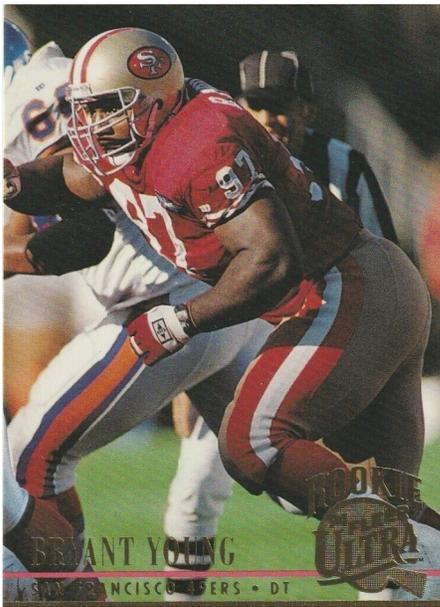


Bryant Young

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

You might be hard-pressed to find a player who had a greater sense of pride playing for the San Francisco 49ers than Bryant Young (b. January 27, 1972).¹ He carried a no-nonsense attitude that was evident in the way he played the game. Worn on his sleeve, it was easily observed by his coaches, teammates, and even opponents. Adam Timmerman, a guard who played against Young as a member of the Green Bay Packers, said of Young, “Bryant was John Randle without all the talking. He did his talking with his pads.”²



Young believed in “doing your job”, which is what made him such an outstanding player. He began his NFL career in 1994 when San Francisco selected him seventh overall in the 1994 NFL draft. Young made an immediate impact, starting in all 16 games where he recorded 6.0 sacks and 49 total tackles.³ His play transformed him into a key cog of the defensive front that sacked opposing quarterbacks a combined 21 times.⁴

The top ten ranked 49ers defense complimented the top ranked offense en route to the Super Bowl XXIX championship.⁵ Young finished third in the Defensive Rookie of the Year voting and was named to the NFL All-Rookie Team.⁶ Teammate Dennis Brown clearly remembers Young’s approach to the game, “I was with B.Y. when he came in as a rookie. And when I think of him, the one thing that comes to mind is his work ethic. This



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was a cat that came in as a rookie. He didn't goof around. He wasn't that guy that walked around and said, ' look at me coming to the NFL.' He went to work from Day 1. We had a pretty darn good defensive line. We had Charles Haley, we had Ted Washington, we had Dana Stubblefield.”⁷ In other words, Young was in the process of becoming a star among stars.

What Young was most proud of was winning the Len Eshmont Award, given to the 49ers player who best exemplifies the “inspirational and courageous” play of Len Eshmont, one of the original 49ers.⁸ Team greats Steve Young, Jerry Rice, Joe Montana, and Jimmy Johnson each won it twice. Young won the award a record eight times. Team owner Jed York said, “The emblem meant so much to him. There was just no question that he was the heart and soul of the team. He was the leader of the team. And that's just who he is as a person.”⁹

There was no coincidence Young excelled as the 49ers were one of the great franchises of the 1990s. His best season was in 1996, when he earned the first of four Pro Bowl selections, was named first-team all-pro, and finished fourth in the Defensive Player of the Year voting.¹⁰ Young recorded a career high 11.5 sacks and 76 total tackles.¹¹ The

- 1 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.
- 2 “About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame,” 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.
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- 5 “1994 San Francisco 49ers Statistics & Players,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/1994.htm>.
- 6 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.
- 7 “About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame,” 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.
- 8 “About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame,” 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.
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- 11 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.



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49ers were in the midst of a string of seven consecutive playoff berths, winning an average of 12 games a season during that time.¹²

From 1994 to 1997, the team boasted a top 10 ranked defense in points allowed.¹³ He continued his stellar play in 1998 and 1999, recording a total of 20.5 sacks, earning second-team all-pro honors in each season.¹⁴ Young also made second-team all-pro in 2001, for a total of four career all-pro selections.¹⁵ Former teammate, linebacker Jeff Ulbrich said it wasn't about Young's statistics, rather it was his demeanor on the field, "Although his numbers are great, his ability was way beyond his statistics. The statistics don't tell the story of the man."¹⁶

Maybe his 1998 season was the ultimate example of his heart and soul. It was November 30, 1998 when the 49ers played at the New York Giants in a pivotal game for San Francisco.¹⁷ The 49ers were 8-3 heading into the game, needing a win to keep their playoff hopes alive. San Francisco led 24-7 in the fourth quarter, when 49ers linebacker Ken Norton Jr. sacked Giants quarterback Kent Graham.¹⁸ On the play, Norton's helmet smacked into Young's lower leg, causing a compound fracture of both his right tibia and fibula. Young had an 18 inch metal rod inserted in to support the bone structure, effectively ending his season, and potentially his career.¹⁹

Young spent 17 days in the hospital and was sent on a long rehabilitation program. Young remembers, "Seeing my leg, I was like 'oh shoot, this doesn't look good.' It was so painful. There was that moment where I kind of knew that this was really serious. There were some complications that came after the surgery, so there was a thought in my mind

1 2 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

1 3 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 26, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/>.

1 4 "Bryant Young," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.

1 5 "Bryant Young," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.

1 6 "About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame," 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.

1 7 "About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame," 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.

1 8 "About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame," 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.

1 9 "About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame," 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.



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of the reality that I could not play again.”²⁰ In his rehabilitation period, the easiest tasks became difficult, due to the slow healing and steady recovery. His perseverance and no-quit attitude powered him through, as he was back on the field during Week 1 of the 1999 season.

Hungrier than ever, Young turned in a marvelous campaign. He started in all 16 games returning from injury, recording 11.0 sacks, was named to the Pro Bowl and second-team all-pro honors.²¹ In addition, Young was named the Comeback Player of the Year by both the Associated Press and the Pro Football Writers Association.²² Young was very appreciative, “It was humbling to win Comeback Player of the Year because my career could have been over. It was one of the really outstanding moments of my career, but it was all hard, hard work that went into the rehab and recovery.”²³

He remained a consistently solid player into the 2000s, as the 49ers went into a decline on the field. 2002 was the last year Young saw the postseason in his career, as San Francisco went through three coaching changes in four seasons.²⁴ The 2007 season was his final, before announcing his retirement.

In his 14 years with San Francisco, he started in each and every one of the 208 games he played in.²⁵ He recorded a total of 89.5 sacks, which ranks sixth-best all-time for all defensive tackles.²⁶ He also ranks third in 49ers history in sacks, trailing only Cedric Hardman and Tommy Hart. He is also sixth in team history with 519 solo tackles and owns the franchise record for career safeties with three.²⁷

In February 2022, his name was called for enshrinement into the pro football hall of fame. Young broke through after appearing as a three-time semifinalist since becoming

- 2 0 “About his business Bryant Young's purpose filled career lands him in 49ers hall of fame,” 49ers.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.49ers.com/news/about-his-business-bryant-young-s-purpose-filled-career-lands-him-in-49ers-hall->.
- 2 1 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.
- 2 2 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.
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- 2 5 “Bryant Young,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/Y/YounBr00.htm>.
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- 2 7 “San Francisco 49ers Career Defense Leaders,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 25, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sfo/career-defense.htm>.



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eligible in 2013, and two-time finalist in 2020 and 2022.²⁸ Upon learning of his induction, Young became very emotional. He admitted, “Yeah, I cried. I cried like a baby.”²⁹ He was named to the NFL 1990s All-Decade Team, and is also a member of the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame, 49ers team hall of fame. Among numerous awards he's won include the NFC Rookie of the Year and George S. Halas Courage Award.³⁰

Young's emergence into the NFL was a result of his stellar play at the University of Notre Dame. A four year player from 1990 to 1993, Young anchored the Irish defensive front. In the three years as a starter, Notre Dame compiled a 31-5-1 record that included 10-1-1 and 11-1 seasons.³¹

The team's success stemmed from the highly ranked defense. The rush defense was among the top ten in the nation, largely due to Young's presence. Young had offers from other top institutions – Michigan, Tennessee, Michigan State, etc. - but chose to play for Notre Dame, largely due to everything the school had to offer.³² Young distinctly recalls, “It was the school itself. I learned early in the process to really look at the school and the environment, the campus, the academics...”³³

He excelled under head coach Lou Holtz, earning first-team All-American honors as a senior in 1993, a year where he also served as team captain. Young graduated with a degree in marketing in 1994.³⁴

A native of the Chicago, Illinois area, Young attended Bloom High School in Chicago Heights. Young and his wife, Kristen, have six children.³⁵ The Young's lost their only

2 8 Maiocco, Matt. “How 49ers' Bryant Young learned of Hall of Fame induction,” NBCSports.com, February 12, 2022, <https://www.nbcsports.com/bayarea/49ers/how-49ers-bryant-young-learned-pro-football-hall-fame-induction>.

2 9 Maiocco, Matt. “How 49ers' Bryant Young learned of Hall of Fame induction,” NBCSports.com, February 12, 2022, <https://www.nbcsports.com/bayarea/49ers/how-49ers-bryant-young-learned-pro-football-hall-fame-induction>.

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3 1 Prister, Tim. “Bryant Young: A Man of Integrity and Football Mayhem,” 247sports.com, February 23, 2021, https://247sports.com/college/notre-dame/LongFormArticle/Notre-Dame-Bryant-Young-A-Man-of-Integrity-and-Football-Mayhem-161352594/#161352594_1.

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3 3 Prister, Tim. “Bryant Young: A Man of Integrity and Football Mayhem,” 247sports.com, February 23, 2021, https://247sports.com/college/notre-dame/LongFormArticle/Notre-Dame-Bryant-Young-A-Man-of-Integrity-and-Football-Mayhem-161352594/#161352594_1.

3 4 Prister, Tim. “Bryant Young: A Man of Integrity and Football Mayhem,” 247sports.com, February 23, 2021, https://247sports.com/college/notre-dame/LongFormArticle/Notre-Dame-Bryant-Young-A-Man-of-Integrity-and-Football-Mayhem-161352594/#161352594_1.



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son, Colby, who was 15, from a battle with pediatric cancer, in 2016.³⁶ On his son's loss, it was not easy on Bryant and his family, “We think it's hard out there. We strain, and we grind, physically, to live another day. But to see firsthand and experience somebody's tough battle through a disease, it lets you know life is precious.”³⁷

End Notes:

3 5 McClure, Vaughn. “Bryant Young,” strongofheart.ed.edu, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://strongofheart.nd.edu/profiles/bryant-young-2018/>.

3 6 McClure, Vaughn. “Bryant Young,” strongofheart.ed.edu, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://strongofheart.nd.edu/profiles/bryant-young-2018/>.

3 7 McClure, Vaughn. “Bryant Young,” strongofheart.ed.edu, accessed March 5, 2022, <https://strongofheart.nd.edu/profiles/bryant-young-2018/>.