

RUNNING AGAINST THE GRAIN

**THE STORY OF PHILADELPHIA
EAGLE AND MOVIE STAR**

TIMMY BROWN

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AND SHAWN SRIVER**

EAGLE22 LLC

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Timmy Brown wearing No. 22 in Eagles green in a photo from the 1967 season, his last with the team. *BETTMAN ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES*

The authors used multiple sources of information – interviews, books, periodicals, documents, videos, and social media – to ensure the accuracy of this book. Every effort was made to locate any copyright owners of the photos used. The authors regret any inadvertent omission or error.

PREFACE

It had never been accomplished before in the National Football League. It would be decades before it happened again.

On Nov. 6, 1966, at age 29, he was wearing Philadelphia Eagles green, a running back in the middle of a gridiron career that would lead him to the team's hall of fame.

His life's journey had not been easy. He began it as one of six children growing up in a small city east of Indianapolis, but his family fell apart and he was sent to a home for orphans and at-risk children. He faced the racial restrictions and attitudes enforced on all African Americans before the civil rights era. Perseverance led him to college, but still, his world had consisted only of the flat plains of East Central Indiana. His dreams ran wider.

At Ball State, his talents started to jell. He did well in many sports, but also started to find his voice as a singer. While he often struggled academically, he excelled in football. He left college in 1959 before finishing his degree to join the Green Bay Packers in Vince Lombardi's first season there. His confident, sometimes brash demeanor did not sit well with Lombardi's no-nonsense style. But his quick departure was a blessing, as he soon joined the Eagles. In Philadelphia, he found himself as a player and entertainer.

By 1966, he had established himself as one of the best offensive weapons in the NFL. He had finally obtained his college diploma. He was a regionally popular singer, booked into nightclubs, and a friend – and sometimes boyfriend – of top recording stars such as Chubby Checker and Diana Ross. Helped by his team's proximity to New York, he found professional training not only as a singer, but as an actor – his next dream. He had appeared in summer stock theater in the Philadelphia area. He was beginning to talk of retirement from football, although from time to time he intimated that a trade to the Los Angeles Rams, to allow him to focus more on acting, would be of interest.

But his screen career – including roles in two iconic films of the 1970s and one of the most beloved TV series of all time – was well in the future. And his pursuit of work in entertainment was not always sitting well with coaches, teammates, sportswriters, and fans, who thought it distracted him from the only future they cared about – providing excitement and victories on the football field for as long as he was able.

In November 1966, Timmy Brown – everyone knew him this way, although his given name was Thomas – had established himself as a solid and versatile back who could catch passes and was one of the most effective kick returners in the league. He had studied how to play the position, and said he “ran against the grain of the blocking and tackling,” sometimes faking to the right, then breaking quickly to the left. But as he walked onto Franklin Field on this Sunday afternoon, with temperatures in the mid-40s and a slight wind, his only focus was to keep Philadelphia in the hunt for a playoff berth. His 4-4 Eagles were in a must-win situation if they wanted to get back into contention against the division-leading Dallas Cowboys. The Cowboys were seeking their first trip to the playoffs since joining the league in 1960. The Eagles were also hungry for revenge for a game a month earlier, in which Dallas, led by quarterback Don Meredith's 394 passing yards and five touchdown passes, had crushed the Eagles by 56-7. In that game, Timmy had only

been able to manage 8 rushing yards on eight carries, although he did have five receptions for 62 yards.

The 1 p.m. game got off to a bad start for the Eagles. Dan Reeves, the Cowboys' running back – his 135 total yards of offense would eclipse the Eagles' team total for the day by 55 yards – scored a 2-yard touch-down to put the Cowboys up by 7-0. The Eagles knew that the Cowboys were on the verge of taking the crowd out of the game and, in essence, ending their season. It was time for some big plays.

Timmy took his usual place near the end zone and watched Danny Villanueva's perfect kick fly toward him. As the ball landed in his hands, he saw an opening — one that would land him in the NFL record book.

As he ran toward the end zone, Timmy also was sprinting toward the end of his football career – which would come with a different team in the third Super Bowl. He was moving toward an acting career that would keep him in the Hollywood game for about a decade, but would largely lead to years of frustration. Philadelphia fans knew Timmy as one of the swiftest men on the field, a moody person not afraid to speak of and show his feelings, a football player who also wanted to be an entertainer (or perhaps an entertainer who also wanted to be a football player). Today, reaching any height seemed possible. Timmy was at the top of his game. It would not have seemed likely that this aspiring Renaissance man would nearly always fall short of his dreams. He lived his life running against the grain – making decisions that would often be unanticipated and surprising to those who knew him best, and that did not always work out as he intended.

Still, Nov. 6, 1966, would not be like that. It would be an unforgettable day. And this day belonged to Timmy Brown.



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