

THE DEFINING MOMENTS

“I gave my first touchdown ball
to our equipment guy to keep
for me because my dad told me
you never know where
you will end up in history.”

— Emmitt Smith





“My body hasn’t stopped hurting since I first pulled on a pair of shoulder pads. Football is not for the weak of mind or heart. You either put it on the line or you take up another sport.”

— Emmitt Smith

Head tucked low. Body taut. Ready to explode. The count. The snap. The play unfolds. Emmitt Smith uncurls from his customary spot in the eye of the backfield and takes the ball. Two quick steps toward the line and there’s nowhere to go. His right guard has been blown back toward him by a pit bull of a defensive tackle. Emmitt jukes the behemoth and dashes outside to a sliver of daylight. He dives forward as he’s hit by a 300-pound freight train and two of his sizable cohorts. By the time the referee pulls everyone off the pile of humanity at the 35-yard line, Emmitt’s gained four yards. The announcer says “2nd and 6” and the Cowboys huddle for the next play.

And so it goes for Emmitt Smith. Yards, inches,

centimeters. They all matter. They all count. It’s just that some feel a whole lot better than others. In the scheme of things, it’s just one carry in more than 10,000 in Smith’s football career. He’s spent a majority of his life looking at the world from the same vantage point — three steps directly behind the quarterback, crouched and ready to strike.

Out of the thousands of carries in Emmitt’s football life, how many actually define him as a football player? Ten? One hundred? One thousand? In truth, the answer is that every last one of them helped shape the legendary running back. But when push comes to shove — which is always the case in this relentless game of football — four games in particular define No. 22 like no other.