

Inside The Ravens With Aaron Wilson

Ngata continues to dominate ~ August 5, 2009
2nd team AP All Pro player hopes to earn respect of fans



By Aaron Wilson
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WESTMINSTER -- For the moment, the destructive force was confined to mauling a blocking sled that seemed to cry out for relief as two powerful hands triggered a loud enough recoil that the sound resonated across the football field.

Baltimore Ravens defensive tackle Haloti Ngata was only warming up, though.

Between his rare combination of brute strength, nimble feet and massive size, Ngata is a nightmare for offensive linemen to deal with.

Simply put, Ngata is an absolute beast.

And the 6-foot-4, 345-pound Salt Lake City native has demonstrated his physical prowess again and again at training camp by abusing blockers while busting through gaps with his quickness or just simply overpowering linemen at the point of attack.

Although it's such a demanding game, especially in the trenches, Ngata tends to make it look easy with his natural skills and athleticism.

"Haloti has got so much power, and he's really, really quick for how big he is," Ravens offensive guard Marshal Yanda said. "Most big guys aren't as quick as him, but he's got the size and he can move. That makes him even harder to deal with."

"He'll run right over you, too. With a big guy like him, you've really got to stay low and keep a good, sound base. He's a hell of a player. I'm just glad he's on our team."
As a former rugby player, Ngata is adept at turning the line of scrimmage into his own personal scrum.

In three NFL seasons, the former first-round draft pick from Oregon has never missed a start while emerging as one of the top defensive linemen in the league.

"Everybody knows about Haloti in football, and I'm sure fans know about Haloti now," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said. "He's going to be a dominant tackle for many years to come."

For his career, Ngata has registered 222 career tackles, five sacks, three interceptions and one forced fumble.



Last season, he posted 77 tackles, one sack, two interceptions and five pass deflections for the league's second-ranked defense.

Yet, being named to the Pro Bowl has eluded Ngata despite a strong reputation in league circles for being an elite player. Last year, he was named an alternate to the league's annual all-star game. A lack of popularity in fan balloting affected his prospects.

If the Pro Bowl snubs offend Ngata, he hasn't let it show. Named second-team All-Pro by the *Associated Press* last year, Ngata isn't concerned about being shut out from the Pro Bowl in the future.

"I feel like I can get there," Ngata said. "That's not a problem. It doesn't bother me at all that they've had other guys over there. I'm working as hard as I can. Hopefully, I can make it over there, too."

When Ngata, 25, was younger, he tended to study several defensive linemen to try to master their strategy and techniques.

In Baltimore, he's constantly watching nose guard Kelly Gregg apply the leverage game better than most interior defensive linemen.

"I think we have the best here in Kelly Gregg," Ngata said. "I watch him all the time and learn from him."

Last season, Ngata was unblockable at times.

And he surprised the Houston Texans with his ability to backpedal into coverage, retreating into the end zone to snag an errant pass to halt a red-zone threat.

"I think my quickness for a big guy is big," Ngata said. "I hope I can use it and my size."

In the AFC championship game, Ngata registered his first career sack in the playoffs by tackling elusive Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger in the backfield.

Now, he's intent on building on three strong seasons with another stellar campaign.

"Definitely, that's what I'm always working toward is getting better," Ngata said. "Hopefully, great things are ahead."

Those great things could include seeing some action on offense again this season after lining up as a blocking tight end last season.

Ngata has been lobbying to touch the football as a runner or a receiver.

"Give me the rock," he said with a smile. "I like when they put me in there. I enjoy it."

Signed to a five-year, \$11.9 million contract in 2006 following a brief holdout, Ngata is expected to be the next player the Ravens look to lock up to a long-term deal now that Pro Bowl outside linebacker Terrell Suggs has been secured with a six-year, \$62.5 million deal.

On most NFL defenses, Ngata would likely be an even bigger name. In Baltimore, though, he's routinely overshadowed due to the star power of middle linebacker Ray Lewis, free safety Ed Reed and Suggs.

Modest and quiet, Ngata doesn't mind that he's not a household name.

"Oh definitely, those guys worked so hard to get where they are," Ngata said. "I'm not going to take anything away from them. Hopefully, I can get my name out there, too."