

= Walter Payton =

Walter Jerry Payton (July 25 , 1954 ? November 1 , 1999) was an American football running back who played for the Chicago Bears of the National Football League (NFL) for thirteen seasons . Payton was known around the NFL as " Sweetness " . He is remembered as one of the most prolific running backs in the history of the NFL . Payton , a nine @-@ time Pro Bowl selectee , once held the league 's record for most career rushing yards , touchdowns , carries , yards from scrimmage , all @-@ purpose yards , and many other categories . His eight career touchdown passes are just second to Frank Gifford an NFL record for non @-@ quarterbacks . He was elected into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1993 . Hall of Fame NFL player and coach Mike Ditka described Payton as the greatest football player he had ever seen ? but even greater as a human being .

Payton began his football career in Mississippi , and went on to have an outstanding collegiate football career at Jackson State University where he was an All @-@ American . He started his professional career with the Chicago Bears in 1975 , who selected him as the 1975 Draft 's fourth overall pick . Payton proceeded to win two NFL Most Valuable Player Awards and won Super Bowl XX with the 1985 Chicago Bears . After struggling with the rare liver disease primary sclerosing cholangitis for several months , Payton died on November 1 , 1999 , aged 46 , from cholangiocarcinoma . His legacy includes the Walter Payton Award , the Walter Payton Man of the Year Award , and a heightened awareness of the need for organ donations .

= = Early life = =

Payton was one of three children born to Peter and Alyne Payton in West Point , Mississippi . His father was a factory worker who had played semi @-@ professional baseball . Payton was an active member of the Boy Scouts , Little League , and his local church . At John J. Jefferson High School , Payton played drums in the marching band , participated in the track team and sang in the school choir . Outside of school , he played drums in jazz @-@ rock groups .

His brother Eddie was on the football team , and Payton did not play partly to avoid competing with him . After Eddie graduated , the football coach asked Payton to try out for the team , and he agreed on condition that he be allowed to continue playing in the band .

Once he began to play football , as a junior , he achieved instant success as a running back , running 65 yards for a touchdown on his first high school carry . At 5 ft 10 in (1 @. @ 78 m) , he was not especially large , but his speed and strength made him one of the team 's featured players . Jefferson High School was integrated with neighboring Columbia High School that year ; Payton and his teammates were upset that their head coach , Charles L. Boston , had become an assistant and Payton boycotted some of the spring practices in protest , but returned during the fall season . He then earned statewide honors as a member of Mississippi 's all @-@ state team , leading Columbia to an unexpected 8 @-@ 2 season . His performance helped ease the local tensions surrounding desegregation . Tommy Davis , Columbia ? s football coach , claimed that he could always count on Payton when the team needed to score . Payton ? s statistics proved that that was no exaggeration : he scored in every game during his junior and senior years . He was named to the all @-@ conference team three years in a row . Payton also led the Little Dixie Conference in scoring his senior year and made the all @-@ state team . In addition to excelling at football , Payton averaged 18 points a game for Columbia ? s basketball team , leaped three @-@ quarters of an inch short of 23 feet in the long jump , played some baseball , and continued to drum in the school band .

= = College career = =

Though Payton had established himself as one of Mississippi 's best running back prospects , he received no invitations from Southeastern Conference colleges or universities , which were accepting only a few black players at the time . After originally committing to Kansas State University , he decided to pursue his collegiate career at the historically black , Jackson State University , Jackson , Mississippi , where his older brother Eddie played football (contrary to popular belief , he

was never recruited by the University of Kansas , according to then coach Don Fambrough as Payton claimed in his autobiography) .

While attending Jackson State , Payton played alongside many future professional football players , including Jerome Barkum , Robert Brazile , and Jackie Slater . As a member of the Jackson State Tigers , Payton rushed for more than 3 @, @ 500 yards , averaging 6 @. @ 1 yards per carry . Also , he broke the scoring record by rushing for 65 touchdowns during his college career , although this is not an official NCAA record , as they do not recognize individual scoring records . In 1973 , Payton was selected for the All @- @ American Team . The following year he was named Black College Player of the Year . Payton graduated in 1975 with a Bachelor 's degree in Communications .

He acquired the nickname " Sweetness " in college . The nickname 's origin is ambiguous : it is variously said to have stemmed from his personality , from his athletic grace , or as a sarcastic description of his aggressive playing style . In 1996 , Payton was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame . On January 18 , 2010 , it was announced that Payton would be one of eleven members of the inaugural class inducted into the Black College Football Hall of Fame on February 20 , 2010 .

== Breakout performance ==

On October 1 , 1972 during Walter Payton ' s sophomore year , he set a then @- @ best SWAC scoring record by scoring 7 touchdowns and running two points after for 46 points as Jackson State crushed Lane College , 72 ? 0 . Payton scored on TD runs of 6 , 8 , 2 , 3 , 1 , 2 , and 31 yards in the blowout win .

== Statistics ==

== Professional career ==

== 1975 ? 1982 ==

The Chicago Bears drafted Walter Payton in the first round of the 1975 NFL Draft , as the fourth overall pick . The Bears had endured several losing seasons after the retirement of the iconic Gale Sayers in 1972 . Payton 's first game was not particularly successful ; he was held to zero net rushing yards on eight attempts . His best performance of the season was the final game against the New Orleans Saints , where he rushed for 134 yards on 20 carries . Payton finished the season with only 679 yards and seven touchdowns . However , Payton led the league in yards per kickoff returns .

Payton was eager to improve his performance . During the 1976 NFL season , Payton rushed for 1 @, @ 390 yards and scored 13 touchdowns . After the season , he was selected to play in the 1977 Pro Bowl , where he was declared the Pro Bowl MVP . The next year , he rushed for 1 @, @ 852 yards and scored 16 touchdowns , becoming the league ' s leading scorer for the season . He earned numerous awards that season , including the Associated Press and Pro Football Writers of America 's Most Valuable Player awards . A memorable game of the 1977 NFL season was against the Minnesota Vikings on November 20 . He rushed for a then @- @ record 275 yards , breaking the previous record of 273 yards held by O. J. Simpson . In that record @- @ setting game against the Vikings , Payton was suffering with a 101 @- @ degree fever and intense flu . His longest run was for 58 yards , and he caught one pass for 6 yards . His record stood for 23 years until Corey Dillon of the Cincinnati Bengals ran for 278 yards on October 22 , 2000 ? a record that has since been broken by Jamal Lewis (295 yards) on September 14 , 2003 , and Adrian Peterson (296 yards) on November 4 , 2007 . By the end of the decade , Payton had received additional accolades for his exploits as a blocker , receiver , emergency punter , and quarterback .

== 1983 ? 1986 ==

The Bears struggled to assemble consecutive winning seasons , landing only two playoff berths since his arrival . The lack of success prompted the Bears ' management to replace Neill Armstrong with Mike Ditka for the season that began in the Fall of 1982 . Ditka , a tight end during the 1960s and 1970s who would also join the Pro Football Hall of Fame , led the Bears to a 3 ? 6 (strike @-@ shortened) record in 1982 . He led the Bears to an 8 ? 8 finish in 1983 and to a 10 ? 6 finish in 1984 . Payton continued his success by rushing for more than 1 @,@ 400 yards in both seasons . On October 7 , 1984 against the New Orleans Saints , Payton broke Jim Brown 's career rushing record of 12 @,@ 312 yards . In 1985 , Payton rushed for more than 1 @,@ 500 yards , helping the Bears establish the league 's second @-@ best offense . The Bears ' 46 defense of that season would go on to become one of the best in NFL history , setting a record for fewest points allowed .

Payton performed with his teammates in the widely released 1985 music video The Super Bowl Shuffle . The Bears went on to a 15 ? 1 record that culminated in a 46 @-@ 10 victory over the New England Patriots in Super Bowl XX . Although Payton 's offensive prowess had assisted the Bears throughout the 1985 season , he did not score any touchdowns in the postseason and the New England Patriots prevented him from reaching the end zone in the Super Bowl . According to quarterback Jim McMahon , he was targeted by two or three defenders on every play , and others stated that Payton 's mere presence allowed others to shine , given that at least 2 people were targeting Payton on every play . In a later interview , Ditka stated that one of his major regrets was Payton 's lack of a touchdown in this game .

== 1986 ? 1987 ==

Payton , who was a 12 @-@ year veteran , amassed 1 @,@ 333 yards in the 1986 NFL season . The Bears won the NFC Central Division , but lost to the Washington Redskins 27 ? 13 in the divisional round . At the end of the 1986 season , he announced that he would retire after completing the 1987 NFL season . During his last season with the Bears , Payton split carries with his successor , Neal Anderson , and rushed for only 533 yards . Payton 's career ended with another loss to the Washington Redskins in the divisional round of the playoffs by the score of 21 ? 17 on January 10 , 1988 . Over his entire career , Payton rushed for 16 @,@ 726 yards , which broke the record for most rushing yards by any NFL player in history , and scored 110 touchdowns . He caught 492 passes for 4 @,@ 538 yards and 15 touchdowns . Payton set several team records , including most career rushing yards , receptions , touchdowns , and touchdown passes by a running back . His jersey number was retired by the Bears , and he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1993 . The only game he missed in his 13 @-@ year career was in his rookie season of 1975 .

== Playing style ==

Payton 's motto was " Never Die Easy " , which is also the title of his posthumously published autobiography . Payton attributed this motto to Bob Hill , his coach at Jackson State . In practice , this meant that Payton refused to deliberately run out @-@ of @-@ bounds and always delivered some punishment to his tacklers before being forced off the field or forced down .

One of Payton 's signature maneuvers was the " stutter @-@ step " , a high @-@ stepping , irregularly paced run . He developed this as a way to distract his pursuers during long runs , saying that it startled them into thinking and gave him some advantage over players who were actually faster runners . In his autobiography , he likened the stutter step to a kind of " option play " : when he was stutter @-@ stepping , defenders would have to commit to a pursuit angle based upon whether they thought he would accelerate after the stutter @-@ step , or cut ? he would read this angle and do the opposite of what the defender had committed to .

He re @-@ invented the practice of stiff @-@ arming his tacklers , which had gone out of favor among running backs in the 1970s . At times , he used his high school experience as a long jumper to leap over his opponents , landing on his head in the end zone to gain a touchdown in a game

against the Buffalo Bills . His running gait was somewhat unusual , as his knees were minimally bent , and the motion was largely powered from the hip . This may have given his knees , a football player 's most vulnerable joints , some protection , although he underwent arthroscopic surgery on both knees in 1983 . He referred to this procedure as an 11 @, @ 000 @-@ yard checkup .

After scoring touchdowns , Payton declined to celebrate ; instead , he would often hand the ball to his teammates or the official . He disapproved of the growing practice of touchdown celebrations ; he preferred post @-@ game antics such as rushing into the locker room and locking his teammates out in the cold while taking a long shower . Although Payton would have won the respect of his peers and coaches by his running alone , he made 492 receptions and over 4 @, @ 000 yards over his career and was a consistent threat in the passing game .

= = Personal life = =

Throughout his life Walter Payton had claimed his date of birth as July 25 , 1954 , a date which is cited in many of his early biographies . However , while researching his biography of Payton , Sports Illustrated 's Jeff Pearlman discovered his actual date of birth to be July 25 , 1953 . Pearlman found Payton 's earliest use of the later date during his pursuit of the Heisman Trophy at Jackson State .

Payton married Connie Norwood in 1976 . During his rookie year he resided in a home on the north side of Arlington Heights , Illinois . The couple had two children , Jarrett Payton (born 1980) and Brittney (born December 26 , 1985) and resided in South Barrington , Illinois .

A 2011 biography by Jeff Pearlman describes a tumultuous personal life very different from his positive public image . According to Pearlman 's biography , Payton was a consistent adulterer , and a multiple drug user . His drug use began with painkillers provided to him by the Chicago Bears to cope with the punishment he absorbed during games , and continued after his football career ended . Payton did not cope well with life after his career , especially with issues of boredom and loneliness . His wife and family contend that the book is filled with factual misstatements , and paints too bleak a picture of his life . However , many reviewers of Pearlman 's work have found it to have been " exhaustively " researched and documented by hundreds of interviews . The ghostwriter for Payton 's autobiography called the book " an incredible , thoughtful , deep and profound read . It ? s exceptional work . "

= = Civic Awards = =

Walter Payton was inducted as a Laureate of The Lincoln Academy of Illinois and awarded the Order of Lincoln (the State ? s highest honor) by the Governor of Illinois in 1987 in the area of Sports .

= = Investments = =

In 1995 , Payton , along with many other investors , sought to bring an NFL expansion team to St. Louis , Missouri , and Payton expressed his interest in becoming the first minority owner in NFL history . Although the NFL strongly favored a franchise in St. Louis , their efforts were thwarted because of internal dissension among the investment group members leading the NFL to award franchises to investment groups in Jacksonville , Florida (Jacksonville Jaguars) and Charlotte , North Carolina (Carolina Panthers) . St. Louis eventually received a team when the Los Angeles Rams moved to the city in 1995 .

Payton pursued various business ventures in retirement , including becoming co @-@ owner of Dale Coyne Racing in the CART IndyCar World Series . He also drove in several Trans @-@ Am Series events , including a 1993 race at Road America in which his car overturned and caught fire . He suffered burns but escaped serious injury .

In 1995 , he and several partners purchased a Chicago , Burlington and Quincy Railroad roundhouse in Aurora , Illinois . The property became known as " Walter Payton 's Roundhouse " , hosting a restaurant , brewery , banquet and meeting facility , and museum . In 1999 the property

received an award from the National Trust for Historic Preservation . The beers brewed at the Roundhouse received awards in the 2000s . Payton appeared on a 1987 episode of Saturday Night Live (co @-@ hosting with fellow football player Joe Montana) . In 1994 , he made an appearance at Summerslam in the corner of Razor Ramon .

= = Illness and death = =

In February 1999 , Payton announced that he had a rare autoimmune liver disease known as primary sclerosing cholangitis , which may have led to his cholangiocarcinoma (bile duct cancer) . He spent his final months as an advocate for organ transplants , appearing in many commercials to encourage others to donate organs , although by the time his first appeal was recorded , his illness was already too far advanced for transplantation to have been a viable option . In April of that year , Payton made a final public appearance at a Chicago Cubs game with Mike Ditka , where he threw the game 's ceremonial first pitch . Author Don Yaeger worked with him during the last weeks of his life to create his autobiography , Never Die Easy .

On November 1 , 1999 , Payton died from the complications that arose from his illness . During the same week , the NFL held special ceremonies in each game to commemorate his career and legacy . In addition , the Chicago Bears wore special # 34 patches on their jerseys to honor Payton . His body was cremated after his death .

Speakers at Payton 's public funeral service , held in Soldier Field , included Jesse Jackson ; then National Football League Commissioner Paul Tagliabue ; former teammate Dan Hampton ; his widow Connie Payton ; and his children , Jarrett and Brittney . Among the 1 @,@ 000 mourners at the private service were John Madden ; Illinois Governor George Ryan ; Chicago 's mayor Richard M. Daley ; former teammates Matt Suhey , Mike Singletary , Roland Harper , and Jim McMahon ; the Bears ' equipment manager and building superintendent ; and many other people representing a wide social , political , and economic spectrum .

= = Legacy = =

Payton 's legacy continues through the charitable Walter and Connie Payton Foundation . His own appeals ? and after his death , his foundation 's ? for greater awareness of the need for organ donations are widely credited with bringing national attention to the problem . After his appeals , donations in Illinois skyrocketed , and the regional organ bank of Illinois was overwhelmed with calls . In response , the City of Chicago inserted organ donation requests into city @-@ vehicle @-@ registration mailings in early 2000 , and by August 2000 , 13 @,@ 000 people had signed on to the program . The foundation continues to run a program that Payton organized to donate toys to underprivileged children across the Chicago area each Christmas . The family established the Walter Payton Cancer Fund in 2002 .

Many modern NFL running backs have cited Payton as a source of inspiration . Emmitt Smith tearfully paid homage to Payton after breaking Payton 's rushing record . LaDainian Tomlinson , who set numerous records during the 2006 NFL season , named Payton as one of his foremost mentors and inspirations . Ahman Green , a former player for the Bears ' rival Green Bay Packers , is said to have idolized Payton , viewing the highlight film " Pure Payton " before each game . Walter 's son , Jarrett Payton , was a running back for the Tennessee Titans , NFL Europe 's Amsterdam Admirals , CFL 's Montreal Alouettes and IFL 's Chicago Slaughter . During his tenure at the University of Miami , Jarrett wore a # 34 jersey to honor his father 's memory . In 2009 , Jarrett married on March 4 , which was intentionally set to coincide with Payton 's jersey number .

The city of Chicago has honored Payton 's memory in several ways . In 1999 , the city created a special city sticker that featured Payton . The profits from the sales of these stickers along with the special license plate created by the State of Illinois are given to support organ @-@ donor programs across Illinois . Also , the city named a high school , Walter Payton College Prep , in his honor . In September 2007 , the University of Illinois at Chicago Medical Center opened the Walter Payton Liver Center after a generous donation from Payton 's family , who were pleased with the care he

received there . Chicago Metra commuters have long been witness to a simple " # 34 Sweetness " , painted on a bridge piling of the Air Line on the south end of the Chicago Union Station yards . The CBS sitcom Mike and Molly honored Payton in 2011 with " The Walter Payton Elementary School " .

Until its sale to Two Brothers Brewing in 2011 , Walter Payton 's Roundhouse continued to draw hundreds of thousands of visitors annually to the Aurora , Illinois site . A plaque now hangs on the building commemorating Payton . There are two athletic awards named after Payton . The NCAA gives the " Walter Payton Award " to the best offensive player from a Division I FCS (still often known by its former designation of Division I @-@ AA) football team . The NFL hands out the " Walter Payton Man of the Year " award for player achievements in community service during a particular season . The wellness center at Jackson State University is also named in honor of him , known as " The Walter Payton Recreation and Wellness Center . "

The Chicago Bears honored Payton 's career and life on November 1 , 2009 by airing a special tribute video during halftime . The video consisted of highlight clips from Payton 's career and interview segments from Mike Ditka , Virginia McCaskey , Richard Dent , and many other members of the Bears organization . Payton 's wife , daughter , son , and mother were present to watch the video , which aired on Soldier Field 's Jumbotron .

After Payton 's death , Nickol Knoll Hill , an old landfill site turned into a golf course in Arlington Heights , Illinois , was renamed " Payton 's Hill " . There are two plaques on the hill to remind visitors of the hill that it was where Payton used to train in the 1970s / 80s . Payton did his morning run at the hill every day . Pictures and memorabilia of Payton cover the walls of the golf course club house .

= = Career statistics = =

Payton was the NFL 's all @-@ time leader in rushing yards and all @-@ purpose yards prior to the 2002 NFL season , when Emmitt Smith broke his record . He also held the single game rushing record until the 2000 NFL season , when it was broken by Corey Dillon . Payton led the league in rushing yards and touchdowns in the 1977 NFL season . Also , he was among the top @-@ ten players for rushing attempts during his entire career , including 1976 , 1977 , and 1978 , leading the category in 1979 . As of 2013 , he is the NFL 's second all @-@ time leading rusher , and is ranked fourth in rushing touchdowns scored . Along with Frank Gifford , Payton threw six interceptions , more than any other non @-@ quarterback position in NFL history . He also passed for eight touchdowns , which is second to Gifford (14) for non @-@ quarterbacks .

= = = Career totals = = =

= = = Statistics by season = = =

= = NFL records = =

= = = Service = = =

Consecutive regular season starts by a running back : 170 , from 000000001975 @-@ 12 @-@ 07 @-@ 0000December 7 , 1975 to 000000001987 @-@ 09 @-@ 20 @-@ 0000September 20 , 1987
Payton missed only one game in his career for a coach 's decision , despite being eligible .

= = = Rushing attempts = = =

Consecutive seasons leading the league in rushing attempts : 4 (1976 ? 1979)

== Rushing yards gained ==

Rushing yards gained , career : 16 @, @ 726

Broken by Emmitt Smith

Seasons with 1 @, @ 000 or more yards rushing : 10 (1976 ? 1981 , 1983 ? 1986)

Payton played in only nine games during the 1982 season because of the players ' strike .

Broken by Emmitt Smith

Rushing yards gained , game : 275 (on 40 carries) , Chicago Bears vs. Minnesota Vikings , 000000001977 @-@ 11 @-@ 20 @-@ 0000November 20 , 1977

Record first broken by Corey Dillon on 000000002000 @-@ 10 @-@ 22 @-@ 0000October 22 , 2000

Games with 100 or more yards rushing , career : 77

Consecutive games with 100 or more yards rushing : 9 , from 000000001985 @-@ 10 @-@ 13 @-@ 0000October 13 , 1985 to 000000001985 @-@ 12 @-@ 08 @-@ 0000December 8 , 1985

Broken by Barry Sanders

== Rushing touchdowns ==

Rushing touchdowns , career : 110

First broken by Marcus Allen ; record now held by Emmitt Smith

== Yards from scrimmage gained ==

Yards from scrimmage gained , career : 21 @, @ 264

Broken by Jerry Rice

Games with 100 or more yards from scrimmage gained , career : 108

== All @-@ purpose attempts ==

All @-@ purpose attempts , career : 4 @, @ 368

Broken by Emmitt Smith

All @-@ purpose attempts , season : 400 (1979)

Broken by Eric Dickerson in 1983

== All @-@ purpose yards gained ==

All @-@ purpose yards gained , career : 21 @, @ 803

Games with 150 or more all @-@ purpose yards gained , career : 46

Tied by Barry Sanders

== Touchdown passes ==

Touchdown passes , non @-@ quarterback , career : 8