

ELIJAH PITTS: THE IDEAL SECOND STRING BACK

By Stan Grosshandler

If Vince Lombardi had been asked to describe the ideal second string half back he would have snapped in his typical brusque way, "Elijah Pitts!" If asked to elaborate Vince would have said the ideal second string halfback is totally dedicated to the team, knows his role, and is always ready mentally and physically to give 100%.

This describes Elijah Pitts, who recently passed away last year at age 60.

Pitts was a 13th round draft choice from the small Arkansas college, Philander Smith. He joined the Green Bay Packers in 1961 to find future Hall of Famers Jim Taylor and Paul Hornung, plus the previous year's number 1 choice, Tom Moore, in the backfield. The odds were stacked against him, to say the least.

Elijah became adapt at running off tackle to daylight, the Packer sweep, and the option pass. He carried 23 times for 75 yards and one touchdown his rookie year. In 1962 he was again behind Taylor, Hornung, and Moore plus Earl Gros; however, he averaged 5 yards per carry and scored twice.

Paul Hornung was suspended by the NFL in 1963 and Pitts backed up Moore. When Hornung returned, he continued his back-up roles in 1964 and '65.

By 1966 Hornung's many injuries had finally caught up with him and Elijah replaced him as the starter. He had more than 100 rushing attempts for the first and only time. He was the leading rusher in the championship game with 12 for 66 and one score, and in the Super Bowl he went 11 for 45 and two TDs

In 1967 he was behind Donny Anderson and was limited by injuries to eight games, missing the famous Dallas icebowl and Super Bowl II.

Pitts remained behind Anderson and Jim Grabowski in 1968 and Anderson, Dave Hampton, and Travis Williams in '69. For the 1970 seasons he played for both the Rams and Saints, then returned to the Packers in 1971 where he was only used as a punt returner.

Recently the media gave much hype to the fact Dorsey Levens was about to break Jim Taylor's single season total yardage (which he did not); but no one seemed aware of the fact he played more games, was the team's sole ball carrier, and did not have to share the carry with a Paul Hornung, Tom Moore, or Elijah Pitts. Another testimony to how absurd comparisons of different eras are!

After his active career Pitts became a coach with the Rams 1974-77, Bills 78-80, Oilers 81-83, Hamilton CFL 1984, and the Bills again starting in 1985 until last fall when his fatal illness drove him from the side lines.

His son Ron, a defensive back from UCLA, played for him in 1986-87 and is now a TV commentator.

The offensive plans of current teams do not leave much room for a second string halfback with few egos willing to play the role.

Elijah Eugene Pitts

Running Back

6-1 210

College: Philander State

High School: Pine Street [Conway, AR]

Born: Feb. 3, 1938, Mayflower, AR

Died July 9, 1998, Buffalo, NY

THE COFFIN CORNER: Vol. 21, No. 3 (1999)

Year	Team	G	RUSHING				RECEIVING			
			Att	Yds	Avg	TD	No	Yds	Avg	TD
1961	GB	14	23	75	3.3	1	1	5	5.0	0
1962	GB	14	22	110	5.0	2	3	44	14.7	0
1963	GB	14	54	212	3.9	5	9	54	6.0	1
1964	GB	14	27	127	4.7	1	6	38	6.3	0
1965	GB	14	54	122	2.3	4	11	182	16.5	1
1966	GB	14	115	393	3.4	7	26	460	17.7	3
1967	GB	8	77	247	3.2	6	15	210	14.0	0
1968	GB	14	72	264	3.7	2	17	142	8.4	0
1969	GB	14	35	134	3.8	0	9	47	5.2	1
1970	LA-NO	8	35	104	3.0	0	7	63	9.0	0
1971	GB	6	0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0	0
11 years		134	514	1788	3.5	28	104	1245	12.0	6