

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Gale Sayers

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Sayers, Gale, 1943-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers,
Dates:	November 24, 2008 and November 5, 2008
Bulk Dates:	2008
Physical Description:	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:28:35).
Abstract:	Entrepreneur and football player Gale Sayers (1943 - 2020) was drafted by the Chicago Bears and was named rookie of the year in 1965, then Pro Bowl MVP in 1967, 1968 and 1970. He was inducted into the NFL: Hall of Fame in 1977. He served as athletic director at Southern Illinois University, then founded Sayers and Sayers Enterprises in Chicago. His 1971 autobiography, 'I Am Third,' was produced into an award-winning television movie, 'Brian's Song.' Sayers was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 24, 2008 and November 5, 2008, in Northbrook, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2008_124
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

NFL Hall of Famer Gale Eugene Sayers was born on May 30, 1943, in Wichita, Kansas. Sayers grew up in Omaha, Nebraska and graduated from Omaha Central High School. As a running back at the University of Kansas, he was a two-time All-American player known as "The Kansas Comet." In 1963, he set an NCAA Division I record with a 99-yard run against Nebraska.

Sayers was drafted in 1965 by the Chicago Bears and remained with the team for his entire NFL career. He was the unanimous choice for NFL Rookie of the Year in 1965. He was named the MVP of the 1967, 1968 and 1970 Pro Bowl Games, and he was named to the 75th Anniversary All Time NFL Team. Sayers was inducted into the Black Sports Hall of Fame in 1975, the NFL Hall of Fame in 1977, and the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame in 1980. In July 2000, he was named to the NFL All-Time Millennium Team.

After completing his professional football career in 1971, Sayers returned to the University of Kansas to receive his B.A. degree in physical education while also working as the assistant athletic director. Sayers accepted the assignment as assistant director of the Williams Education Fund for three years and received his M.A. degree in educational administration. Sayers served as athletic director at Southern Illinois University from 1976 to 1981.

Sayers moved back to Chicago and launched a sports marketing and public relations firm, Sayers and Sayers Enterprises. He then started a computer supplies business in 1984 and built that business into a provider of technology products and services. In 1999, Sayers was inducted into another Hall of Fame - the Chicago Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame. He is also a recipient of the prestigious Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Sayers spends a great deal of time supporting and fundraising for a variety of charitable organizations including the Better Boys Foundation, the Cradle Adoption Agency, the Gale Sayers Center, Grid Iron Greats, Junior Achievement, and Wesley House. The University of Kansas has established the Gale Sayers Microcomputer Center in recognition of Sayers's commitment to both education and technology. Sayers has authored an instructional publication on the fundamentals of football's offensive strategies called *Offensive Football*. In addition, his 1971 autobiography, *I Am Third*, was produced into an award-winning television movie, *Brian's Song*, starring James Caan and Billy Dee Williams. In 2007, he released a new book, *Gale Sayers, My Life and Times*.

Sayers serves on the board of directors at American Century Mutual Funds, located in Kansas City, Missouri.

Sayers passed away on September 23, 2020.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Gale Sayers was conducted by Larry Crowe on November 24, 2008 and November 5, 2008, in Northbrook, Illinois, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Entrepreneur and football player Gale Sayers (1943 - 2020) was drafted by the Chicago Bears and was named rookie of the year in 1965, then Pro Bowl MVP in 1967, 1968 and 1970. He was inducted into the NFL: Hall of Fame in 1977. He served as athletic director at Southern Illinois University, then founded Sayers and Sayers Enterprises in Chicago. His 1971 autobiography, 'I Am Third,' was produced into an award-winning television movie, 'Brian's Song.'

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Sayers, Gale, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Sayers, Gale, 1943---Interviews

African American football players--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American businesspeople--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

Running backs (Football)--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Chicago Bears (Football team)

Occupations:

Entrepreneur

Football Player

HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|SportsMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, November 24, 2008 and November 5, 2008. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue,

Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, Section A2008_124_001_001, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

Gale Sayers was born on May 30, 1943 in Wichita, Kansas to Bernice Ross Sayers and Roger W. Sayers. His mother was born in Gilmer, Texas, and later moved to Wichita to live near her sister. His father was born in Nicodemus, Kansas, the son of one of the few African American lawyers in the region. Sayers' parents married in Wichita, where his father worked at The Boeing Company aircraft plant. As a child, Sayers spent several years in Nicodemus, where his father cared for his own father, who was ill. After Sayers' paternal grandfather died, Sayers finished the fifth grade in Speed, Kansas, and then moved to Omaha, Nebraska, where his father worked at the Cudahy Packing Company. In Omaha, Sayers enrolled at Howard Kennedy Elementary School, and attended a Baptist church with his family, including his brothers, Roger Sayers and Ron Sayers. He also joined a Pop Warner Little Scholars football team, where future actor John Beasley was his teammate. Sayers continued with the sport at Omaha Central High School.

African American football players--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American businesspeople--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

Running backs (Football)--Illinois--Chicago--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, Section A2008_124_001_002, TRT: 0:29:30 ?

Gale Sayers attended Omaha Central High School in Omaha, Nebraska, where he played football alongside his older brother, Roger Sayers, for Coach Frank Smagacz. Sayers qualified for the all-state team in his junior and senior seasons, and won two state championships. Despite his slight build, he was recruited by 125 college football programs, and chose to attend the University of Kansas. There, during his three-year football career, he set a collegiate record for the longest run from scrimmage, and made the All-American team twice. In 1965, Sayers was drafted by both the American Football League's Kansas City Chiefs and the National Football League's Chicago Bears. He signed with the Bears in order to play in a more established league, and replaced Willie Galimore as the Bears' starting running back under Coach George Halas. Sayers talks about the

changes in football training routines from the time of his career, including the increased focus on lifting weights and sprinting.

Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, Section A2008_124_001_003, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Gale Sayers joined the Chicago Bears in 1965, and played for Coach George Halas. Sayers was the team's kickoff and punt returner, and threw a touchdown pass during his rookie season. That year, he scored twenty-two touchdowns, breaking Jim Brown's National Football League (NFL) record for most touchdowns in a single season. Sayers was selected to the Pro Bowl in his first five NFL seasons; but, because many of his best teammates, like Richie Petitbon, Doug Atkins and Bill Wade, were aging, the Bears did not qualify for the playoffs during his tenure. Sayers lived in the South Shore community of Chicago, Illinois, where his neighbors included pianist Ramsey Lewis, Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and baseball player Ernie Banks. In 1968, Sayers tore several ligaments in his knee while playing against the San Francisco 49ers. He returned to the NFL in 1969, but retired after suffering another knee injury, and declined opportunities to become a coach. Sayers was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1977.

Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, Section A2008_124_002_004, TRT: 0:29:00 ?

Gale Sayers was a running back for the Chicago Bears football team, which played home games at Wrigley Field during his career. He was a close friend of the Bears' running back Brian Piccolo, and the two men and their wives often spent time together socially. In 1968, Sayers and Piccolo decided to room together during away games, becoming the Bears' first interracial roommates. Sayers recalls his devastation when Piccolo was diagnosed with lung cancer, and passed away in 1970. The year before, Sayers had returned from a severe knee injury to win the National Football League's Comeback Player of the Year award. However, Sayers sustained several more knee injuries, and retired from professional football in 1972. He worked briefly as a stockbroker at the firm of Paine, Webber, Jackson and Curtis, and then completed a master's degree in administration while working in the athletics department at the University of Kansas. In 1976, Sayers was hired as the athletics director of Southern Illinois University.

Video Oral History Interview with Gale Sayers, Section A2008_124_002_005, TRT: 0:30:05 ?

Gale Sayers was a National Football League (NFL) all-star player during his rookie season with the Chicago Bears, when he replaced Willie Galimore as the team's running back. In 1971, he was portrayed by actor Billy Dee Williams in the movie 'Brian's Song,' which starred James Caan as Sayers' teammate, Brian Piccolo. In 1976, Sayers became the athletics director at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, where his personnel included football coach Rey Dempsey and star basketball player Mike Glenn. Sayers stepped down from this position in 1983, and returned to Chicago, Illinois. There, he founded the Sayers Group LLC, a computer hardware supplier whose clientele included numerous Fortune 500 companies. Sayers talks about the conduct of professional athletes at the time of the interview. He also reflects upon his life and family, his hopes and concerns for the African American community and how he would like to be remembered.