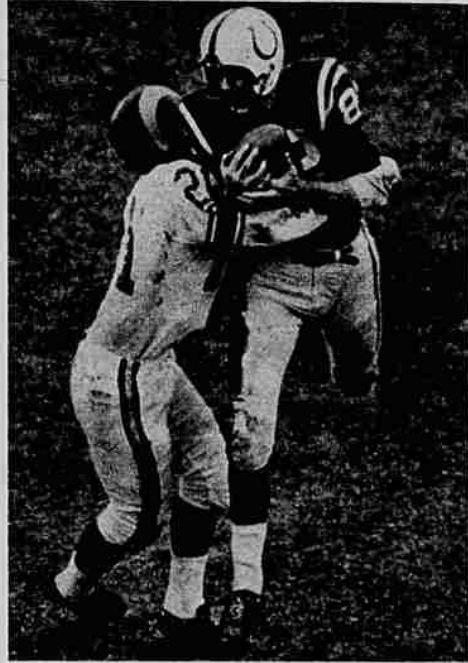


FOOTBALL'S FUSSIEST, FANCIEST FAKER

Ray Berry, star end of the Baltimore Colts, has some "screwball" habits, but they pay off in pass-catching records

By ROBERT G. DEINDORFER



When Raymond Berry can't fake himself loose, he uses gluelike hands to grab ball from opponent's grasp.

SOME TIME AGO, high-scoring Raymond Berry of the Baltimore Colts sat in the locker room reading one of several detailed notebooks he keeps.

As he sat reading such helpful items as "and don't fumble" (which he had underlined twice), an old friend and teammate who plays defensive halfback dropped down on the bench beside him. An inquisitive guy, the teammate focused his eyes on Berry's notebook.

Suddenly, Berry flipped the notebook shut and put it in the locker. What might seem strange behavior for anyone else made good sense to him.

"You may get traded to another team some time," Berry explained. "And if you're playing defense against me, I don't want you to know all my trade secrets."

Unusual? Not at all. In a way, that incident says much about sway-backed, nearsighted Raymond Berry ("don't call me 'Ray!'"), who plays football wearing contact lenses and extra long cleats on one shoe because one of his legs is slightly shorter than the other.

Whether fans who marvel at his dazzling catches realize it or not, Berry is considerably more than professional football's greatest pass-catching end. He also happens to be the fussiest, fanciest faker in that rough, tough, bone-crushing sport.

Among many other things, for example, the 27-year-old from Paris, Texas, feels that he might lose his artistic touch if his weight ever exceeds 185 pounds. To guard against such a fate, he weighs himself regularly three times every day and often carries his own scales along on road trips.

Early in Berry's professional career with the champion Colts, he carefully researched a number of fabrics until he found precisely the durable lightweight material he wanted for his custom-made uniform. In Berry's view, the slightly heavier team uniform might slow him down.

Another thing that sets him apart from other players is a voluble, nonstop tongue, which he uses mostly on himself. "Nice catch, Raymond," he says after fielding a difficult pass. "Shouldn't miss that one, Raymond," he scolds when he muffs a pass.

If Berry wasn't immensely popular with his teammates, and if he didn't happen to be the outstanding end in football, he might easily be laughed out of the game as a screwball.

Berry, however, is taken with grim seriousness by his befuddled opponents and with amused admiration by teammates. Not the least of Berry's admirers is the incredible, rifle-armed Baltimore quarterback, Johnny Unitas, who teams with Berry to flimflam the opposition.

"It isn't so much Berry's speed that shakes him past receivers, although he is moderately fast," Unitas says. "What Berry exploits are a confusing hip-wiggling run and magnificent fakes that confound rival players."

Between seasons, Berry visits with his parents in Paris, Texas, where his father coaches the high-school football team. Raymond works out regularly, runs and reruns films of Baltimore games, and goes through his notebooks. For a few weeks each year, he helps the coaching staff at Baylor University work with offensive ends.

Earlier this season, Berry married a girl he met at Baylor. The two have a comfortable apartment in a pleasant section of Baltimore. They live quietly without any night life, and except for occasional visits from teammates and other friends the pattern of Berry's concentration hasn't changed much.

After the Colts' last game, the Berrys expect to return to Texas.

In the meantime, you can bet that Berry has been devoting almost every minute to being the perfect pro specialist. The day before a game, for example, Berry often walks back and forth across the playing field searching for irregularities: high spots, low spots, soft

areas. Running downfield in the game, he wants to know exactly what to watch out for.

Last year Berry even asked Colt president Carroll Rosenbloom to buy a special new double-weight tarpaulin to spread over one corner of the end zone between games. Since Berry caught a number of passes there, he wanted the firmest footing possible. In the locker room after the next home game, Rosenbloom kidded Berry about that new tarp. He reminded him that the team had spent \$2,000 for the canvas, and it hadn't rained once all week.

Berry's dead serious answer not only illustrates his fussy approach to the game, it also helps explain how a gimpy, nearsighted Texan became the most exciting, highest-scoring end in pro football: "No, it didn't rain all week, Carroll," he said, "but it *might* have rained."



Raymond Berry

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