

John Mackey added to poignancy of funeral for John Unitas

On Sept. 17, 2002, I ignored the request that media not attend the funeral of John Unitas, tucked a note pad into my blazer and entered a pew in the back of the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen. I'm not sure if it was during a reading or one of the many spoken tributes to the great Baltimore Colts quarterback when a large man in a cowboy hat began to wander the aisles of the Cathedral, like a small child separated from his parents.

What I do recall, is that for most in the congregation, it was our first realization that John Mackey's battle with dementia was very real, and accelerating. Mackey died July 6, at age 69. He revolutionized the tight end position in pro football, continued to break ground as a labor activist, and alas, also reminded us of the delicacy of the human brain – and condition.