

Pro Football's Hall of Fame

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FROM DON SMITH

HALL OF FAME TOP TWENTY RUSHERS

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(First of a series)

CANTON, Ohio -- Ever since the Pro Football Hall of Fame's Top Twenty display was created three years ago, Jim Brown, Joe Perry, Jim Taylor, John Henry Johnson and Don Perkins have ranked No. 1 through No. 5 among the rushing leaders.

Now this elite quintette is being challenged for the first time by the surge of Leroy Kelly of the Cleveland Browns, who now ranks No. 6 with 6074 yards gained by rushing in his eight pro seasons. At that level, Kelly is just 143 yards behind Perkins and only 729 yards shy of Johnson's total.

Two years ago, Kelly didn't even rank among the leaders in the Top Twenty display, a unique attraction created in handsome, three-dimensional form that presents the lifetime individual leaders in rushing, scoring, passing and pass receiving. The display includes a pro player's record in all major leagues, including the All-America Football Conference. It is changed weekly during the football season.

Interestingly, Kelly, now the leading active rusher in pro football, is the man who replaced Brown as the Cleveland Browns' heavy-duty ball-carrier when that big fullback retired after the 1965 season. Brown, not only is the all-time leader, but he is so far ahead of his nearest challenger, Kelly, that there is some doubt as to whether he can ever be overtaken. Most records are literally made to be broken, but Brown's career rushing figure seems to be the exception.

The great fullback gained 12,312 yards in his nine years with the Browns and that figure puts him still 6138 yards ahead of Kelly. There are four other active players among the Top Twenty rushers, but none appear to be a threat to overtake even Kelly in the immediate future.

While the top spots among the rushing leaders have remained fairly stable, the lower spots have not. Bill Brown of the Minnesota Vikings, Jim Nance of the New England Patriots and Ken Willard of the San Francisco 49ers all moved upward in 1971 while Gale Sayers of the Chicago Bears, injured most of the season, dropped two spots from 17th to 19th.

Bill Brown gained only 136 yards in 1971 but he moved one notch up to the 10th spot, displacing Hugh McElhenny from the Top Ten. McElhenny, who started the season as No. 9, dropped all the way to No. 12 with Kelly, Brown and Nance moving ahead of him.

Nance, in gaining 463 yards during the season, jumped all the way from the 18th position to No. 11, but the 49ers' Willard made an even bigger jump, moving into the Top Twenty for the first time about midway in the season and then advancing all the way to No. 13. Willard gained 855 yards during the campaign.

With the election of Ollie Matson (No. 15) to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in the class of 1972, the Hall's Top Twenty rushing display now includes six Hall of Famers. They are Jim Brown, Perry, Van Buren, McElhenny and Marion Motley, as well as Matson.

Motley, now No. 20 on the list, ranks along with Perry as the only leaders who played part of their careers in the AAFC. As new players enter the Top Twenty in every category, ex-AAFCers tend to drop from the list and Motley may do so in the 1972 season. The nearest active challenger is Baltimore's Tom Matte, who will begin the season with 4509 total yards, just 211 shy of Motley.

Perry will not soon, if ever, lose his place in the Top Twenty but he does rank No. 2 when his AAFC figures are included while he would drop to No. 3, behind Taylor, if the AAFC records were omitted.



LEADING LIFETIME RUSHERS
(At Conclusion of 1971 Season)

Rank		Player	Pre-1971 League	Yrs.	Att.	Yds.	Avg.	TD
1	(1)	Jim Brown	NFL	9	2359	12312	5.2	106
2	(2)	Joe Perry	AAFC-NFL	16	1929	9723	5.0	71
3	(3)	Jim Taylor	NFL	10	1941	8597	4.4	83
4	(4)	John Henry Johnson	NFL-AFL	13	1571	6803	4.3	48
5	(5)	Don Perkins	NFL	8	1500	6217	4.1	42
6	(10)	Leroy Kelly *	NFL	8	1371	6074	4.4	67
7	(6)	Steve Van Buren	NFL	8	1320	5860	4.3	69
8	(7)	Rick Casares	NFL-AFL	12	1431	5797	4.1	49
9	(8)	Dick Bass	NFL	10	1218	5417	4.4	34
10	(11)	Bill Brown *	NFL	11	1501	5328	3.5	45
11	(18)	Jim Nance *	AFL	7	1323	5323	4.0	45
12	(9)	Hugh McElhenny	NFL	13	1124	5281	4.7	39
13	(--)	Ken Willard *	NFL	7	1399	5219	3.7	40
14	(12)	Lenny Moore	NFL	12	1069	5174	4.8	63
15	(13)	Ollie Matson	NFL	14	1170	5173	4.4	39
16	(14)	Clem Daniels	AFL-NFL	9	1146	5138	4.5	30
17	(15)	Paul Lowe	AFL	9	1026	4995	4.9	39
18	(16)	John David Crow	NFL	11	1157	4963	4.3	38
19	(17)	Gale Sayers *	NFL	7	991	4956	5.0	39
20	(19)	Marion Motley	AAFC-NFL	9	828	4720	5.7	31

* Active in 1971 season

Number in (parenthesis) indicates rank at the start of the 1971 season.

NOTE -- J. D. Smith (4672 yards) was displaced from the Top Twenty during the 1971 season.