

# RON AND RICH:

The All-America, All-NFL, Twin Sauls

by Jim Sargent

Rich and Ron Saul, identical twins who were born and raised in Butler, Pennsylvania, became football standouts on defense and offense, respectively, for Michigan State University. During the 1967, 1968, and 1969 seasons the Spartans never won more than half their games. But the Saul brothers performed so well that both earned All-American honors, and both were selected in the National Football League draft of 1970.

Born on February 5, 1948, the sons of Craig and Ruth Saul, Rich and Ron grew up playing sports, especially football and baseball. The rugged brothers made names for themselves on local sandlots and high school gridirons. At Butler High they helped the varsity fashion a three-year record of 26-1. Rich starred at linebacker, Ron starred at fullback, and Terry Hanratty, a close friend and later a regular at Notre Dame, was the quarterback. The trio traveled to many college football games before choosing their respective universities.

In the end, the Saul's chose MSU, which had won Big Ten Football Championships in 1965 and 1966. Notre Dame, which recruited Hanratty, had finished first in national polls during 1966, after the Spartans, ranked second, held the Irish to a 10-10 standoff in a nationally televised game. So controversial was coach Ara Parseghian's decision to settle for the tie on Notre Dame's last series of downs that 30 years later the game is still debated by longtime fans of both universities!

During their three years at Michigan State, the twins identical appearance was often shown by photos in the Lansing *State Journal*. Rich, who wore number 88, had a chipped tooth. Ron, who wore number 70, did not. Coach "Duffy" Daugherty used to quip that he had to get the brothers to smile before he could call their names!

Both young men stood around 6'2" and weighed between 220-230. Ron, an offensive tackle and guard, was married and had a baby girl, and Rich, a linebacker and defensive end, was a bachelor.

Throughout the Saul years, MSU produced seasons of 3-7, 5-5, and 4-6. Those records, however, do not reflect the excitement of big-time Big Ten football or the big games played against non-conference rivals such as Notre Dame or Southern California. After the 1969 season, Rich and Ron were both named All-Big Ten, Academic All-American, and Football All-American, and Ron was voted the Spartans' Most Valuable Player.

Before that, Rich had the ligaments of his right knee wrecked by a blindside hit during the 1968 Ohio State game, which MSU lost, 25-20. According to newspaper reports, his football career was finished. Instead, MSU team doctor and orthopedic surgeon Lanny Johnson reconstructed the knee, a new process which Johnson helped pioneer.

Rich, after a slow start in 1969, moved to defensive end, where he regained his hard-hitting form. Ron's explosive blocking opened holes on the right side of State's offensive line, and Rich crunched opposing ball carriers. After the regular season, Ron was chosen to play in the All-American Game and the East-West Shrine Game, and Rich played in the North-South Shrine Game.

In the NFL the Saul brothers went separate ways: Ron was drafted by the Houston Oilers in the fifth round, and Rich was picked by the Los Angeles Rams in round eight.

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Ron became a first-year regular with Houston at offensive guard. He likes to characterize the NFL of the Seventies as being "iron-man football." In other words, you played healthy or hurt, but you just kept on going.

In 1970 Ron started Houston's first game but had his right knee torn up. He limped through the year, started six or seven times, and had his first surgery after the season. "Shoot it up and go, that's what we used to say," Ron recalled. "It was awful. I had torn cartilage, and it was clicking. It would pop out.

"I remember playing against Dallas and Bob Lilly in one game. They drained my knee just before the game, shot it with Novocain or Zyllocaine, taped it, and drained it again at half-time. They used to have to carry us off the field to get us out of the game. You couldn't take yourself out of the game."

Injuries didn't seem to faze Saul. "I hear guys today complain about 'turf toe.' What's that? I don't even know what that means. I had lots of cartilage torn, a broken nose, hip pointers. They would say, 'Shoot it up and play.'

"So we played. We prided ourselves on being tough. You had to be tough. There were always young guys coming out of college who wanted our jobs."

Houston struggled during the early Seventies. But the Oilers slowly improved, going 10-4 in 1975, Saul's last year.

After that season, George Allen, who saw Ron play against Washington, arranged a trade: "George gave up Washington's third, fifth, and sixth round draft picks. Houston used those choices to acquire Earl Campbell in 1977, so both clubs came out ahead."

Ron loved playing for the Redskins:

"Washington was a real, real professional organization, the best. Allen had an unlimited budget, and he overspent it! We went first-class in every way. I enjoyed my years with the 'Skins.

"We had some pretty good seasons in the late Seventies. We kept improving and in 1981, we won eight out of our last eleven games."

The 13-year veteran, the oldest Redskin, reinjured his knee in 1982 and finished the year on injured reserve. But he was there all season with his team:

"In 1982 we had Washington's first Super Bowl team since 1972, and we beat Miami, 27-17. I went out, like the Kenny Rogers song said, 'with a blaze of glory.'

"John Riggins was still tough, Joe Theismann was our quarterback, and myself and Jeff Bostic were two of the original 'Hogs.' I was All-Pro in 1979, which was my best football honor. But my greatest honor was earning Academic All-American."

"Being able to excel in the classroom," Ron told me, "as well as on the gridiron was a wonderful accomplishment. I tried to excel in every opportunity which came my way.

"Life goes on after sports. To be wise is as good as being rich; in fact, it's better. You can get anything by having wisdom or money, but wisdom has many more advantages."

Over his career Ron endured seven knee operations, five on the right knee and two on the left. He's proud of his football career, and he's proud of his brothers. The Saul family has produced the most years in the professional football, 34: Ron had 13, Rich had 12, and older brother Bill played nine seasons in the Sixties. In addition, Bill was an English major who made the Dean's List three out of four years while at Penn State, before starring in the NFL.

Since retiring from football Ron has worked in the recycling business in the Washington area. Involved in many community services, he is also a big backer of the 'Skins.

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On the other hand, Rich played his entire career for the Los Angeles Rams. During those 12 seasons he played several positions, all on the offensive line: guard, tackle, and center. His versatility earned him the nickname "Supe," or "Super-sub" by the mid-1970s.

Rich also remembers the "iron-man" NFL. He started out playing on special teams and wherever the coaches put him. Like Ron, Rich was dedicated to succeeding as a team player. Like his brother, he always thrived on tough, hard-hitting, aggressive football.

In college football," Rich explained, "you have to work on your grades, and you have to take your God-given talent and excel. I still feel a responsibility to MSU, and I still love to see those guys we played with at State."

But instead of talking about his football achievements, Rich preferred to reflect on the important values involved:

"You have to feel dedication, determination, self-sacrifice, and pride. You have to love to compete daily, you have to want to rise to the occasion, and you have to do your best in the fourth quarter. You run the last 110 yards faster than the first 110, even though you're dying.

"Why? Because ever since you're a kid, you love that total release, that feeling of wanting to win. Those kinds of feelings have to be part of you.

"You look back on your years in football, and you remember that you sweat, you bled, you laughed, you cried, you did it all. Every week you were going into battle, counting on the next guy. It's something which you just have to *experience*."

Rich talked briefly about his surgery at MSU in 1968. But he remembers having his knee hurt a week earlier in the Notre Dame game, a 21-17 victory. Then against Ohio State, he was clipped after a play ended. They carried him off, Doctor Johnson performed his complex surgery, and Rich was determined to play the '69 season and graduate with his class. He did both, and he's still grateful to Johnson.

Projected earlier as a first-round pick, Rich was chosen in the eighth round, due to his 1969 operation.

"NFL football wasn't so specialized then. We had 40-man rosters, and George Allen didn't keep many rookies. He didn't like 'rookie mistakes,' which cost you wins.

"George's system was complicated, but I was a Scholastic All-American, and I studied it and learned it. I was a 'crazy guy' that first year. Our assistant coach, Marv Levy, charted the special teams, and I made 51 tackles in 14 games on kicks.

"Later, I became the regular center, but I still played on special teams. Then I began making the Pro Bowl, and I played in the Pro Bowl my last six seasons, 1976 through 1981."

The six-time All-Pro also observed, "In the Seventies, 90% of the revenue came from the fans. Today, less than 30% of revenue comes from the fans. It's television. I liked it better when you had to play for the fans, when the players were more involved with the fans.

"But I enjoyed our 'iron-man' football. I played with a lot of great guys such as Merlin Olsen. Today it's more specialized. Maybe a Dick Butkus or a Joe Schmidt wouldn't play as much today."

Since retiring from football, Rich has worked in banking, in real estate, and with arena football. He likes the arena game: it is designed for players to give an all-out effort and to be more involved with the fans.

"Life is about giving back," Rich commented. "There are four quarters in life. In the first quarter, you grow up and learn from your parents and coaches. In the second, you break away from your parents and work on your career. In the third, you concentrate on your family and your friends. Finally, in the fourth quarter, you go into your twilight years and you say, 'What have I accomplished?' Your success in each quarter depends on how well you played the previous quarter.

"Right now I'm enjoying the third quarter--make no excuses, make no mistakes, make no waves."

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Rich works with and speaks to abused children as well as to kids with cancer and to those who are homeless or fatherless. "Today my life is about giving back," he said.

Ron made the same statement. For example, he works with battered and abused women, with cystic fibrosis patients, and for the March of Dimes.

The Saul's have the same heart. They both told me, "When you go into a hospital and help make a child smile who may be dying... Well, that makes you more of a person.

"You have to go out and touch people. When you do, it makes you feel like you are giving back to the Lord and to your fellow man."

Ron and Rich Saul, identical but distinctive twin brothers, are still working to excel, accomplishing their goals, and reaching out to others.

### **Richard Robert Saul and Ronald Reed Saul**

Born: 2 / 5 / 1948, in Butler, PA

Col: Michigan State HS: Butler

Rich 6-3 241 C  
Drafted  
Round 8, 1970 Rams

Ron 6-2 255 OG  
Drafted  
Round 5, 1970 Hous

<u>Year</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>GM</u>
1970	LARm	14
1971	LARm	14
1972	LARm	14
1973	LARm	14
1974	LARm	14
1975	LARm	14
1976	LARm	14
1977	LARm	14
1978	LARm	16
1979	LARm	16
1980	LARm	16
1981	LARm	16

12 years 176

<u>Year</u>	<u>Team</u>	<u>GM</u>
1970	Hou	14
1971	Hou	3
1972	Hou	13
1973	Hou	3
1974	Hou	14
1975	Hou	14
1976	Was	11
1977	Was	14
1978	Was	15
1979	Was	15
1980	Was	16
1981	Was	10

12 years 142