

Payton dead at age 45

CHICAGO (AP) — Walter Payton, the NFL's greatest rusher whose aggressive style masked a playful temperament that earned him the nickname "Sweetness," died yesterday at age 45.

Payton was diagnosed earlier this year with primary sclerosing cholangitis, a rare liver disease. His only hope for survival was a transplant and he had been on a waiting list since February.

Payton rushed for 16,726 yards in his 13-year career, one of sport's most awesome records. And Barry Sanders ensured it would be one of the most enduring, retiring in July despite being just 1,458 yards shy of breaking Payton's mark.

"I want to set the record so high that the next person who tries for it, it's going to bust his heart," Payton once said.

Payton was coached for six years by Mike Ditka, now coach of the New Orleans Saints, who called him "the best football player I've ever seen."

"It's sad to me because he had a lot greater impact on me than I had on him," Ditka said.

"And he led by example on the field. He was the complete player. He did everything. ... He was the greatest runner, but he was also probably the best blocking back you ever saw."

Payton was widely celebrated in Chicago, the city's highest-profile athlete in the years after Cubs' Hall of Famer Ernie Banks retired and before Bulls' superstar Michael Jordan emerged.

"Walter was a Chicago icon long before I arrived there," Jordan said in a statement issued after Payton's death. "He was a great man off the field and his on-the-field accomplishments speak for themselves. I spent a lot of time with Walter, and I truly feel that we have lost a great man."

A two-time Little All-American, Payton finished fourth in voting for the Heisman Trophy in 1974, and was picked fourth overall by the Bears in the 1975 NFL draft. He rushed for 679 yards and seven touchdowns in his rookie season and the next year had the first of what would be 10 1,000-yard seasons, rushing for 1,390 yards and 13 touchdowns.

In 1977, just his third year in the NFL, Payton won the first of two MVP awards with the most productive season of his career. He rushed for 1,852 yards and 14 touchdowns, both career highs. His 5.5 yards per carry also was the best of his career.

Against Minnesota, he ran for 275 yards, an NFL single-game record that still stands. And in 1984, he broke Jim Brown's long-standing rushing record of 12,312 yards.

After carrying mediocre Chicago teams for most of his career, the Bears finally made it to the Super Bowl in 1985. Payton rushed for 1,551 yards and nine touchdowns as the Bears went 15-1 in the regular season, and also caught 49 passes for 483 yards receiving and two TDs.

Chicago beat New England 46-10 in the Super Bowl, but Payton did not score in the game.

When he disclosed his illness at an emotional news conference in February, he looked gaunt and frail, a shadow of the man who gained more yards than any running back in the history of the NFL.

"Am I scared? Hell yeah, I'm scared. Wouldn't you be scared?" he asked. "But it's not in my hands anymore. It's in God's hands."

Payton made few public appearances after that and his son, Jarrett, who plays for the University of Miami, was called home Wednesday night.

The numbers of 'Sweetness'

Here is a look at the career of Walter Payton.

Walter Payton
Running back
Chicago Bears
(1975-87)
Elected to Hall of Fame-1993



- 16,726 Career rushing yards, an NFL record
- 275 Yards rushing in a single game, an NFL record
- 3,838 Career carries, an NFL record
- 21,803 Total yards gained career, an NFL record
- 110 Career rushing touchdowns
- 9 Consecutive games with 100 or more yards rushing
- 10 Seasons with 1,000 or more rushing yards

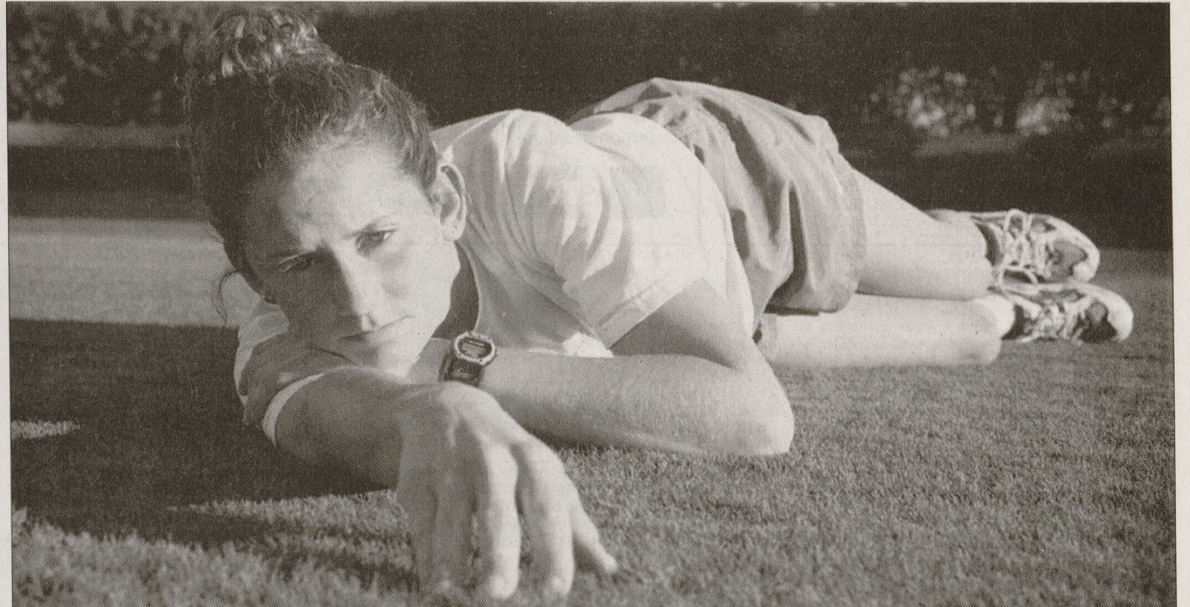
Source: AP research AP

Reports of how sick Payton was first surfaced Sunday, with at least two East coast radio stations reporting prematurely that he had died.

One newspaper columnist wrote that he was not expected to live through the weekend.

Yesterday, in the hours after the announcement of Payton's death, the Bears' blue and orange

SEE **PAYTON** ON PAGE 8.



Sophomore cross country runner **Andrea Bookout** has been the Aggies' top runner in every race this season.

Comeback Kid

After stint in Arizona, Bookout returns 'home'

BY **BLAINE DIONNE**
The Battalion

When A&M sophomore cross country runner Andrea Bookout faced the important decision of choosing what college to attend after her senior year of high school, she did not think she would ever change her mind.

When she decided to attend Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz., she did it for the reasons many student-athletes choose a particular school: the strength of its athletic program and its prominence in that student-athlete's particular sport.

Something was missing in Arizona, though, and by the spring of her freshman year, the Woodlands native was homesick. She was looking to come back to Texas, but

little did she know how coincidental her path home would be.

Bookout had a friend from her hometown who lived in Haas Hall on the A&M campus. Also, cross country sophomore runners Katy Gilstrap and Sarah Shauger were living in the room across the hall from Bookout's friend. One day, the mutual friend mentioned in passing to the two runners that Bookout was also a runner and was interested in coming back to Texas.

Through her correspondence with the two runners, Bookout's friend learned of the arrival of cross country coach Dave Hartman. When she told Bookout, Bookout became interested in learning more about the program.

After gaining the approval of her coach at Northern Arizona, Bookout contacted the A&M Athletic Department, starting the process of

transferring schools. Normally, when student-athletes transfer from one institution to another, they have to sit out their first year with their new team.

Luckily for the Aggie harriers, Northern Arizona was gracious enough to grant her a release from sitting out her first year at A&M, and Bookout has had an immediate impact, finishing as the Aggies' top runner thus far this season.

Hartman said he is grateful for her arrival and subsequent positive influence on the team.

"Last year, our women had the talent, they were just a little hesitant to go to the front of the pack or push the pace of a race," Hartman said. "Andrea came in and really took control of workouts with her aggressive style and toughness."

SEE **BOOKOUT** ON PAGE 8.

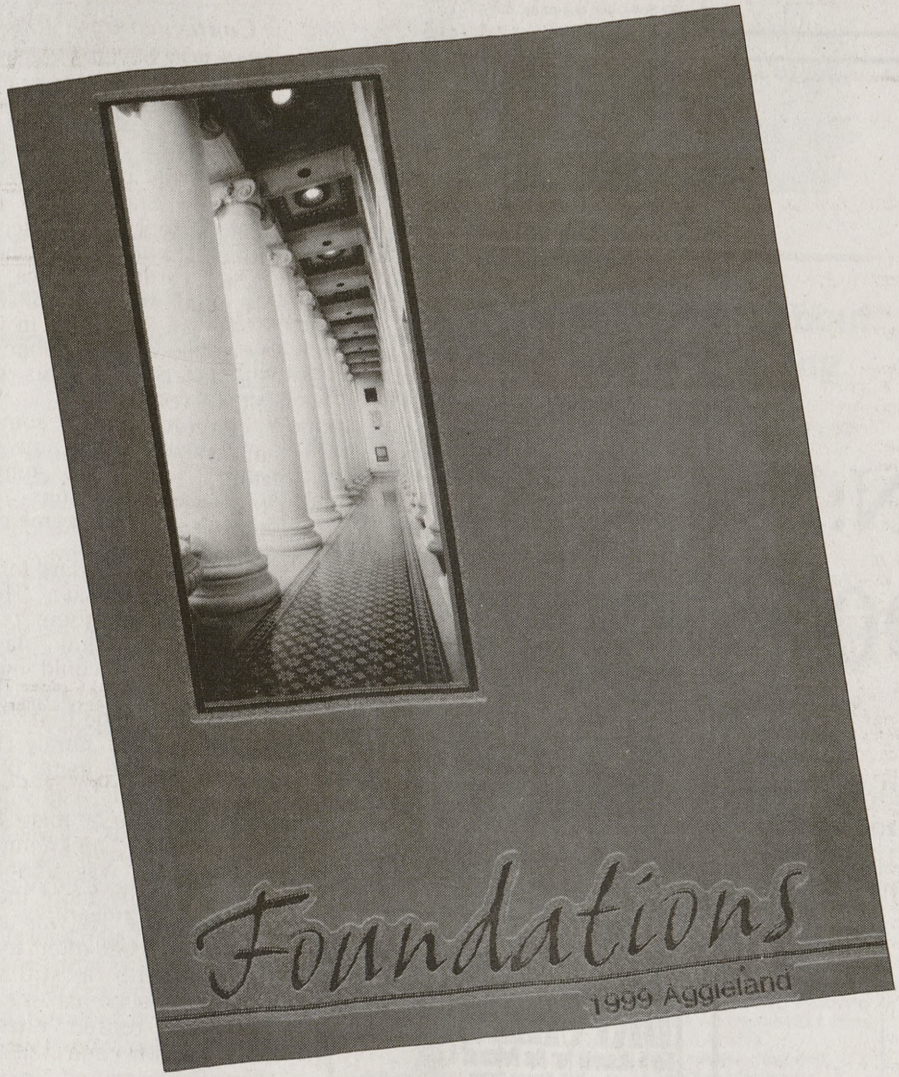
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