

HERB ADDERLEY: CORNERBACK

By Don Smith

Starting with his first regular-season game in the National Football League, Herb Adderley proved to be a "big-play" star who could and many times did turn apparent defeat into important victory.

Adderley, who excelled for the Green Bay Packers from 1961 through 1969 and then wound up his 12-year career with the Dallas Cowboys in 1970, 1971 and 1972, demoralized the opposition in a variety of ways.

For instance, in his first NFL appearance against the San Francisco 49ers, he had three long kickoff returns, one of which set up a Packers' field goal when the game was still closely contested.

Two years later in 1963, Green Bay was trailing Minnesota, 28-27, when Adderley raced in to block Fred Cox's 10-yard field goal. The Packers returned the block for a touchdown and the 10-point turnaround made possible by Herb's outstanding effort provided Green Bay's margin of victory.

Against the Oakland Raiders in Super Bowl II, Adderley returned an intercepted pass 60 yards for a touchdown, one of only four such returns in the Super Bowl history. The feat earned Herb a coveted Super Bowl game ball.

While Adderley did star on the special teams during his eight years in the NFL, his primary job was to play left cornerback for both the Packers and the Cowboys, perennially two of the premier defensive teams in the NFL. Many insist that Herb, along with Dick (Night Train) Lane, was the best ever to play the position. Time cannot erase that kind of long-term quality performance. Proof of this came with Adderley's election to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1980.

An all-Big Ten running back at Michigan State, Adderley was the Packers' No. 1 draft choice in 1961. Had it not been for injuries in Green Bay's defensive backfield later that year, Herb might never have had a chance to become one of history's premier cornerbacks.

Slowed by a pre-season injury and unable to beat out either Jim Taylor or Paul Hornung for a running back job, Adderley was languishing on the special teams until late season. When regular cornerback Hank Gremminger was injured on Thanksgiving Day, Coach Lombardi called on Herb to move onto the defensive unit. As it turned out, Adderley recorded his first career interception as Green Bay whipped Detroit.

After the College All-Star game in 1962, Adderley became permanently entrenched as a regular. He was the starting left cornerback, first for the Packers and later for the Cowboys, for more than a decade. Until he was replaced midway through the 1972 campaign in Dallas, the 6-1, 200-pound speedster missed only three games. A muscle pull shelved him for one game in 1965 and he missed two games in 1971 with a severe calf bruise suffered when he collided with a sideline television camera.

If Adderley as an individual was successful, so too were the teams for which he played. While Herb was there, Green Bay won five NFL championships and Super Bowls I and II. The Cowboys won NFC championships in 1970 and 1971, lost Super Bowl V but then won Super Bowl VI. Thus, Adderley played in four of the first six Super Bowls and was on the winning team three times. As a Packer, he was all-NFL five times in 1962, 1963, 1965, 1966, and 1969 and he played in five Pro Bowls consecutively from 1963 through 1967.

Ironically, being left off the Pro Bowl squad after a fine comeback season in 1969 led to the end of his Green Bay career. Feeling that the Packers' coaching staff had failed to recommend him for the post-season classic, Herb demanded to be traded. In late-summer 1970, his wish was fulfilled when Dallas sent center Malcolm Walker and defensive end Clarence Williams to Green Bay in exchange for the veteran cornerback.

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In Dallas, Herb teamed with Mel Renfro to give the Cowboys an exceptional cornerback duo. Renfro was at his prime and Adderley proved to be as formidable as ever. If he had lost a step or two, as some quarterbacks believed, Herb used his superior know-how to disguise it well.

Even though he missed most of the 1970 pre-season, Herb allowed only one touchdown reception in his first campaign in Dallas. A year later, he gave up only three TDs and picked off six interceptions to help Dallas to another Super Bowl.

It wouldn't have been surprising if Herb had experienced initial misgivings about moving to the defensive platoon. At Northeast High School in his native Philadelphia, where he was born on June 8, 1939, he played only offense. At Michigan State, he played defense only briefly as a middle safety in a three-man deep alignment.

Interestingly, in the 1961 College All-Star game, the first of seven in which Herb would play, Coach Otto Graham placed him on defense in the hope his speed and quick reflexes would neutralize Tommy McDonald and Pete Retzlaff, the Philadelphia Eagles' two outstanding receivers. Still Herb fully expected to be a running back in Green Bay. After winning all-NFL honors his first two seasons on defense, Herb quickly became totally committed to the cornerback idea. "I can honestly say I enjoy going head-to-head with fellows like Johnny Morris, Jimmy Orr, and Gary Collins," he insisted. "Defense is in my blood now and nothing could make me want to go back to offense."

Adderley had a perfect attitude for the position. He was a gambler on the field and he knew, if his guess was wrong, he could look very bad. "You have to recognize that you are going to get beaten once in a while," he pointed out. "You just can't dwell on it. You just have to concentrate on not letting the same man beat you again."

Without question, Adderley benefited because of the exceptional supporting cast he had in both Green Bay and Dallas. "Adderley is the most difficult man in the NFL against a passing attack for three reasons," a leading receiver once explained. "First is his all-around ability. Second is the great help he gets from the rest of his defensive unit. Third is that Adderley himself is the best team player of any cornerback I know."

Adderley particularly had to count on help from his teammates in Dallas where the Cowboys employed a much more complicated defense than the basic man-for-man used in Green Bay. "In Dallas, we changed up a lot," Adderley relates. "One side might have been playing man-to-man while the other was in a zone. Our alignment would change depending on how the offense set up. Cornell Green saved the day for me. He was always there to make sure I knew the right call."

Adderley's 48 interceptions rank him high among the all-time leaders. His interception returns totaled 1,046 yards for a 21.8-yard average. He had seven scoring returns, a mark surpassed only by Washington's Ken Houston in the all-time records. He returned 120 kickoffs for 3,080 yards and a 25.7 average. Included was a 103-yard return in 1962 and a 98-yarder in 1963.

If Adderley had doubts about switching to defense in 1961, so too did Lombardi. But the coach's concern didn't last long. "I was too stubborn to switch him to defense until I had to," Lombardi once admitted. "Now when I think of what Adderley means to our defense, it scares me to remember how I almost mishandled him."

Two of the NFL's top quarterbacks during the 1960s also praised Adderley.

"He's just a class football player," Fran Tarkenton, the Vikings' scrambling genius, said. "He'd strengthen any team in the league."

"I'm just thankful he's playing for the Packers," Green Bay's Bart Starr added. "He's the best cornerback I've ever seen."

Adderley had his own thoughts on the matter. "When people leave the stadium," he once remarked, "I want them to say they've just watched one of the best cornerbacks they've ever seen in their lives."

In Adderley's case, that was a totally reasonable expectation!

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HERBERT A. ADDERLEY

Cornerback

Born June 8, 1939, at Philadelphia, PA

Hgt: 6-1 Wgt: 200 College: Michigan State

Firstround choice by Green Bay in 1961 NFL Draft;
also drafted by N.Y. Titans in 2nd Round AFL Draft

Pro Bowl following 1963-64-65-66-67 seasons

All-NFL 1962-63-65-66-69

Pro Football Hall of Fame 1980

YEAR	TEAM	LG	GM	-INTERCEPTIONS--				KICKOFF		RETURNS-	
				NO	YDS	AVG	TD	NO	YDS	AVG	TD
1961	Green Bay	N	14	1	9	9.0	0	18	478	26.6	0
1962	Green Bay	N	14	7	132	18.9	*1	15	418	27.9	*1
1963	Green Bay	N	14	5	86	17.2	0	20	597	29.9	1
1964	Green Bay	N	13	4	56	14.0	0	19	508	26.7	0
1965	Green Bay	N	14	6	*175	29.2	*3	10	221	22.1	0
1966	Green Bay	N	14	4	125	31.3	1	14	320	22.9	0
1967	Green Bay	N	14	4	16	4.0	1	10	207	20.7	0
1968	Green Bay	N	14	3	27	9.0	0	14	331	23.6	0
1969	Green Bay	N	14	5	*169	33.8	1	-	-	-	-
1970	Dallas	.. N	14	3	69	23.0	0	-	-	-	-
1971	Dallas	.. N	12	6	182	30.3	0	-	-	-	-
1972	Dallas	.. N	13	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
12 years			164	48	1046	21.8	7	120	3080	25.7	2

Additional statistics: 1 punt return, no yards in 1965.