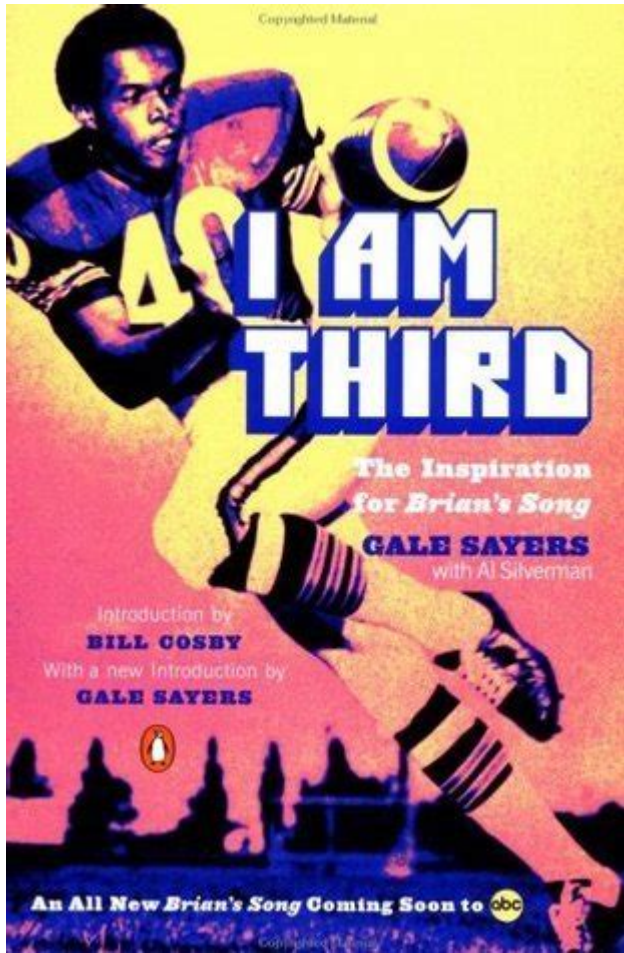


# Gale Sayers I Am Third



**Gale Sayers: I Am Third** is a profound statement that encapsulates the life philosophy of one of the most celebrated athletes in American football history. Known for his electrifying speed, agility, and extraordinary talent on the field, Sayers was not just a phenomenal player; he was also a remarkable individual whose life story transcends sports. His autobiography, "I Am Third," co-authored with Al Silverman, delves into his life experiences, values, and the principles that guided him.

## Early Life and Background

Gale Eugene Sayers was born on May 30, 1943, in Wichita, Kansas. He was the youngest of three children in his family. His parents, a domestic worker and a laborer, instilled in him the importance of hard work and perseverance from a young age. Sayers faced several challenges growing up, but his love for sports, particularly football, provided him with an outlet and a pathway to success.

## High School Sports

During his high school years at Wichita North High School, Sayers developed his skills in various sports. He excelled not only in football but also in basketball and track. His athletic prowess caught

the attention of college scouts, and Sayers was soon on his way to pursuing a collegiate football career.

## College Career

Sayers attended the University of Kansas, where he played for the Jayhawks from 1961 to 1964. His collegiate career was marked by outstanding performances, earning him a reputation as one of the best running backs in the nation. In 1962, he led the NCAA in rushing yards, and by the time he graduated, he had set multiple school records.

## Professional Career

In 1965, Gale Sayers was drafted by the Chicago Bears as the fourth overall pick in the NFL Draft. His arrival in the NFL marked the beginning of a legendary career that would be characterized by both brilliance and heartbreak.

## Playing Style and Achievements

Sayers' playing style was unique, combining speed, agility, and an innate ability to read defenses. Some of his notable achievements include:

- Rookie of the Year: Sayers was named NFL Rookie of the Year in 1965, making an immediate impact in the league.
- Pro Bowl Selections: He was selected to the Pro Bowl four times during his career (1966-1969).
- NFL Most Valuable Player: In 1969, Sayers received the NFL MVP award for his outstanding performance.
- Hall of Fame Induction: In 1977, he was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame, becoming one of the youngest players to receive this honor.

## Injuries and Challenges

Despite his exceptional talent, Sayers' career was marred by injuries. He suffered a significant knee injury in 1968 that limited his playing time and ultimately led to his early retirement in 1970. However, even during his struggles, Sayers maintained a positive outlook and a determination to overcome obstacles.

## Life Philosophy: "I Am Third"

The phrase "I Am Third" is central to Sayers' life philosophy. It reflects his belief in prioritizing faith and others before oneself. This principle is rooted in the biblical teaching of putting God first, others second, and oneself third. Sayers' values shaped not only his career but also his personal life and

interactions with others.

## **Faith and Family**

Sayers' Christian faith was a guiding force throughout his life. He often spoke about the importance of maintaining a strong spiritual foundation, which helped him navigate the ups and downs of his career. His family also played a crucial role in shaping his values, providing him with support and encouragement during challenging times.

## **Legacy Beyond Football**

After retiring from professional football, Sayers ventured into various business endeavors, including owning a successful sports marketing firm. He also became actively involved in philanthropy, focusing on education and healthcare initiatives. His commitment to giving back to the community reflects his "I Am Third" philosophy.

## **The Impact of "I Am Third"**

Gale Sayers' autobiography, "I Am Third," published in 1970, has resonated with readers for decades. The book chronicles not only his athletic achievements but also personal struggles, including his relationship with his parents, the impact of his faith, and the value of friendship.

## **Key Themes in "I Am Third"**

1. Resilience: Sayers' journey demonstrates the importance of resilience in the face of adversity. His ability to bounce back from injuries and setbacks is a testament to his character.
2. Sacrifice: The book highlights the sacrifices Sayers made for his family, faith, and career, showing the significance of putting others first.
3. Friendship: Sayers shares heartfelt stories about his friendship with fellow Bears player Brian Piccolo, illustrating the power of camaraderie and loyalty.
4. Faith: His unwavering faith is a recurring theme, guiding his decisions and providing solace during difficult times.

## **Influence on Future Generations**

Gale Sayers' legacy extends far beyond his on-field accomplishments. He has inspired countless athletes and individuals with his life story and the principles he espouses. His "I Am Third" philosophy has become a guiding mantra for many, emphasizing the importance of humility, service, and selflessness.

## **Tributes and Honors**

In recognition of his contributions to football and society, Sayers has received numerous accolades, including:

- NFL Lifetime Achievement Award: Honored for his impact on the sport and his commitment to community service.
- Brian Piccolo Award: Recognizing his friendship with Piccolo and his contributions to the Bears organization.
- Various Community Awards: Acknowledged for his philanthropic efforts and dedication to education and healthcare initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

Gale Sayers: I Am Third is a powerful testament to a life led by faith, humility, and a commitment to serving others. His journey from a small-town boy to an NFL superstar is not just about athletic prowess; it reflects the values that define true greatness. Sayers' legacy continues to inspire, reminding us that life is not merely about personal achievements but about uplifting those around us. Through his story, we learn that the essence of success lies in prioritizing faith, family, and friendships over personal ambition. As we reflect on the life of Gale Sayers, we are encouraged to embrace the philosophy of "I Am Third" in our own lives, fostering a spirit of compassion, resilience, and selflessness.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Who is Gale Sayers and why is he significant?**

Gale Sayers was a professional American football player, known as one of the greatest running backs in NFL history. He played for the Chicago Bears and was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1977. His significance also stems from his inspiring story of resilience and his friendship with teammate Brian Piccolo.

### **What is the central theme of 'I Am Third'?**

'I Am Third' emphasizes the importance of putting others before oneself. Sayers reflects on his life, his relationship with Brian Piccolo, and how their friendship taught him about love, sacrifice, and the true meaning of priorities.

### **How did Gale Sayers' relationship with Brian Piccolo influence 'I Am Third'?**

Sayers' relationship with Piccolo, who battled terminal cancer, deeply influenced 'I Am Third'. Their friendship showcased the values of loyalty, compassion, and support, highlighting how Sayers learned to prioritize friendship and love over personal accolades.

## **What impact did 'I Am Third' have on sports literature?**

'I Am Third' is considered a classic in sports literature, blending personal narrative with broader themes of humanity and friendship. It has inspired readers and athletes alike, setting a precedent for memoirs that focus on personal growth and relationships in sports.

## **How has 'I Am Third' been received in popular culture?**

'I Am Third' has been well-received, leading to its adaptation into a television movie titled 'Brian's Song' in 1971. The film further popularized Sayers' story and highlighted the emotional depth of his relationship with Piccolo, making it a cultural touchstone.

## **What lessons can readers learn from 'I Am Third'?**

Readers can learn valuable lessons about selflessness, the importance of relationships, and the impact of personal struggles on friendships. Sayers' narrative teaches that life's challenges can foster deeper connections and that love and support are paramount.

## **What role did Gale Sayers play in advocating for social issues?**

Gale Sayers used his platform to advocate for social issues, including racial equality and better treatment for athletes. His life and work emphasized the need for compassion and understanding, reflecting the values presented in 'I Am Third'.

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