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### Warren Lahr

This article was written by Matthew Keddie.

Growing up in the small town of West Wyoming in northeast Pennsylvania, Warren Lahr may never have imagined that life would lead him to success in the NFL. As a member of the Cleveland Browns for 11 seasons (1949 to 1959), he contributed to four championship teams (one AAFC title, three NFL titles) playing primarily in the defensive backfield.<sup>1</sup> Lahr nabbed 44 career interceptions, a figure that was tops in franchise history for decades, and still ranks second all-time today. From 1950 thru 1955, he recorded no fewer than five picks per season.<sup>2</sup> Because he had such a nose for the ball, it was a natural habit for him to make uncanny plays when the game was on the line. He once said, “You invite passes. It’s funny. When you first start to play defense, you hope they won’t throw. Then after you play a while, you’re afraid they won’t.”<sup>3</sup> In 1950, the Browns’ inaugural season in the NFL, he came down with a pivotal interception during the Divisional round playoff against the New York Giants that propelled the team to an 8-3 win.<sup>4</sup> The Browns then squared off against the Los Angeles Rams for the NFL title, prevailing, 30-28. Cleveland’s defense forced five turnovers, including two interceptions from Lahr.<sup>5</sup> His strong performances year in and year out led him to Pro Bowl honors in 1953 as well as all-pro honors in four distinct years (1951, 1952, 1954, 1955).<sup>6</sup> Former teammate Walt Michaels, who played with Lahr for eight seasons, said of him, “He was just a plain good tackler. He didn’t punish you, he didn’t come up and kill you, but he didn’t miss you.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Warren Lahr,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>2</sup> “Warren Lahr,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>3</sup> Erzar, John. “UN Sung Hero West Wyoming’s Warren Lahr Played in 7 NFL Title Games,” *Times Leader*, July 27, 2013, accessed October 1, 2023, [WebCite query result \(webcitation.org\)](#).

<sup>4</sup> “Divisional Round – New York Giants at Cleveland Browns – December 17<sup>th</sup>, 1950,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Divisional Round - New York Giants at Cleveland Browns - December 17th, 1950 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>5</sup> “Championship – Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns – December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1950,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns - December 24th, 1950 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>6</sup> “Warren Lahr,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>7</sup> Erzar, John. “UN Sung Hero West Wyoming’s Warren Lahr Played in 7 NFL Title Games,” *Times Leader*, July 27, 2013, accessed October 1, 2023, [WebCite query result \(webcitation.org\)](#).



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On the road to success, Lahr experienced several ups and downs that helped shape his greatness. He was initially drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers in the 1947 NFL Draft, but suffered a knee injury during training camp and was cut by the team.<sup>8</sup> Lahr then signed with the Browns but missed the entire 1948 season because he was still recovering. Ready for play in 1949, he almost did not make it through the preseason. In a contest against the San Francisco 49ers, Lahr was called out by head coach Paul Brown for a missed assignment, and he was nearly cut.<sup>9</sup> He rebounded to turn in a solid season, as Brown utilized him on offense, defense, and special teams. Lahr had 10 touches on offense, played punter and returner on special teams, and roamed the defensive backfield, hauling in four interceptions.<sup>10</sup> The Browns finished at 9-1-2, en route to their fourth consecutive AAFC title with a 21-7 victory over the 49ers. Lahr made a memorable pass breakup to prevent a touchdown reception by San Francisco's Paul Salata in the title game.<sup>11</sup> The next season, 1950, Lahr became a full-time starter at right defensive halfback, opposite Hal Herring. The Cleveland defense was not loaded with Hall of Fame talent, but they were good enough to rank second in scoring, allowing just 12 points per contest.<sup>12</sup> He hauled in eight interceptions which was his career best, and returned two for



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touchdowns, which led the NFL. Cleveland steamrolled through the regular season, posting an 11-1 record. Their only defeat was in the opening week against the 49ers.<sup>13</sup> The defense led the league in scoring and ranked second in yards allowed. On December 23, they met the Los Angeles Rams for the title, losing a narrow 24-17 contest that came down to the game's final play, when Otto Graham's pass for Dante Lavelli fell incomplete.<sup>14</sup> Despite the defeat, Lahr pulled in two interceptions off Rams' quarterback Bob Waterfield. Following the season, he earned first-team all-pro honors from both the UPI and *NY Daily News*.<sup>15</sup>

The Browns continued their dominance in 1952, reeling off an 8-4 record, and third consecutive division title. In a rematch with the Rams in the season's opening week, the Browns dominated to a 37-7 victory.<sup>16</sup> The defense held Los Angeles to 158 yards of total offense, including just 58 net passing yards. The defense only yielded 213 points on the season, ranking second. Cleveland's secondary of Lahr, Bert Rechichar, and Tommy James hauled in a combined 15 interceptions<sup>17</sup>. The Browns met the Detroit Lions in the 1952 NFL Championship Game. The Browns lost to the Lions, 17-6, during the regular season and were held to just 214 yards of total offense in the game. Lahr and the defense limited the Lions to 59 passing yards, but they had a difficult time containing Lions' running back Doak Walker, who ran for 97 yards and a touchdown.<sup>18</sup> The Lions won, 17-7. Lahr was once again named an All-Pro, this time a second-team choice by the UPI and *NY Daily News*. Cleveland once again dominated during the 1953 regular season, reeling off another 11-1 record and NFL East Division title.<sup>19</sup> They posted shutouts of the Green Bay Packers (27-0) and New York Giants (7-0), yielding only 162 points the entire season. Lahr earned his first and only career Pro Bowl selection, picking off five passes, returning them for 119 yards, which was a career best.<sup>20</sup> The Browns squared off against the Lions for a rematch of last year's NFL championship, losing in heartbreaking fashion, 17-16. Cleveland trailed 10-3 in the second quarter, but clawed back with 13 consecutive points to take a 16-10 lead.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Lahr was beaten on the game-winning score by



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Detroit, a 33-yard pass from Bobby Layne to Jim Doran. Doak Walker kicked the extra point to seal the victory. On Detroit's game-winning drive in the huddle, Doran said to Layne, referring to Lahr, "Just throw it. I'll beat him."<sup>22</sup> Doran said, "Lahr and I had been feuding a bit, you know, like you do in a tough game. ... Lahr came at me pretty hard. He really was going to knock my head off. But then I ran right by him."<sup>23</sup> The Browns rebounded in 1954 to reach the title game, where once again they squared off against the Lions. Lahr maintained his consistent play, picking off five passes on the league's top ranked overall defense. The five interceptions tied for first on the team with linebacker Chuck Noll and safety Ken Konz.<sup>24</sup> Lahr was named a second-team All-Pro by the UPI and the *Newspaper Ent Association*. The Browns dominated the regular season, finishing at 9-3, that included an eight-game-winning streak. The fell early in the season to the Philadelphia Eagles and Pittsburgh Steelers, and in the regular season finale against the Lions.<sup>25</sup> The stage was set for a rematch with Detroit for the title. Cleveland came to play, as they dominated them, 56-10. The Lions committed nine turnovers, including six interceptions from quarterback Bobby Layne.<sup>26</sup> With the win, Cleveland denied Detroit their third straight NFL championship. Cleveland successfully defended its title in 1955, rolling through the regular season with a 9-2-1 record. Lahr once again had five interceptions, tying for the team lead. He was selected as a second-team All-Pro by the UPI, *Newspaper Ent Association*, and the *NY Daily News*.<sup>27</sup> The Browns squared off against a familiar foe in the 1955 NFL Championship Game, the Los Angeles Rams, whom they lost to in the 1951 Championship Game. This time, the Browns prevailed with a convincing 38-14 victory in Los Angeles.<sup>28</sup> Lahr and the defense held the Rams to just 143 passing yards and picked off Rams' quarterback Norm van Brocklin six times. Meanwhile, Otto Graham paced the Browns' offense with 209 passing yards and touchdown passes to Dante Lavelli and Ray Renfro.<sup>29</sup> The victory marked the Browns' third NFL title since joining the league. It was significant in that the club would not win

<sup>8</sup> "Warren Lahr," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>9</sup> Swartz, Jimmy. "The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr (Complete Story)," December 13, 2020, [The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr \(Complete Story\) \(brownsnation.com\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> "Warren Lahr," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>11</sup> Swartz, Jimmy. "The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr (Complete Story)," December 13, 2020, [The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr \(Complete Story\) \(brownsnation.com\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> "1950 Cleveland Browns Roster & Players," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1950 Cleveland Browns Roster & Players | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>13</sup> "1950 Cleveland Browns Roster & Players," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1950 Cleveland Browns Roster & Players | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>14</sup> "Championship – Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns – December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1950," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns - December 24th, 1950 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>15</sup> "Championship – Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns – December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1950," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Los Angeles Rams at Cleveland Browns - December 24th, 1950 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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another until 1964.<sup>30</sup> The following season, 1956, marked a turning point for the Browns. With the retirement of quarterback Otto Graham and Dante Lavelli in the twilight of his career, the team regressed on offense that attributed to a 5-7 record. The defense remained the club's strength, ranking first in scoring once again, allowing under 15 points per game.<sup>31</sup> Lahr ranked third on the team with three interceptions, behind Konz' four, and team leader Don Paul, who hauled in seven. The regression allowed the Browns to draft running back Jim Brown in the 1957 NFL Draft. That, along with solid quarterback play from Tommy O'Connell, revived the Cleveland offense in 1957.<sup>32</sup> The defense held its own, maintaining its top scoring ranking. The Browns faced the Lions for the 1957 NFL title, their largest rival in the decade, and were on the losing end of another lopsided 59-14 defeat at Briggs Stadium in Detroit.<sup>33</sup> Cleveland turned the ball over seven times and fell behind 17-0 before finding the scoreboard. Lahr made just seven starts in 1958, picking off only one pass, as his role became more limited. He retired after the 1959 season, making 110 starts over 124 contests.<sup>34</sup> His 44 career interceptions ranked most in franchise history at the time. He returned five of them for scores, which still stands as a Cleveland Browns record.<sup>35</sup> Lahr was a member of three NFL title winning teams, and one AAFC championship. He remained with the team after his playing days, working as a color analyst alongside broadcaster Ken Coleman, for the local CBS station.<sup>36</sup> Several years later, he left CBS and worked in entrepreneurship, running a local sporting goods store. Lahr suddenly passed away on January 19, 1969, at the age of 45 from a heart attack.<sup>37</sup> He was named to the Cleveland Browns Legends in 2008, a program that honors outstanding former players, coaches, and contributors to the franchise.

Lahr was born as Warren Emmett Lahr on September 5, 1923, in Mt. Zion, Pennsylvania. He was an outstanding basketball and football player at West Wyoming High School.<sup>38</sup> Lahr graduated in 1941 and was not highly recruited by major football programs. He received one offer, from Western Reserve University (now Case Western Reserve

<sup>1</sup> 6 “1951 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1951 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>1</sup> 7 “1952 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1952 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>1</sup> 8 “Championship – Detroit Lions at Cleveland Browns – December 28<sup>th</sup>, 1952,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Detroit Lions at Cleveland Browns - December 28th, 1952 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>1</sup> 9 “Warren Lahr,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>2</sup> 0 “Warren Lahr,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

<sup>2</sup> 1 “Championship – Cleveland Browns at Detroit Lions – December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1953,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Cleveland Browns at Detroit Lions - December 27th, 1953 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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University), playing on the team in 1942. At that time, he was called on to serve in the U.S. Navy for three years during World War II.<sup>39</sup> Lahr returned to Western Reserve in 1946 and was granted additional eligibility as a result of his military service. He demonstrated fantastic speed, playing halfback on the football team. During his playing days he stood at roughly 5'11" and 189 pounds.<sup>40</sup> He was inducted to the Case Western Reserve University Athletics Hall of Fame in 1975 and to the Luzerne County (PA) Hall of Fame in 1986. Lahr married Rowena Scott, and together they had five daughters: Jane, Janet, Sallie, Josephine, and Nancy.<sup>41</sup>





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- <sup>2</sup> 2 Strother, Shelby. "Life in the fast Layne," profootballhof.com, January 1, 2005, accessed October 1, 2023, [1953 Championship Game | Pro Football Hall of Fame \(profootballhof.com\)](https://profootballhof.com).
- <sup>2</sup> 3 Strother, Shelby. "Life in the fast Layne," profootballhof.com, January 1, 2005, accessed October 1, 2023, [1953 Championship Game | Pro Football Hall of Fame \(profootballhof.com\)](https://profootballhof.com).
- <sup>2</sup> 4 "1954 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1954 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1954-roster.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> 5 "1954 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1954 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1954-roster.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> 6 "Championship – Detroit Lions at Cleveland Browns – December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1954," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Detroit Lions at Cleveland Browns - December 26th, 1954 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1954-12-26.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> 7 "Warren Lahr," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/l/lahrwa01.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> 8 "Championship – Cleveland Browns at Los Angeles Rams – December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1955," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Cleveland Browns at Los Angeles Rams - December 26th, 1955 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1955-12-26.htm).
- <sup>2</sup> 9 "Championship – Cleveland Browns at Los Angeles Rams – December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1955," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Championship - Cleveland Browns at Los Angeles Rams - December 26th, 1955 | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1955-12-26.htm).
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- <sup>3</sup> 1 "1956 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1956 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1956-roster.htm).
- <sup>3</sup> 2 "1957 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [1957 Cleveland Browns Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/cle/1957-roster.htm).
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- <sup>3</sup> 6 Swartz, Jimmy. "The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr (Complete Story)," December 13, 2020, [The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr \(Complete Story\) \(brownsnation.com\)](#).
- <sup>3</sup> 7 Swartz, Jimmy. "The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr (Complete Story)," December 13, 2020, [The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr \(Complete Story\) \(brownsnation.com\)](#).
- <sup>3</sup> 8 Swartz, Jimmy. "The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr (Complete Story)," December 13, 2020, [The Life And Career Of Browns DB Warren Lahr \(Complete Story\) \(brownsnation.com\)](#).
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- <sup>4</sup> 0 "Warren Lahr," ProFootballReference.com, accessed October 1, 2023, [Warren Lahr Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
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