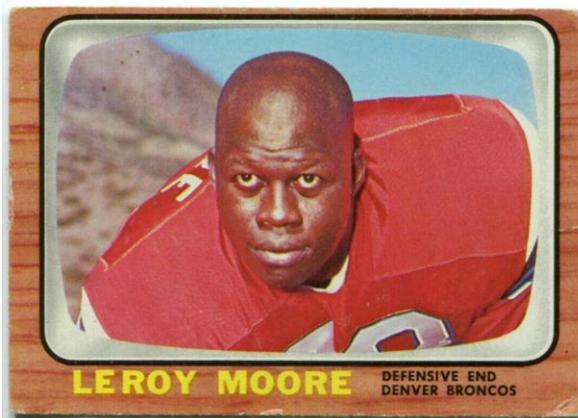




Leroy Moore

This article was written by Greg D. Tranter

Leroy Moore was a tough, fast, 6-foot 2-inch, 240-pound defensive lineman. Moore played for three different teams in the American Football League, the Buffalo Bills, the Boston Patriots, and the Denver Broncos amassing 53 games played, and two touchdowns. He had a short stint in the Canadian Football League with the Hamilton Tiger-Cats, and finished his professional football career in Hartford, Connecticut. He played for the Hartford Charter Oaks of the Continental Football League in 1967, and for the Hartford Knights of the Atlantic Coast Football League in 1968, winning a championship with the Knights.



Leroy Franklin Moore was born on September 16, 1935 in Pontiac, Michigan. He grew up in Pontiac while attending Central High School in the city. Moore was a three-sport star at Central. He attended Fort Valley State College in Fort Valley, Georgia. He had the opportunity to attend Michigan State in his home state but felt more comfortable going to Fort Valley and was happy that he did. Moore captained the Wildcats football team as a senior. He was also an honor student at Fort Valley State.

Moore went undrafted out of college but was invited to the Detroit Lions training camp in 1960. He played throughout the preseason but was released by the Lions on September 14. He was among the final cuts to get the Lions down to the required roster limit for opening day. The newly formed Buffalo Bills, of the American Football League, signed him on September 21.

Moore nicknamed "Sweet Pea" made his professional debut for the Bills against the Boston Patriots on September 23. He teamed with Mack Yoho to man the right defensive



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end position throughout the game. The Bills shut out the Patriots 13-0 at Boston University Field, capturing the teams' first ever regular season victory. Surprisingly, the Bills released Moore before their next game.

The Patriots impressed enough with his play, signed him in the off-season after he showed up at their training camp and told head coach Lou Saban that he thought he could help the team. He became the surprise of the 1961 preseason for the Pats. The Boston Globe headlined a story on August 31, "Surprising Moore Patriots Line Key." The story went on to say that "Remember that Moore. He well could be the key man in the Patriots plan to make from their last place windup in the Eastern division last season." He offered the Patriots flexibility as he could play both defensive end, and offensive guard. He became the Patriots third defensive end, spelling both starters Bob Dee, and Larry Eisenhauer.

He wanted to show the Bills they made a mistake by cutting him after only one game in 1960. In the Patriots final exhibition game of the 1961 preseason, Moore intercepted a Tommy O'Connell pass setting up a Patriots field goal in their 15-12 defeat of Buffalo.

Moore contributed throughout the season, playing in all 14 games, and starting one. The Patriots improved from a last place 5-9 record in 1960 to an impressive 9-4-1 record, and second place finish, only one game behind league champion Houston in 1961. Moore's only start came in a 28-21 victory over the Dallas Texans on November 3. He was pleased to help the Patriots sweep the Bills in their two games, with wins of 23-21 and 52-21.

The highlight of Moore's season came on November 11 versus the Oakland Raiders. With the Patriots trailing the Raiders in the fourth quarter 17-13, Raider punter Wayne Crow set-up to punt from his own end zone. Crow's punt bounced off the left goal post and Moore alertly dove on the ball in the end zone, scoring the game winning touchdown as Boston won the ballgame 20-17. As the Associated Press reported the play, "Moore, a 235-pounder, outraced a defender to smother the ball just before it rolled over the endzone sideline." Following the improbable victory, the Patriots finished the season on a four game winning streak to finish in second place in the East.

Moore was back with the Patriots in 1962. He had another impressive preseason and played the first five games of the regular season with Boston, starting one of those games. He had a similar role in 1962 as the third defensive end. However, after a demoralizing 27-7 defeat to the Dallas Texans, head coach Mike Holovak released Moore. His former head coach, Lou Saban, now the head man in Buffalo, almost immediately signed Moore.



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Saban activated Moore on November 3, just in time to play his former Patriots club. Moore had an immediate impact, starting at right defensive end and he was active throughout the game causing the Boston offense troubles. With the Patriots deep in their own end, five minutes into the second quarter, quarterback Babe Parilli attempted a screen pass. Moore cut in front of the intended receiver and made a juggling interception while scooting four yards into the end zone for a Bills touchdown. The score gave the Bills a 21-14 lead. The game ended in a 28-28 tie, but Moore was elated to be able to contribute in a big way to his new, old team. It was his second career touchdown.

Moore started at right defensive end for the final six games as the Bills had a 4-1-1 record in his starts. Buffalo finished the season with a 7-6-1 overall record, the teams first winning season. Moore returned to the Bills in 1963, but only played two games for the club. He played in the Bills opening game, a 14-10 loss to the Chargers, and the following week in a 35-17 drubbing by the Raiders. He became expendable when the team signed Ron McDole. Moore was released on September 17 to make room for McDole on the active roster. That ended his career with Buffalo.

Moore joined his fourth team in 1964, signing with the Denver Broncos. He participated in the Broncos training camp and played well enough to not only make the club, but to become the starting right defensive end. He played in 12 games for the Broncos, starting 11 of them. The highlight of his season was a 70-yard interception return on November 20 in a 12-7 loss to the Patriots. His interception set-up the Broncos only touchdown of the game. He seemed to always come up with a big play when he was playing one of his former teams. The Broncos finished the season with a dismal 2-11-1 record and a last place finish in the AFL West division.

He returned to the Broncos in 1965. Moore was Denver's starting right defensive end for most of the season, starting 12 of the teams 14 games and playing as a reserve in the other two. The Broncos improved to 4-10, but still finished in last place in the West. Moore's AFL career ended at the conclusion of the 1965 season. Overall, he played in 54 games, starting 31, and contributed two interceptions for 73 yards and a touchdown, and scored a TD on special teams.

For the 1966 season, Moore tried his hand at Canadian football. He played six games for the Hamilton Tiger-Cats in the CFL at defensive end. That did not work out well for Moore, so he came back to the states for the 1967 season and joined the minor league Hartford Charter Oaks. The Charter Oaks played in the Continental Football League. It was a step below the AFL/NFL, but he thought it might provide him another opportunity to get back to the big-time.



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He missed the teams' first three regular season games as he had to return to Detroit to nurse his wife, who had become seriously ill and hospitalized. He returned to the Charter Oaks in time to make his debut for the club on September 16 in a 16-3 win over the Toronto Rifles.

Moore split time between defensive tackle and defensive end throughout the season for Hartford, playing in the final nine games of the season. He was a mainstay on their defensive line, as the Charter Oaks finished in second place in the East division with a 5-7 record.

Between the 1967 and 1968 football season there was a fight in Hartford for the minor league football market between the Charter Oaks and a new entrant, the Hartford Knights of the Atlantic Coast Football League. Clearly the market could not support both. In the end, the deep pockets of owners Peter Savin and his brother Herb won out and the Hartford Knights were the surviving franchise. Several players jumped from the Charter Oaks to the Knights, including Moore.

Moore played for the Hartford Knights in 1968 and was the teams' starting left defensive end through the first seven games. He played extremely well as the Knights bolted to a 7-0 record. He tore cartilage in his knee in week seven and it caused him to miss the last five regular season games. He was placed on the injured reserve list on October 28. The Knights finished the season with a league best 11-1 record, winning the Northern Division title. Moore missed the ACFL championship game between the Knights and the Virginia Sailors on November 30. Hartford defeated the Sailors 30-17 to claim the ACFL Championship in their inaugural season. After nine years of pro football, Moore had a championship ring. Though he would have preferred it be an NFL or AFL championship, he was pleased to be a champion in Hartford.

Despite missing the final five games, he was named an honorable mention on the 1968 ACFL All-Star team. He underwent off-season surgery on his left knee.

Moore re-signed with the Knights for the 1969 season on July 17 and reported to training camp on-time. He played well in the teams' first two preseason games, with wins over the Quincy Giants 34-0 and the Long Island Bulls 19-12. His surgically repaired knee began to give him trouble and on August 28 he announced his retirement from pro football. Knights head coach Fred Wallner said, "I'm sorry to lose Moore...he was a fine defensive end."ⁱⁱ And with that Moore was done with football and went home to Detroit.



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End Notes:

ⁱ Associated Press, "Patriots Whip Oakland 20-17 in AFL Tilt, Johnson City Press, November 18, 1961, p7

ⁱⁱ "Sweetpea Moore Ends Grid Career," Hartford Courant, August 29, 1969, p18