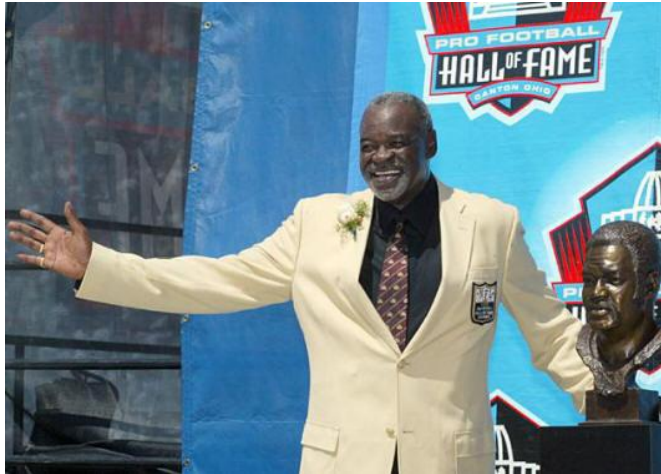




## Larry Rayfield Wright: Pro Football Hall of Fame Induction Address



delivered 5 August 2006

**AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED:** Text version below transcribed directly from audio

First of all, I'd like to give praise and thanks to our Father in heaven and through his Son, Jesus Christ, that has given me the ability to play sports.

I learned a poem in the eighth grade titled, "The Road Not Taken." It's about two roads. One was well traveled, the other was grassy and wanted wear. Through this poem, I discovered that life would give me choices. It was recognizing those choices that proved to be the greatest challenge. And looking back, my instinct was to always take the easy road. But the easy road never came my way.

You see, I grew up in Griffin, Georgia. My mother and my grandmother raised me, my brothers, and my sister. We didn't have much money or any luxuries to speak of. Times were tough, and I recognized at an early age the struggles that we faced.

I remember getting on my knees when I was 10 years old beside my grandmother, and I simply asked God something. I asked Him if He would just give me the ability that I could do something, that I could help my mother and my grandmother, and I could help other people. My grandmother taught me the power of prayer and what that prayer meant to me. And it's still in front of me today.

Back in the '50s, kids in my neighborhood didn't wear hundred dollar tennis shoes, and never went to sporting camps. After chores and homework, you'd find us in an empty field playing football, basketball, baseball. We didn't have golf in our community, and if we had, we would have learned how to play that.



My brother Lamar taught me the basics of sports. Even then something in my spirit told me that sports would be my chosen path. But success didn't come my way instantly. In fact, I went out for football in high school and I couldn't make the team my first three years.

Now, basketball was a different story. I loved playing basketball. Another recognized my ability and my passion for the game. In fact, Loyola University wanted me to come play basketball for them. But due to financial hardships, I selected a career in the Air Force to serve this great country and to continue my education and play basketball.

But I -- As I came to learn, that wasn't God's plan for me. About the same time, a gentleman by the name of Mr. Stan Lomax was hired to coach at Fort Valley State College. Coach Lomax had learned of my athletic ability from my cousin, John Willis. And through Coach Lomax' [sic] persistence, I was offered an athletic scholarship. Coach Lomax, I thank you for always treating me and believing in me, treating me like a son.

And to my cousin, John Willis, I wouldn't be standing here today without you. God bless you, brother. I love you.

During my college years, I excelled in both football and basketball, but basketball was still my preferred sport, as I averaged over 20 points a game and 21 rebounds per game. In fact, the Cincinnati Royals tried to sign me my junior year to come and play basketball for them, but I declined that invitation because I needed to stay in school and get my education. And I did just that.

And I knew I was headed for the NBA. But, again, I found myself traveling yet another road. My senior year, I received a telephone call from a gentleman by the name of Mr. Gil Brandt of the Dallas Cowboys. And he stated that the Cowboys was interested in drafting me. And I asked him, for what? I had my sights set on the NBA.

But I realized that potential, playing for the Cowboys, was a God-given opportunity, and I couldn't ignore it. I decided to attend the Cowboys training camp which was in July. The Royals camp didn't start till August. And I kind of figured that if I didn't make the Cowboys team, I could go right to the NBA.

That year, 1967, the Dallas Cowboys had 137 rookies in training camp. Gil Brandt was signing everybody that could walk. Only five made the team that year, and I was one of the five.

I thank you, Mr. Brandt, for giving me the opportunity to play for the Dallas Cowboys.

My career started as a tight end. Don Meredith was our quarterback at the time. Recently I asked Don -- I said, "Don, you remember throwing me a touchdown pass against the Eagles?" He laughed and said, "Rayfield, I wasn't throwing the ball to you. You was just so tall, you got in the way."



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Two years later, Coach Landry called me into his office and said, "Rayfield, I'm going to move you to offensive tackle." I looked at him and I said, "Coach, I never played that position before in my life." He said, "I know, but you're quick, you learn fast. Besides, we got a young quarterback coming to the team this year, and his name was Roger Staubach, and he don't stay in the pocket. He run around a lot, and he needs a little bit more protection."

But I was never one to question the authorities of elders. And Coach Landry, I believed in his decision, and that was good enough for me.

Now, offensive linemen are taught to protect the quarterback the same way that the secret service protects our nation [sic] President. In this case, Roger Staubach was our president. And the Director of the Secret Service was our offensive line Coach Jim Myers. He built an offensive line that was unmatched. And today I cannot accept this honor without bringing Coach Myers and his offensive line into the Hall with me. That line consists of John Fitzgerald, and Tony Liscio, and Dave Manders, and Ralph Neely, John Niland and Blaine Nye.

Gentlemen, I'm proud to call myself your teammates, and I share this enshrinement with you.

And to our defense, you were the "Doomsday." And I'm thankful that I only had to face you guys in practice. I remember Coach Landry once telling me that, Rayfield, no matter how many awards or accolades you receive, that you will be never greater than the team. The Dallas Cowboys was a team, and what a team the Cowboys had during the dynamic decade of the '70s.

I have 13 years of players and coaches I would like to acknowledge today. But I've been told that I'm not -- and not to go into overtime. And we had a lot of shares of playing games in overtime back in the glory days. So you can understand the pressure that I face up here right now.

But we played together as a team in 12 playoff games and five Super Bowls. Guys, you know who you are. I know who you are. The Cowboy fans around the country know who you are. I always remember that we were winners, and I treasure those moments and memories.

Fans always ask me [who] my toughest opponent was, and how tough they were, and who they were. I played against the best. My body still hurts when I hear their names called. But I wouldn't be here today without these great players. Deacon Jones, thank you for your gracious welcome into the NFL. And in case you're wondering, Deek, the answer is "Yes, my mother knows I'm here."

Claude Humphrey, you were a brute, a strong and physical player. LC Greenwood, your long arms and quickness made Sunday afternoon a chore. Jack Youngblood, you played with finesse, and I tried always to try and outsmart you. Bubba Smith was a mountain of a man. Carl Eller. Carl, if you ever need a ride from Bloomington to Minneapolis, give me a call, my friend. But this time, I'll drive you in my car.



I have some angels here today that are enshrined in the Heavens Hall of Fame. My first angel probably arrived here at 4:00 this morning to make sure that everything was in place. That angel is my grandmother. We called her Big Mama. In essence, Big Mama was my first coach. And I know she's very proud of me.

The spirit of my youngest brother Phillip is also here. He was a great athlete with a big heart. He left this world much too soon.

Cowboy fans would give the next angel a warm welcome because he is Coach Tom Landry. However, you may not recognize him today because he's smiling. Thank you, Coach Landry, for your inspiration on and off the field. On the sideline was Coach Ernie Stautner, our distinguished defensive coach.

Next to Coach Landry and Coach Stautner are two Cowboy legends, Harvey Martin and Bob Hayes. Harvey was one of the most accomplished defensive ends to ever play the game. And "bullet" Bob Hayes forever changed the game of football. Harvey and Bob, my hope and prayer is that someday you will both join me into -- and inducted into -- the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

I've had many mentors in my life who always said, Let honor and success come -- come to you only if it's deserved, not because it's sought after. Being enshrined today is, indeed, an honor. And I extend my gratitude to the selection committee for nominating me, with special thanks to Mr. Rick Gosselin of the *Dallas Morning News*.

Some say that patience is a virtue. After 22 years of eligibility, God knows that I'm not a saint, but I am a Dallas Cowboy! And today I acknowledge my 2006 inductees. I'm privileged to be such a -- in a stellar class.

I would give thanks and shout to our troops who are protecting this great nation. May God keep you safe.

To thank everyone who is playing and who has played a vital role in my life would take me 60 years, so I'll try to keep it brief. I wish to tip my helmet to the Dallas Cowboy fans, especially the ones who remember my playing days and America's team of the '70s.

To the Bob Hayes family, I thank you for your support and continued support over the years.

To my former teammates, the ones who are here today, to those who have reached out to me over the past several months, I love you guys, and I thank you.

To Miss Jeannette DeVadder, the coauthor of my book and my friend, thanks for keeping me real. To my classmates and teammates from Fairmont High School, and Fort Valley State College, we are connected through the gifts of education and knowledge. To my uncles, my aunts, my cousins, to everyone in Griffin, Georgia, you are a vital link to my past and a solid bridge to my future.



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To Mr. David Walker, my Boy Scout master, who always taught me to "be prepared."

To my brother Lamar and my sister Erline, my children, La Ray, Anisha, Larry, Ariel, and my grandchildren, Lesa and Taylor, you nourish my souls and I love you from the bottom of my heart.

And to my mother, Mrs. Opel Wright, from the day I was born, you watched me take the road less traveled. Mom, you are my rose garden. You watered each day with your love, with your faith, and with your prayers. Your roots are deeply instilled in me, and your soul is so beautiful, in spite of all the painful thorns that life has put in your way.

Now, parents, teach your children well. Encourage them with your faith and leadership. Remember that you are the windows through which your children see this world. Take notice of yourself and the things that you do in hopes that your example will stir their hearts and souls.

To every young athlete within the sound of my voice, it takes courage to dream your dream. Don't let them sit in the locker room. Take a leap of faith. Listen to your parents and respect your elders. Learn from your successes and your losses. Defeat is possible and as a challenge to do better next time. Be satisfied you gave the game everything that you had and remember this: And don't be afraid to travel the road less traveled because Larry Rayfield Wright did, and you can, too.

May God bless you and may He keep you and may His countenance shine down upon you and give you peace. God bless you. I love you.