

SENATE RESOLUTION NO. 111

BY SENATORS DONAHUE, ALARIO, ALLAIN, APPEL, BOUDREAUX, CARTER, CLAITOR, COLOMB, CORTEZ, ERDEY, FANNIN, GATTI, HEWITT, JOHNS, LAMBERT, LUNEAU, MARTINY, MILLS, MIZELL, MORRISH, PEACOCK, PERRY, RISER, GARY SMITH, JOHN SMITH, TARVER, THOMPSON, WALSWORTH, WARD AND WHITE

A RESOLUTION

To express the sincere condolences of the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana upon the passing of former New Orleans Saints Football running back, Hokie Gajan, and to celebrate his sports legacy in the state of Louisiana.

WHEREAS, it is with great sadness and heavy hearts that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana has learned of the passing of a favorite son, Howard Lee "Hokie" Gajan Jr., on April 11, 2016; Hokie was a vibrant individual who touched the lives of others in a positive and meaningful manner; and

WHEREAS, Hokie Gajan made his mark in the world as a multi-talented athlete and an accomplished running back with the Louisiana State University Fighting Tigers football team and with the New Orleans Saints franchise; however, Hokie was more than a football player, scout, and sports broadcaster - he also served as mentor, father figure, and advisor to many young men who struggled to find success in the world of high school, collegiate, and professional sports; and

WHEREAS, Hokie was reared in Baker, Louisiana, in a large working class family; he grew up as the All-American boy who excelled as a stellar athlete in four sports at Baker High School and developed under the tutelage of Coach James C. Stewart and assistant coaches, Larry Thomas and Milton Broussard; football was his element; and

WHEREAS, he was an athletic phenomenon, known as the "Cajun Kid" by local sportswriters who noted his tenacity on the gridiron; he always gave 100% on every play, and his leadership motto was "lead by example"; if Hokie was giving his all, then his fellow teammates were encouraged to do the same; and

WHEREAS, Hokie displayed outstanding physical prowess in all sports, but football was his specialty and Baker High's Wedge Kyes Stadium was his springboard; he was a force to be reckoned with in District Quad-A championship play, the highest ranking in the Louisiana High School Athletics Association at that time; and

WHEREAS, in his senior year, Hokie was named Mr. BHS along with Miss BHS, Judy Moak, his high school sweetheart; they married in 1979 and together celebrated thirty-seven years of love and devotion; and

WHEREAS, college recruiters clamored to sign him; however, LSU Head Coach Charles McClendon and then assistant coach Jerry Stovall recruited Hokie for an athletic scholarship, and from 1977 until 1980, Hokie had a exceptional career total of 1,563 yards rushing and was consistently ranked in the Top Ten for rushing statistics in the Southeastern Conference; and

WHEREAS, Hokie Gajan parlayed his mastery of the game into a professional career in the National Football League when, in 1981, Hokie was drafted in the tenth round by the New Orleans Saints; he played running back and fullback positions for Coach Bum Phillips with a career total of 1,358 yards rushing, resulting in eleven touchdowns; and

WHEREAS, Hokie received praise from his contemporaries and many well-deserved accolades throughout his professional career; in 1984, he led all other NFL rushers in gained yardage per attempt with 102 carries, 615 yards gained, and six yards per carry; and

WHEREAS, two separate knee injuries brought his playing career to a premature end in 1987; however, Hokie joined the scouting staff to seek out new talent for the Saints and also spent thirteen years as a college scout; and

WHEREAS, Hokie Gajan possessed those essential characteristics of leadership and trust that brought out the very best performance in athletes; he encouraged young men, both in the game and beyond it, to put forth their very best efforts, be strong and brave in the face of formidable opposition, and work diligently toward achievement of their lifelong goals; and

WHEREAS, in 2000, he became a color commentator for New Orleans WWL TV and Radio and was host to outdoor TV shows on fishing and hunting; his outgoing personality and genuine nature were the characteristics that defined his public legacy, plus his down-home witticisms, such as, "He's so fast he could go rabbit-hunting with a hammer", were amusing anecdotes that became known on the airways as Hokie-isms; and

WHEREAS, he was also a popular pitchman for local corporate advertising; and

WHEREAS, Hokie remains a larger-than-life figure in the realm of Louisiana's sports history, yet he will always be remembered for his kind heart, his accessibility as a player and as a friend, his love of the outdoors, water sports, hunting, and fishing, and his "joy of life", that enigmatic spark that still burns warmly in the hearts of all who knew him; and

WHEREAS, it is the memory of his passion for the game that shall be revisited from time to time; the spirit of Hokie Gajan was remembered, along with the late Will Smith, at the 2016 National Football League Draft ceremonies with heartwarming reverence by friend and fellow New Orleans Saint, Deuce McAllister; and

WHEREAS, Gajan and Smith were both elected for enshrinement into the New Orleans Saints Hall of Fame in early 2016; and

WHEREAS, Hokie Gajan had the good fortune to participate in high school, college, and professional football careers all in south Louisiana, within one hundred miles of family and home; it seemed that Hokie was always "at home" wherever he was, at ease with himself and the world around him; and

WHEREAS, Hokie and Judy were blessed with four daughters: Jennifer Gajan-Mier, Kristin G. Sell, Megan G. Trahant, and Alexis B. Gajan; eight grandchildren, and a host of friends, colleagues, and extended family; and

WHEREAS, although Hokie Gajan has been taken from our midst far too soon, he shall be remembered for his devotion to family, his friendly demeanor, warm smile, and kindness to others as well as his outstanding courage and steadfast dedication to his faith, community, and the sport of football.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Senate of the Legislature of Louisiana does hereby extend its heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the late Howard Lee "Hokie" Gajan Jr., whose legacy and influence shall be felt for many seasons to come at fishing tournaments, hunting camps, and on the gridiron and sidelines of football stadiums throughout this nation, from first whistle to final play his spirit will be there.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the family of Hokie Gajan.

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PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE