

An interview with:

RAYFIELD WRIGHT

Q. What is your best memory of your years with the Cowboys?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Oh, my goodness. I have a lot of memories with the **Cowboys** starting back in 1967 through 1980. To recapture all of that, I have to start with the **Ice Bowl** game in **Green Bay** back in 1967, my rookie year, being known as the team in the late '60s, as the team that couldn't win the big game, then getting to the **Super Bowl** in 1970 against the **Baltimore Colts**, even though we lost, having an opportunity to come back in 1971 and winning our first **Super Bowl**. That was really overwhelming.

Q. Can you share the story about moving positions in the first game against Deacon Jones?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Yes, I can. I remember after playing tight end for two years, my first two years, **Coach Landry** called me into his office, told me that, Rayfield, he said, I want to move you to offensive tackle.

I looked at him with amazement because I never played tackle before in my life. I looked at him and I said, Coach, are you sure? He said, yeah, you'll make a good tackle. You learn fast. You block good at tight end. You just need to gain some weight.

Coach, I said, you believe I can best help this football team by moving in this position that I never played before in my life, I give it everything I have. The only thing we did after that, after he said, I believe you can do it, Rayfield, we just shook hands on the deal. I didn't have to call an agent, renegotiate a contract or nothing, you know.

So I went into that position not knowing anything about it. After practice one I was trying to figure out how to pass block because I never set up the pass block before, even though I was watching game films of all of the greatest tackles I thought that had played the game like **Forrest Greg**, **Bob Brown**, and St. Louis had two tackles, **Ernie McMillan** and **Bob Reynolds**. I was studying these guys, trying to go out on the field the next day to try to imitate these guys, and I couldn't do it, you know, because each individual is

a different person, their makeup is different, they have different abilities and things about them.

It just came to me one day that what I really was trying to do was protect my quarterback, and in order to do so the similarities of playing basketball really hit my mind in saying, Okay, if I'm guarding a guy playing basketball, I'm going to stay between him and the basket. You do that by quickly shuffling your feet, whether you go to the right or left. If you cross your feet, you get beat. The guy will drive on you and get a layup or a dunk.

So what I did was I said, well, the quarterback is the basket, and the defensive end is the guy dribbling the ball. So I just got to stay between these two guys, I'll be okay. So I just had to gain a little bit more strength.

After about halfway during the season, **Ralph Neely**, who I was backing up at right tackle, got hurt. **Coach Landry** called me in his office again and said, Rayfield, you're going to start this week. I said, Okay. We playing the Rams, right? They had the Fearsome Foursome at that time.

I said, Okay, I have to block **Deacon Jones**, who at that time was the most feared defensive end in all of football. I think even today he's probably the best defensive end I think I've ever seen play the game.

So I got prepared to play the game and everything. Offensive linemen are taught one thing, and that is to listen. You're supposed to listen for one voice, and that's the quarterback's voice, because he can call a color or number, change the play at the line of scrimmage. We were out in Los Angeles at the **Coliseum**. There was 80,000 people, television, everybody screaming and yelling. You're supposed to listen and hear one voice.

Roger Staubach called the play. We go up to the line of scrimmage. I'm looking at **Deacon Jones** square in his eyes, his eyes seem to be red as fire, he's kicking his back leg like a bull. I'm saying to myself, my God, what have I got myself into?

The thing is the ball is going to be snapped on two, and I knew exactly what my assignment was. The play was going to go to the left side, but I knew what my assignment was. **Staubach** said, hut, the ball for the first count, and then as this pause between the first and second hut. I hear a voice that came out to me. This voice came out at

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me in a real heavy, deep, meaningful kind of voice. He said, boy, does your mama know you out here? And I heard it. When **Staubach** said the second hut, I never heard it. You can imagine what the "Secretary of Defense" did on that play? He came across the line of scrimmage, hit me, knocked me completely backwards.

I rolled over, looked over at our sideline thinking that **Coach Landry** was going to take me out of the game since it was my first play and I screwed it up. By that time, **Deacon Jones** reached his big arms down and said, Hey, rookie, he said, Welcome to the NFL.

I said, Well, **Mr. Jones**, you don't know my mama, so don't talk about her. You want to play the game this way, we'll play it. I got the game ball for that game. I was the MVP of that ballgame. **Deacon Jones** certainly enlightened me to that position, no question about it.

Q. Can you explain a little bit about your coach at Fort Valley State, Coach Lomax, and why you chose him to be your presenter.

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Yes, sir. **Coach Lomax** was a father figure to me and still is today. Coming out of high school not having the financial resources to go to college, I volunteered for the **Air Force** my senior year. My cousin that was at **Fort Valley State College, John Willis**, we called him **Bubber**, he was at **Fort Valley**. **Coach Lomax** was the new coach that came in out of Brunswick, Georgia. He was trying to build a football team.

Coach Lomax, my cousin told **Coach Lomax** about my athletic ability in basketball, football, that he should consider getting me to **Fort Valley**. So, **Coach Lomax** contacted me. I told him I have this situation. I'd love to come to school at **Fort Valley** but I've got this situation that I've already committed to. He just simply would not leave me alone. He continued to contact me. I said, well, coach, here is what you need to do. You need to come to Griffin, Georgia, which is my hometown, and you need to talk to my mother, my grandmother, my Boy Scout master, which I'm an Eagle scout, need to talk to my minister and the recruiting officer. He said he would. So I got all those people in our little house. He came up. And back in those days, when elder people would get together, they always sent the kids outside. You never kind of hung around when the elders were talking.

So I went outside and sat on the front porch. I sat out there for almost three hours, didn't know what was going on inside while they was talking about my life and my future. All of a

sudden, the front door opened and my mother came out, she was crying. Then my grandmother came out, and she was crying. And I didn't know whether to cry, get mad, because I didn't know what had happened. Then the recruiting officer came up to me and said, Larry, he said, you can go to college. He said, but if you drop out of school, flunk out of college, he said that you'll be drafted into the Army immediately.

So **Coach Lomax** is responsible for that, and when I went, September had already began, so I missed the first quarter at **Fort Valley**. I didn't start college until January in '64. Basketball season was halfway over at that point. In a couple of weeks, I made the first team in basketball at **Fort Valley**. That was my love for the game anyway.

I thought that I had a basketball scholarship. After the school year was over in June that year, I went back to Griffin. I was working at a mill. **Coach Lomax** called and he was very upset with me because I wasn't at spring football practice. I said, well, coach, I didn't know I was supposed to play football. I thought I had a basketball scholarship. He said, No, you have an athletic scholarship, so get your fanny back down here.

I had to quit my job, I went back to **Fort Valley** and I started playing football because I couldn't make the high school football team. That's when I really started playing football. My first position was free safety, I was a punter, I played defensive end and I played tight end. The **Cowboys** drafted me as a tight end.

Q. You were talking about changing all these positions, changing sports, willingly doing so on the advice and trust of your coaches. Do you think the game today has gotten so sophisticated and specific that it would be very difficult for a player to change sports or positions like you did, and the type of athlete today would be so willing to make some of the changes and adjustments you made?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Well, number one, you're looking at the game as it is today, everything pretty much is specialized. What's really, really interesting is that **Coach Landry** had a system back in those days. He knew his system would work if he could simply find the right athletes to place in that system.

It wasn't necessarily by position that you played in college or high school, it was whether or not you were an athlete. He wasn't changing his system. He knew it would work if he could find the

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right player. **Cornell Green** was a basketball player, **Bob Hayes** was a track star. You just go right down the line of the athletes we had back there.

As of today, you know, I don't see that happening today because everything is so specialized. Even offensive linemen and defensive linemen today, if you don't weigh 300 pounds, you can't even go out and play football in college or some of these schools today, which is ridiculous to me. You don't need to weigh that much to play the game of football, especially on the offensive line.

That situation is a pretty interesting situation because, you know, the players today are more specialized in a position than we were. We were interested in just playing the game, so it didn't make any difference what position we played, you know, as long as we had the opportunity to play, we could play it. Because, you know, there's a lot of difference between, as I see it, from my standpoint, a good football player and a good athlete. A football player specialized in that position, but an athlete is different because an athlete can play any position. It's like when I was growing up as a kid, when it was football season, we played football in the streets or in the park or someplace. When basketball season, we played basketball, and track season we ran track, baseball season we played baseball. We just didn't have golf in our community back in the '40s and '50s back in Georgia. But, you know, I would have learned how to play that back then if we had had it.

Then that particular person that can get involved in all these different sports he becomes a true athlete instead of just a good player in a game. And the players today, if you look at every team, you have position coach. We didn't have that growing up. In high school, there was one coach, and that was it. He was the head coach. He coached football, basketball, baseball, the whole deal. Today, everybody has a coach, specialties in every position.

Q. Have you been to Canton before? What do you anticipate that is going to be like in a couple of weeks?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Well, I tell you, you know, I have been to Canton. We played a pre-season game up there many years ago with the Cowboys. It's going to be an interesting, interesting week for me because I'm going there not to play a football game, I'm going there to be inducted into the highest honor a professional

football player can receive, and that's being inducted into the **Pro Football Hall of Fame**.

I really don't know, I can't say right now my true feelings on that day of enshrinement. That day have to come. But it is going to be a tremendous honor. It's not just going to be an honor for **Rayfield Wright**, it's going to be an honor for a lot of people, especially the offensive linemen that have played for the Dallas Cowboys over all the years because of one fact, and that is out of all the great teams that the Cowboys have had over the years, there has not been an offensive lineman placed in the **Hall of Fame**. I will be the first one.

You know, I will be carrying the weight on my shoulders from the offensive line, **Coach Jim Myers**, and all the offensive linemen that have played the game for the **Dallas Cowboys** especially during the era in which I played, because we had a lot of players on our line that was all pro and that played in the **Pro Bowl** game. **Roger Staubach**, really played behind an All-Pro offensive line. **John Niland**, **Ralph Neely**, **Blaine Nye**, myself, all these guys played in the **Pro Bowl** game.

I remember **Coach Landry** making a statement to me after I got into that position of offensive tackle. He said, no matter how many accolades you receive or how many awards you receive, he said, you will never be greater than the team.

So the Cowboys were not operating as individual players; we were operating as a unit, as a team. That's what wins ballgames and also wins championships.

Q. Can you talk about your wait. You were on all the decades best lists. You had so many close calls. Talk about the wait to get into the Hall of Fame?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Well, my last season was '79. I retired in '80. **Staubach** and I both retired in 1980. I think my first year of eligibility would have been '85, I believe. It's 2006 now. You know, I didn't really think about the **Hall of Fame** based on my performance for the Cowboys. I joined the Cowboys to do one thing -- well, to do two things. One was to help the club win football games, and secondly was to help my family, my mother and my grandmother, you know, in Georgia.

My performance on the football field was not thought about one day becoming a **Hall of Famer**. Until after I had retired and a lot of the news media had started talking about it and

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looking at the things that I had accomplished in the game and saying, Hey, this guy should be considered for the **Hall of Fame**.

Once a player and once that information comes out to a player, then it gets in his heart and in his head. He's saying, Hey. He get to looking at the players that are in the **Hall of Fame**, and based on the position that he played, saying, Hey, maybe I should be there, you know. I did help our team go to five **Super Bowls**. Maybe I should be there. I was one of the co-captains for seven, eight, nine years, something like that.

You know, it's going to be an interesting week for me, like it will be for the others. It's going to be a great week for each of the teams that these players and **Coach Madden** was with. I'm just honored for this opportunity because I think it's going to be great, it will open the doors for a lot of -- hopefully will open the doors for a lot of other offensive linemen.

Q. Even though you didn't play with him, does it mean anything to be going in with Troy Aikman, another Cowboy?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: I think the only two players from the same team that have gone in from the **Cowboys** was **Randy White** and **Tony Dorsett**, if I'm not mistaken. To go in with **Troy Aikman**, even though I didn't play with him, I certainly admired his ability to play the game and his leadership qualities that he possessed. It's going to be an honor to go in with him. **Troy** is a fine young man and I think that he certainly is deserving of the honor. It's just going to be an honor to go in with him, no question about it.

Q. Can you talk about the whole process of getting the bust made, what that was like for you.

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: It's really interesting because when I was over in Hawaii for the **Pro Bowl** game, they took all the measurements of everything, your head, your eyes, your nose, your mouth, the whole deal, your ears. You know, they took those measurements. What they did at the **Hall** was they have people, which I didn't know, wasn't aware of, around the country that make these different busts for different players, I guess. If you live in this part of the country, then they have a guy that does that. You live in this part of the country.

Well, you know, down here in **Texas**, there's a guy here that did **Elvin Bethea's** bust. He's the one that made my bust. I'm going to tell you something, he called me. He took those

measurements, that was done over at the **Pro Bowl** game, and he looked at all of the pictures that he had of me that had been passed on to him. He took that and from that he began making this bust of me. I was shocked when I saw it the first time because he came over to my house, he and another gentleman, and he had something wrapped up in a bag. You couldn't see it. Openly, he had the bust of **Elvin Bethea**. I saw that. He showed me what he had done. I said to myself, I said, Well, that's really nice. Did you do that? He said, yes, he's the one that did that.

Then he unwrapped the one that was wrapped up. It was what he had done of me. I had never in my life ever seen myself that way, you know. I don't know about you, but it was so devastating to me, I almost ran out of my own house when I saw that. I said, Hey, guys, I'm still alive, you know.

It was totally -- it was awesome when I really saw that. It's hard to explain because I had to call my mom and tell her, you know, so she could settle me down a little bit. It was really interesting to see that.

Q. A good likeness of you?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Well, absolutely. No question about it. And once you see it, you going to see what I'm talking about because it's just like a split (sic) image of what I was back in the '70s, how I looked, played, everything else. The expression on my face, it's just an awesome, awesome bust, picture of me.

Q. Over the last six months or so, since the announcement, can you talk about what that has been like? More people shaking your hand, calling you, that sort of thing?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: Well, no question about that. I just came out of Virginia for an autograph-signing session up there. I was there over the weekend. I cut my computer on this morning, even today, I had 261 emails on my computer today. It's kind of been that kind of a thing for me since that has happened, because all of the people I went to high school with, grew up in **Griffin**, all my teammates and students I went to **Fort Valley State** with, my business associates all around the country that I have worked with for so many years, kids that I had spoken to for my speaking engagements that I do, it's just been overwhelming to me. You know, it's hard to say when you going to kind of slow down because this point is coming now where you got to really focus and settle in, you know, on the activities that's

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going to happen in a couple of weeks.

But it's been overwhelming, no question about it.

Q. What has been the best part of that? Any one particular phone call or memory, somebody congratulating you that you didn't expect to hear from?

RAYFIELD WRIGHT: What's interesting is I heard from most of all the guys in the **Hall of Fame** already, you know, coaches that I played against around the league. It's just been so many people that I have heard from that have been a part of the **National Football League**, whether they was coaches or players, trainers, doctors, so forth. I can't really recall one in particular that really stands out. It's just so many calls and letters that I have received. I'm keeping all of those for future reference and so forth for my own personal use and memories because I think to hear from some of these guys really, really, really was a shock to me and also a sign of respect that they exemplified in their words to me, in their letters and so forth, emails.

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