

TEN QUESTIONS

Coach Bill Parcels

ACG interviews a renowned coach whose road to Super Bowl victories began at West Point.

BY JOHN INGOLDSBY



Before legendary Coach Bill Parcels won two Super Bowls with the New York Giants, he was an assistant coach at Army and head coach at Air Force. His natural coaching talent and military discipline combined to make him the most famous turnaround artist in NFL history. After leading the Giants “from worst to first,” Parcels took his coaching talents to the New England Patriots, New York Jets and Dallas Cowboys, and then to the Miami Dolphins’ front office, bringing each of these franchises back from the dead. In an interview with ACG Correspondent John In-

goltsby, Parcels discusses how his experience coaching at the academies helped form the foundation that led to his unprecedented NFL success.

ACG What years did you coach at West Point, and who was head coach when you were linebackers coach?

PARCELLS: I was at Army from 1966 through '69, and Tom Cahill, who coincidentally was my high school coach in New Jersey, took a job at West Point as the freshman coach after my senior year in high school. Paul Dietzel was the head coach and later left

Army for South Carolina, and then Cahill became the head coach, and fortunately I was able to get a job with him.

ACG How did you end up getting the job with Coach Cahill?

PARCELLS: I was already coaching for about three years in the Midwest, starting at a Division 3 school named Hastings College in Nebraska as a part-time job. Then I went back to my alma mater, Wichita State at the time, and was there for a few years, and then the opportunity at West Point came along. That was a good place to develop as a coach

ABOVE: Parcels (kneeling, second from right) poses with his fellow West Point coaches, including head coach Tom Cahill (standing, center). Parcels was an assistant coach at the U.S. Military Academy from 1966-69.

“I also gained a greater appreciation for the military, which helped me form opinions about our country and sacrifices people made.”

and learn a lot, and I met Bobby Knight, and we’ve been lifelong friends. (See *10 Questions* in the January 2010 issue of *ACG* for our interview with Bob Knight.)

ACG I understand you were a part-time assistant with Knight’s basketball team. How was that experience?

PARCELLS: I did help him occasionally with scouting or basketball camps. We were friends, and he found something for me to do while I was there. We were both in our formative years in coaching and wound up being a good sounding board for one another regarding coaching, organization, team concepts and managing problems, [things] that all come up for young coaches.

ACG Did it help to have players like Mike Krzyzewski (West Point class of 1969) on the basketball team?

PARCELLS: I remember vividly when Mike was playing for us, and he was the recipient of some coaching wrath from time to time; but I think, too, that Mike was the beneficiary of having that experience.

ACG What did you take away from coaching at West Point that you have used throughout your career?

PARCELLS: Time management was important because there were constraints on the cadets, so the opportunities that you had to actually coach were limited. So, I decided the most important things to get across in a limited time. Another was discipline, not only personal but team discipline, and I carried that with me even into the pros. I also gained a greater appreciation for the military, which helped me form opinions about our country and sacrifices people made, which I saw firsthand because the Vietnam War was going on then. That war was not the most popular, and yet I saw a lot of guys graduate and go there, and my brother was one of those and served on the front lines.

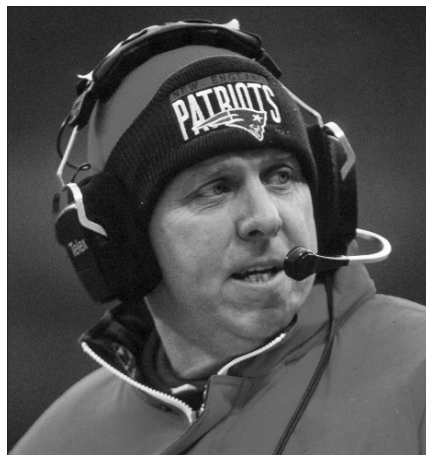
ACG Did you ever return to visit West Point?

PARCELLS: West Point is a very unique place, and while I was coaching the Giants it was only a short drive from New Jersey. I would just get in my car and drive through the campus, stopping at Camp Buckner, Bull Pond, Trophy Point, the old field house and

the stadium. And I’d always go by the neighborhood where I lived in the quarters that were provided for us coaches, and did it many, many times. Even today, if I am nearby it’s hard for me not to just stop, even if it’s just for 15 minutes. It’s just a special place for me.

ACG When you coached at West Point, was there anyone there who left a lasting impression on you?

PARCELLS: One of our players I coached was Steve Yarnell, and we have remained very close friends. After Steve got out of the Army,



LEFT: After coming out of retirement, Parcells became head coach of the New England Patriots in 1993. Within three years, he had them playing in Super Bowl XXXI. **RIGHT:** Parcells took his first head coaching job in 1978 at the U.S. Air Force Academy. He finished his only season there with a record of 3-8 before moving on to become the defensive coordinator for the NFL’s New York Giants.

he was in the FBI for about 20 years, and then when he got out of the FBI, I hired him as a security man for the New York Jets when I was working there.

ACG What’s the biggest difference between coaching Army cadets and coaching NFL players?

PARCELLS: I don’t think there’s a big difference in the coaching. Your job as the coach is to try to give your players a good design and try to get them to play hard and play well, and that’s basically what I did as a coach at Army. At West Point, there was nobody around the players other than other cadets, their commanding officers, and their peers and instructors. Now, in professional football,

there are an awful lot of other people on the periphery of your athletes.

ACG What are your memories of 1978, your year as Air Force Academy head coach?

PARCELLS: That was a good experience because that was my first opportunity at a head coaching job. Air Force had been under Coach Ben Martin for a very long time, and he did an outstanding job there. In the short time I was there, I hired some people that had a good long-range effect on the academy’s program.



ACG Your brother Don played for West Point in the 1962 Army-Navy game, scoring a touchdown in front of President John F. Kennedy. Have you been to any Army-Navy games?

PARCELLS: I’ve been to three of them as a coach, but I haven’t been to any since I left. One of my longtime coaches, Bill Belichick, his dad was a coach at Navy, and I knew him well. So Bill and I, when we were coaching together, always had a little friendly competition on the Army-Navy game, and we’d make a small wager. That was our way of being interested, and we paid close attention to the game – who had a winning streak going, and those kinds of things. I don’t think there have been many of them I have missed on TV. ★

John Ingoldsby, a leading writer on the intersection of sports and the military, conducted this interview. He president of IIR Sports & Entertainment Inc. (IIRsports.com), a public relations firm in Boston.

WEB EXTRA!

Visit armchairgeneral.com for more Q&A from Coach Parcells.

