



KANSAS LEGEND BIOGRAPHY

Gale Eugene Sayers (1943 – Present)

Known as The Kansas Comet, Gale Sayers dazzled the world on the football field at the high school, college and professional level. Sayers played only 68 professional football games, roughly four seasons, but his legendary performances at halfback and kick returner for each of his teams are as great as any player's.

Born in Wichita, Kan., and raised in Omaha, Neb., Gale Sayers grew up the son of a polisher and mechanic. Sayers attended Omaha Central High School, where he became the team's star running back. He also participated in track, earning the state's high school long jump record, which he still holds today. After being offered more than 75 scholarships from universities across the country, Sayers chose the University of Kansas.

Sayers rushed for 2,675 yards, with 3,917 all-purpose yards during his college career. He was chosen as an All-American back-to-back in 1963 and 1964. Sayers also set the NCAA record with a 99-yard run in 1963 against the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. He topped the Jayhawks' charts in touchdowns, rushing and kick returns, while also excelling in track and field for the university.

In 1965, Sayers was a first-round draft pick of the Chicago Bears. Although he was offered a more lucrative offer from the Kansas City Chiefs, he ultimately chose Chicago, where his presence was immediately felt. Sayers scored a record 22 touchdowns in his rookie season, accumulating 2,272 all-purpose yards.

The following year, Sayers received the rushing title with 1,231 yards in 14 games. However, Sayers' success was put on hold during the 1968 season after suffering ruptured cartilage and two torn ligaments in his right knee. Despite the setback, Sayers began physical therapy and returned to the sport the very next season, winning his second rushing title with 1,032 yards. For his miraculous return to the game, Sayers was awarded the NFL's Most Courageous Player Award.

Sayers suffered another injury in 1970, which basically ended his football career. He left the game as the NFL's all-time leader in kickoff returns. Sayers returned to his college alma mater and served as assistant athletic director before becoming director of the Williams Educational Fund, which raises money for the school's athletics programs. Sayers left Kansas to serve as athletic director of Southern Illinois University from 1976 to 1984.

In 1977, Sayers was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, then as the youngest inductee. He also received the honor of being inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame, the Kansas Sports Hall of Fame and the Black Athlete's Hall of Fame.

After leaving athletics and education behind him, Sayers started his own technology products and services business, which became a multi-million dollar endeavor. Sayers is a frequent public speaker and is involved in numerous charities. Many have learned about Sayers football memories through the 1971 made-for-television movie "Brian's Song," chronicling Sayers' friendship with Brian Piccolo, who passed away from cancer. Sayers published his autobiography, "I am Third," in 1973.

