

= Marion Motley =

Marion Motley (June 5 , 1920 ? June 27 , 1999) was an American Football fullback and linebacker who played for the Cleveland Browns in the All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) and National Football League (NFL) . He was a leading pass @-@ blocker and rusher in the late 1940s and early 1950s , and ended his career with an average of 5 @.@ 7 yards per carry , a record for a fullback that still stands . A versatile player who possessed both quickness and size , Motley was a force on both offense and defense . Fellow Hall of Fame running back Joe Perry once called Motley " the greatest all @-@ around football player there ever was " . Motley was also one of the first African @-@ Americans to play the professional game in the modern era .

Motley grew up in Canton , Ohio . He played football through high school and college in the 1930s before enlisting in the military during World War II . While training in the U.S. Navy in 1944 , he played for a service team coached by Paul Brown . Following the war , he went back to work in Canton before Brown invited him to try out for the Cleveland Browns , a team he was coaching in the newly formed AAFC . Motley made the team in 1946 and became a cornerstone of Cleveland 's success in the late 1940s . The team won four AAFC championships before the league dissolved and the Browns were absorbed by the more established NFL . Motley was the AAFC 's leading rusher in 1948 and the NFL leader in 1950 , when the Browns won another championship .

Motley and fellow black teammate Bill Willis contended with racism throughout their careers . Although the color barrier was broken in all major American sports by 1950 , the men endured shouted insults on the field and racial discrimination off of it . " They found out that while they were calling us niggers and alligator bait , I was running for touchdowns and Willis was knocking the shit out of them , " Motley once said . " So they stopped calling us names and started trying to catch up with us . " Focused exclusively on winning , Brown did not tolerate racism within the team .

Slowed by knee injuries , Motley left the Browns after the 1953 season . He attempted a comeback in 1955 as a linebacker for the Pittsburgh Steelers but was released before the end of the year . He then pursued a coaching career , but was turned away by the Browns and other teams he approached . He attributed his trouble finding a job in football to racial discrimination , questioning whether teams were ready to hire a black coach . Motley was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1968 .

= = Early years and college career = =

Motley was born in Leesburg , Georgia and raised in Canton , Ohio , where his family moved when he was three years old . After going to elementary and junior high schools in Canton , Motley attended Canton McKinley High School , where he played on the football and basketball teams . He was especially good as a football fullback , and the McKinley Bulldogs posted a win @-@ loss record of 25 ? 3 during his tenure there . The team 's three losses all came against Canton 's chief rivals , a Massillon Washington High School team led by coach Paul Brown .

After he graduated , Motley enrolled in 1939 at South Carolina State College , a historically black school in Orangeburg , South Carolina . He transferred before his sophomore year to the University of Nevada , Reno , where he was a star on the football team between 1941 and 1943 . As a punishing fullback for the Wolf Pack , Motley played against powerful West Coast teams including USF , Santa Clara , and St. Mary 's . He suffered a knee injury in 1943 and returned to Canton to work after dropping out of school .

= = Military and professional career = =

As America 's involvement in World War II intensified , Motley joined the U.S. Navy in 1944 and was sent to the Great Lakes Naval Training Station . There he played for the Great Lakes Blue Jackets , a military team coached by Paul Brown , who was serving in the Navy during an extended leave from his job as head coach of Ohio State University 's football team . Motley played fullback and linebacker at Great Lakes , and was an important component of the team 's offense and defense .

The highlight of his time at Great Lakes was a 39 ? 7 victory over Notre Dame in 1945 . Motley was eligible for discharge before the game ? it was the final match of the season and the last military game of World War II ? but he stayed on to play . Motley put up an impressive performance , thanks in part to Brown 's experimentation with a new play : a delayed handoff later called the draw play .

After the war , Motley went back to Canton and began working at a steel mill , planning to return to Reno in 1946 to finish his degree . That summer , however , Paul Brown was coaching a team in the new All @-@ America Football Conference (AAFC) called the Cleveland Browns . Motley wrote to Brown asking for a tryout , but Brown declined , saying he already had all the fullbacks he needed . At the beginning of August , however , Brown invited Bill Willis , another African @-@ American star , to try out for the team at its training camp in Bowling Green , Ohio . Ten days later , Brown invited Motley to come , too . " I think they felt [Willis] needed a roommate , " Motley later said . " I don 't think they felt I 'd make the team . I 'm glad I was able to fool them . "

Both Motley and Willis made the team and became two of the first African @-@ Americans to play professional football in the modern era . The Los Angeles Rams of the National Football League had signed the only other black players in pro football earlier that year : Kenny Washington and Woody Strode . The four men broke football 's color barrier a full year before Jackie Robinson was promoted from the Class AAA Montreal Royals to join the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 . Motley felt the Browns would likely be his only opportunity to make a career of football . " I knew this was the one big chance in my life to rise above the steel mill existence , and I really wanted to take it , " he said .

Motley was signed to a contract worth \$ 4 @,@ 500 a year (\$ 54 @,@ 607 in 2016 dollars) . With the Browns , he joined a potent offense led by quarterback Otto Graham , tackle and placekicker Lou Groza and receivers Dante Lavelli and Mac Speedie . He was a force to be reckoned with in the AAFC , and helped the team win every championship in the league 's four years of existence between 1946 and 1949 . He had a combination of quickness and power ? he was listed at 238 pounds ? that helped him plow through tacklers . He was also an able pass blocker and played on defense as a linebacker . Motley rushed for an average of 8 @.@ 2 yards per carry in his first season . His forte was the trap play , a scheme where a defensive lineman was allowed to come across the line of scrimmage unblocked , opening up space for Motley to run . He led the league in rushing in 1948 as the Browns posted a perfect 15 ? 0 record . He was the AAFC 's all @-@ time rushing leader when the league folded after the 1949 season and the Browns were absorbed into the more established National Football League (NFL) . The Browns had a 47 ? 4 ? 3 overall regular @-@ season win @-@ loss @-@ tie record during the AAFC years as Motley rushed for a total of 3 @,@ 024 yards .

Like other black players in the 1940s and 1950s , Motley faced racist attitudes both on and off the field . Paul Brown would not tolerate discrimination within the team ; he wanted to win and would not let anything get in his way . Motley and Willis , however , were sometimes stepped on and called names during games . " Sometimes I wanted to just kill some of those guys , and the officials would just stand right there , " Motley said many years later . " They 'd see those guys stepping on us and heard them saying things and just turn their backs . That kind of crap went on for two or three years until they found out what kind of players we were . " Motley and Willis did not travel to one game against the Miami Seahawks in the Browns ' early years after they received threatening letters . Another time in Miami , Motley and Willis were told they were not welcome at the hotel where the team was staying . Brown threatened to relocate the entire team , and the hotel 's management backed down .

Attitudes toward race in America began to change after the war , which had caused social and political upheaval and prompted people to think about the future with more ambition and confidence . Although progress was slow and racially motivated hostility continued for many years , the color barrier was broken in all major sports by 1950 . Many of Motley and Willis 's teammates on the Browns were used to playing with black players in college , where teams were integrated across most of the country . The presence of Motley and Willis , meanwhile , contributed to strong attendance at many of the Browns ' early games as large black audiences came to watch them . By one estimate , 10 @,@ 000 black fans saw the Browns play their first game .

Aided by Motley 's swiftness and size , the Browns won the NFL championship in 1950 , their first

season in the league . In October 1950 , Motley set an NFL record that stood for more than 52 years when he averaged over 17 yards per rush against the Pittsburgh Steelers , with 188 yards on 11 carries . In December 2002 , quarterback Michael Vick of the Atlanta Falcons rushed for 173 yards on 10 carries against the Minnesota Vikings , eclipsing Motley 's average . Motley also had a 69 @-@ yard rushing and 33 @-@ yard receiving touchdowns in the game . While Motley did not factor in the Browns ' championship game win against the Los Angeles Rams , he led the league in rushing with 810 yards in 1950 despite averaging fewer than 12 carries per game . He was a unanimous first @-@ team All @-@ Pro selection .

By the 1951 season , Motley started to feel the physical effects of his hard @-@ hitting , up @-@ the @-@ middle running style . He suffered a knee injury in training camp , and he was getting older ; by the time the season was in full swing , he was 31 . Motley only ran for 273 yards and one touchdown that year , an uncharacteristically low total . Despite Motley 's troubles , the Browns made the championship game again after winning the American Conference with an 11 ? 1 record . Cleveland , however , lost the title game to the Rams , 24 ? 17 . Motley had just five carries and 23 yards .

Motley 's knees continued to bother him in 1952 . While he showed occasional signs of his old form that season , it became clear to the Browns ' coaching staff that he was no longer in his prime . Motley finished the year with 444 yards of rushing and 4 @.@ 3 yards per carry , a career low . The Browns finished with an 8 ? 4 record but still captured the conference title and secured another spot in the NFL championship game . Motley performed well in that matchup against the Detroit Lions , rushing for 95 yards . The Browns , however , lost 17 ? 7 .

The 1953 season was no better for Motley , whose effectiveness was again limited by injury . Cleveland finished with an 11 ? 1 record and faced Detroit in the championship for the second year in a row . As Motley 's production declined , the Browns relied on Otto Graham 's passing to Lavelli and receiver Ray Renfro , who also lined up as a running back . Motley did not participate in the championship game that year , another loss to the Lions .

Motley thought he could come back and play a ninth season in 1954 , and showed up to training camp to prove it . Paul Brown , however , thought otherwise . Dogged by injuries and 34 years old , Motley quit before the season began , after Brown said he would otherwise be cut from the team . " Marion realized that his knee was weak and did not feel that it was coming around , " Brown said at the time . " He was one of the truly fine fullbacks in his prime , the type that comes along once in a lifetime . I certainly never will forget some of his runs and I imagine Cleveland football fans feel the same . "

Motley took the 1954 season off and attempted a comeback in 1955 after the Browns , who still had rights to Motley under his contract , traded him to the Pittsburgh Steelers for Ed Modzelewski . In Pittsburgh he played seven games as a linebacker , but the Steelers released him before the end of the season . In his eight years in the AAFC and NFL , Motley had rushed for 4 @,@ 712 yards and averaged 5 @.@ 7 yards per carry . His career rushing average is still an all @-@ time record for running backs .

= = Later life and death = =

After ending his playing career for good , Motley asked Brown about a coaching job with the team . Brown , however , rejected his overtures , saying Motley should instead look for work at a steel mill ? the very career football was his ticket out of . Unable to find coaching opportunities in the NFL , he worked as a whisky salesman in the early 1960s . He got occasional scouting assignments from the Browns , but as the Civil Rights movement began to coalesce in 1965 , he issued a statement saying he had been refused a permanent coaching position by the team numerous times . He applied for a coaching job in 1964 , he wrote , and was told that there were no vacancies . The Browns then hired Bob Nussbaumer as an assistant . " When I heard of the hiring of a new assistant , I began to wonder if the full reason is whether or not the time is ripe to hire a Negro coach in Cleveland on the professional level , " he wrote . Art Modell , the Browns ' owner , responded by saying the team filled its coaching positions based on ability and experience , not race . " We are

represented by scouts at every major Negro school . And we now have 12 Negroes signed for the 1965 season , " he said .

Motley asked Otto Graham for a job with the Washington Redskins when Graham was head coach there in the late 1960s , but he was again turned away . Motley also signed on to coach an all @-@ girl professional football team called the Cleveland Dare Devils in 1967 . By 1969 , the team had only played a few exhibition games as Cleveland theatrical agent Syd Freedman struggled to drum up interest in a women 's league . Later in life , Motley worked for the U.S. postal service in Cleveland , HM Miller Construction Suffield , Ohio , the Ohio Lottery and for the Ohio Department of Youth Services in Akron . He died in 1999 of prostate cancer .

= = Honors and legacy = =

In 1968 , Motley became the second black player voted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame , located in his hometown of Canton . Having played successfully as a fullback and pass blocker on offense and as a linebacker on defense , he is seen as one of the best all @-@ around players in football history . Blanton Collier , an assistant who took over as the team 's head coach after Paul Brown 's firing in 1963 , said Motley " had no equal as a blocker . He could run with anybody for 30 yards or so . And this man was a great , great linebacker . "

Most of Motley 's runs were trap plays up the middle , but he had the speed to run outside . " There 's no telling how much yardage I might have made if I ran as much as some backs do now , " he once said . Running back Jim Brown surpassed Motley 's rushing records in the early 1960s , but many of Motley 's coaches and fellow players regarded Motley as the better player , in part because of his strength as a blocker . " There is no comparison between Jim Brown and Marion Motley , " Graham said at a luncheon in Canton in 1964 . " Motley was the greatest all @-@ around fullback . "

In his books The Thinking Man 's Guide to Pro Football and The New Thinking Man 's Guide To Pro Football , football writer Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated called Motley the best player in the history of the sport . He was named to the NFL 's 75th Anniversary All @-@ Time Team in 1994 .