

Francis VanRensselaer Gansz

SMU lost the heart – and unofficial voice – of its football program when special teams coach Frank Gansz died. He was 70.

The former Kansas City Chiefs coach and NFL special teams guru died less than a week after he suffered complications after undergoing knee replacement surgery.

Gansz, who has long had a unique style of leading practice with his lively voice ringing through a microphone, had been on a respirator at Presbyterian Hospital since his heart stopped after coming out of the surgery.

Survived by his wife of nearly 50 years, Barbara, and children Jennifer and Frank Jr., who is the special teams coach at UCLA, Gansz led the Mustangs' spring practice in his typical style only a week previously.

"I am deeply saddened by the loss of my good friend," SMU coach June Jones said in a prepared statement. "He will live on with us. My team will miss him as a coach and mentor, but most of all, I will miss him as my best friend."

Former SMU punter Thomas Morstead initially felt joy when he was selected in the NFL draft by New Orleans, but seconds later he was overcome by grief and headed to the hospital to visit Gansz and give his family a Saints hat. Frank Jr. later made an appearance at Morstead's draft party.

"He always talked about getting to the highest level," Morstead said of Gansz. "And that's how he lived his life."

Gansz is considered one of the top special teams coaches in the history of the NFL. The native of Pennsylvania coached for 38 seasons, 24 in the NFL and 14 in the college ranks. Former NFL coach Dick Vermeil said the St. Louis Rams would not have won Super Bowl XXXIV without Gansz, but his impact reached much deeper.

"He was the finest football coach I ever worked with," Vermeil said. "The quality of the human being matched his coaching skills. ... His vibrancy will live forever in the people that he touched."

Gansz came out of retirement in 2008 to join Jones, whom he had worked with for the Detroit Lions and whom he claimed was one of only a couple of people who could get him to coach again.

Gansz played center and linebacker for the Naval Academy from 1957 to 1959 and graduated in 1960. He served in the Air Force for nearly seven years.

Frank Gansz came out of retirement to coach special teams for SMU at the request of June Jones, a former colleague of Gansz on the Detroit Lions staff.

After years of specializing in special teams, Gansz was promoted to head coach of the Chiefs from 1987 to 1988. He then became the special teams coach of the Lions from 1989 to 1993. He was named the NFL special teams coach of the year in 1989.

"Coach Gansz means so much to this team," sophomore defensive back Chris Banjo said.

"What he stands for, he loves us so much. We also love him."

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