

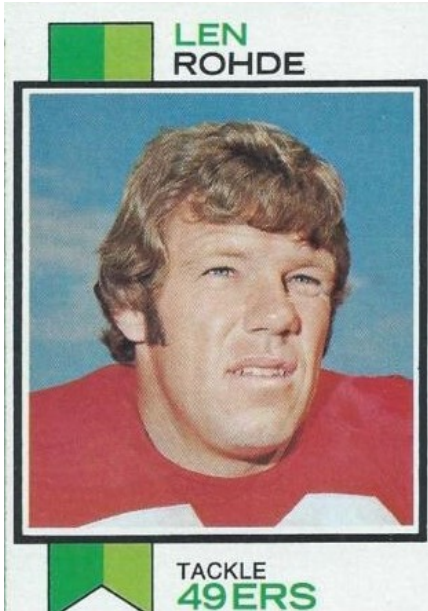


Len Rohde

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Len Rohde experienced a career defining moment on November 18, 1962 in a game against the Los Angeles Rams. Earlier in the 1962 season he said, “I figured it was all over, my career was over. I mean, how many opportunities do you get? I knew I had been struggling on offense, so I didn't think I had a chance. I was about as low as you could go.”¹ That afternoon, starting offensive tackle Bob St. Clair went down with an Achilles injury and was lost for the season. In stepped Rohde, who turned in a monumental performance in the 24-17 San Francisco victory.² He vividly recalled his performance against legendary Hall of Famer Deacon Jones, “Deacon had some gamesmanship about him. He was always talking. And if he got blocked, he'd automatically think it must be because you were holding, so he'd start screaming at the officials. You'd be thinking, 'Yeah, right.’”³ Rohde harnessed that situation to propel his career, earning the starting left tackle position that he would not relinquish until he retired 12 seasons later. Had Rohde not won the starting role, he may have gone down a different path recalling, “At that point, I figured I'd wait out the season and if the 49ers didn't want me, (I'd go) play defense for somebody somewhere. I knew I could rush the passer.”⁴

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- 1 “Former San Francisco 49ers Pro Bowler Len Rohde dies at 79,” UPI.com, May 15, 2017, https://www.upi.com/Sports_News/NFL/2017/05/15/Former-San-Francisco-49ers-Pro-Bowler-Len-Rohde-dies-at-79/3801494896223/.
 - 2 “Former San Francisco 49ers Pro Bowler Len Rohde dies at 79,” UPI.com, May 15, 2017, https://www.upi.com/Sports_News/NFL/2017/05/15/Former-San-Francisco-49ers-Pro-Bowler-Len-Rohde-dies-at-79/3801494896223/.
 - 3 Mano, Daniel. “Longtime 49ers offensive lineman Len Rohde dies,” The Mercury News, May 16, 2017, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/05/15/longtime-49ers-offensive-lineman-len-rohde-dies/>.
 - 4 “Former San Francisco 49ers Pro Bowler Len Rohde dies at 79,” UPI.com, May 15, 2017, https://www.upi.com/Sports_News/NFL/2017/05/15/Former-San-Francisco-49ers-Pro-Bowler-Len-Rohde-dies-at-79/3801494896223/.



Rohde turned in a solid career with the 49ers. He joined the team in 1960 as a fifth round draft choice in the that years' NFL Draft. Starting out, Rohde was a versatile two-way player along the offensive and defensive lines, also seeing time on special teams.⁵ He rotated between defensive end and offensive tackle. It was not until 1962 when Rohde found his niche at left offensive tackle.⁶ He was a Pro Bowl honoree in 1970, and throughout his 15 seasons, he was a member of formidable offensive lines who blocked for team greats in John Brodie, Ken Willard, Joe Perry, Hugh McElhenny, and Vic Washington. Perry, Willard, and McElhenny are among the Top 10 rushers in team history.⁷ Among the greats who started alongside Rohde were Hall of Famer Bob St. Clair, four-time Pro Bowler Bruce Bosley, guard Howard Mudd, and center Forrest Blue.⁸

Solidified by its offensive line, San Francisco owned a top five ranked scoring offense three times (1965, '70, '72), twice the top ranked passing attack during Rohde's career.⁹ MVP quarterback John Brodie led the NFL in passing yards three times (1965, '68, '70),

5 "Len Rohde," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/R/RohdLe00.htm>.

6 "Len Rohde," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/R/RohdLe00.htm>.

7 "San Francisco 49ers Career Rushing Leaders," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/career-rushing.htm>.

8 "San Francisco 49ers Career Rushing Leaders," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/career-rushing.htm>.



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tossing 30 touchdowns in the 1965 season.¹⁰ End Dave Parks was the NFL's top receiver in 1965, hauling in 80 passes for 1,344 yards, 12 touchdowns, averaging 96 yards per game – all league bests. Parks was a consensus first-team all-Pro and first-team all-NFC selection by the *Sporting News*. He also made the Pro Bowl and finished third in the MVP voting.¹¹ Fullback Ken Willard contributed 1,031 yards from scrimmage and nine total touchdowns during that season, as he finished runner up in the Rookie of the Year voting. Willard joined Parks in the Pro Bowl and was named a second-team all-Pro.¹² Despite the 49ers offensive heroics, they finished with a disappointing 7-6-1 record. However, the 49ers won three consecutive NFC West Division titles from 1970 to 1972 under Dick Nolan, making its first playoff appearance since 1957.

Despite the success under Nolan, they could not overcome the Dallas Cowboys in the postseason, falling to them three straight years.¹³ San Francisco would not return to the playoffs until 1981 when they went on to win Super Bowl XVI under Bill Walsh. One of Rohde's proudest achievements came during the 1970 season when San Francisco boasted the top ranked passing offense.¹⁴ The 49ers offensive line allowed a league low eight unofficial sacks, which was a testament to Rohde's play as he protected quarterback John Brodie's blindside.¹⁵

Rohde was not a highly decorated player, but he left his mark in team history. His 208 games played is tied for third in 49ers history with tight end Brian Jennings, trailing only Jimmy Johnson (213) and Jerry Rice (238).¹⁶ The 208 games and 173 starts is the most by a lineman. His 15 seasons of service also ranks third in team history behind Jimmy Johnson and Jerry Rice, who each played 16 seasons.¹⁷ Rohde won the Len Eshmont Award in 1974, a team award given to the most spirited and courageous 49er.

9 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

10 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.

11 "Dave Parks," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/P/ParkDa00.htm>.

12 "Ken Willard," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WillKe02.htm>.

13 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

14 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

15 "John Brodie," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/B/BrodJo00.htm>.

16 "San Francisco 49ers Career Rushing Leaders," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/career-rushing.htm>.

17 "San Francisco 49ers Career Rushing Leaders," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/career-rushing.htm>.



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Reflecting back on his career Rohde stated, “As an offensive tackle, there aren't too many individual stats you can hang your hat on. But I guess playing in 208 games, winning the Len Eshmont, the NFC West, going to the Pro Bowl and the sack record aren't bad.”¹⁸ Upon his retirement he praised head coach Dick Nolan saying, “I was getting to the point where my back was bothering me quite a bit. Coach Nolan treated me well, he pulled me in one day and said, 'You've been a good team guy all these years and you could really help us a lot.’”¹⁹ Speaking about playing in so many games he said, “It's one of those things that just creeps up on you and you don't realize. You don't set out to do something like that: you take things one at a time and all of the sudden you realize you've got a string going. And then you hope you can hang on.”²⁰

Leonard Emil Rohde was born on April 16, 1938 in Palatine, Illinois. He attended Palatine High School then went on to college at Utah State.²¹ Rohde played three seasons (1957-1959) on the Aggies football team. Utah State did not field a particularly strong team during this time as a member of the Skyline Conference.²² Head coach Ev Faunce, who played briefly as a halfback for the AAFC's Baltimore Colts, did not have a successful stint, going 15-24-1 in four seasons. His best season was 1955 with a 6-4 record and tie for third place in the Skyline Conference.²³ In Rohde's senior season, 1959, under first year head coach John Ralston, the Aggies went 5-6 that included a 22-13 upset victory over tenth ranked Montana State.²⁴ Ralston would use that year as a springboard for success, winning consecutive conference titles in 1960 and 1961, furnishing 9-2 and 9-1-1 records, respectively.²⁵ In his collegiate years, Rohde was a two-time all-Skyline choice and named to the Utah State all-century football team as an offensive tackle. He was also the team captain and MVP during his senior season.²⁶

On May 13, 2017 Rohde sadly passed away at the age of 79. His involvement in football was tremendous, something he prided himself on saying, “I probably wouldn't have gone to college without football. I owe an awful lot to the game, and I was around people who had a great influence on me. I feel pretty grateful for the opportunities, and I wouldn't trade them for anything.”²⁷ Outside of football, he earned his master's degree from San Jose State University, venturing into entrepreneurship. Rohde managed a variety of restaurants, including several Applebee's and Burger King locations in the Bay Area. He was also an avid farmer, his family a major producer of Templeton Olive Oil.²⁸

1 8 Branch, Eric. “Ironman former 49ers offensive lineman Len Rohde dies,” sfgate.com, May 15, 2017, <https://www.sfgate.com/49ers/article/Ironman-former-49ers-offensive-lineman-Len-Rohde-11148141.php>.

1 9 Branch, Eric. “Ironman former 49ers offensive lineman Len Rohde dies,” sfgate.com, May 15, 2017, <https://www.sfgate.com/49ers/article/Ironman-former-49ers-offensive-lineman-Len-Rohde-11148141.php>.

2 0 Branch, Eric. “Ironman former 49ers offensive lineman Len Rohde dies,” sfgate.com, May 15, 2017, <https://www.sfgate.com/49ers/article/Ironman-former-49ers-offensive-lineman-Len-Rohde-11148141.php>.



End Notes:

- 2 1 Len Rohde,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/R/RohdLe00.htm>.
- 2 2 “Len Rohde,” utahstateaggies.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://utahstateaggies.com/honors/hall-of-fame/len-rohde/107>.
- 2 3 “Utah State Aggies School History,” SportsReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/utah-state/index.html>.
- 2 4 “1959 Utah State Aggies Schedule and Results,” SportsReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/utah-state/1959-schedule.html>.
- 2 5 “Utah State Aggies School History,” SportsReference.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/utah-state/index.html>.
- 2 6 “Len Rohde,” utahstateaggies.com, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://utahstateaggies.com/honors/hall-of-fame/len-rohde/107>.
- 2 7 Mano, Daniel. “Longtime 49ers offensive lineman Len Rohde dies,” The Mercury News, May 16, 2017, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2017/05/15/longtime-49ers-offensive-lineman-len-rohde-dies/>.
- 2 8 “Former 49ers T Len Rohde Passes Away,” 49ers.com, May 15, 2017, <https://www.49ers.com/news/former-49ers-t-len-rohde-passes-away-18862498?sf79078201=1>.