

Former Wildcat Brown recalls time in Manhattan, NFL Manhattan Mercury February 8, 2015

By Jeff Chapman February 8, 2015

Q & A with Wildcat and Washington Redskins legend Larry Brown.

Jeff Chapman — a Kansas State alum — is a freelance writer and political cartoonist from Kansas City, Mo.

Larry Brown played football at Kansas State for two seasons (1967-68) under Vince Gibson.

After finishing college in 1969, Brown played under Vince Lombardi for the Washington Redskins from until he retired in 1976. During the 1972 season, Brown was named the NFL's Most Valuable Player and played in the Super Bowl against the undefeated Miami Dolphins.

Brown was selected to the NFL Pro Bowl four straight years — 1969-72. He has been inducted into the Washington Redskins Ring of Fame. His No. 43 has not been used by the organization since, although it has not yet been retired.

I chose to write about and interview Brown because he is to me, the forgotten Wildcat, and the forgotten Redskin when it comes to his achievements.

How does a punishing runner who has had such great successes — on and off the field — in both college and professionally not get into the NFL Hall of Fame?

It remains a mystery.

In countless interviews over the years, Larry has avoided that question or left it to others, except once in 2012 when he told David Elfin of CBS Sports that he “belongs in that group.”

The group Larry refers to are these 11 running backs that played before or during his era and are all in the Pro Football Hall of Fame — O.J. Simpson, Gale Sayers, Walter Payton, Jim Brown, Tony Dorsett, Franco Harris, Larry Csonka, John Henry Johnson, Jim Taylor, Joe Perry and Lenny Moore.

Brown ranks in the upper middle of this pack of greats in statistics.

Sometimes the Hall of Fame voting just doesn't make sense, and part of it is that coaches and players often campaign and rally behind their peers. In Larry's case, both of his former coaches — George Allen and Vince Lombardi — are deceased and would have been his biggest cheerleaders.

The same question emerges when wondering why such an accomplished K-State Wildcat has no honors or is hardly recognized at his alma mater or in the State of Kansas.

Why?

Brown was an underutilized blocking back in his days at K-State, leading the way for an offense led by Lynn Dickey and the flashy tailback Mack Heron.

While Brown's numbers and stats are not record-breaking, his contribution as a representative of K-State on and off of the field place him at the top of his category by being named to the Pro Bowl as a rookie and the MVP, the highest honor thus far of any former Wildcat player.

Not to mention, Brown's life during and after football of charitable activity in the Washington D.C., area. K-State has honored plenty of individuals over the years for far less than what Brown has accomplished.

Here is my question-and-answer session with Brown:

CHAPMAN: Larry, as the 1972 MVP, I believe you remain the highest achieving individual former K-State Wildcat football player in the professional leagues. How does that make you feel?

BROWN: Quite frankly, I have never given that achievement a thought before now. I think you are correct. If so, I am ecstatic. I would like to challenge current and future "Wildcats" to match or exceed this accomplishment by being inducted in the NFL's Hall of Fame. Now that takes "Purple Pride" to the highest level possible in the game of professional football.

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CHAPMAN: What was life like for a black student-athlete in Manhattan in 1968?

BROWN: It definitely was a different experience for me, as well as I suspect for the others. I grew up in the inner city of Pittsburgh, so it took quite a while for me to get used to seeing feed lots, cattle, flat terrain and tornados.

At the time, there weren't any black sororities or fraternities and most of the black males were on the football team, probably more prevailed there than in the entire student population.

Looking back, I don't recall experiencing any racial problems in 1967 and I made the cultural adjustment without any difficulties.

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CHAPMAN: Do you follow K-State today? What are your thoughts on Bill Snyder?

BROWN: I do follow the team, but not as closely as I would like.

I think Bill has done an excellent job and I once sent him a congratulatory note and thanked the coach for putting KSU on the map.

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CHAPMAN: What was it like playing for Vince Lombardi?

BROWN: It was like playing for a field general like George C. Scott's portrayal of George Patton.

One of Lombardi's vital skills was known to be player management, on and off the field, which seems to be a front burner issue in the game today.

Believe me, on the field it was crystal clear in 1969, my rookie year, that there wasn't a person on the team who thought or acted as if he was larger than the team itself. A player might unintentionally do something that has the appearance of being self-serving and Lombardi's response was the same, an in-your-face intense discussion about your antics in front of your peers, regardless of the venue.

Case and point, during a home game, we were on the opponent's 1-yard line and the quarterback threw a pass to the tight end for a touchdown. Before we could alter our direction to leave the field, Lombardi was on the field and chewing the quarterback's head off for throwing a 11-yard pass.

His message was that we know you can throw the football, however, we must let other members of the team participate in the game. One thing was always for sure, while Lombardi was in charge, no man was an island.

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CHAPMAN: Do you have an opinion on the recent controversy over the Washington Redskins mascot?

BROWN: No.

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CHAPMAN: You were pretty much a battering ram in the NFL, with complete disregard to your body. How has that affected your health today?

BROWN: I have been told years ago that both knees need to be replaced. I think I am about to give in and put the procedure in motion soon. Other than that, arthritis in some of my joints, I am fine.

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CHAPMAN: Would you have done anything differently regarding how you ran as you look back?

BROWN: I don't think so because the average career for a running back is about three years. It was my belief that if you don't touch the football getting recognition for your contribution to the team effort, the game and the league would be extremely difficult to accomplish.

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CHAPMAN: I read in your book that your toughest competition was running against Willie Lanier. Do you ever see him these days?

BROWN: Yeah, Willie was the hardest hitting guy in the league. We are good friends now. I see him periodically.

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CHAPMAN: When was the last time you were in Manhattan?

BROWN: Unfortunately, I haven't been in Manhattan since 1969.

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CHAPMAN: Do you keep in touch with your old KSU teammates?

BROWN: Yes, I have been in touch with the following people — Art Strogier, Lotus Rhodes, Clarence Scott, Ira Gordon, Ozzie Cain, John Acker, Mack Herron and John Walker.

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CHAPMAN: Did you keep a relationship with K-State coach Vince Gibson after college?

BROWN: I didn't immediately, but later. I came very close to creating a Sports Spectacular Events company in the Mid-Atlantic area which would have been similar to his business in New Orleans.

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CHAPMAN: What advice do you have for today's student-athletes?

BROWN: As these student-athletes plan for the future, they must not put all their eggs in one basket. When it comes to professional football, the numbers just don't work. You have a huge number of student-athletes competing for a small number of jobs and many don't turnover.

Thus, you must complete the trade off, play sports in order to get an education, which prepares you for the real world of work.

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Brown is currently a vice president at NAI Michael in Lanham, Md, where he manages investment sales and leasing and is a licensed realtor. He is a regular speaker on numerous subjects, including workforce diversity and volunteerism around the country, but more regularly in the D.C. and Baltimore area.

After retiring from football, he was a financial planning consultant for E.F. Hutton, then managed finances with the Xerox Corporation for many years until his current job.

Larry Brown Park is named for him in Alexandria, Va., and he has received numerous awards for community service over the years according to his company website bio.

Brown was born near Pittsburgh, Pa., and attended Dodge City Community College prior to K-State. He and his wife Janet live in Potomac, Md. He has two adult daughters — Tonya and Laurin.

- See more at: <http://themercury.com/articles/former-wildcat-brown-recalls-time-in-manhattan-nfl#sthash.bGxs6ViU.dpuf>





At Kansas State, I was used mostly as a blocking back my junior year but I got to carry the ball more as a senior. Here I'm blocking for wingback Mack Herron, 42, during a 56-20 loss to Missouri my senior year, and taking a handoff from quarterback Lynn Dickey in the same game. (Courtesy Kansas State University)



