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Charley Taylor's NFL Glory Run

By [MICHAEL RICHMAN](#), FOR INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY

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Taylor shifted from running back to wide receiver in his third pro season and wasted no time leading the National Football League in catches.

[AP View Enlarged Image](#)

Charley Taylor was slower than many of the defensive backs he faced in his NFL career.

He simply outlasted them.

"I would say to myself, 'We've got to play four quarters,'" the former wide receiver told IBD. "In the fourth quarter I'm going to be at the same speed as I was in the first. I'm going to wear that guy down to where we've both got the same speed. That's the way I'd approach the game. 'Hey, you might run with

me in the first quarter. But the fourth quarter is going to be mine."

Taylor executed that strategy to perfection. Upon retirement in 1977 after 14 seasons, he held the National Football League record for catches with 649, a mark since broken.

He was selected to the Pro Bowl eight times. He entered the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1984 and made the 1960s NFL All-Decade team.

Taylor outwitted defenders in other ways, too. He was a superb runner after catching the ball and racked up 9,110 receiving yards.

On The Go

He thought of himself as a running back, the position he played in college and early in his NFL career, and never stopped moving his legs.

He also relied on quickness and shiftiness, posting dazzling moves that left defenders in disarray. Opponents often bounced off his powerful 6-3, 215-pound body.

"I was just trying to get every yard possible," he said.

"Taking a 5-yard hitch pass and turning it into a 60-yard gain, that was part of my makeup."

Said NFL Films President Steve Sabol: "Charley Taylor was fantastic at taking a short pass over the middle and running ... through a broken field. He was maybe the best ever at gaining yards after the catch. He had some incredible runs. Tackler after tackler missed him. If they'd have kept the statistic of yards after the catch in his era, he would have some all-time records."

Taylor, 69, welcomed challenges from the time he was growing up in Grand Prairie, Texas. His family consisted of many people who excelled in sports, including his dad and uncles, and he motivated himself to be like them.

Taylor's Keys

- In the Pro Football Hall of Fame and once the NFL's all-time leading receiver.
- "I knew when I was going to have a great day. I'd just look in the defensive back's eyes and I could tell. You see a guy who's undecided about what he wants to do on the play. With those players you're sort of like, 'I got this guy.' "

As a high school football player, he honed his skills by competing against the wealth of talent in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

"There was enough competition there to satisfy any kid," he said.

He realized he'd found his calling and vowed to stick with it.

On the gridiron at Arizona State University, he teamed with amazing athletes such as sprinter Henry Carr, an Olympic gold medal winner in 1964. With such motivation, Taylor became an all-conference halfback and one of the top college running back prospects.

The Washington Redskins picked him No. 3 in the 1964 draft.

Before his rookie season, Taylor played for a college all-star team against the defending NFL champion Chicago Bears and took a big hit even before the game.

The college team's coach, Otto Graham, slammed him for a lazy work ethic in practice. The former NFL quarterback went so far as to say Taylor wouldn't cut it in the pros.

Taylor's answer? A stellar performance in the exhibition. Even though the collegians lost 28-17, he caught a 5-yard touchdown pass, threw a 14-yard scoring pass, rushed for more than 5 yards a carry and recovered two fumbles playing defensive back.

He was named the game's MVP.

Taylor eyed NFL stardom while staying focused. The rookie running back dreamed of becoming the next Jim Brown, then the league's premier rusher and perhaps the best ever. Watching film of Brown, he analyzed his moves and admired his punishing running style. He emulated him in practice and games and asked for advice from Redskins star receiver Bobby Mitchell, a former Brown teammate in Cleveland.

"Every young player coming in during that time wanted to be like Brown because he was a fantastic player," Taylor said. "Why not pattern yourself after him?"

Taylor's determination to be the best paid off. That season he rushed for a team-high 755 yards and caught 53 passes — then an NFL record for running backs — for an additional 814 yards. He was named NFL Rookie of the Year.

After Graham was hired to coach the Redskins before the 1966 season, Taylor showed no animosity toward his old adversary. Instead, he listened closely to the Hall of Fame quarterback at practice and team meetings and took copious notes.

Case in point: Taylor followed instructions when Graham moved him to wide receiver during the 1966 season. The coach made the switch because he saw that Taylor got open, caught passes and amassed yards at a winning rate.

Taylor thrived and became one of the marquee receivers, leading the NFL in catches in 1966 with 72 and in 1967 with 70.

"Charley was the go-to guy," said Steve Gilmartin, the Redskins radio voice at the time. "In other words, if you want to pull out a ballgame, 'Where's Charley, where's number 42?' He was a warrior, a tremendous player ... big, fast, aware of everything on the field."

Big Hit

Taylor was also a powerful blocker who leveled many defenders.

In practice, he picked the brains of teammates such as future Hall of Fame middle linebacker Sam Huff. Taylor wanted to know where defenders would be so he could time his blocks. He perfected the crackback block in which he came across the middle and hit a linebacker or safety, hoping to spring a ball carrier.

"I'll tell you, man, he took down a lot of linebackers," Huff said. "When he took them down, they went down. When Charley Taylor was out there, you looked to see who was there."