

DREW PEARSON OF SOUTH RIVER HIGH SCHOOL

A common expression, in sports and beyond, originated on Dec. 28, 1975, during an NFL playoff game between the Dallas Cowboys and Minnesota Vikings.

The Cowboys trailed, 14-10, in the final seconds and with no time outs left. With the ball at midfield, the only option left for quarterback Roger Staubach was to unload a desperation pass deep toward the end zone in hopes that a teammate could make a miraculous catch.

So Staubach made the throw, and Cowboys receiver Drew Pearson made the catch near two Vikings receivers just in front of the end zone. He turned and scored the winning touchdown for one of the most improbable and famous endings in NFL playoff history.

When asked about the play after the game, Staubach, perhaps jokingly, said after throwing the ball, he closed his eyes and said a Hail Mary prayer.



Although there are examples linking the prayer with Notre Dame football going back to the 1920s, after that Staubach-to-Pearson connection, the term for calling a similar end-game throw a "Hail Mary play" was popularized from that moment forward.

The expression has also come to signify desperate but calculated last-chance moves in all forms of life, and it came about because of that famous catch by Pearson, who hails from South River, N.J.

That one play may have been the most famous, but Pearson's career was full of shining moments from the days he starred at South River, where he graduated in 1969.

Growing up on Prospect Street in the Middlesex County town, he dreamed as a kid of playing for the hometown Rams. He was a star as a receiver for quarterback Joe Theismann as a sophomore, and then took over at QB beginning the following year after Theismann moved on to Notre Dame as part of his own special career.

Drew was born in Newark in 1951, and grew up in South River along with six brothers and sisters. In addition to football, he was a standout



in basketball and baseball. He was first team All-State as a quarterback after leading the team to an undefeated season as a senior in the fall of 1968.

After South River, he moved on to the University of Tulsa to play football and baseball. Football became his focus after becoming the starting QB as a sophomore. He was converted to wide receiver as a junior, and was an immediate success.

He was signed in 1973 by the Cowboys as an undrafted free agent. He rose to become one of the team's greatest all-time receivers, and one of the NFL's all-time pass-catching greats as well.

During his 11-year career with the team, he totaled 489 receptions for 7,822 yards and 50 touchdowns. He also had 67 catches for 1,105 yards and eight TDs in playoff games. He even caught a pass in 22 consecutive playoff games.

He helped the Cowboys reach three Super Bowls, including a championship in 1978.

His career was so special that in 2021, he was bestowed with the greatest honor for any player - induction into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio.

