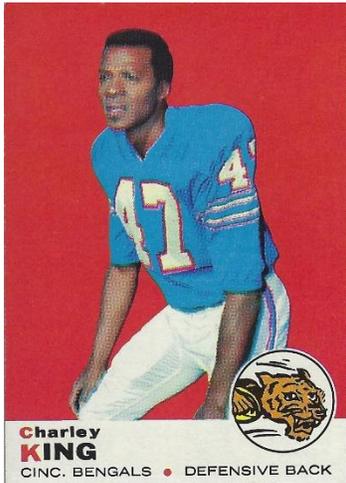




## Charlie King

This article was written by Greg D. Tranter

Charlie King and his brother Tony made pro football history by becoming the first African American brothers to play in the same professional football game. It happened in 1967 at War Memorial Stadium in Buffalo. Before that groundbreaking event, Charlie starred at Purdue in 1964 and '65, making all-Big Ten as a safety. He was drafted by the Bills and played for the club in 1966 and 1967. He then finished his career playing two years for the expansion Cincinnati Bengals.



Charles Ronnie King was born on January 7, 1943 in Canton, Ohio. He grew up at 1422 Pike Street in Alliance, Ohio with his younger brother Tony. Sports were a big part of his life from an early age. He played high school football for Alliance High School legendary coach Mel Knowlton. He was an all-Ohio selection as a senior.

Charlie went on to play his college football at Purdue. Alliance produced another Purdue star, Len Dawson, who went on to pro football fame. King played for legendary Purdue head coach Jack Mollenkopf. As a sophomore in 1962 he played running back and returned kicks, appearing in all the team's nine games. He rushed 62 times for 247 yards and caught 10 passes for 142 yards with one touchdown. He was the team's third-leading rusher and second-leading pass receiver. King also had 161 kickoff return yards on five returns for a 32.2 average.

Charlie had two highlights to his sophomore season. The first was an outstanding effort against Notre Dame on October 6, helping lead the Boilermakers to a 24-6 triumph over the Fighting Irish. Charlie was the leading ball carrier, rushing 13 times for 67 yards.



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The other was two weeks later, on October 20, as he was voted player of the game in Purdue's 37-0 win over Michigan. He caught a 34-yard touchdown pass in the first quarter from quarterback Ron DiGravio. It was a short pass that King, utilizing his blazing speed, cut back across the field outracing the defenders to the end zone for his first collegiate touchdown. He also rushed seven times for 48 yards in Purdue's rout of the Wolverines.

The Boilermakers finished the season with a so so 4-4-1 record. King suffered a knee injury in spring practice in 1963 and missed that entire season.

For the 1964 season, King was switched to defensive back and started at safety. The highlight of the year for the Boilermakers was a 21-20 upset victory over No. 5 Michigan. The team improved to a 6-3 overall record and a third-place finish in the Big Ten behind conference champion Michigan. The Wolverines were 9-1 for the season, their only blemish the loss to Purdue, which cost them the national championship as they finished ranked second in the country.

At the conclusion of the 1964 season, Charlie, at 6'0" and 187 pounds, was drafted in the 8<sup>th</sup> round by the Buffalo Bills in the 1965 AFL Redshirt draft (conducted on November 28, 1964). The redshirt draft allowed teams to select players prior to their college class graduating. Later, the Baltimore Colts drafted him in the 18<sup>th</sup> round of the 1965 NFL draft.

King returned for his senior season as the starting safety. Purdue had another solid season, finishing in third place in the Big Ten sporting an overall 7-2-1 record with future Pro Football Hall of Famer Bob Griese playing quarterback. Purdue upset #1-ranked Notre Dame on September 25 by a score of 25-21. Following the game, the Boilermakers were ranked #2 in the country. But they could not hold that ranking, as they tied SMU the following week and then in a showdown against #2-ranked Michigan State, Purdue lost a heartbreaker 14-10. Michigan State went on to be Big Ten champion and had a chance to win the National Championship but lost the Rose Bowl 14-12 to UCLA.

At the conclusion of the season, King was named to the 1965 first team All-Big Ten team at defensive back by United Press International and was honorable mention defensive back on the Associated Press All-Big Ten team.

Charlie's dad, while negotiating a contract for him with Bills general manager Dick Gallagher, suggested that he should also draft his other son Tony and have them both play for the Bills. Charlie signed his first pro contract with the Bills on November 25. Three days later, Gallagher drafted Charlie's 6-foot-1, 197-pound brother Tony with their third-round selection of the 1966 AFL Redshirt draft. Gallagher signed Tony as well for



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the 1966 Bills squad. In later years Charlie was asked why he signed with Buffalo, he reminisced, “The reason why I signed with Buffalo is because they wanted to sign Tony and me. Baltimore didn’t. It was as simple as that.”<sup>i</sup>

The Bills 1966 yearbook said about Charlie “Had best clocking running backwards of any Bills player ever.”<sup>ii</sup> He ran a 4.7 backwards for 30 yards! And a Big Ten opponent said Charlie was “best player we saw in 1965.”<sup>iii</sup>

Charlie was late arriving to the 1966 Bills training camp as he played in the College All-Star game on August 5 against the NFL Champion Green Bay Packers. The Packers trounced the All-Stars at Soldier Field 38-0, but Charlie got his teeth wet playing against the likes of Bart Starr, Boyd Dowler, Carroll Dale, Jim Taylor, and Paul Hornung.

Once Charlie arrived at camp, both King brothers played throughout the preseason. Charlie made the club and it was a surprise when brother Tony was cut near the end of training camp. However, he was signed to the Bills’ taxi squad. Charlie was a backup defensive back playing behind starters Tom Janik and Butch Byrd and contributed on special teams. He played in all 14 regular season games. Charlie snagged his first career interception off George Blanda, in the Bills’ 42-20 rout of Houston on November 20.

The Bills won the 1966 East Division title with a 9-4-1 record but lost to the Chiefs in the AFL Championship Game. Charlie played in the 31-7 loss that denied him an opportunity to play in Super Bowl I.

Charlie made the Bills squad out of training camp in 1967, but Tony was again relegated to the taxi squad. However, the Bills suffered some injuries and Tony was activated during the Bills’ October 16 bye week and made his debut on November 5.

What appeared to be a somewhat run of the mill regular season AFL game between the Bills and Miami Dolphins on November 5, actually was a history-making and groundbreaking game. Charlie and his brother Tony became the first African American siblings to play in the AFL on the same team at the same time. In fact, no other African American siblings in NFL history had done it either. In this historic game, they both played and contributed to the Bills’ 35-13 victory.

In front of 31,622 fans at War Memorial Stadium, Buffalo jumped to a quick lead. On the opening kickoff Joe Auer returned the Mike Mercer boot 20 yards to the 25-yard line; however he fumbled the ball and Tony King recovered for the Bills. Four plays later Wray Carlton ran 6 yards for the touchdown, and only 1:57 into the game Buffalo was ahead 7-0.

Buffalo took a 21-0 lead midway through the second quarter as Bills safety Tom Janik picked off a Griese pass and returned it 19 yards for a touchdown. Griese bounced back with a 13-yard touchdown pass to tight end Doug Moreau on the ensuing drive.



Charlie King #47 returning the second quarter kickoff 36 yards  
Photo credit: Robert L. Smith

Charlie returned the Miami kickoff 36 yards to the Miami 49-yard line, setting the Bills up in great field position. Tom Flores relieved Kemp and drove the Bills to the Dolphins 17 yard-line but on third and four, he threw an ill-advised pass into the end zone that was intercepted by Dick Westmoreland of the Dolphins. The game went to halftime with Buffalo in control 21-7. Buffalo controlled the ball in the second half on their way to the victory.

The King brothers played together on the Bills for the final six games of the regular season. Though the Bills won only one of those final six games, the brothers made history. They were honored by the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2009 for this milestone.

Overall, Charlie had a solid season as the Bills' third cornerback behind Byrd and Booker Edgerson. He led the team in kickoff return average, garnering 26.3 yards per return. In addition, he had one punt return for 12 yards and a fumble recovery. It was a disappointing overall season for the Bills as they finished third in the AFL East Division with a 4-10 record.



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The AFL expanded in 1968, adding Cincinnati, bringing the number of teams in the AFL to ten. Charlie was exposed to the Bengals in the expansion draft and was selected.

Charlie had his best season as a pro, starting all 14 games at cornerback for Cincinnati. Charlie paid back the Bills for exposing him in the expansion draft. With the Bengals trailing the Bills 14-13 late in the third quarter on September 22, Charlie picked off a pass from Kay Stephenson and raced 32 yards for the go-ahead score. It helped the Bengals on to a 34-23 upset victory. It was the Bengals' second win in their first three games, but they would play the rest of the season like an expansion team and finished the year in fifth place in the AFL West Division at 3-10-1.

Charlie played one more season in 1969 with the Bengals, participating in nine games with one start and then his pro football career was over.

Since retiring from football, Charlie has run his own businesses in Akron, Ohio.

The King brothers had those seven games in 1967 to make pro football history, but went their separate ways, football-wise, as Charlie went onto Cincinnati and Tony to Denver following that season.

### End Notes:

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<sup>i</sup> Keating, Mike, "Head of Public Enemy's Security Elected to NFL Hall of Fame," Davey D's Hip Hop Corner, <http://hiphopandpolitics.com/2009/05/02/head-of-public-enemys-security-elected-to-nfl-hall-of-fame/>, accessed 08/28/2020

<sup>ii</sup> *Buffalo Bills 1966 Yearbook*, Buffalo Bills, Inc. c 1966, p18

<sup>iii</sup> *Buffalo Bills 1966 Yearbook*, Buffalo Bills, Inc. c 1966, p18