

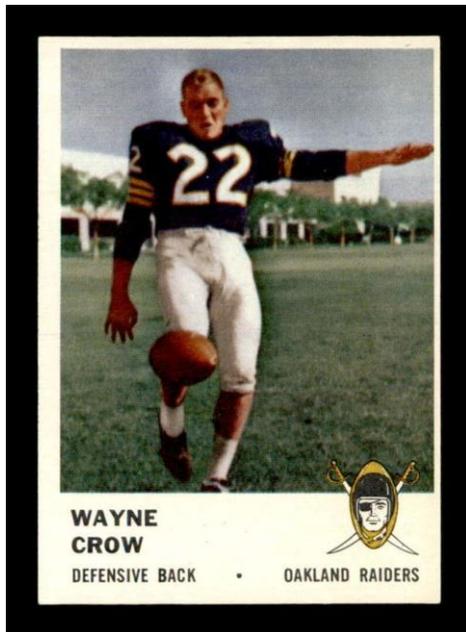


Wayne Crow

This article was written by Budd Bailey

The “help wanted” sign was out in professional football in the 1960s. The creation of the American Football League meant that a few hundred extra players had a chance to take part in the growing sport. One of them was Wayne Crow, who came out of college at just the right time to play for a few years. He even had a few nice moments along the way to show that he belonged.

What’s more, his life must have been a surprise and a happy dream for his parents. A college education for a child must have been an unimaginable idea for them, let alone a little athletic fame followed by a long, successful career in education.



Charles Wayne Crow was born on May 5, 1938, in Coolidge, Arizona. Coolidge is just off the Interstate between Phoenix and Tucson. It’s not known for its football, but rather for a big connection to country music. Waylon Jennings, Duane Eddy and Sammi Smith all have ties to the town, which has a little more than 10,000 people.

Father Coy Clinton Crow was born in Indian City in Payne County, Oklahoma, in 1899. (The village no longer exists.) Census records indicate that he left school after the ninth grade. He married wife Agnes in 1918 in Grayson County, Texas, which is 60 miles north of Dallas. Agnes was 14 years old when she was married to the 18-year-old Coy. They



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had eight children. One of them, Troy, died in Seeadler Harbor in New Guinea during World War II – probably in the explosion of the USS Mount Hood on November 10, 1944. A total of 432 people died in that accident.

It's fair to say the Crow family was on the move a bit in that era. Wayne's brother Lindon was born in Denison, Texas, in 1933. Five years later, the family was in Arizona when Wayne was born. But neither of them went to high school in Arizona. That distinction belongs to Corcoran, California. The family lived there in 1940 according to the census, which listed Coy's occupation as cotton-picker.

The town is located between Fresno and Bakersfield in the Central Valley; the Crows arrived there when Wayne was just a toddler. Corcoran's top claim to fame is that the California State Prison is located there. Charles Manson and Juan Corona are its most famous inmates over the years. About 43 percent of the town's population of about 22,000 consists of prisoners. Like the other towns in that area, agriculture is the biggest industry in Corcoran. Thousands moved to the region in the 1930s and 1940s from the South and Southwest, looking for work.

Brother Lindon set the standard for athletes from Corcoran, especially since he played 10 seasons in the NFL. But Wayne was quite good too. At a regional high school track meet in the spring of 1956, he finished first in the discus (exhibition weight), setting a meet record in the process, and third in the regulation discus. Crow's throw of the three-pound, nine-ounce discus (lighter than the regular one) was 179 feet, 5 inches. To put that in perspective, the national record at the time was held by the legendary Olympic champion Al Oerter, who threw it 184 feet, 2.75 inches. Wayne still holds the school record for the 16-pound shot put at 47 feet, 10.25 inches; it was a career best and put him fifth in the state championship. That weight has not been used for many years. Crow also won an award as the top high school athlete at the West Coast Relays of 1955 for winning the shot put and discus.

Wayne also turned in a fine career as a football player for Corcoran. That attracted the attention of the University of California at Berkeley. Crow headed to the San Francisco area, and waited for the chance to play. Pappy Waldorf was the coach then. Waldorf was something of a legend in the college game, since his first head coaching job came at Oklahoma State in 1929. The highlights of his career came at Cal after his arrival in 1947. The Bears went 9-1 that year, and they were 38-4-1 in his first four years in Berkeley. That included three straight trips to the Rose Bowl – all close losses.

Waldorf had his first losing season at California in 1955, going 2-7-1. Things weren't much better in 1956 (3-7), and Pappy departed. The replacement was Pete Elliott, fresh off a 4-6 season with Nebraska. He couldn't turn the team around immediately, as it



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slipped to 1-9 in Crow's sophomore year. Wayne did not record any statistics in that 1957 season. Crow did not letter that season, so his playing time must have been very limited.

Wayne got on the field in 1958. The Bears had six runners total more than 200 yards that season. The leader with 582 yards was the quarterback, Joe Kapp – the only player besides Crow who would go on to reach pro football. Kapp threw for 649 yards and had a completion percentage of 57.7 – which was quite good for a passer back then. Crow ran 45 times for 210 yards, and caught three passes for seven yards. California took a big step forward that season, improving to 7-3 in the regular season. In the season's final and biggest game against Stanford, the Cal defense stopped a two-point conversion attempt in the fourth quarter that allowed the Bears to win. The victory wrapped up a conference championship and a trip to the Rose Bowl against Iowa. In Pasadena, the Bears couldn't stop the game's MVP, Bob Jeter, who later played cornerback for the Packers. Jeter ran nine times for 194 yards, including an 81-yard touchdown gallop, in a 38-12 win.

Kapp was off to the pros after the Rose Bowl and a future date at the College Football Hall of Fame. He proved to be a tough act to follow, and Crow was the guy who had to do it in 1959. Elliott moved him to quarterback for his senior season, and it was a struggle. Wayne went 26 for 67 through the air for 379 yards and three touchdowns with nine interceptions. He also ran for 223 yards, and did the punting for the second straight year. He was the team leader in total offense. The Bears beat Washington State in the opener and then lost eight in a row.

At least Cal's final game was a 20-17 over arch-rival Stanford. Opposing quarterback Dick Norman went 34 of 39 for 401 yards, setting several NCAA records in the process that day. Still, it wasn't enough. Norman was stopped on the 5-yard line on the game's final play. Crow's last college football memory then, was a good one. The 1959 season was Elliott's last on the job; he was replaced in 1960 by future Hall of Fame coach Marv Levy.

It's interesting to note that on October 24, the Bears ran the ball 79 times against Oregon State to set the school record. The number has been since broken (84 in a game against San Jose State in 1968), but the Oregon State game remains second in Cal's list of most rushing attempts in a game. Indeed, during Crow's time in Berkeley, the Bears also ran the ball 78, 75 and 74 times in a specific game. That might tell you something about the offense in those years.

It's a little difficult to be noticed when you are playing out of position for a bad team. Still, Crow's athleticism no doubt caught the eye of scouts. The St. Louis Cardinals grabbed him with the first pick of the eighth round of the NFL draft (85th overall). Nine



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of the 12 players from that round played pro football; Carroll Dale, a wide receiver from Virginia Tech, led the way with 189 games played.

The American Football League was starting to organize around the same time for its first season, which would take place in the fall of 1960. Crow went undrafted by the new league, but the Oakland Raiders maintained an interest in him because he had played college ball nearby. Apparently Crow decided that staying in California was better than packing for St. Louis, because he signed with the Raiders on April 27, 1960.

Oakland had the usual cast of characters that first year. The biggest name on the roster turned out to be one of the smallest: Otto, as in Jim, the future Hall of Fame center. Tom Flores and Babe Parilli split the quarterbacking chores. The running backs were busy for the Raiders that year. Tony Teresa led the way with 608 yards rushing and 35 receptions. Billy Lott finished with 520 yards rushing and a team-best 49 catches. Eddie Erdelatz, who had been the head coach at Navy for most of the 1950s, was the coach.

If you are looking for Crow in the offensive backfield of the Raiders, don't bother. He was a 6-foot-1, 205-pound defensive back in addition to serving as the punter. He didn't start in the secondary, but still came up with four interceptions. The first was against the Oilers on September 25. They were followed by picks against Denver on October 2 (returned 30 yards), against Boston on October 16, and against Buffalo on October 23. That's four interceptions in five games. But Erdelatz decided in November that Crow's play had turned "sloppy" and briefly benched the defensive back, Wayne punted the ball 76 times and averaged 38.9 per game. The team finished with a 6-8 record that season.

In 1961, the Raiders apparently decided they needed help at running back. Teresa and Lott went elsewhere, and Crow was told he was an offensive halfback. He led the team with 490 yards rushing (good for eighth in the league), and also caught 17 passes. The ultimate answer to Oakland's running problems was on the roster that year. Clem Daniels was picked up from Dallas in a trade, and eventually he'd become one of the best running backs in the AFL. Meanwhile, Crow's punting average went up to 41.5 yards per kick, including a 77-yarder that was a team record for decades. That was second in the AFL to Buffalo's Billy Atkins.

As for the Raiders as a team, they couldn't have had a worse start. They faced the two finalists for the AFL title in their opening weeks, and lost, 55-0, to the Houston Oilers and by 44-0 to the relocated San Diego Chargers. That was it for Erdelatz. Marty Feldman took his place, and Oakland finished with a 2-12 record.

The Raiders were even worse in 1962, going 1-13, but Crow wasn't around to see it. He was involved in a good-sized trade with the Buffalo Bills. Crow and a second-round draft



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choice in 1963 (which turned out to be Jim Dunaway) went to Buffalo for quarterback M.C. Reynolds and AFL all-star defensive tackle Chuck McMurtry. Before Wayne could get comfortable in his new town, he noticed that the Bills had signed a fullback by the name of Cookie Gilchrist early in training camp. Gilchrist had played in the Canadian Football League before coming to Buffalo as something of a consolation prize for the fact that the Bills couldn't sign their top draft choice, Heisman Trophy winner Ernie Davis. Gilchrist was a tank on cleats. The Bills also had veteran Wray Carlton on their roster as a running back.

Those three saw almost all of the work for the Bills' ground game that season. Gilchrist was as good as advertised, running for more than 1,000 yards. Crow added 589 yards in his best year as a pro to finish sixth in the league; he averaged 5.4 yards per carry to rank second in the AFL. Wayne scored two touchdowns, but three others were wiped out by penalties.

One nice moment came on October 13, as Crow ran for 115 yards on only six carries – 49 of them on a fake punt - and Gilchrist picked up 124 yards in a 35-10 win over San Diego. Another highlight came on Nov. 11, when the Bills stomped the Chargers, 40-20. Crow set up a Buffalo field goal on a fake punt. "I didn't intend to run, but they rushed hard from the right," he said. "I started slow, figuring they'd have one guy covering the left and I'd kick on the run. When I saw there wasn't anyone there, I took off." A week later, Crow caught a 17-yard touchdown pass from Kemp with 1:40 left that was the difference in a 10-6 win over Oakland.

Meanwhile, Carlton ran for 490 yards. Buffalo's passing attack still wasn't great. Jack Kemp was picked up on waivers from San Diego but had to wait until he was healthy to move into the lineup. Crow also became the team's regular punter for 1962, averaging almost 40 yards per kick. The Bills finished 7-6-1 under new head coach Lou Saban but won four of their last five – a good sign for the future.

Gilchrist was as powerful as ever in 1963, but depth proved to be a problem. Both Carlton and Crow suffered injuries early in the season. Crow only played in five games, and carried the ball six times for six yards. He also had five catches for 69 yards, and played a little safety as well. Carlton ran for only 125 yards in his four games. Ed Rutkowski and Roger Kochman did the best they could as replacements, but they weren't up to the standards of Crow and Carlton. Kemp had a good year at quarterback, and the defense was improving as the year went by. Buffalo finished 7-6-1, good for a tie for first in the AFL East, but lost the playoff game to Boston, 26-8.

That was it for Crow's playing career in the AFL. There's no sign of him in the 1964 Bills' yearbook, so we can guess the Bills cut him. He did resurface in 1966 as a safety



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and punter for the Hartford Charter Oaks of the COFL, a minor league in that era. If nothing else, Wayne showed he had something left in the tank in his final game. Crow announced his impending retirement before the final game. Then he had a 54-yard interception return for a touchdown in the second quarter, and a 100-yard interception return for a touchdown in the third quarter. The latter set a COFL record for longest interception return. The only spoiler of the day was the outcome – a 31-24 defeat to the Charleston Rockets.

The trail of Internet tidbits turns rather cold at this point, but we do have a few clues about a handful of activities over the years. It appears that Crow served as a football coach at American High School in Fremont, California, in the early 1970s. In the 1980's, Crow was the principal of Robertson High in Fremont, California. Jim McCullough was a student there then, and he loved to listen to Crow tell stories about the original Oakland Raiders. For example, the players on the 1960 team were sent out to sell season tickets to fans door-to-door in the area. McCullough was inspired and eventually compiled a research book on the early Raiders called "Pride and Poise."

In 2012, Crow joined with several other ex-players in Alex Karras' lawsuit against the NFL over the effects of concussions and other head injuries absorbed during their careers. The suit said this about Wayne's condition: "During his NFL career, Mr. Crow sustained repetitive traumatic impacts to his head and/or concussion on multiple occasions. Currently, Mr. Crow suffers from various neurological conditions and symptoms related to the multiple head traumas."

At last report (from the Bills' yearbook in 1963), he was married to Esther, and had three children – Michael, Kevin, and Christy. Kevin played for two United States Olympic soccer teams in the 1980s, and also played professionally in the North American Soccer League and the Major Indoor Soccer League. Athletic ability still runs in the family.

Coy lived until he was 68, long enough to be around for Wayne's entire football career. Agnes did even better, living until the age of 86. She died in 1990 in Fremont, after watching two sons becoming pro athletes and a grandson who was a two-time Olympian. She had quite a life.



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