



A LIST OF SOME OF THE TOUGHEST, DIRTIEST AND CRAZIEST NFL PLAYERS OF ALL TIME

By Kerry Schmidt August 16, 2009

Michael Vick signed with the Eagles. Best town for him. Fans up there are drunk all the time and could care less what he did.

Louisville's Rick Pitino. Offered a girl he laid on a restaurant table \$3,000 for an abortion.

Despite him being Catholic with 5 kids.

Pitino wins championships, so Louisville President said all is forgiven.

Now, on to the good, bad, ugly, crazy and super tough.

I have been researching numerous files, from NFL Films to hundreds of Google hits, conversations with my old NFL contacts – players, coaches and some now broadcasters, among many, and came up with a list.

Several other lists are out there, and my choices include a number of them, but I differ on quite a few.

I can only imagine how many beers have been consumed while coming up with these lists.

I distinguish toughness from just plain dirty players. Some intertwine, and then there are the “just plain crazy” SOB's.

Mix them all up and you have true havoc and mass destruction.

I will start from bottom to top. I am tempted to open with No. 1, as 82% of all individuals I queried on this loudly agreed. “Oh, Christ, he's so far above anyone else. He's from some other planet,” said one.

As I said, I may not be fully convinced of some of my choices, but here goes.

Sam Huff, LB, Giants and Redskins, 1956-1969.

Undoubtedly, his legendary battles with the great Jim Brown (#21) greatly helped put him on my list.

To be an NFL LB, you have to be tough. If it was a war, this bunch would be the ones charging right at the machine gun nest the enemy is laying on them.

Huff then added, the QB would be hunkered down with the general, asking what type of attack is being planned.

Don Meredith, QB, Dallas, 1960-1968

He was the QB depicted in the celebrated movie, “North Dallas Forty,” but he was tough. In his early years, he was on the ground more times than a gopher. Teammate Bob Lilly said, “He came out of a hospital to play with a broken rib, punctured lung, and a 104 fever. His nose was so broken it spread all over his face.”

Ernie Stautner, DT, Pittsburgh, 1950-1963

LB Andy Russell tells the story. “He's in the huddle and his thumb is smashed back against his wrist, skin split wide open. The big white thing you saw was the bone sticking out.”

On the sidelines, with this compound fracture, he just yells, “Gimme some tape.” He taped it up so much it looked like a club. And he used it like one, smashing opponents with it. After the game, he said, “Hey Doc, I think I got a problem,”

Bill Romanowski, LB with 4 different teams.

“Romo” as he was called, was the early poster boy for steroids. He took everything out there and experimented with many other stuff. He was so hopped up, some thought he would explode.

His antics included kicking FB Larry Centers in the head, breaking Kerry Collins jaw, throwing a football at LB Bryan Cox, nailing him in the groin.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Also punched TE Tony Gonzalez, and, this one I like, broke the eye socket of HIS OWN teammate Marcus Williams, forcing him to retire. Oh, he did this in a scrimmage.

He was fined 6 times for illegal hits and spit in the face of WR JJ Stokes.

He played in 4 SB.

Speaking of 'roid rage: DE Lyle Alzado was the king of doping. He estimated he tried over 65 different types of drugs that "would help him."

He was as tough and as mean as a junk yard dog. His mood swings were so wild that his teammates nicknamed him Rainbow and "3 mile Lyle."

As a 12 year old kid in Brooklyn, he used to sneak out of his parents 3rd floor walkup and take the subway to Harlem, "Just to pick fights," he said.

He became so unstable his 2nd wife, Cathy, tried to run him over.

His 4th wife, Kathy, found 46 syringes in the garbage.

He was one of only 2 players I knew that other players said they were afraid of him, mainly because they were convinced he was insane.

A famous quote of his was, "I never trust a sane person."

While playing for the Raiders, before the '84 SB, he screamed at reporters that he would decapitate Redskins' QB Joe Theisman.

I once witnessed a fight in Golds Gym between Alzado and two twin brothers who were steroid monsters. Alzado picked one up and threw him through a plate glass window and then threw a 120 LB dumbbell at the other.

The twins quickly left.

Alzado died of cancer at 43, most certainly due to his ingestion of everything. Near the end, he even injected himself with Grizzly bear hormones! Maybe not on the toughest list, but I need one to be truly insane!

Conrad Dobler, G, with 3 teams. In an ESPN poll, he was, by far, labeled the dirtiest professional athlete of all time, i.e. all sports.

Dobler would spend the week prior to the game building up hatred for his opponents. He was famous for biting, gouging, punching, kicking and pulling the face mask. Some said he ripped players' helmets off over 100 times.

He once had a cast on his left hand and used it as a club. He kicked Merlin Olsen in the head, spit in the face of Eagles' Bill Bradley – as he lay injured on the ground!

A Giants player wished him luck in the playoff and Dobler punched him. He bit one tackle so many times that said player requested a rabies shot. Toughest? Dirtiest? HELL YES.

Walt Garrison, RB, Dallas.

Definitely on the list. Once broke 3 ribs early in a game, was carried off the field, but came back in and rushed for over 100 yards. On separate occasions, he played through a separated shoulder, severely broken nose and a broken collarbone.

Teammate Charlie Waters recalls the time Garrison accidentally cut his thumb so that it was just dangling from his hand. Solution? Wrap it up tighter than a hangman's noose and play the next day – gaining over 100 yards. That's tough.

Mike Curtis, LB '65-78. A well earned member of the list.

Called "The Animal," he was one of the angriest men to ever play. He chewed through the bars of his face mask and reportedly ate the window panes of the team bus. He proudly said he played football because he could legally knock the hell out of people.

Ronnie Lott, CB and safety, SF. Called by coaches and other players, the pound for pound hardest hitter ever. He got his pinkie finger caught in a face mask. Two days later, when they told him it would not heal for the playoffs, the simply said, "cut it off." He did and they won another SB.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Jim Brown, greatest RB of all time! Ran over more would be tacklers than an 18-wheeler over armadillos. Once, he ran 62 yards for a TD, after flattening 7 defenders. His motto was, "Make sure when anyone tackles you he remembers how much it hurt."

Steve McNair. As I detailed in a sorrowful column a few weeks ago, McNair was as tough as they come. His pain threshold had to be in the stratosphere.

Larry Csonka, RB, Miami.

Broke his nose 10 times, but stayed in the games with blood pouring out onto his shoes. He made sure the opposing players saw it. He once thought he broke his back on a hit by a LB. He crawled off the field, but soon came right back in.

Only player in history of NFL to be penalized while carrying the ball - a forearm shot/right cross that knocked a safety unconscious.

He was also infamous. During a black tie dinner, he was seated next to then Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. Having imbibed in "numerous" martinis, he slid off his chair, then used O'Connor's leg to heft himself back up. As she frowned at him, he said, "Hey, lighten up, babe."

Pittsburgh's RB Rocky Bleier is special.

His right leg was shredded with shrapnel during the Vietnam War. Told he may never walk normally again, he took his Purple Heart and Bronze Star, spent 2 full years "nearly killing himself," then came back after 3 years away from the game. He played on 4 winning SB teams.

Jack Tatum, Safety, Raiders.

Nicknamed "The Assassin," he knocked out Hall of Fame TE John Mackey in his first ever game. He knocked the helmet off Minnesota receiver Sammy White, some saying it was the hardest hit they had ever seen.

But he was somewhat tarnished, as he ran completely across the field, away from the play, in a preseason game, yet, and laid a clean, but unnecessary neck shot on Darryl Stingley, paralyzing him for life.

Bob Lilly, DT, Dallas. Considered one of greatest defensive players ever. Despite having both knees torn up, many broken bones and a hamstring tear, he never missed a game in 14 seasons.

Chuck Bednarik, Center and LB, Eagles.

Responsible for one of the most famous pictures, entitled "The greatest collision of all time." He knocked Frank Gifford out cold. "I thought I killed him," Bednarik said. The picture showed Bednarik scowling, standing over the unconscious Gifford, who missed the whole next season. Brocco Nagurski, RB Chicago - early days, '30's.

One of the hardest runners ever, George Hallas recalled a play where "he just ran right over 4 players, kept his head down until he ran into the stadium's brick wall. He went down, but got right up and ran off the field.

Lawrence Taylor, LB Giants.

He revolutionized the LB position. Fast enough to roam the whole field, he could stop or cover any player. Double-teamed all the time, he still led the league in sacks, played with a dislocated shoulder, torn pectoral muscle, and 3 games with a fractured tibia.

Perhaps the most infamous play was when he literally shredded Joe Theismann's leg on Monday night football.

A good friend of mine, Mell Kaufman, was a LB on the Skins and when he saw the leg, Taylor was screaming for medical help to get out there and then he threw up.

Mean Joe Green. One of only a few defensive players who could singlehandedly change a game. As a rookie, he fought veterans at every practice. He was known for kicking players when they were down. He was ejected in a 1975 game for repeatedly kicking a Browns player in the groin. Yet, some may remember him for the great Coca Cola commercial.



OFF THE WALL SPORTS

Jack Lambert, LB, Steelers.

As crazy and tough as anyone.

Listen to John Elway on Lambert. A rookie, it was his very first game.

“I come up to the center, bend over and there is this creature. He has blood coming out of his eye socket, something that looked like puss out of his nose, and no front teeth. And he is smiling.

“I called time out, walked over to my coach and said, ‘I graduated from Stanford! I can be an accountant. I don’t need this s..t.’”

I have left out many deserving and great players: Jim Otto, Brett Favre, Johnny Unitas, Ray Lewis, Earl Campbell, Emmitt Smith, Deacon Jones, Walter Payton and Mark Bavaro among several. All deserving, but space only allows so much.

Thus, we now come to THE number one tough guy.

Of the hundreds of people polled, 82% had my man at the top.

DICK BUTKUS

I will read directly from the bio on Butkis.

Butkis was the angriest, most ferocious, menacing, and yes, toughest player to every play the game of football.

Butkus’s opponents claimed that Butkus was like an odor that you could feel or sense on the field. Anything loose – a knee pad, a shoe, a chin strap – would be ripped off by a Butkus tackle.

Butkus has bitten officials, opponents in the groin, scratched, punched, everything. Going across the middle against Butkus was considered attempted suicide. He was a turnover machine and earned 8 Pro Bowl selections in 9 seasons. Steve Sabol had the following to say about Butkus.

“His career stands as the most sustained work of devastation ever committed on any field of any port, anywhere, any time.”

He lived in Malibu at the same time I did. Many a time I saw him limp into THE place, the Baja Cantina there. Finally one day, I worked up the nerve to introduce myself. He quietly stared down at me, but then smiled, and said, “let’s have lunch.” That was the greatest lunch I ever had, No idea what I ordered, did not matter. We talked for nearly an hour.

Very quiet guy. Devout Catholic. Went to church 6 times a week when he could.

But he still was the Butkus.

A story in the L.A. Times told of how some attorney had hired Butkus to do a commercial, which he did. After a few weeks, Butkus called his office and said, “I will have your check by the end of the week.

He got it, but, oh oh, it bounced!

According to the article, Butkus drove to down town L.A. went up to this attorney’s fancy office and barged into his inner room where, in front of several clients, picked this attorney up out of his chair, slammed him against the wall, his feet dangling well above the fine carpet, and quietly said, ‘You will give me the \$500 before I leave. In cash!

The attorney, after borrowing some from his clients, gave Butkus the cash.

Butkus literally growled at him and walked out. I still have a copy of the article.

I saw him again later and asked him if that were true. He said, “Hell yes, you don’t try to cheat someone out of a deal. It was not the money, but the principal.” Then smiling, he said quietly, “Damn little bastard.”

As most of you now, the award for the top collegiate LB each year is, of course, “The Butkus Award.”

And of course, Butkus was the “other” player that opposing players were scared of (see Alzado). Off to Friends, my local watering hole, for a 65th birthday single malt.