

Arthur J. “Archie” Roberts, MD
Phi Omega, Columbia University, 1965

If you had two “loves” in life, would you be able to do both with the same amount of passion and effectiveness? Dr. Arthur Roberts, better known as Archie, did in his college days and still does today. Some may recognize the name, some may not. But consider this, Roberts excelled in football, baseball, and scholarship while at Columbia University studying Biology/Pre-med. And he also was an active Brother in the Fraternity.

Roberts started his athletic career as a young boy of 12 years old due to his father’s mentoring. “My dad had graduated from NYU where he played football, and after college my dad was a Guidance Counselor at a high school in Holyoke, Massachusetts, where he also served as a football coach and athletic director. So I was in a sports environment from a very early age,” offers Roberts. While in high school, Roberts realized that he wanted to become a medical doctor and play sports. His father and his father’s friends from New York City were helpful in letting young Roberts see the possibilities before him. He chose Columbia University and in his sophomore year became the football team’s lead quarterback.

During his college career Roberts set many records. The Columbia Lions Athletic website outlines them all. Among them include being the first quarterback in Columbia history to complete more than 300 passes and the first to complete at least 100 passes in each of his varsity seasons. Roberts ranks sixth on Columbia University’s all-time list with 3,704 career passing yards. Roberts was a member of the 1964 Playboy All-American Team, as well as the Coaches All-American Football Game as one of three quarterbacks; the other two being Roger Staubach (Navy) and John Huarte (Notre Dame) (Source: Columbia Lions website, www.gocolumbialions.com).

Roberts was also an excellent baseball player. While at Columbia, he played shortstop and had a career batting average of .371 and led the nation in runs batted in with thirty. He was the 1965 Met Player of the Year, a member of the first team All-Eastern League and All East, and was named the first team All-American shortstop (Source: Columbia Lions website, www.gocolumbialions.com).

Given that many of the Columbia athletes were Alpha Chi Rho Brothers, it seemed only logical to associate with the men at the Fraternity and to become a Brother.

During Roberts’ senior year, he had to make some decisions. Both major league baseball and the NFL were looking at him for their respective drafts and Roberts seriously wanted to pursue medicine. “The Kansas City A’s wanted to draft me, but they wanted me to focus completely on baseball and would not allow me the time to complete my studies in medicine nor complete my senior year at Columbia. So I declined the offer to play professional baseball. Art Modell, owner of the Cleveland Browns, was able to negotiate that I would attend Case Western Reserve for medical school and play football. It worked out great because the Browns’ practices, at the time, were on the Case Western Reserve campus!” Roberts states.

In his third year of medical school with the Browns, Roberts was named the backup quarterback to Frank Ryan. But he knew his time was running out to become a first string quarterback. So before entering his fourth year of medical school, Roberts took a chance and asked to be traded to the Miami Dolphins, who were in their second year of existence as a team. "I put medical school on hold to try to become a first string quarterback, but when I got down to Miami the team had drafted Bob Griese out of Purdue to be the first string quarterback," remarks Roberts. Instead of becoming a first string quarterback Archie Roberts was backup quarterback to Griese. "After that year with the Dolphins, I decided that was the end of my quarterback days and focused on completing medical school."

However, Roberts was not able to get football totally out of his blood. During his residency at Yale he served as the assistant football coach for the Yale Freshmen team. And to this day, he is still close friends with many of his old NFL teammates; names like Jim Brown, Roger Staubach, and Bob Griese.

After completing medical school, Roberts began his career as a heart surgeon. For twenty-two years he saved people's lives, lectured on the latest procedures related to heart surgery and focused solely on his family and career. But there was one problem; Roberts was not focusing on his own health. "I was giving a lecture at a conference when I experienced a mild stroke." It was during his recovery that he realized he needed to focus on his health, but he also wanted to still make a difference in other people's lives. "My stroke was the impetus for the Living Heart Foundation, which I founded in 2001," Roberts offers. Roberts paired with the NFL and NFLPA to address cardio-vascular testing and health follow-up among today's professional football players, as well as other individuals. "Due to the size of players today, they run a greater risk of health issues related to heart disease, obesity, and other ailments," Roberts explains. The Living Heart Foundation also served to assist rescue workers of 9/11 by setting up a Ground Zero Clinic at the NYPD Police Academy to provide pulmonary and cardiovascular screenings. "These were admirable people. This was an unforgettable experience," offers Roberts.

Dr. Roberts will be recognized this fall by the National Football Foundation for his work and will be awarded the Distinguished American Award. He will be the 40th recipient of the award given annually by the National Football Foundation. Past recipients included Vince Lombardi and Joe Paterno.

When asked about his experience with Alpha Chi Rho, Roberts states, "the Fraternity provided me the opportunity to socialize with others and to mature. Good relationships were vitally important when you lived in the house."

Roberts lives with his wife, Nancy, in Little Silver, New Jersey. They have six grown children and eight grandchildren.