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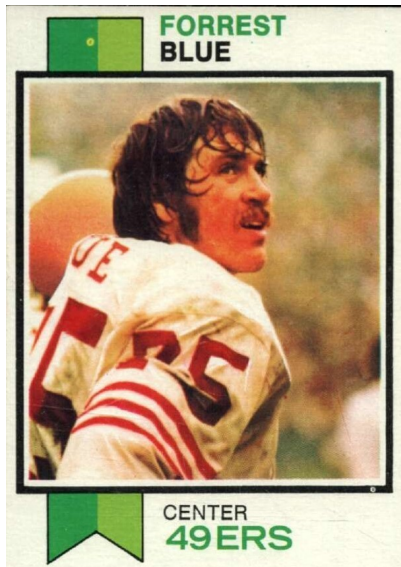
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Forrest Blue

This article was written by Matthew Keddie

Forrest Blue was a mammoth of a football player. He played 11 seasons with the San Francisco 49ers and the Baltimore Colts in the NFL.¹ Standing at roughly 6'6" and over 260 pounds, he played like an immovable wall, said Bob Adams, who played against Blue in high school. "Forrest was just so big, when he started moving down the field you couldn't get around the guy."² Ted Kwalick, one of his teammates in San Francisco, elaborated on Blue's size saying, "Forrest was big back then, for that era. He was a big center and he did a great job. I think he was really dominant. You take a guy like Forrest Blue and John Matuszak, who I played with on the Raiders – and these guys were 270, 280 (pounds). But they didn't have bellies. That was unheard of back then."³

It was not just his size that helped him earn four Pro Bowl appearances (1971-1974) and three consensus first-team All-Pro honors (1971-1973) with the 49ers. Blue demonstrated a unique athleticism for a player of his stature. *New York Times* reporter Andy Barrall wrote, "He had small-man skills in a big body. And it was an advantage to the 49ers when they had a man over him because he could handle a big nose tackle by himself. He was a forerunner for what we see today."⁴



Blue's arrival to the professional ranks occurred as the 15th pick in the 1968 NFL Draft by San Francisco. The move was monumental because he became part of an offensive renaissance anchoring the 49ers' offensive line that led them to three consecutive NFC



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West Division titles from 1970 through 1972.⁵ Sporting number 75, Blue teamed with guards Elmer Collett, Randy Beisler and Woody Peoples, as well as tackles Len Rohde and Cas Banaszek. Under head coach Dick Nolan, the 49ers ranked top 10 in scoring offense, featuring a myriad of stars in quarterback John Brodie, running back Ken Willard, tight end Ted Kwalick, and wide receiver Gene Washington.⁶ The division title in 1970 marked San Francisco's first in franchise history. The 10 wins was the most in a season since joining the NFL in 1950. The 49ers also won their first NFL playoff game, defeating the Minnesota Vikings, 17-14, at Metropolitan Stadium in Minnesota.⁷ However, the 49ers came up short, falling to the Dallas Cowboys in the NFC championship game, 17-10.

Linebacker Skip Vanderbunt, who was Blue's roommate while in San Francisco, described his work ethic and focus as extremely valuable saying, "Forrest, whatever he decided he was going to do, he would learn everything he could about it, study it, and try to improve on it. That's just the nature of the guy, the reason he was a success as a football player."⁸ Further he said, "[Blue] was balls to the wall, he didn't get into anything that he didn't do full blast."⁹

Blue was not an immediate starter in his rookie season in 1968, but he learned behind a solid veteran center in Bruce Bosley, who played 14 years with the 49ers and made trips to four Pro Bowls (1960, 1965-1967). Bosley was cut by the team after the 1968 season, setting the stage for Blue to step into the starting center spot¹⁰ Blue earned the starting role in 1969, starting all 14 games and never looked back.

- 1 "Forrest Blue," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 2 Meachem, Andrew. "Chamberlain star Forrest Blue went on to shine in the NFL," *The Tampa Bay Times*, July 23, 2011, [Chamberlain star Forrest Blue went on to shine in the NFL | Tampa Bay Times \(archive.org\)](#).
- 3 Branch, Eric. "Forrest Blue dies after years of dementia," sfgate.com, July 20, 2011, [Forrest Blue dies after years of dementia \(sfgate.com\)](#).
- 4 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 5 "Forrest Blue," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 6 "1968 San Francisco 49ers Roster & Players," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1968 San Francisco 49ers Roster & Players | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 7 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [San Francisco 49ers Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 8 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 9 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 10 "Bruce Bosley," ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Bruce Bosley Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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The 1970 49ers scored 352 points for an average of over 25 per contest.¹¹ Quarterback John Brodie earned Pro Bowl and consensus first-team All-Pro honors and was the consensus NFL MVP. He was sacked an NFL-low eight times, powering the top-ranked passing offense.¹² Barrall wrote, “That was really the rebirth of 49er football. The offensive line came together really quickly.”¹³

The team followed up the 1970 performance with another NFC West Division crown in 1971, finishing at 9-5. Backs Ken Willard and Vic Washington each ran for over 800 yards and averaged over 4.0 yards per carry.¹⁴ The rushing offense improved its average yards per rush to 4.3, up from 3.4 the previous year. San Francisco won its first ever NFL home playoff game at Kezar Stadium, dispatching the Washington Redskins, 24-20, behind a solid 10 of 19 for 176 passing yards from Brodie.¹⁵ The next week, the 49ers again fell to the Dallas Cowboys, 14-3, in the NFC Championship Game.

In 1972, the 49ers captured their third straight division title with an 8-5-1 mark, that saw the team overcome adversity as Brodie missed half the season with injuries.¹⁶ Filling in for Brodie, Steve Spurrier guided the team to a 6-2 record, after they started 2-3. Brodie returned for the regular season finale and quarterbacked the 49ers to a win.¹⁷ San Francisco trailed 17-6 in the second half, but two fourth quarter touchdown passes from Brodie to Gene Washington and Dick Witcher sealed the comeback.¹⁸ In the Divisional

1 1 “1970 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1970 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 2 “1970 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1970 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 3 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).

1 4 “1971 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1971 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 5 “1971 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1971 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 6 “1972 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1972 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 7 “1972 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1972 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

1 8 “Minnesota Vikings at San Francisco 49ers – December 16th, 1972,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Minnesota Vikings at San Francisco 49ers - December 16th, 1972 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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playoff round, the team lost to the Cowboys, 30-28, in a close, hard-fought heart-breaking defeat.

The 49ers regressed in 1973, falling to a third-place finish, and 5-9 record.¹⁹ Despite the woes, they ranked second in the league in pass attempts and ran for over 4.0 yards per rush. During this stretch (1971-1973), Blue was a consensus first-team All-Pro at center each season, named by major selectors such as the Associated Press, Pro Football Writers Association, and *Pro Football Weekly*.²⁰ He was also named to the Pro Bowl during each season, and named a first-team all-conference selection by the Associated Press, the UPI, the *Sporting News*, and *Pro Football Weekly*.²¹

The 1974 season marked Blue's final year as a 49er. After beginning the year 2-0, the team endured a seven-game losing skid that defined the season. A large reason was the retirement of Brodie. San Francisco was without a definitive heir apparent at quarterback.²² Four different candidates – Tom Owen, Joe Reed, Dennis Morrison, and Norm Snead – started at least one contest, without any level of stability.²³ Blue still performed at a high level, earning first-team all-conference honors by *Pro Football Weekly*, the *Sporting News*, and the UPI.²⁴ Prior to the 1975 season, Blue was traded for a pair of draft picks to the Baltimore Colts, where he spent the final three years of his career, wearing number 50.

The Colts obtained him for his durability, veteran experience, and solid work ethic.²⁵ Baltimore was near the top of the AFC under head coach Ted Marchibroda. They possessed powerful offenses ranked near the top of the NFL behind a solid offensive line, MVP caliber quarterback Bert Jones, running back Lydell Mitchell, and receiver Roger Carr.²⁶ From 1975 thru 1977, the Colts won 31 games, but went 0-3 in the playoffs,

1 9 “1973 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1973 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 0 “Forrest Blue,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 1 “Forrest Blue,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 2 “1974 San Francisco 49er Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1974 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 3 “1974 San Francisco 49er Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1974 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 4 “Forrest Blue,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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falling twice to the Pittsburgh Steelers, and once to the Oakland Raiders in the infamous “Ghost to the Post” game.²⁷ Blue called it a career following the 1978 season. In total, he appeared in 148 games, making 82 starts.²⁸

Blue was born Forrest Murrell Blue, Jr. on September 7, 1945 in Marfa, TX. His father was in the army, and relocated shortly thereafter to Tampa, FL.²⁹ There, Forrest attended George D. Chamberlain High School, developing a high degree of athleticism as a star on the football, baseball, basketball, and track teams.³⁰ Blue won a Class AA state football championship in 1961 during his sophomore year, as the team is widely regarded as one of the greatest in school history. His high school coach, John Adcock, said of him, “Forrest had a lot of natural ability. He was a great football player, but he also was a great basketball and baseball player. You could always count on him to give a supreme effort. He was a role model, a leader and a pleasure to coach.”³¹

Blue went on to attend Auburn University where he played on the football, baseball, and basketball teams. As a freshman he hit over .400 on the diamond.³² The next year, he began focusing on football, playing under College Football Hall of Fame coach Ralph Jordan. Auburn was not a power in the Southeastern Conference under Jordan, but he fielded competitive teams.³³ The Tigers went 6-4 in 1964, then 5-5-1 in 1965 that ended with a loss to Ole Miss in the Liberty Bowl. Auburn finished at 4-1-1 in the SEC, good enough for second place.³⁴ They defeated top ten ranked Kentucky and Florida, and tied the Tennessee Volunteers, who finished the year ranked in the top ten.³⁵

At Auburn, Blue met his future wife, Anne. She was a cheerleader and routinely noticed Blue prior to every home game during the school's traditional “Tiger Walk” where the team marches into the stadium under the school's “War Eagle” fight song.³⁶ Anne recalls, “He said that he had his eye on me for a while. And that was it.”³⁷ The more she spent

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- 2 5 “Forrest Blue,” ProSportsTransactions.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Football Transactions Search Results \(prosportstransactions.com\)](#).
 - 2 6 “1975 Baltimore Colts Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1975 Baltimore Colts Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 7 “Indianapolis Colts Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Indianapolis Colts Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 8 “Forrest Blue,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
 - 2 9 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
 - 3 0 Meachem, Andrew. “Chamberlain star Forrest Blue went on to shine in the NFL,” *The Tampa Bay Times*, July 23, 2011, [Chamberlain star Forrest Blue went on to shine in the NFL | Tampa Bay Times \(archive.org\)](#).
 - 3 1 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).



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around him, the more she fell for him saying, “It took me awhile to realize what a special person he was. He was bright and smart, he was handsome, he was athletic. He was just the whole package.”³⁸

In 1968, Blue was drafted by the San Francisco 49ers and his initial salary was \$17,000, marking the beginning of his professional career.³⁹ With Anne, the couple had two daughters, Brandi and Brittney. While the girls do not vividly recall his playing days, they do recall his fatherhood growing up. Brittney remembers, “but when he was [home], he was always involved in our lives and just fun. He was like that until he ended playing football.”⁴⁰

Blue no doubt took a beating during his playing days, and signs began to show during the 1980s. His mental state began to decline. He exhibited signs of dementia and hallucinations.⁴¹ Brandi recalls, “Literally, you would come in with your friends and be like 'Hi, Dad,' and he would just ignore you – no acknowledgment that you were even there.”⁴² Anne said, “A lot of his personality just changed. It was very hard on me, especially after seeing what it was doing to the girls. They didn't know what was going on. This was their dad that they danced with, played with, rolled on the floor with, and all the sudden, he's just not paying any attention to them, and so they didn't know how to handle that. The girls were devastated.”⁴³ Forrest and Anne divorced, and he married two more times.

- 3 2 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 3 3 “Auburn Tigers School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Auburn Tigers College Football History, Stats, Records | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
- 3 4 “1965 Auburn Tigers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1965 Auburn Tigers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
- 3 5 “1965 Auburn Tigers Schedule and Results,” sports-reference.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [1965 Auburn Tigers Schedule and Results | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
- 3 6 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 3 7 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 3 8 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 3 9 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
- 4 0 Swanson, Tim. “The Hollow Man,” sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
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On July 16, 2011, Blue passed away at the age of 65 in an assisted living facility in Carmichael, CA.⁴⁴ It is believed the cause of death was chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). It is also believed that CTE was on the mind of Blue throughout his playing days and worsened in the days thereafter. It was written that, "... He had kept folders with article clippings about the long-term effects of repeated head trauma on football players, and it had been his wish that his brain be examined for it after his death."⁴⁵ Several years after his death, it was confirmed that Blue's brain showed signs of CTE by the Boston University CTE Center.⁴⁶

In 2013, Blue was posthumously inducted into the Alabama Sports Hall of Fame. Twenty years earlier, in 1993, he had been inducted into the Tampa Sports Hall of Fame.

End Notes:

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- 4 4 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
 - 4 5 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).
 - 4 6 Swanson, Tim. "The Hollow Man," sactownmag.com, accessed January 12, 2024, [Forrest Blue - The Hollow Man - Sactown Magazine](#).