

Passions Include Computers, Scuba Diving Sayers - Omaha World-Herald (NE) - June 16, 1991 - page 1A

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The kid from **Howard Kennedy Elementary** School in Omaha who played after school for the Roberts Dairy midget team and went on to become a pro great has made it big in a field other than football.

Meet Gale Sayers, 48, owner, president and CEO of Crest Computer Supply. It's a division of Computer Supplies by Sayers Inc., a company formed in 1982 by Sayers and his wife of 18 years, Ardith, also a former Omahan.

"Black Enterprise" magazine recently recognized Crest as the 38th - largest black - owned industrial service company in the nation and the fifth - best growth company, with a 51.5 percent increase in sales. Career Cut Short

He said that sports are great but that young athletes who bank on pro careers are deluding and hurting themselves.

"They have a better chance of winning the Illinois State Lottery than of becoming professional athletes," Sayers said.

Many know Sayers as a Kansas All - American, a pro Hall of Famer, the man who scored six touchdowns in a game as a rookie for the Chicago Bears and whose career was cut short because of knee injuries.

He was the roommate of Brian Piccolo, their friendship made famous first in a New York speech by Sayers that stunned the audience and later in the movie "Brian's Song."

Sayers also is the author of the autobiography "I Am Third," the title coming from a medallion he wore as a player, which came from the prayer: "The Lord is first, my friends are second, and I am third."

Today his passions, besides his business and his family, include scuba diving and underwater photography. He recently returned from a dive in the Great Barrier Reef off Australia. He said he loves the quietude, the teeming life and the incredible activity underwater. 'Thousands of Jobs'

As a businessman, he said, he admires athletic achievements but disregards them in job applicants.

"I just want to know what skills you can bring to my company," he said. "Hopefully, coaches, parents and administrators are telling that to these kids. You'd better get your degree.

"There are thousands of jobs for teachers, thousands of jobs for doctors, thousands of jobs for

lawyers. Even if you do play professional athletics, it's probably going to be for one year, three years, four years. Then what are you going to do?"

Sayers got a chance to give that message Saturday night in Omaha. He spoke at the sixth annual Omaha Blacwhit Scholarship Awards Dinner at the Holiday Inn Central, where 10 students each received \$1,000 scholarships.

Blacwhit is a non - profit scholarship organization of employees at the Kellogg's Co. in Omaha and of Omahans interested in the education of minority - race students and others in financial need. Scholarships are supported by donations from individuals and the Omaha business community.

In an interview Saturday, he said: "We don't have enough role models. Athletes today - many of them, not all - don't want to go out and talk to kids. They think it's a waste of time."

Though spending about 15 days a month on the road speaking with customers and obtaining new accounts, Sayers said he is committed to using his name to get a message across to young people - the importance of education.

"I enjoy giving that message," he said. "I tell it like it is." Brothers

How it is for Sayers today isn't always how it was. Unlike his brother Roger, an Omaha University star who became the only sprinter to beat Bob Hayes in the 100 - yard dash in college, Gale wasn't always a serious student.

Roger, a year older, made Little All - American in football, but "little" was the problem when it came to pro ball. He got a tryout with the Bears but at 160 pounds got knocked around.

He has had a successful career in management at the Union Pacific Railroad and served as human relations director for the City of Omaha.

A younger brother, Ron, also a football player at Omaha U. (now the University of Nebraska at Omaha), works in San Diego for the Pace Corp., which assists former athletes in finding jobs.

With a football under his arm, Gale was as smooth and instinctive a runner as any who have played the game. As a student, he says, he not only wasn't smooth but also wasn't much interested.

"I was never a good student like Roger," he said, "but I had the ability to be a good student. I had the ability to learn. I just didn't do it."

After his pro career, in which his highest salary was \$80,000, he returned to Kansas, finished requirements for his bachelor's degree, became assistant athletic director at \$17,000 a year and earned his master's degree at 35.

He became athletic director at Southern Illinois University and, four years later, with his education and experience thought he was ready for a front - office job in the National Football League.

"I wrote to all 28 teams and didn't get a bite," he said. "I said, 'OK, I tried, I gave it my best shot.' If

they were sincere about hiring minority applicants, they could have made something available. But it didn't happen, and I had no regrets, no hard feelings."Business Opportunities

He then moved back to Chicago, surveyed business opportunities and chose computers. His company is based in the Chicago suburb of Skokie, with a branch in Scottsdale, Ariz., that handles the West Coast.

"It's doing well," he said. "We distribute computer hardware and software and supplies nationwide to Fortune 1,000 and Fortune 500 companies. We're authorized for IBM, Hewlett - Packard, AT&T and others. We do everything. It's a one - stop shop."

He said that his customers include several Omaha companies and that he returns three or four times a year.

"I like Omaha," he said. "Omaha is a very, very nice town, a great city to raise children in. But my main interest now is in Chicago. Chicago has been good for Gale Sayers."

He has three children from his first marriage: Gale Lynne, 24, who works in a Chicago bank and is returning to school to get a master's degree in finance; Scott, 22, a student at the University of South Carolina; and Timothy, 19, a high school wrestler who probably will attend Chicago State.

"They're all good students," he said. "They're not especially into sports. I didn't put any pressure on them."

Sayers said he remembers his days as an athlete with fondness, but he doesn't dwell on them. He recalls his family moving from Kansas to Omaha when he was 8, a move he says was great for the boys because it exposed them to midget football and other sports - but was a bad move for his parents, who never found stability and died 20 years ago.

He says his late father could have been a lawyer but dropped out of high school early. He had a brake shop in Wichita but was only an auto dealership car - polisher in Omaha.'We Stuck Together'

"We lived in a number of places, starting with the projects up on North 30th Street," Sayers said. "We moved seven or eight times. My parents did the best they could do. It was a tough time for a black, but we stuck together. The kids came out OK."

"Living in a so - called ghetto or undesirable situation, we didn't feel we were worse off than anybody else because our friends were the same way. I thought we had a good life. It's not until you go outside that little 50 - block area that you realize there are other things out there."

After his knee injury in 1968, Sayers returned to lead the league in rushing again in 1969. But another knee injury in a preseason game in 1970 led to his eventual retirement in 1972.

After his 1969 comeback, he received the award for the most courageous football player of the year and startled the audience by revealing that his teammate and friend, Piccolo, who would die weeks later, was seriously ill.

"He has the heart of a giant and that rare form of courage that allows him to kid himself and his opponent, cancer," Sayers said. "He has the mental attitude that makes me proud to have a friend who spells out the word courage 24 hours a day for his life."

Sayers still is close to Piccolo's widow, Joy, who has remarried and each year puts on the Brian Piccolo Charity Golf Tournament to raise money for cancer patients. Sayers said he never misses it.

And, he said, he doesn't miss football.

"When I came into professional football in 1965," he said, "the average life of a football player was 4 1/2 years. Today it's 3 1/2. I played six years, so I have no regrets.

"I've said many times that as you prepare to play, you must prepare to quit. I prepared. After my second year in the league I was a stockbroker in the off - season. At 27, I had to go out and find another job. Some of these kids today think they'll play until they're 47 - and most of them aren't going to play at all. They'd better get their education."

Sayers . . . The NFL great now tells student - athletes not to bank on a pro career.

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