

CLIFF BATTLES

Courtesy of the Pro Football Hall of Fame

When a modern-day professional athlete threatens to retire "because I can make more money doing something else," the natural tendency is to question the validity of the claim.

But there is at least one member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame who did just that. He quit at the absolute peak of his career and he did make more money "on the outside" -- 33 percent more, to be exact.

That is the incredible story of Cliff Battles, one of the most brilliant running backs pro football has known. After only six years in the National Football League, 28 years old and in perfect condition and a member of a championship team, Battles quit the Washington Redskins when owner George Preston Marshall refused to raise his salary above \$3,000. So Battles became an assistant coach at Columbia University, where he was paid \$4,000.

In his brief time in the pros, Battles made an indelible impression. He gained 3,622 yards rushing in six years and, up to 1938, no one had ever approached that career total. He had led the league in rushing twice and had been a member of the official all-league team three times, including his last two seasons.

In 1937, the Redskins' first year in Washington, Battles had teamed with rookie Sammy Baugh to give the Redskins not only a league title, but one of the most explosive running-passing threats in history. This rare combination should have meant misery for other NFL teams for years to come.

Ironically, Baugh may inadvertently have been a factor in Battles' premature retirement. Sammy was himself thinking of quitting pro football for baseball after his brilliant rookie season and Marshall was expending all of his efforts in trying to re-sign his ace passer. Cliff will now admit that this concentration of effort by Marshall on Baugh with little or no time left to negotiate with Battles was a considerable factor in his eventual retirement.

If Marshall slighted Battles in 1938, it was the same Marshall who had used progressive measures to first sign the Phi Beta Kappa star from tiny West Virginia Wesleyan College. In 1930 Battles made three touchdowns on dashes of 90, 96 and 98 yards. Marshall had first spotted Battles in 1931 when Cliff was a halfback for an outmanned Wesleyan eleven playing Georgetown. He saw in Battles the characteristics of a super star for his new pro team to be started in Boston in 1932.

So he sent an envoy with instructions not to return until he had the speedy halfback's name on the dotted line. Battles signed with Boston, whom he chose over Portsmouth Spartans and New York Giants precisely because Marshall had sent a representative instead of a letter. Reportedly, he was also swayed by the fact that Marshall was from West Virginia. Marshall was not disappointed with his prize catch.

Cliff played on just so-so teams in Boston until the final season in the Hub City; when the Redskins won the divisional championship. Still, Battles was No. 1 in rushing as a rookie, and finished second to teammate Jim Musick as a sophomore. At 6'1" and 195 pounds, he could hit the line with a fullback's authority yet was fast enough to outrace any pursuer and had plenty of elusive moves to get out of tight spots. In his greatest single game, he rushed for 215 yards against the New York Giants, a record that stood for 17 years.

Battles' heroics led the Redskins to a division title in 1936, but Boston fans wouldn't support the team. Owner Marshall switched the Championship Game against Green Bay to a neutral field -- New York's Polo Grounds. Battles' worth to the team was unmistakable when an injury forced him out in the early moments of the title game. The Redskins stumbled miserably without him.

So when Marshall moved the Redskins to Washington in 1937, he had one all-league halfback in Battles and quickly added a second in Baugh. Still, the Redskins battled the New York Giants down to the wire

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for the divisional crown with the issue to be decided on the season's final day in New York's Polo Grounds.

Thousands of Redskins' fans made the trip to New York by train to see their heroes play and they weren't disappointed as the Redskins prevailed, 49-14. Baugh clinched the NFL passing title and Battles the rushing crown, and, in what proved to be his final game in regular season, he had one of his finest days. He scored three touchdowns on scrimmage runs of four and 73 yards and an interception return of 76 yards.

There wasn't a happy Redskin fan that day that could possibly have known that this was th the last time this super-star would play pro football.

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CLIFFORD FRANKLIN (GYP) BATTLES

TB-DB-WB-FB 6-01 195
West Virginia Wesleyan
Kenmore High School in Akron, OH
Born: 05/01/10, Akron, OH
Died: 04/28/81, Clearwater, FL (70)
National Football Foundation Hall of Fame 1955
Pro Football Hall of Fame 1968

RUSHING			Gm	ATT	YDS	AVG	TD
1932	Bos	N	8	148	*576	3.89	3
1933	Bos	N	12	146	737	5.05	3
1934	Bos	N	12	103	511	4.96	6
1935	Bos	N	7	84	310	3.69	1
1936	Bos	N	11	176	614	3.49	5
1937	Was	N	10	*216	*874	4.05	*5
6 yrs			60	873	3622	4.15	23

*-led NFL