

Jim Rooney

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Jim Rooney, one of Dan and Patricia Rooney's nine children, worked alongside his father for decades. Dan was one of the most-influential sports executives of his generation, the man who transformed the Pittsburgh Steelers into one of the National Football League's great dynasties. Some of his most important achievements, however, took place off the field as he sought to bring about equity in the league's hiring practices and peace in his ancestral Ireland. As a business leader, philanthropist, diplomat and the author of the Rooney Rule, Dan was known for his values, quiet strength, effectiveness, and willingness to talk to and hear from those who disagreed with him. Jim's personal and professional view of his father's career comes from having assisted his father with relationships at the State Department and the White House during Dan's time as Ambassador to Ireland, and also being involved in the football enterprise and support of the Rooney Rule. In addition to being an author, Rooney is co-partner of Rooney Consulting, which assists organizations with enhancing culture, building strong teams and growing businesses. He also founded FirstLink Research and Analytics, a world leader in building business analysis for technology transition. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Jewish Healthcare Foundation of Pittsburgh, The American Ireland Funds and Gilmour Academy. Rooney holds an Organizational Consulting certificate from Georgetown University and a B.A. in Political Science and Communications from Boston College.*

**You recently published a new book, *A Different Way to Win: Dan Rooney's Story From The Super Bowl to The Rooney Rule*. What interested you in writing the book?**

I wanted to tell my father's story. He had a lot of influence and he wasn't afraid of his influence. He felt that accountability to others or the mission – not self-gratification – was the reason one would use that influence. That is the basis of how I relay his story. I lay the

# A Different Way to Win

## An Interview with Jim Rooney

book out into four main story lines: rebuilding the culture of the Steelers, his influence on the NFL, peace in Ireland and the Rooney Rule, which is his life's work.

It's a career playbook to inspire the next generation of leaders and centers around my father's business values: consensus-building; diversity and inclusion; listening and respect; rigor; and focusing on the long game.

**In regard to the Steelers, what were the keys to your father's ability to transform the franchise and create success?**

My father had an internal drive to always get things right, to always be organized, and to always have a plan. He went to business school and studied economics and finance.

He understood innovation. For example, the Steelers coach that he hired in the 1970s, Chuck Noll, was one of the most innovative guys in football. My father understood you always had to have the balance of stability and continuity, but that you can't become stale. He was always trying to balance innovation with continuity.

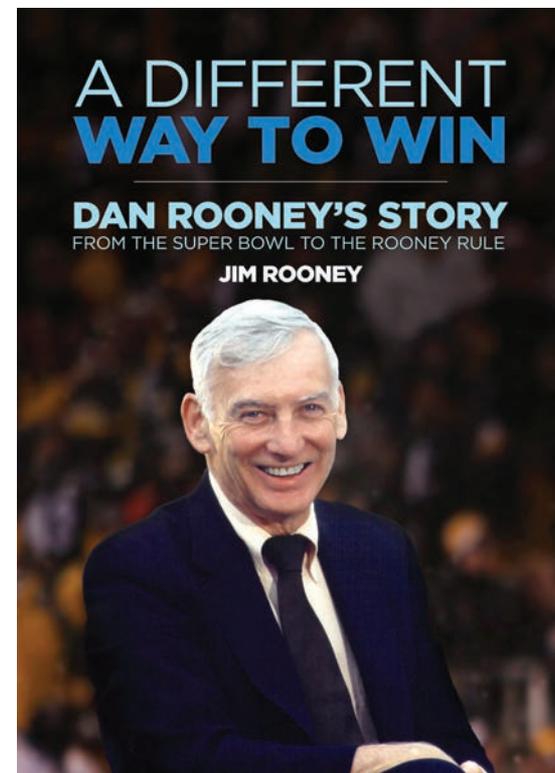
**Did your father focus as much on the type of character a Steelers player had as he did the talent?**

Football is a team game and you need guys that can play on a team. We, like every team does, have run into that challenge where you fall in love with someone's 40-yard dash time. You fall in love with their tape. You find someone that's so good on the field and then they can become a real challenge off the field. Those things in the long run, I think, are harder to clean up. I think they take more time.

The hard part is that intuitive notion of what that line is. These guys are young guys. They have big egos. You want big personalities. You don't want shrinking violets. The challenge is knowing who's going to cross that line to a point where they're detrimental to the locker room versus who has a strong personality. You're always going to have to manage big personalities.

**Your father was committed to philanthropy and supporting those in need. Where did this passion develop?**

I think this is somehow a part of everyone's story. We all have some immigrant story. My father was born in the Depression. He tells a story of looking out his window when he was eight years old, seeing my grandmother feeding neighbors who had come to the back door. She brought them



soup and bread. He saw that suffering and it certainly had an impact on him. I think he just felt an obligation to do it from a personal level. The Steelers had so many players that gave back to the community and supported worthy causes. Franco Harris is one of the most decent human beings I've ever met. Mel Blount spent his whole life helping youth with the Mel Blount Youth Home. I think when you bring good people in, it's not about instilling your values on them. It's about creating the opportunities and as an organization allowing it to happen.

**The book focuses on the Rooney Rule. Will you elaborate on the Rooney Rule and the impact it has made?**

Tony Dungy talks about the spirit of the Rooney Rule. What he means by that is that he saw my father with this total commitment to try to create fairness. From 1968 to 1976, the Steelers drafted more players from historically black colleges and universities than any other team. These players that were being excluded because of the schools they went to were contributing at an increased level.

My father was really the leader who brought that about. We brought in one of the first African-American scouts, a man named Bill Nunn, and Bill was the scout that went to those schools.

The impact of the Rooney Rule is clear. There were seven minority hires in the NFL between 1920 and 2003. Since then, with coaches and general managers, you have 30 hires. You have a 40 percent increase at the assistant coach level and those jobs don't even require a Rooney Rule interview, but that's what Tony Dungy was talking about when he referred to the spirit of the rule. The Rooney Rule now has extended into other industries, including tech and finance.

**What was it like growing up in the Rooney family?**

We are Irish. We had more than our share of fist fights. But in the end, we all knew we had each other's back which is what I think was most important. I am very grateful. It was a special experience. ●