

Sanders, Barry (1968-) Encyclopedia Article

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Sanders, Barry (1968—)

While many argue whether or not he was the best ever or even the best of his decade, Barry Sanders of the Detroit Lions was the most intriguing running back in the National Football League (NFL) during the 1990s for two reasons: his productivity and personality. Sanders's consistent productivity on the football field was incredible; he averaged more than 100 rushing yards for every game in which he played. Despite never playing for a championship team, Sanders's remarkable on-the-field production—achieved through a combination of power, speed, and tremendous agility—brought him many postseason awards including player-of-the-year honors in 1997. Yet, Sanders may be best known for his humility during an era of professional sports dominated by outspoken and self-absorbed players constantly trying to increase their wealth. According to Paul Attner of the *Sporting News*, Sanders preferred a lifestyle that was "neither flamboyant nor extravagant," which was why he consistently turned down lucrative endorsement opportunities. In the final game of one season, Sanders even took himself out of the game in the closing minutes despite being close to setting the season rushing record. He later explained that the personal achievement meant little to him and he wanted to let his backup have a chance to play. Accentuated by his quiet demeanor, the leadership, modesty, and family values exhibited by Barry Sanders made him not just a great athlete but a uniquely humble superstar. Prior to the 1999 season, in a surprising move, Sanders retired from playing professional football for the Detroit Lions, claiming that he had lost his drive to play.

Further Reading:

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Kavanagh, Jack. *Barry Sanders: Rocket Running Back*. Minneapolis, Lerner Publications, 1994.