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Trailblazing legend: Veryl Switzer

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TRAILBLAZING LEGEND

VERYL
SWITZER



On June 4, 2022, K-State lost an important member of the campus and community. Widely known as one of its greatest athletes, Veryl Allen Switzer Sr. played a historical role in building the university's multicultural programs. Additionally, he was a key leader in promoting the significance of his hometown of Nicodemus, Kansas.

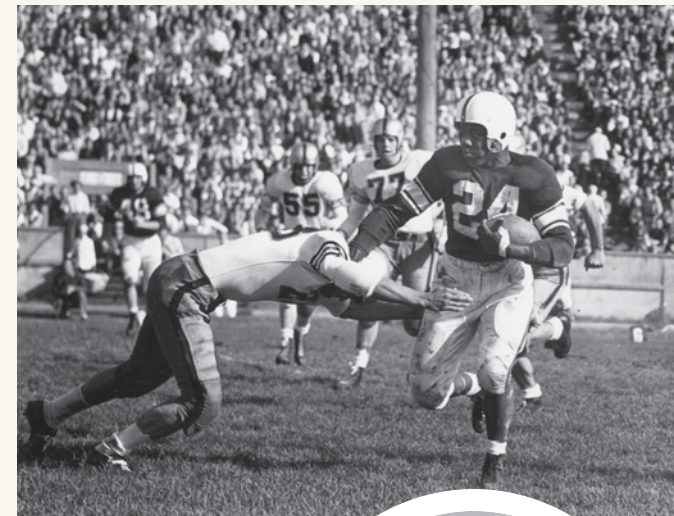
Born in 1932 as the youngest of six children, Switzer was a descendant of original settlers in Nicodemus, a Black farming community founded by formerly enslaved people. As a child, he helped with farm chores

and developed a knack for making biscuits and pies.

As Switzer grew, his athleticism emerged. In high school, he excelled in football and track and field. After playing on a dominating football team and being the state long jump and pole vault champion his senior year, Switzer received an athletic scholarship to K-State in 1950. This became a life-changing event. At K-State, he was a conference long jump champion, had a pole vault best of 13'9" and could run the 100-yard dash in 9.8 seconds. These feats garnered letters in track and

Bogue High School was small enough that they played six-man football. In Switzer's junior and senior years, they scored more than 900 points while giving up about 50 points to their opponents.

field each of his varsity years, but football was where Switzer gained national prominence. His strong senior season led him to being the fourth player selected in the 1954 NFL draft, which remains the highest pick of a K-State player. Switzer played five pro seasons before retiring due to injuries.



Switzer was a powerful running back and punishing defensive back. He was an all-conference and All-American selection in each of his three varsity seasons.



Switzer became K-State's first Black associate dean; his duties expanded to support multicultural students, faculty and staff.

During a two-year stint in the Air Force, Switzer became a first lieutenant and led the Bolling Air Force Base football team.

In 1969, K-State Athletic Director Ernie Barrett and Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean

As one of the few Black student-athletes at K-State and in the conference, Switzer faced hardships on and off the field. His teammates found opportunities to support him, such as when they ate in a restaurant's kitchen together, because its racist policy kept Black people from the dining area. When he started in the NFL with the Green Bay Packers, he was the only Black player on the team and among the league's 20 Black men. These situations influenced Switzer's approach to multicultural work: "I competed hard to express my disapproval."

Switzer spent the 1960s working in the Chicago public school system, first as a teacher and then overseeing school-community relations. He even drove a bus of high school students to the historic March on Washington in August 1963. It was one of many examples of Switzer supporting racial equity and justice.

of Students Chet Peters convinced Switzer to return to K-State as an administrative assistant to Barrett and coordinator of minority and cultural programs for Peters. In 1973, he became an assistant professor in University Human Relations and associate dean for University Minority Affairs. His efforts helped increase the multicultural student population from 137 in 1969 to 951 in 1982. One of his philosophies was that "the majority is more obligated to show hospitality to the minority; that is, those in decision-making positions are more capable to determine what will or won't be. Minorities have never been in these decision-making positions."

Switzer also remained engaged in the communities where he lived. In Manhattan, he was a

school district board member, serving as its first Black president from 1975 to 1976. He later was on the Kansas Children's Services League board and helped found the Kansas Black Farmers Association. On many weekends, he made the 180-mile trek back to Nicodemus to help work his land there. He was an early advocate for the community to become a National Historic Site. It now stands as the only remaining town west of the Mississippi River that was established by Black people after the Civil War.

Veryl Switzer's actions as a K-Stater and Kansan helped the university and his community change. He also positively influenced numerous relatives, including the three children he had with his wife, Fern. Throughout his life, Switzer was an important mentor and guide to thousands of students, parents, staff, family and friends.



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