

My tampa bay. in
1996, became the
first



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My article that I choice was about one of the most interesting sports players of our time. Barry Sanders arguably the best back ever to play the game of football. Barry is not one of those players who is just out there to make money, no he loves the game and is always trying his hardest when he is out there.

In my paper there is a lot of interesting information about Barry that not every one knows about him. Barry Sanders was born July 16th, 1968 in Wichita, Kansas. He grew up in a family being one of eleven other children. When Barry was a kid he was considered to be too short to play football well at the college level. In fact, his 1,417 yards rushing in his senior year of high school wasn't enough to impress college recruiters. One recruiter told Barry's coach, "We don't need another midget." Only two colleges offered Barry a football scholarship.

Barry accepted a scholarship from Oklahoma State University and the rest is now history. Here are some of Barry's career achievements that he has done in the short time he has played the game. Which has made him such the over achiever that he is. 1988, won the Heisman Trophy Award for best player in the nation. 1989, lead the NFC in rushing and was Rookie of the Year. 1992, became the Lions' All-Time leading rusher.

1994, rushed for the fourth best NFL season record of 1,883 yards and included a 237 yards in week 11 vs. Tampa Bay. In 1996, became the first player in NFL history to rush for over 1,000 yards in his first eight seasons, won the NFL rushing title, selected to the Pro Bowl for the eighth time and became the first player to rush for over 1,500 yards in three consecutive

seasons. Sanders continues adding to his extraordinary numbers on the field. He has run for 1,300 yards and now stands seventh among the NFL's all-time rushers with 11,472, having surpassed Ottis Anderson, O. J.

Simpson and John Riggins. He is 128 yards behind Kansas City's Marcus Allen, Sanders' boyhood hero when he was growing up in Wichita, Kan., and Allen was a Los Angeles Raider. Next year, providing he keeps up this trend of 1,000-yard seasons, Sanders will pass Franco Harris (12,120), Jim Brown (12,312) and Tony Dorsett (12,739) and slide into third place behind Eric Dickerson (13,259) and Walter Payton (16,726).

Sanders is the first player in league history to rush for at least 1,000 yards in eight straight seasons, and Thursday he was named to his eighth straight Pro Bowl. "Anytime he touches the ball, it's a highlight reel," says Allen, now in his 15th NFL season. "The player most fun to watch, and by far, the most dangerous player in the game today, is Barry Sanders. He is just remarkable. He is also, in my opinion, the guy everyone's still trying to crack.

"Mention any of this to Sanders, and you would expect him to be bemused, wearing the kind of bored look people get when they're waiting in line at the grocery store. You've seen him being interviewed on TV, standing or sitting in that same spot in front of his locker, avoiding eye contact with the camera and speaking in that unhurried monotone. There has always been a kind of perceived uneasiness about him.

But rattle off a few of the aforementioned tales of change especially what his teammates and family have noticed about him lately and he nods knowingly and begins, very un-Sanders like, by answering a question with a question."

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When I first came into the league, I was 20 years old," he starts out saying. " Now I'm 28.

So wouldn't you expect there to be some changes between 20 and 28?" Sure, you say. He continues. " I know I'm more outgoing, especially publicly," Sanders says. " I don't think any! of my brothers or sisters, though, would ever term me as quiet or reserved. Whenever I become more comfortable with people, I get more open. And now, I just think I'm more comfortable outside of my own little environment and people can see more of me, more inside of the person.

Before, I was a person who felt out of their element and was just kind of being, sitting back and watching everything. " At home, they knew I wasn't just this quiet and reserved person, the way people thought I was here. It's just a matter of comfort, that's all it is. Even in the locker room, people that I'm not real close with I can laugh and joke. And now, I'm more prone to try to defend myself from attacks from Brett Perriman and Herman Moore." Sanders starts cracking up.

Get it? He has just made a joke. " I can sit and talk with my oldest son for hours and hours. Barry and I could never do that. But the last time he called, he asked to talk to me.

We talked for quite a while. Barry, he used to make me mad because he was just like his mother. Looks like her. Quiet like her. I wanted him to have something of me.

But I wouldn't let him be outgoing. Barry, I said, you've got to be different. Ask him. Hell remember." William Sanders, Barry's father Peter Schaffer, one of Sanders' agents, lives in Denver. He belongs to a health club where Sanders and former Michigan receiver Mercury Hayes joined a pick up basketball game last year. Sanders! , who's 5-feet-8 and 203 pounds, wore a plain T-shirt and shorts. Hayes' shirt said "Michigan" on the front.

The next day, a couple of Schaffer's friends who played in the game sought him out. "Hey, it was sure fun playing basketball with Mercury Hayes!" they said. Schaffer didn't have the heart to tell them who the other guy was.

Stories like that one are still as popular as they were in 1988 -- the year Sanders won the Heisman Trophy as a junior at Oklahoma State and turned down an invitation to the White House because he said he had to study.

Or how about the time two years ago in Miami when Sanders spent the evening in the lounge at the Marriott? Think you're onto some juicy gossip, right? Well, Sanders wasn't attached to any barstool. He and Steve Atwater of the Denver Broncos were in a corner, playing Pop-A-Shot basketball all night. Former Lions offensive tackle Lomas Brown has a good one, too. He can list the times Sanders has been over to his house for dinner, but you! wouldn't have known he was there.

"You know how it's kids in one room, adults in another?" says Brown, who spent 11 years with the Lions before he signed with the Arizona Cardinals last February." Well, most of the time Barry would be with my kids, sitting on the floor playing a video game or eating off their plates watching a movie."

Sanders, who has one year left on a four-year, \$17.2-million contract he signed in December 1993, still lives in the \$175,000 house in Rochester Hills he bought in 1989 after the Lions made him their first-round draft pick. But back in Wichita, he moved his parents into a new 7,000-square-foot house three years ago. The white brick home, which sits on 11 acres with a private pond stocked with bass, crappie and catfish, replaces the three-bedroom, 850-square-foot home Barry and his 10 brothers and sisters grew up in. "You do what's right," Sanders says with a shrug.

Well, that includes everything from paying the college tuitions for his brothers! and sisters to making sure his Nike contract still has a clause that says the company must supply his former high school football coach with 60 pairs of shoes a year. One person who knows Sanders best outside his family is Mark McCormick, a newspaper reporter at the Wichita Eagle. They grew up on the same street, Volusia, on the city's north side, and have been friends since McCormick got over the day Sanders beat him up in kindergarten. When Sanders was attending Oklahoma State, McCormick was studying journalism at the University of Kansas. He was on a tight budget and got sick, losing 30 pounds one semester. "Dang, what's going on with you?" Sanders asked. "I'm in college," McCormick replied. "I'm starving.

"Sanders wanted to help and offered his Pell Grant money, which McCormick refused. A few years later, after Sanders joined the Lions, he heard that McCormick was evicted from an apartment after getting his first job. He mailed him \$500. "I'm at the point now in our relationship that I can never repay him unless I give him a lung or a kidney," McCormick says. "And he still calls me all the time." After rushing for 1,470 yards and breaking Billy

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Simssingle-season club record his rookie year, Sanders gave each of the Lions offensive linemen a Rolex watch, valued at more than \$10, 000. On the back was the inscription: " Thanks for a great 89 season.

Barry Sanders." When center Kevin Glover came home one day last February, a box the size of a small refrigerator was sitting in the driveway near his garage. In it was a big-screen TV and a thank-you note from Sanders. " Its not expected, but he does it," Glover says. The TV " is something Im going to cherish. When I retire, I plan on getting a plaque for it that will say, A gift from Barry Sanders.

" All of this giving, all of this helping, and Sanders still turns down most of the endorsement offers that come his way, deals that could bring him an additional \$4 million to \$5 million a year, Schaffer says. " You can put \$1 million in front of him that he turns down, but he will say yes to the Michigan state seat-belt patrol campaign," Schaffer says. " A lot of football players have tremendous egos. They like to see themselves on TV. Not Barry.

" Sanders doesnt decline everything, though. He has endorsement deals with more than a half-dozen companies, including many of the prized ones Nike, McDonalds, Cadillac, 7-Eleven, and, soon to be announced, Little Caesars. " He needs to let himself take off," Perriman says. " He should be the Michael Jordan of football. He could be that. Playing eight years, he knows hes not going to be playing forever.

I tell him, You better get what you deserve and what you can while you can. He needs to be as large in commercials as he is a player." But Sanders wont. He is doing more, but he wont do it all. " I wish there were another way of

doing it," Sanders says of endorsements. "I'm definitely more comfortable with the game being bigger than the person." That has been Sanders' philosophy since the fourth grade.

That year, in his first football game ever, the first time he touched the ball, he scored on a 70-yard sweep. The next Saturday, his coach tried him out on kickoffs. He ran the first one back for a touchdown. His father was there. "It was 1977 and I was sitting in my '63 Pontiac listening to Texas beat Oklahoma, 13-6," William Sanders says. "Must have run for three or four touchdowns that day."

"In his first few years with the Lions, much was made about Sanders' upbringing, about the stern father and quiet mother, parents who had their own distinct ways of raising their children." Growing up, the kids would get together and just kind of ask the question, "How in the world did these two get together?" Barry says with a laugh. Barry was especially close to his mother and still is. Shirley Sanders had children spanning three decades, beginning with Diane, born in 1959, and ending with Krista, the youngest of the eight girls, born in 1974. Shirley delivered Barry, No. 7 on the family's roster, on July 16, 1968. His mother speaks in a soft voice and is bashful around strangers.

"I love it when he comes home," she says. "We sit and talk for hours. I miss him."

"I feel for him sometimes all the attention he gets and doesn't want." When her husband pipes up and offers one of his gruff opinions ("I don't like boys to be close to their mothers because it makes sissies out of them," he says), Shirley

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smiles and rolls her eyes. Last month at the Sanders home in Wichita, Shirley spent part of the evening in her kitchen listening to Christian music while her husband sat on his leather recliner watching a basketball game. Indiana was beating up Princeton.

Shirley says she missed many of Barry's football games when he was growing up, mainly because Friday night was reserved for choir practice at Paradise Baptist Church. Religion is a central theme of the Sanders family. One of the proudest moments in her life came when Barry sent \$200,000 of his \$2.

1-million signing bonus to Paradise his rookie year. While Shirley is quiet and unassuming, her husband is anything but. William Sanders listens to Rush Limbaugh and Dr. Laura, smokes White Owl cigars and rarely leaves home without his Cleveland Browns jacket. His favorite college remains Oklahoma because he listened to the Sooners broadcasts on the radio when he was growing up. He points out that he has collected only two autographs for himself through the years Troy Aikman (because he played two seasons at Oklahoma) and Bernie Kosar (Cleveland).

In 1994, William Sanders brought a football to Dallas, where the Cowboys were playing the Lions. When the teams were warming up, he was introduced to Emmitt Smith. Sanders asked if Smith could do him a favor and sign his football for a friend. "He said he'd get me after the game," William Sanders says, angry as he tells the story. As it turns out, the Lions won the game in overtime. When he asked Smith to sign the ball, he refused. "My Barry would never do that," Sanders says. Until this past summer, William Sanders was working six days a week as a freelance roofer and remodeler.

Before that, he worked on the beef-kill line at a rendering plant, firing .22s into the skulls of cattle, among other jobs. "Barry came into money in '88," William Sanders says, walking up the private drive that leads to their home. "You know, we'll be here four years on Memorial Day. I was never hung up on moving out of the ghetto just to say I moved out.

Money can be a curse and a nightmare if you let it control you." As nice as his new house is, William Sanders misses his old neighborhood. "I bought that house (on Volusia) for \$8,200 in 1964," he says. "I paid it off in February 1984 -- \$77.50 a month on a 20-year note." In those days, sleeping arrangements were eight girls in one bedroom, three boys in another. William was the neighborhood's master builder of bunk beds. And also, the chief disciplinarian.

"I remember in Barry's senior year in high school he had on a pair of Converse All-Stars for basketball," William Sanders says. "He came in one day and his shoes were untied. I told him if he ever comes in the house again with his shoes untied I'd break both his legs." "I was such a sergeant over my kids. I felt I had to be." Barry's brother Byron, who played football at Northwestern, says, "My father doesn't realize that although we appear to be reserved, no one in the world can intimidate any of his children because of the way he was. He loved us, and that's the difference.

"Today, the children all grown and gone, William Sanders misses the full house. He's planning a family reunion for next summer." "Let me tell you how I feel about things now," William Sanders says. "God told Abraham that he was a blessing to many nations.

Well, were thankful for the blessings of Barry. I remember I wanted one of my sons to go to Oklahoma so bad, so that I could go down in peace. Now, if Barry goes into the Hall of Fame, when he's standing up there, on the steps in Canton, I can lay downright there and die." " I think a lot of things that I believe have changed, or I have just adjusted some. I think if that's what you really want to do, then I think you should. What the other players around the league think about him. You could call him the best running back, and there would be no real argument.

But you could go even further: Barry Sanders of the Detroit Lions might be, quite simply, the best player in the game. Were he to be judged only for the magic he creates with a hand off, his supremacy would end at his position. But Sanders has accomplished something remarkable, if not unprecedented, since the days of Jim Brown. The current of terror that begins to flow in the days and hours before a game usually emanates from vicious defenders and flows white-hot into the rattled psyches of the players who earn their pay with the ball in their hands. But alone among his offensive fellows, Sanders has reversed that current. Sanders has a whole breed of men best known for barking like dogs instead praying out loud. In a week of preparing for Sanders, says Chicago Bear linebacker Vinson Smith, " You have to not sleep for a couple of nights." Really? " Yes.

Yes. " And even during fitful dozing, says Minnesota Viking defensive tackle Henry Thomas, who usually dreams of sacks and motor cycles, " you sit up in the middle of the night hollering, 'Barry! Sanders!' " Most people don't just think Barry is a great football player they also think he is a great person too. Barry Sanders is simply the most exciting sports player to watch. Not to

mention that he has a great personality and isa class act. This guy is so good at what he does it's scaryand he doesn't even have a trace of ego in him. WhenBarry runs the ball he defies the laws of gravity and physics of a moving object.

He makes moves that make your eyespop out of their sockets and leave your mouth hangingwide open. To me this report help my find out that Barry ismore than just a good ball player he also is a good personthat most people dont see. Barry does not let all themoney he earns get to his head he act like you and me. Atthe end of Barrys career he will probably own every singlerecord there is.

He is on the pace to do that with noproblem. There is no doubt in my mind that Barry will be inthe Hall of Fame with ease. To bad all the sports playersare not like Barry if they were all the games you watchwould be ten times better then what they are now. Biographies