

O.J.

By Don Smith

During Jim Brown's exceptional nine-year career in the National Football League, the Cleveland fullback established several seemingly unbreakable rushing records. One was his 12,312-yard career mark that still ranks No. 1 today, but a record that probably will fall during the 1984 season.

Another was his single-season mark of 1,863 yards gained in the 14-game 1963 campaign. A landmark achievement at the time, the record lasted just 10 years before another superior ball-carrier, O.J. Simpson of the Buffalo Bills, raced past Brown and all the way to the legendary 2,000-yard rushing plateau.

Simpson's 2,003-yard performance is featured in a sparkling new display that was created during the recent \$250,000 refurbishing project at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It is one of 26 new displays that have greatly enhanced the entire exhibition rotunda in the Hall's first building.

Featured mementoes in the Simpson display are two items from the final 1973 game against the New York Jets, when the Bill's super-star carried 34 times for 200 yards to wind up the year just past the 2,000-yard barrier. One is the jersey, still unlaundered, that O.J. wore on a muddy Shea Stadium field. The other is one of the several footballs he carried in the final game.

A large photographic display that captures Simpson in action on 12 different occasions during the memorable 1973 season commands a large space in the Simpson exhibition. The montage was created by the noted freelance photographer from Buffalo, Robert L. Smith.

Another attention-getter is the chart comparing the four leading single-season rushing marks of all time. Simpson's toop mark is followed by the 1,934-yard total produced by Earl Campbell of the Houston Oilers in the 16-game 1980 season. Brown's 1,863-yard season ranks third and the Chicago Bears' Walter Payton has the fourth highest mark with his 1,852-yard accumulation in 1977.

A breakdown of Simpson's record-shattering season shows that O.J. rushed for more than 200 yards on three occasions and more than 100 yards eight other times. He was particularly effective against the New England Patriots with a sizzling 469 yards in two games. He opened the season against the Patriots with a 250-yard day and then followed up with 219 yards in a return game with New England in the season's 13th game.