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'EDDIE!' gets his day in sun at Candlestick

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The chant started as a low roar at halftime Sunday, then could be heard reverberating throughout that old concrete bowl called Candlestick Park.

"Eddie! EDDIE! ED-DIE!" they cried for the man who helped make this place famous.

Those special days when Eddie DeBartolo Jr. ruled the roost in 49erland and his team did the same in the NFL are now slipping farther and farther into past history, but Sunday was for remembering the beloved owner who led the Niners to the promised land.

DeBartolo was back at center stage on the home field of his former team, honored at halftime of San Francisco's 23-10 beatdown of the Seattle Seahawks as the inaugural inductee into the 49ers' Hall of Fame.

DeBartolo owned the team from 1977-98, when the 49ers won five Super Bowls, and was affectionately known as "Mr. D" to his players and coaches.

DeBartolo finally got his well-deserved day in the sun at Candlestick. Walking alongside several family members, DeBartolo was greeted with loud cheers from fans, many of whom still see him as the player-friendly owner who helped build the team's dynasty and transformed the franchise into true NFL greatness.

A stage was set up at midfield, where Jerry Rice spoke and a plaque was unveiled honoring DeBartolo as the first inductee into the Eddie DeBartolo Sr. Hall of Fame, named after DeBartolo's father who bought the team for his son in 1977 for the bargain price tag of \$17 million.

"Eddie has set a standard in the NFL that has never been matched," said Rice, one of a half-dozen former players taking part in the ceremony. "When you think of San Francisco, you think of the 49ers and of Eddie DeBartolo Jr.'s legacy. He demanded perfection and we delivered for him."

Among the players joining Rice at halftime were Hall of Famers Joe Montana and Ronnie Lott, and former 49ers stars Dwight Clark, Roger Craig and [Eric Davis](#).

Steve Young, another Hall of Famer who played for DeBartolo's teams, delivered a video tribute that was played on the stadium scoreboard.

"This is probably the last time that I will ever have an opportunity to stand before the people that have made such an impact on my life," DeBartolo told the crowd in a brief speech. "You are not 49er faithful. You are my 49er family. From the bottom of my heart, to everybody who has been with us, fought with us and struggled with us during my ownership, I thank you."

The 62-year-old DeBartolo later told reporters he plans to help his nephew and current 49ers president Jed York in the team's efforts to land a new stadium deal.

"I'm going to be around, and I'm going to help Jed," DeBartolo said. "I told him I would help him with the stadium effort and do whatever I needed to do to help him. Believe me, whether or not anybody wants to understand this, this is a family affair. I'm not involved in the ownership or management of the team but I will be actively involved to help him wherever he needs me."

Some of the other subjects touched upon by DeBartolo on Sunday:

On San Francisco's fans: "The fans, you have made me and my family's life complete," DeBartolo said. "I love

you. I cherish you and I will never forget you. God bless you all and thank you so very much.”

On coming back to San Francisco to be honored: “It's so bittersweet, but the fans, the players, the coaches ... I could have been up there for a long time. I'm not a speaker but my heart went out. They made my life complete and today made my life complete. I put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into this organization and thank God we were successful. I think we did right by the city of San Francisco and the Bay Area. I'm just thrilled that I'm able to, I guess, go out like this.”

On how Jed York is leading the franchise: “I think he's doing great. He's a young man and he was thrown into something. He's got some hurdles and he's got a tough road to haul with this stadium situation. I wish it was sooner and I wish they could get a spade in the ground, but Rome wasn't built in a day and he'll do great.”

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