

Gale Sayers

Hall of Fame Running Back, Member of the NFL 75th Anniversary All-Time Team

Despite his brief football career, Gale Sayers is considered one of the greatest NFL players of all time. Best known as the “Kansas Comet,” he was the youngest player ever inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame at the age of 34. A multi-talented individual, Sayers used pride, poise, leadership and loyalty to fuel his success.

Born in rural Kansas, his family migrated to Omaha, Nebraska, before Sayers high school years. After a star-studded four years at Omaha Central, Sayers turned down offers from several other colleges to return to his home state and play at the University of Kansas. There, Sayers was a running back with a celebrated career, being named an all-American twice and finishing with 2,675 rushing yards. His 99 yard touchdown run as a sophomore against Nebraska is still an NCAA record today.

In the 1965 draft, Sayers was taken as the fourth pick in the first round by the Chicago Bears. That year, Sayers burst onto the professional football scene with a dynamic rookie debut. In his first preseason game, Sayers raced 77 yards on a punt return, 93 yards on a kickoff return, and scored his first professional touchdown on an 18-yard run against the Los Angeles Rams. This marked the beginning of possibly the greatest rookie season of any offensive player the NFL has ever experienced.

The young phenom would go on to score 22 touchdowns: 14 rushing, 6 receiving and 2 on returns, and compile a combined 1,347 rushing and receiving yards that year. At Wrigley Field against the San Francisco 49ers in December of 1965, Sayers tied an NFL record with six total touchdowns. Following Sayers impressive performance, Chicago lost the final game of the season at home to the Minnesota Vikings, missing a possible playoff spot at the same time. He was voted the NFL's Offensive Rookie of the Year and set an NFL record with his 22 total touchdowns.

The following year (1966) proved to be Sayers' best. He rushed for 1,231 yards and caught passes for another 447. He scored 8 rushing touchdowns, 2 via receptions and another 2 on returns. In his third season he tallied 880 yards with an average of 4.7 yards per carry. Playing in the first nine games of the season in 1968, Sayers led the NFL in rushing, running for 856 yards before his season ended due to a knee injury.

Sayers career was cut short after just seven seasons, many of which were riddled with injuries, when he retired in 1971. Despite only playing three full seasons, he managed to finish his career with nearly 9,435 combined net yards, 4,956 yards rushing, and 336 points scored. Sayers claimed All-NFL honors five-straight years and was named Offensive Player of the Game in three of the four Pro Bowls in which he played.

During his time away from the field caring for injuries, Sayers took classes to become a stockbroker, a task that would later pay off. His first position after retiring from football was Athletic Director at Southern Illinois University in 1976. He went on to establish Crest Computer Supply Company in the Chicago Area in 1984, later renamed Sayers 40, Inc., and still in

existence today. In 2009, Sayers joined his alma mater's athletic department as Director of Fundraising for Special Projects and in June of that year he was inducted into the John McLendon Minority Athletics Administrators Hall of Fame.

Among his many accolades, Sayers was ranked #22 on *The Sporting News's* list of the 100 Greatest Football Players and had his number #40 retired by the Chicago Bears in 1994.

Sayers is also an accomplished author, as his autobiography *I am Third* was adapted into the award winning television movie, *Brian's Song*. He is also an active philanthropist, supporting the Cradle Foundation and establishing The Gale Sayers Center with wife Ardie. An after-school program for children ages 8-12 from Chicago's west side, it centers on leadership development, tutoring, and mentoring.

Past charitable endeavors include serving as honorary chairman of the American Cancer Society, member of the board of trustees of the Chicago chapter of Boy Scouts of America, the Marklund Children's Home, and BBF (formerly Better Boys Foundation) of Chicago. Sayers also served as alumni spokesperson for the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, was a member of the National Board of Junior Achievement, and the alumni representative for the Kansas University Athletic Corporation in 2000.