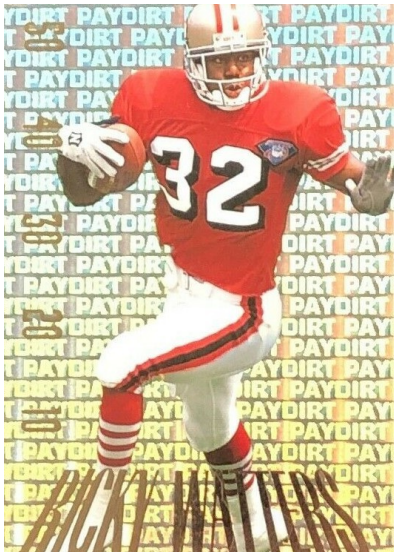


## Ricky Watters

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Every team Richard “Ricky” James Watters (b. April 7, 1969) played for he brought a uniqueness that was fueled by his competitive personality growing up: “[Being an adopted child] pushed me harder. It made me want to be the best in everything. I wanted to be accepted, I wanted people to like me, I wanted people to think I'm cool, all that kind of stuff.”<sup>1</sup>



During his 11-year professional football career as a member of the San Francisco 49ers, Philadelphia Eagles, and Seattle Seahawks, Watters became one of two players to rush for over 1,000 yards in a season with three different franchises.<sup>2</sup> Ricky did a lot of running, thus earning the nickname, Ricky “Running” Watters, coined by ESPN's Chris Berman.<sup>3</sup> There was no slowing him down: Watters totaled 14,891 yards from scrimmage, which, when calculated out, totals approximately 8.5 miles. Seven of his ten statistical seasons, he accrued 1,000 or more rushing yards, including six consecutive (1995 to 2000). Just once did Watters net less than 1,000 yards from scrimmage: 2001, his final season that was hampered by injuries.<sup>4</sup>

He was drafted in the second round of the 1991 NFL draft by the 49ers.<sup>5</sup> Due to injuries, he sat out the entire 1991 season, however, he starred immensely the following year. As a rookie Watters was the feature back, rushing for 1,013 yards, scoring nine touchdowns on a 14-2 49ers team that reached the NFC Championship Game.<sup>6</sup> Watters earned the first of five consecutive Pro Bowl selections (1992 to 1996) and finished sixth in the NFL AP



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Offensive Player of the Year voting.<sup>7</sup> Teammate and quarterback Steve Young won the award. San Francisco would suffer at the hands of the Dallas Cowboys in the NFC title game, losing 30-20 and again in 1993, by a score of 38-21.<sup>8</sup> Watters ran for 950 yards in 1993, becoming more of a receiving threat as he totaled 1,276 yards from scrimmage and 11 total touchdowns.<sup>9</sup>

The 49ers broke through in 1994, reaching Super Bowl XXIX where they beat down the San Diego Chargers, 49-26, behind Watters' three total touchdowns.<sup>10</sup> In the big game he scored on a 51-yard pass reception from Young that staked San Francisco to a 14-0 first quarter lead. He caught a second touchdown pass in the second quarter from 8-yards out and his third TD was a 9-yard jaunt in the third quarter. For the 1995 season, Watters signed with the Eagles as a free agent that paid him among the highest salaries for running backs in the league.<sup>11</sup> Aside from the Super Bowl, Watters' most memorable game with San Francisco was likely during the 1993 playoffs, on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1994 against the New York Giants, when he rushed for 118 yards and five touchdowns in a 44-3 romp.<sup>12</sup>

- 1 Marvi, Robert. "What Happened To Ricky Watters? (Complete Story)," ProFootballHistory.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.profootballhistory.com/ricky-watters/>.
- 2 "McGahee second RB to reach 1,000 yards with three teams," NFL.com, December 24, 2011, <https://www.nfl.com/news/mcgahee-second-rb-to-reach-1-000-yards-with-three-teams-09000d5d8255c9dd>.
- 3 Berube, Allie. "Episode 35: Ricky Watters on Central PA roots, Super Bowl win, health concerns in NFL players," ABC27.com, January 20, 2022, <https://www.abc27.com/sports/the-sports-extra-podcast/episode-35-ricky-watters-on-central-pa-roots-super-bowl-win-health-concerns-in-nfl-players/>.
- 4 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.
- 5 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.
- 6 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.
- 7 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.
- 8 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.
- 9 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.
- 10 "Super Bowl XXIX – San Francisco 49ers vs. San Diego Chargers – January 29<sup>th</sup>, 1995," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/199501290sdg.htm>.
- 11 "Eagles Make Watters Offer He Can't Refuse," Deseret.com, March 19, 1995, <https://www.deseret.com/1995/3/19/19165067/eagles-make-watters-offer-he-can-t-refuse>.
- 12 "Divisional Round – New York Giants at San Francisco 49ers – January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1994," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/199401150sfo.htm>.



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Watters continued his productivity in Philadelphia, rushing for greater than 1,000 yards in each of his three years there. Undoubtedly, he was the Eagles' workhorse, carrying the load on offense. Philadelphia earned a 10-6 record in 1995, losing to the Dallas Cowboys in the Divisional round of the playoffs, while Watters rolled up 1,273 yards on the ground. He then led the league in rushing attempts (353), total touches (404), and yards from scrimmage (1855) in 1996.<sup>13</sup> Watters looks back on his years in Philadelphia and attributes them to molding his identity, "When I go all-around the world, and I mean all around the world, I see Philadelphia fans and I know they are Philadelphia fans because they let me know. They come up and say, 'Hey I'm a Philadelphia fan, dawg, I loved you' or whatever the situation is and 'I wish you would have stayed there and I believe we would have gotten a Super Bowl' and stuff like that. That is everything to me. That means so much."<sup>14</sup> As an Eagle, Watters totaled 3,800 rushing yards and scored 32 touchdowns.<sup>15</sup>

Playing in Philadelphia was akin to a homecoming for Watters, who grew up in Harrisburg, PA. He recalls, "I grew up in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, so I feel that's home to me. That's a big feeling for me right now, and it's why I am so excited about this time. I've gone back and had this happen in San Francisco and Seattle, but it's really special in Philadelphia."<sup>16</sup> Watters played his high school football at Bishop McDevitt High School, where he lettered all four years, and starred in basketball and baseball. Coming out of high school, he was the nation's number one football recruit. He was named the PA Big 33 Player of the Year in 1987.<sup>17</sup>

Watters was also known for his, "For who, for what?" quote during a frustrated post-game situation while playing for the Eagles. He very much has moved on from the moment, "Obviously I don't want to be known for that, especially in the city that I love, with great fans that are definitely not fair-weather fans, I'll tell you that much. ... That was my nature back then. It's really crazy for me to even try to explain it because I am so different than that now, but at that time when somebody was to come at, or say anything that I felt was threatening to me, my way was to lash back, and that was how I lashed

1 3 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.

1 4 Eskin, Spike. "Ricky Watters Wishes he Never Said, 'For Who, For What'," CBSPhiladelphia.com, October 11, 2012, <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/10/11/ricky-watters-says-he-wishes-had-never-said-for-who-for-what/>.

1 5 "Ricky Watters," ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.

1 6 Eskin, Spike. "Ricky Watters Wishes he Never Said, 'For Who, For What'," CBSPhiladelphia.com, October 11, 2012, <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/10/11/ricky-watters-says-he-wishes-had-never-said-for-who-for-what/>.

1 7 "Career Highlights," Rickywatters.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.rickywatters.com/career-highlights>.



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

back and it was wrong.”<sup>18</sup> Every time he visits Philadelphia, he feels a strong bond with the city, the fans, “That’s a big part of me, wanting to come back, is to be able to express that to the fans. That man, I really appreciated all the letters, the emails, everything that you’re saying about I should be in the Hall of Fame and when I do get in there you believe I’m going to get in there, that you’re going to come out to see me and you’re going to be in the stands. ...”<sup>19</sup>

After his three productive years in Philadelphia, Watters signed with the Seattle Seahawks as an unrestricted free agent following the 1997 season.

Spending the final four seasons of his career in the Emerald City, Watters was again the feature back.. He continued to play at a very high level, amassing 1,239 rushing yards in 1998, but Seattle finished out of the playoffs at 8-8.<sup>20</sup> In 1999, the Seahawks won the AFC West Division title at 9-7, while Watters pounded out the tough yards on offense, running for 1,210 yards.<sup>21</sup> Seattle fell to the Dolphins, 20-17, in a close Wild Card playoff game. Watters was held to 40 yards on the ground, and 62 total yards, as Jon Kitna threw two costly interceptions and the team lost a 17-13 advantage in the fourth quarter.<sup>22</sup>

Seattle slumped to a 6-10 record in 2000, but Watters ran for 4.5 yards per carry and 1,242 total. He matched his career high of 1,855 total yards. Watters played in just five games in 2001, due to injury.<sup>23</sup> He entertained offers to return to football in 2002, but was unable to find the right match.

Upon his retirement, his career statistics showed that he started 142 of 144 games, totaled 10,643 rushing yards, 4,248 receiving yards, and 91 combined rushing and receiving touchdowns.<sup>24</sup> In 2010, Watters was named to the Seattle Seahawks 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Team.

---

1 8 Eskin, Spike. “Ricky Watters Wishes he Never Said, 'For Who, For What',” CBSPhiladelphia.com, October 11, 2012, <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/10/11/ricky-watters-says-he-wishes-had-never-said-for-who-for-what/>.

1 9 Eskin, Spike. “Ricky Watters Wishes he Never Said, 'For Who, For What',” CBSPhiladelphia.com, October 11, 2012, <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2012/10/11/ricky-watters-says-he-wishes-had-never-said-for-who-for-what/>.

2 0 “Seattle Seahawks Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sea/>.

2 1 “Seattle Seahawks Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sea/>.

2 2 “Wild Card – Miami Dolphins at Seattle Seahawks – January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2000,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/200001090sea.htm>.

2 3 “Ricky Watters,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.



## Professional Football Researchers Association

www.profootballresearchers.com

Growing up, Watters had a high affinity for art. He became inspired by drawing that led him to develop a keen interest in architectural studies.<sup>25</sup> When he was recruited by colleges, Watters only considered institutions with strong architecture programs, “The reality of it set in at a high football school like Notre Dame.”<sup>26</sup> “It’s obviously about academics, but it’s also playing big-time football, and the demands that are placed on you doing that and the demands that are placed on you trying to do architecture, they just don’t fit, not if you plan on getting any sleep or eating or surviving.” Watters chose to attend the University of Notre Dame, being highly recruited by head coach Lou Holtz. In his four years at the school, Watters churned out 1,814 rushing yards on 325 attempts, and 21 touchdowns.<sup>27</sup> The Irish went 41-8, playing in the Cotton, Fiesta, and Orange (twice) bowls. Notre Dame was the 1988 consensus national champion, soundly defeating the West Virginia Mountaineers, 34-21, in the 1989 Fiesta Bowl.<sup>28</sup> His best season for the Fighting Irish was 1989 when he rushed for 791 yards with 10 touchdowns. Traditionally a running back, Watters spent part of his collegiate career as a receiver, where he earned his versatility as a pass catcher coming out of the backfield.

Watters returned to Notre Dame to finish his degree, which he earned in 2014. Watters wanted to finish what he started, “It’s for your soul, just to feel complete and to feel like you finished it. You did what you set out to do. Both my parents, they’ve passed away now, and I know they’re looking down on me, and when they see me get that degree it’s going to be a happy time for them, too.”<sup>29</sup>

Currently, Watters works as a motivation speaker, and gives much of his time back to the community for pediatric cancer patients and at-risk youth.<sup>30</sup> Ricky also worked as a recording artist, starting an independent record label “Tigero Records,” whereby he produced music and songs for himself and other artists.<sup>31</sup> Watters faced much adversity,

2 4 “Ricky Watters,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed May 24, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/W/WattRi00.htm>.

2 5 Fortuna, Matt. “Ricky Watters finishing what he started,” ESPN.com, July 9, 2014, [https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/\\_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started](https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started).

2 6 Fortuna, Matt. “Ricky Watters finishing what he started,” ESPN.com, July 9, 2014, [https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/\\_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started](https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started).

2 7 “Ricky Watters,” SportsReference.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/players/ricky-watters-1.html>.

2 8 “1988 Notre Dame Fighting Irish Schedule and Results,” SportsReference.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.sports-reference.com/cfb/schools/notre-dame/1988-schedule.html>.

2 9 Fortuna, Matt. “Ricky Watters finishing what he started,” ESPN.com, July 9, 2014, [https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/\\_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started](https://www.espn.com/blog/notre-dame-football/post/_/id/20898/ricky-watters-finishing-what-he-started).

3 0 “Bio,” Rickywatters.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.rickywatters.com/about-ricky>.

3 1 “Bio,” Rickywatters.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.rickywatters.com/about-ricky>.



## **Professional Football Researchers Association**

www.profootballresearchers.com

---

challenges, and difficult situations in his life, but it has been his resiliency and dedication that powered him through. Watters has been a semifinalist for the Pro Football Hall of Fame twice, in 2020 and 2022. He has been inducted into several Hall of Fames including, the Central Florida Sports Hall of Fame and to the PA Sports Hall of Fame Capital Area Chapter.<sup>32</sup>

End Notes:

---

3 2 “Bio,” Rickywatters.com, accessed May 26, 2022, <https://www.rickywatters.com/about-ricky>.