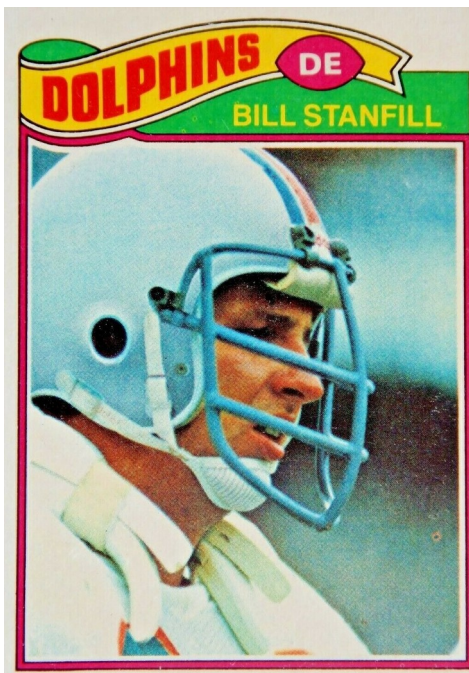


Bill Stanfill

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

The unsung hero of the Miami Dolphins' "No Name Defense" during the 1970s was defensive end William Thomas Stanfill. Former teammate Nat Moore raved about playing alongside Stanfill when he said, "With his intensity on the field and his wit in the locker room, he was a leader on a team that was composed of a host of unique personalities."¹ Stanfill's performance during his eight year NFL career (1969-1976) with Miami spoke for itself. He compiled an unofficial 69.5 career sacks in just 109 career games.²



Stanfill's strongest season was in 1973. Miami was en route to three consecutive Super Bowl appearances, and he recorded an unofficial, league high 18.5 sacks.³ He outperformed the best defensive linemen that season including Jack Youngblood, Elvin Bethea, Claude Humphrey, and Carl Eller. Simply put, he was a model of consistency because he led the Dolphins in sacks during five of his eight seasons.⁴ It was noted by Shula that each of Stanfill's sacks was hard earned, because he had to push through a lot of double-teams, "This was when we used a lot of three-man lines to get to the quarterback, Shula said."⁵



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When Stanfill was drafted 11th overall in the 1969 NFL draft out of the University of Georgia, he made an immediate impact. Sporting number 84, he stood at a towering 6'5," carrying a broad 250 pound frame, built to terrorize opposing offenses.⁶ He started 13 games as a rookie, and finished second in the AFL Rookie of the Year voting, despite the Dolphins' 3-10-1 record. Ironically, Stanfill also intercepted two passes, which he returned for touchdowns, and was just one of two Miami defensive starters to make the Pro Bowl.⁷

The Dolphins experienced a much needed face lift for the 1970 season. Don Shula became head coach and the team experienced instant success.⁸ In his first year in Miami, Shula led the Dolphins to a 10-4 record and a wild-card berth in the playoffs. Stanfill started all 14 games at right defensive end and contributed six sacks. The following season the Dolphins won their first East Division crown with a 10-3-1 record. In the playoffs Miami defeated the Kansas City Chiefs and Baltimore Colts to qualify for their first Super Bowl in franchise history. Stanfill contributed 6.5 sacks and recovered three fumbles while being named first team All-AFC by United Press International.

The Dolphins would go on to win double-digit games every year thru 1975. They would also qualify for three consecutive Super Bowls, the first team to do that and it was one of the outstanding feats of the 1970s.⁹

The Dolphins lost to the Dallas Cowboys, 24-3, in Super Bowl VI, where they earned the moniker "No-Name Defense" from Dallas head coach Tom Landry, because the unit lacked a number of high profile stars.¹⁰ Miami rebounded to win Super Bowls VII and VIII, besting the Washington Redskins (14-7) and Minnesota Vikings (24-7),

1 "Former Georgia, Dolphins star Bill Stanfill dies at 69," SI.com, November 11, 2016, <https://www.si.com/nfl/2016/11/11/ap-fbo-obit-stanfill>.

2 "Bill Stanfill," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

3 "Bill Stanfill," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

4 "Bill Stanfill," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

5 Turney, John. "R.I.P. Bill Stanfill, the Big-Name No Name Defender," NFLFootballJournal, November 11, 2016, <https://nflfootballjournal.blogspot.com/2016/11/rip-bill-stanfill-big-name-no-name.html>.

6 "Bill Stanfill," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

7 "Bill Stanfill," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

8 "Miami Dolphins Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/mia/>.

9 "Miami Dolphins Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/mia/>.



respectively.¹¹ Their run included the only perfect regular and postseason in NFL history in 1972 with a 17-0- record).

When discussing the best defenses in NFL history, the 1972 Dolphins is often mentioned in the top five. A write-up on the unit details, “The Dolphins' 'No Name' defense played like a bunch of no names in Super Bowl VI, when the Cowboys ran roughshod over them, 24-3. Miami, specifically its defense, used the humbling experience, led by Hall of Fame linebacker Nick Buoniconti, defensive tackle Manny Fernandez, defensive end Bill Stanfill, and safeties Dick Anderson and Jake Scott, as motivation for the 1972 season. The team recorded two shutouts while allowing just 12.2 points per game during the [1972] regular season.”¹² They also allowed only 12.7 point in the three playoff games to finish off the undefeated season.

While Miami was at the pinnacle of the league, Shula said, “Bill was an outstanding player and key contributor to our Super Bowl championship teams. He was quick and he was strong, and it was almost impossible to block him. His constant pressure on the opposing quarterback helped make our no-name defense even better.”¹³ Shula continuously pinpointed Stanfill's stellar play as one of the unit's strengths, “On the field, he was a fierce competitor. His toughness served as an example to the entire team and was a key reason why he was so respected by teammates and opponents alike.”¹⁴

With the team's success, Stanfill's sack total rose from 6.5 in 1971 to double-digits in each of the next three seasons (10, 18.5, 10).¹⁵ As a result, he earned a series of accolades that included Pro Bowl, All-AFC, and All-Pro selections. Specifically, he was a five-time Pro Bowl honoree (1969, 1971-1974), first-team All-AFC choice by various media outlets (UPI, *Sporting News*, Associated Press, *Pro Football Weekly*) three times, and earned All-Pro honors in three distinct seasons (1972-1974).¹⁶

Stanfill still shares the team single-season sack record with 18.5 (tied by Jason Taylor in 2002). The 1975 and 1976 seasons were cut short due to injury.¹⁷ Stanfill started in just

1 0 Leifer, Neil. “The 1972 Dolphins Defense's Place in History,” SI.com, June 12, 2020, <https://www.si.com/nfl/dolphins/news/the-miami-dolphins-perfect-season-defense-and-its-place-in-history>.

1 1 “Miami Dolphins Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/mia/>.

1 2 Leifer, Neil. “The 1972 Dolphins Defense's Place in History,” SI.com, June 12, 2020, <https://www.si.com/nfl/dolphins/news/the-miami-dolphins-perfect-season-defense-and-its-place-in-history>.

1 3 “Former Georgia, Dolphins star Bill Stanfill dies at 69,” SI.com, November 11, 2016, <https://www.si.com/nfl/2016/11/11/ap-fbo-obit-stanfill>.

1 4 Turney, John. “R.I.P. Bill Stanfill, the Big-Name No Name Defender,” NFLFootballJournal, November 11, 2016, <https://nflfootballjournal.blogspot.com/2016/11/rip-bill-stanfill-big-name-no-name.html>.



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eight contests in 1975, and seven in 1976, thereby calling it a career following the 1976 season. He suffered knee and neck injuries in a game during the 1975 preseason. Later, he underwent spinal fusion surgery that impaired his ability to turn his head or tilt it back.

One of his three sons, Stan, who also played football at Georgia said, “But he was not bitter about football. He wouldn't have changed a thing. He loved football. It was who he was.”¹⁸ Stanfill's abilities stem from his days growing up, when he was a multi-sport athlete that was determined to make it in professional athletics.

Born in Cairo, GA to Noah William Stanfill and to Muriel Stanfill on January 13, 1947, Bill starred in football, basketball, and track at Cairo High School.¹⁹ His athletic abilities propelled him to win at least one state championship in each sport. Bill was an All-State caliber football talent and named the Class AA Lineman of the Year as a senior.²⁰ Continuing his football career, Stanfill enrolled at the University of Georgia in 1965. There, he embarked on a career that saw him become one of the greatest Georgia Bulldogs of all-time.

Stanfill was a titan of an athlete along the trenches. Former Bulldogs coach, and teammate on the 1968 team that won the Southeastern Conference Championship, Mike Cavan distinctly recalls, “I feel so fortunate to have known Bill Stanfill as a teammate and more importantly as a dear friend. Bill was without a doubt one of Georgia's all-time greatest players, along with being one of the characters in Georgia's history.”²¹

As a sophomore in 1966, Stanfill made All-SEC, teaming with George Patton on the defensive line. One of Stanfill's most memorable performances occurred that season on November 5 against Florida.²² Stanfill was in the backfield all game long, chasing

1 5 “Bill Stanfill,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

1 6 “Bill Stanfill,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

1 7 “Bill Stanfill,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 8, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/S/StanBi00.htm>.

1 8 Towers, Chip. “Towers' Take: Football took a heavy toll on Georgia legend Bill Stanfill,” DawgNation.com, November 14, 2016, <https://www.dawgnation.com/football/opinion/towers-take-football-took-a-heavy-toll-on-uga-legend-bill-stanfill/>.

1 9 “Bill Stanfill,” NationalFootballFoundation.org, accessed May 8, 2022, https://footballfoundation.org/hof_search.aspx?hof=1931.

2 0 “Bill Stanfill,” NationalFootballFoundation.org, accessed May 8, 2022, https://footballfoundation.org/hof_search.aspx?hof=1931.

2 1 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.



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eventual Heisman Trophy winner and All-American quarterback Steve Spurrier. The Bulldogs defense shut down the Florida offense, holding them to 10 points in the 27-10 victory for Georgia.²³ Teammate John Kasay remembers, “Bill was really beaten up, but he got in the locker room early, and the trainers and doctors rubbed him down and stretched out his neck and back and shoulders. We knew we had to have him to win, and boy did he play a great game that day.”²⁴

As a senior in 1968, Stanfill earned consensus All-American honors and was the Outland Trophy recipient, awarded to the nation's top interior lineman, and SEC Lineman of the Year that season, as well as an academic All-American. He was also an All-SEC choice in 1966, 1967, and 1968. Georgia won two SEC titles in his three seasons, compiling a 26-6-2 record, with berths in the Cotton, Liberty, and Sugar Bowls.²⁵ Head coach Vince Dooley reflected on Stanfill's career, “Bill was probably the greatest athlete as a lineman I ever coached. He could have been a great tight end as well. Against the triple option, he was the only player that could take the quarterback, the dive back, and the pitch man. Bill was a great person, a great warrior, and a great Bulldog.”²⁶

Following his retirement, Stanfill moved to Albany, GA, where he partook in real estate. Stanfill was inducted into numerous hall of fames following his playing career, some of which include: College Football Hall of Fame (1998), Florida-Georgia Hall of Fame, Georgia Sports Hall of Fame (1984).²⁷ In 2007, he was named to the All-Time Miami

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- 2 2 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 2 3 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 2 4 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 2 5 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 2 6 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 2 7 “Bill Stanfill,” NationalFootballFoundation.org, accessed May 8, 2022, https://footballfoundation.org/hof_search.aspx?hof=1931.



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Dolphins Team, and to the Miami Dolphins Honor Roll in 2010. He was named to the Hall of Very Good in 2022 by the Professional Football Researchers Association.

Sadly, Stanfill suffered from numerous concussions throughout his career, exhibiting symptoms associated with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).²⁸ It was said he broke nearly every bone in his body as a result of playing football. He passed away on November 10, 2016 in Albany, GA at the age of 69 from complications from surgery to repair a broken leg. His strong sense of leadership, tenacity, and extroverted personality will always be remembered. Bill lived a lifetime of success on and off the gridiron.²⁹ His son Stan said of his outgoing personality, “He loved to make people laugh. That was his thing, telling stories.”³⁰ Bill Stanfill's career is full of numerous stories, memorable moments and highlights, that may one day include a stop in Canton.

End Notes:

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- 2 8 Towers, Chip. “Towers' Take: Football took a heavy toll on Georgia legend Bill Stanfill,” DawgNation.com, November 14, 2016, <https://www.dawgnation.com/football/opinion/towers-take-football-took-a-heavy-toll-on-uga-legend-bill-stanfill/>.
 - 2 9 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.
 - 3 0 Dantzler, Jeff. “Dominant Defender, Bill Stanfill, takes his place amongst other departed Georgia football legends,” BulldawgIllustrated.com, November 22, 2016, <https://bulldawgillustrated.com/sports/uga-football-2/dominant-defender-bill-stanfill-takes-place-amongst-departed-georgia-football-legends/>.