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## Lamar Hunt

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**HUNT, LAMAR** (b. 2 August 1932 in El Dorado, Arkansas; d. 13 December 2006 in Dallas, Texas), founder of the American Football League, owner of the Kansas City Chiefs, and sports promoter who was inducted into three professional sports halls of fame.

Hunt was the youngest of seven children of Haroldson Lafayette (H.L.) Hunt, Jr., and Lyda Bunker Hunt. (They were known as the “First Family,” since H.L. also had eight children with two other women.) The elder Hunt had used his gambling winnings to purchase oil leases, and was named as the world’s richest man by *Fortune* magazine in 1948. The family moved to Tyler, Texas, and then to Dallas, where the office of Hunt Oil Company was established.

As a child, Lamar Hunt’s nickname was “Games” due to his interest in inventing and playing new games. He attended high school at the Hill School in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, and was captain of the varsity football team during his senior year. After graduation in 1952, Hunt attended Southern Methodist University, from which he received a B.S. in geology in 1956. He was a third-string tight end on the SMU football team, played very sparingly, and was nicknamed “Poor Boy” by his teammates. Shortly after graduation, Hunt married Rose Mary Whittle; they had two children and divorced in 1962. He married schoolteacher Norma Knoble in 1964, and they also had two children.

Sharing his father’s competitive nature, Hunt wanted to bring professional football back to Dallas, but was rebuffed when he approached the National Football League (NFL) about acquiring an expansion franchise. He also attempted to purchase the Chicago Cardinals in 1959 and move them to Dallas, but was again turned down. Realizing that several other people were also trying to purchase the Cardinals in order to bring professional football to *their* cities, Hunt approached those other businessmen to organize a new football league. The American Football League (AFL) was established in August 1959, and each owner paid \$25,000 for their franchise,

with Hunt forming the Dallas Texans. Hunt also served as the league's president for its ten-year existence. The original eight owners called themselves the "Foolish Club," knowing that they would likely lose money, as well as face intense competition and pressure from the NFL. The NFL retaliated against the AFL by awarding an expansion franchise to Dallas (the Cowboys) to directly compete with the Texans for fans and revenue, and also awarded a team to Minnesota to prevent them from joining the AFL. The NFL even offered Hunt a franchise as well as a share of the Cowboys, but he refused to abandon the other AFL owners.

Hunt hired Hank Stram as head coach, whom he knew from Stram's one year as offensive coach at SMU. Even though the Texans won the AFL championship after their third season, Dallas could not support two teams, so Hunt moved the franchise to Kansas City in 1963, where they became the Chiefs. The AFL secured a five-year \$36 million national television contract with NBC (1965), which led teams to spend more freely on college talent and begin to sign top NFL players to future contracts. The TV contract, the raid on players, and the AFL's increasing success in the important New York market (where the Jets had signed quarterback Joe Namath from Alabama) led the NFL to realize that the AFL was not going to die, and they approached Hunt about a merger. Hunt met with NFL executives in April 1966 to negotiate the terms, and he succeeded in preserving all of the AFL franchises. The two leagues agreed to an inter-league championship game, a common draft and inter-league preseason play beginning in 1967, with a full merger of all AFL teams into the NFL to take place in 1970.

After the Chiefs won the franchise's second AFL championship in 1966, they lost to the NFL's Green Bay Packers in the first NFL-AFL Championship Game (later referred to as Super Bowl I). Kansas City won a third AFL championship in 1969, and then defeated the heavily favored Minnesota Vikings in January 1970 in Super Bowl IV, the last game prior to the merger.

Coupled with the Jets' victory in Super Bowl III a year earlier, the AFL was able to join the NFL as an equal partner, with each league having won two Super Bowls. Hunt was credited with coining the name "Super Bowl" for the championship game, inspired by the super ball that his children played with, and he also suggested using Roman numerals. Hunt was inducted into the Kansas City Chiefs Hall of Fame in 1970, and was the first AFL figure inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame (1972). He was president of the NFL's American Football Conference (AFC) from 1970 until his death, and in 1984 the NFL created the Lamar Hunt Trophy in his honor, presented annually to the AFC champion. Hunt's AFL forced the NFL to expand and brought professional football to areas of the country that had been ignored.

Although Hunt was primarily associated with football, he was also involved in the family oil business (including Placid Oil and Penrod Drilling), real estate ventures, and other professional sports. He built two Kansas City-based theme parks, Worlds of Fun (1973) and Oceans of Fun (1982), as well as SubTropolis, an 1100-acre cave designed to be an underground business complex. In 1966, Hunt purchased a minority interest in the newly established Chicago Bulls basketball team, an investment that would pay off much later when Michael Jordan helped the team win six championships. In 1967, he founded the Dallas Tornado of the United Soccer Association (later renamed the North American Soccer League), and the team won the NASL championship in 1971. Hunt promoted soccer tirelessly, and even though both the Tornado and the NASL folded in the early 1980s, he left a strong legacy of youth soccer in Texas. For his efforts, he was inducted into the United States Soccer Federation Hall of Fame (1982), and the U.S. Open Cup was later renamed the Lamar Hunt U.S. Open Cup in his honor. Hunt later became owner of three franchises in Major League Soccer, and his Kansas City Wizards won the MLS championship in 2000. He received the Medal of Honor from the National Soccer Hall of

Fame in 1999.

In 1967, at a time when there was a split in tennis between professional and amateur players, Hunt established the World Championship Tennis (WCT) tour, which consisted of a circuit of related events culminating in a final playoff. He obtained a television contract with NBC, and reached an agreement with the rival International Lawn Tennis Federation which led to the beginning of true open professional tennis. The WCT's final season was 1989, after which the Association of Tennis Players (the players' union) started its own tennis tour. Hunt was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in 1993.

Hunt and two of his brothers (William Herbert Hunt and Nelson Bunker Hunt) found themselves in the news during the 1970s and 80s when they were accused of attempting to corner the world silver market. Lamar Hunt became involved in the purchasing of silver later than his brothers, but in 1988 a court ordered the Hunt brothers and other defendants to pay over \$130 million in damages to Minpeco S.A., a commodities concern owned by the government of Peru which had lost money due to the Hunts' silver speculation. Although all three brothers' trusts declared bankruptcy, Lamar Hunt was the only one not to declare personal bankruptcy.

Hunt was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1998, which was initially treated with chemotherapy. He underwent surgery to remove the prostate gland in 2003, but the cancer later spread and he died in 2006 at age 74. He was buried at Sparkman/Hillcrest Memorial Park in Dallas. Among his numerous awards were induction into the NFL Alumni Association's prestigious Order of the Leather Helmet (1981); the state Sports Halls of Fame of both Texas (1984) and Missouri (1995); the Business Halls of Fame of both Texas (1997) and Kansas City (2004); and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the U.S. Soccer Foundation (2005). In 2008, Hunt's bust was added to the "Hall of Famous Missourians" at the state capitol in Jefferson City.

A humble, softspoken man who mingled with fans, flew coach, and drove an old car, Hunt's telephone number was publicly listed in the phonebook until his death. He insisted on being listed in the team media guide as the *founder* of the Chiefs rather than the *owner*, and left daily management of his sports teams to his professional employees. Hunt was involved with six different professional sports leagues and seven sports franchises, five of whom won thirteen championships, and he is the only person to have been inducted into three professional sports halls of fame. He anonymously lent and donated many pieces of art to the Dallas Museum of Art, generously donated to his alma mater, Southern Methodist University, and also helped fundraise for St. Mark's School of Texas and for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, both of whose boards he served on.

[A biographical profile of Hunt by Jon E. Taylor is in Arnold Markoe (ed.), *The Scribner Encyclopedia of American Lives: Sports Figures 1* (2002): 439-441. Information on Hunt, the AFL, and the Chiefs is in Joe McGuff, *Winning it All: The Chiefs of the AFL* (1970). His contributions to football, soccer, and tennis are detailed in Michael C. Miller, "Lamar Hunt: Dallas Sports Czar," *Legacies* 17 (Spring 2005): 56-65. The most thorough account of the Hunt family history is Harry Hurt III, *Texas Rich: The Hunt Dynasty From the Early Oil Days Through the Silver Crash* (1981). Obituaries are in the *Kansas City Star* (14 December 2006), and *New York Times* and *Washington Post* (both 15 December 2006).]

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