



Words Hillel Kuttler

FALCONS LEGEND

Bill Fralic

Bill Fralic still makes his living moving large objects, but now they're 18-wheelers, not defensive linemen. Beginning in 1985, the 6ft-5in, 280lb Fralic starred as an offensive lineman for eight seasons with the Atlanta Falcons and one with the Detroit Lions, twice being voted a first-team All-Pro.

This August, he celebrated the 25th anniversary of Bill Fralic Insurance, an Atlanta-area firm that provides policies to long-distance trucking companies. A few years into his NFL career, Fralic began working for an insurance company in the offseason. When that company failed, Fralic launched his own firm – just before the start of the season in which he earned his fourth consecutive Pro Bowl appearance.

"I put my nose to the grindstone. I juggled both," Fralic said.

Handling two pulls simultaneously is something Fralic already was experiencing on the field. While he was excelling, his Falcons were not. Atlanta missed the playoffs in Fralic's first six seasons and seven of his eight years as a Falcon. He reached the playoffs once more in his last NFL season, but that was as a Lion.

"That really wears on you. It's a lot easier to go out there and perform when the team is doing well, but you've got to show up and do the best you can, regardless of the circumstances," Fralic said of the losing years. "It's a hell of a lot harder

to perform at a high level when things around you are not going very well."

The Falcons did boast some offensive talent around Fralic, the second overall pick in the 1985 NFL Draft. Gerald Riggs and John Settle each had seasons where they put up 1,000-plus rushing yards, Billy "White Shoes" Johnson and Deion Sanders made kick and punt returns look like an art, and Andre Rison and Michael Haynes were effective, sometimes devastating, receivers.

However, those players came and went throughout, never overlapping long enough to gel. And Fralic never protected a top-flight quarterback; the closest he got was in 1991, when a Falcons third stringer played two games and was traded – a fellow by the name of Brett Favre.

That year's team, though, finished 10-6 before the eventual Super Bowl-champion Washington Redskins booted Atlanta from the Divisional round of the playoffs. Still, the accomplishment was noteworthy for Fralic, whose Falcons compiled a pre-1991 record of 27-67-1.

The playoff team was led by Jerry Glanville, the eccentric head coach known to leave game tickets for the late Elvis Presley.

"He was always, at practice, making wisecracks. He was always a character, but he was more knowledgeable about football than given credit for," Fralic

said. "It was fun. We had a number of characters on our team. Unfortunately, we ran into the Redskins in the playoffs. They were obviously a much better team than we were at that time, but it was a good year, all in all."

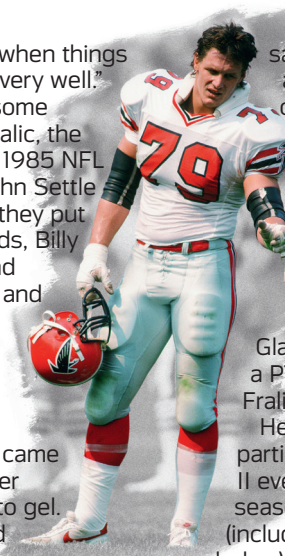
Playing under Glanville was, "like being in a PT Barnum atmosphere," Fralic said.

He would know, having participated in a Wrestlemania II event following his second season. Several NFL players (including William Perry, pictured below) competed in the Battle Royal. Twenty men entered the ring and were whittled down to one winner as competitors tossed one another over the top rope. One of those who Fralic tossed was Jimbo Covert, offensive lineman for the Chicago Bears, and his teammate at the University of Pittsburgh.

As a boy, Fralic enjoyed wrestling, but said he "never really had the desire to do that for a living".

He did aspire to play pro football, of course, and he reached that goal, if not the mountaintop that Covert and Perry conquered when the Bears won Super Bowl XX.

"I tried every day to give 100 per cent," Fralic said. "I can't pinpoint anything I regret." 🍷



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