

LEWIS and LANE

By T.J. Troup

In the history of the NFL there have been men from decidedly different backgrounds who achieved success as teammates. This story will detail Woodley Lewis and Richard Lane who were teammates with both the Rams and Cardinals.

Woodley Lewis was born in Los Angeles; played high school and junior college football in his hometown, matriculated to the University of Oregon, and was drafted in the 8th round by the Rams. Lewis joined the defending western division champions in 1950. He earned a starting position in the defensive secondary and recorded an interception in his very first game in the NFL.

After a 2-2 start to the season the Rams caught fire by winning 7 of their last 8 games to tie for the national conference championship with the Bears.

Lewis intercepted 11 passes in this 8-game span and had interceptions in 6 of the 7 late season victories by the Rams. He led the league in interception yards returned with 275. He not only tied a then-team record of intercepting in four consecutive games but he is the only Ram rookie ever chosen for the Pro Bowl. Woodley's fine rookie season also included his first touchdown on a 50-yard fumble return against the Packers. Lewis contributed an interception in the Ram play-off victory over the Bears in the Coliseum.

The National Conference [western] title chase of 1951 was one of the closest in league history as four teams had a chance to win the title on the final Sunday of the season. Woodley played his usual stellar game as the Rams defeated the Packers to clinch the conference title. All three of Woodley's interceptions that season occurred in victories, and in December of 1951 the Rams were crowned NFL champions for the second time in team history.

The Ram teams of this era are remembered for many things; two Hall of Fame quarterbacks sharing the position, constant change and turmoil in the coaching ranks, and a star-studded array of men who suited up in the golden jersey's the Rams wore in those days. Joining this cast for the '52 season was a free agent from Texas – one Richard Lane. Lane unlike Lewis was not a homegrown talent. Like Lewis he had played junior college football, but unlike Lewis did not receive a scholarship to a major university. Much has been

written about Lane walking into the Ram offices on Pico Boulevard, asking for a try-out (after playing service ball), and making the team.

There are seasonal records that are virtually untouchable; Richard Lane holds one of them. Not only did he intercept 14 passes in a season, but in a 12-game season. Upon closer look though...Lane intercepted all 14 during the last nine games; eight of which were Ram victories.

Lane broke Lewis' team record by intercepting in five consecutive games and tied Waterfield's team record by intercepting three passes in a game twice. Even more impressive is the fact he did it in back-to-back weeks under the immense pressure of knowing that a Rams' loss would hand the Lions the conference title outright. Lane recorded six interceptions for 151 yards and 2 touchdowns in those key victories over Green Bay and Pittsburgh. Surprisingly for his outstanding accomplishments Lane was not chosen for the Pro Bowl.

Lewis played both offense and defense during the season; and even with the outstanding backs the Rams had; Woodley's 51 yard run from scrimmage against the 49ers was the longest Ram run that season. Lewis added to his repertoire in 1952 by returning punts for an 18.5 average and a league leading 2 touchdowns.

November 9th, 1952 was a statistically strange game, but a special day in Ram history; on the road in rainy and windswept Dallas the Rams lost 5 yards passing for the entire game (with 2 Hall of Fame qb's!), and still won...the Rams intercepted six Texan passes for 126 yards, and Woodley Lewis returned a punt 65 yards for a touchdown. Later that month against the 49ers Lewis returned a punt 82 yards for a touchdown in the Coliseum. Lewis and Lane were significant contributors to the Rams returning to the play-offs.

The 1953 season saw the Rams again in competition with the Lions and 49ers for the western conference title. Night Train Lane would not lead the league in interceptions, but Woodley Lewis would have a stellar season as he led the NFL in both punt and kick-off return yardage. After six games in '53 the Rams led the division with a 5-1 record and Lewis had returned a punt 78 yards for a touchdown against the defending

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world champion Lions in a 31-19 Ram victory on October 18th. Though they lost the division title to the Lions, the Rams closed the season on a high note with a 33-17 victory over the Packers. In that game both Lewis and Lane intercepted. Before the 1954 season began Night Train Lane was traded to the Chicago Cardinals.

On November 14th, 1954 Lewis and Lane opposed each other. Lane intercepted in a losing cause that day, and Lewis returned a Cardinal kick-off 88 yards for a touchdown. At the close of the season both men would rank at the top of different statistical categories. Night Train Lane led the league with 10 interceptions and Woodley for the second year in a row led the league in kick-off return yardage.

On November 13th, 1955, while playing split end, Night Train caught a 98-yard touchdown pass. Lane also intercepted two passes that day (he would be the last Cardinal to catch a touchdown pass and intercept a pass in the same game until Roy Green in 1981). Lewis became a fulltime offensive player for the western division champion Rams in 1955 and contributed 19 receptions as a split end (tied for 5th on the team). When the Rams lost to Cleveland in the title game in the Coliseum to close the season it also closed Woodley Lewis' career as a Ram.

When the 1956 season began the Chicago Cardinals had won only 8 of their previous 44 games. Woodley Lewis joined the Cardinals, and Chicago became a contender for the first time since 1948. When a team has an open field runner like Ollie Matson there was no need for Lewis to return kicks, but he did join an already strong secondary of Lindon Crow, Jimmy Hill, and Lane.

The Cardinals won five of their first six games and the Night Train had an interception in each of those five Cardinal victories. When the Cardinals stunned the Giants in a 35-27 victory in Chicago, Lewis contributed an interception, and Lane returned a Giant pass 66 yards for a touchdown. The Cardinals could not maintain their early season success and finished second to the World Champion Giants. It was the only season in the '50's where the Cardinals posted a winning record.

Lewis played defense, offense, and was back to returning kicks for the 1957 season. Lane continued his all-pro play at corner. Lewis intercepted in the season opening upset of the 49ers, and against the Redskins on October 20th, caught touchdown passes of 39 and 8 yards in a 44-14 victory. Lane contributed a 33 yard interception return.

The Cardinals have had many outstanding receiving performances in their history; on Saturday December 14th, in a nationally televised game, Woodley Lewis caught six passes for 162 yards (second most

receiving yards by a Cardinal in a game up to that time) and touchdown catches of 42, 53, and 34 yards in a 31-27 victory over the Eagles.

At the close of the 1958 season *The Sporting News* named Woodley Lewis as one of their all-pro split ends. Lane was chosen 2nd team all-pro by UPI. On December 6th, 1959 Lewis scored his last touchdown as a Chicago Cardinal on a 20-yard pass reception. Lewis was one of only three men to play in every game during the decade of the 1950's (the others being Leo Nomellini and Emlen Tunnell).

The expansion Dallas Cowboys chose Lewis for their inaugural team in 1960, but he played in six games as a Cowboy and retired.

With a trade to the Lions Night Train Lane's career reached a new pinnacle. Lane strengthened an already resilient Lion defense and at one point in the early '60's Detroit won 27 of 38 games and finished second to the Packers three consecutive years. Lane had interceptions in 11 of those Detroit victories, and finished his Lion career with 21 interceptions. Adding to those interceptions were countless neck-tie tackles.

Since both men have recently passed on... let us revere these two outstanding athletes one further time.