

# **MIKE HAYNES**

## **Hall of Fame Defender**

By Joe Horrigan

A short time after his 1989 retirement from pro football, Mike Haynes was asked if he thought he'd eventually be elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. It was a reasonable question. Haynes, after all, was already considered by many to be one of the best cornerbacks ever to play the position. Still, the former New England Patriots and Los Angeles Raiders star didn't want to appear overly confident. "My fingers are crossed," he replied. "I'll just have to wait. It would be a great way to cap off a career in the National Football League."

Haynes as most suspected - didn't have to wait long. In just his second year of eligibility, the former Arizona State University standout was accorded the game's highest honor - membership in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Haynes, born on July 1, 1953, in Denison, Texas, was raised in Los Angeles, California and attended John Marshall High School. There he lettered in both football and track and was voted Athlete of the Year as a senior. At ASU he earned All-America honors in his junior and senior years and All-WAC honors three out of four years. He was doubly honored following his junior season with All-WAC recognition as both a cornerback and return specialist. A two-year letterman in track, he was the Conference champion in the long jump one year and the runner-up in another.

ASU Head Coach Frank Kush once described his star defensive back as a "luxury."

"We'd put Mike on the opponent's top receiver.. one on one.. .with no help, short or deep," Kush explained. "That's a hell of a responsibility, but Mike handled it beautifully.

"Leaving Mike by himself would enable us to give free safety help to the other corner, or even utilize the safety blitz. It was a great four years, at least from the standpoint of our secondary."

In 1976, the New England Patriots made the 6-2, 190-pound Haynes their number one selection in the NFL draft. He was the fifth overall pick and the first defensive back chosen. It was the highest a defensive back had been selected in the draft since 1963 when Jerry Stovall was picked second overall by the St. Louis Cardinals.

In 1975, the 3-11 Patriots were outscored by their opponents by an even 100 points.

Collectively, the defense recorded just 13 interceptions. One reporter called the porous Pats' secondary the "true Adventure Land in American entertainment." In 1976, with the addition of Haynes and another rookie defensive back Tim Fox of Ohio State, the interception tally rose to 19. Haynes netted eight, the second best total in the AFC that year.

Seven of those eight interceptions came in a span of just four games. The string began on November 7, with an interception against the Patriots' Eastern Division rivals, the Buffalo Bills. The next week he grabbed two more against the Baltimore Colts, followed by three more against the New York Jets, and one against the Denver Broncos. "That kid is a helluva player," remarked a twice-victimized Joe Namath. "He has great range. I didn't think I made any bad throws and I was reading the coverages pretty well. He just went out there and got the ball."

While Namath may have been surprised by the rookie cornerback, Jets' Head Coach Lou Holtz was not. "When I was coaching at North Carolina State, we played against Haynes at Arizona State," he recalled. "I went up to him in the pre-game warmups that day and told him he was the best collegiate defensive back I'd ever seen. It was the first time I ever did something like that. I also told him he wasn't going to

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see much of the ball because we were throwing away from him. As it turned out, the only time he touched the ball all game was when he returned a kickoff 97 yards for a touchdown."

Haynes had a sensational rookie season with the Pats. In addition to his eight interceptions he accounted for an AFC- leading 608 punt return yards that included touchdown runs of 89 and 62 yards. His 89-yard touchdown return came against the Bills the same week he began his four-game interception streak. The score came late in the second quarter when punter Marv Bateman lofted a 46-yard kick that Haynes fielded on the third bounce. Demonstrating his tremendous speed, he took off towards the left sideline, then ran upfield untouched as Tim Fox delivered the key block on Bateman. Haynes' touchdown was the first score by way of a punt return in the Patriots' 17-year history. It's still a team record. For his outstanding first-year play, Mike was named Defensive Rookie of the Year.

A master of man-for-man coverages, Haynes was rarely beaten on a deep route. "The receiver tells you where the ball is," he once explained. "If the defensive back looks back and the ball's not there, he's beaten." Quarterbacks found the best way to combat Mike's speed, quickness, and range was to avoid throwing in his direction.

"If Mike has a problem of any kind it is that he may go for a while, even a couple of games, without ever seeing the ball in his area," remarked a Patriots' assistant coach. "His biggest problem may be to keep from getting too relaxed." At one point during the 1977 season, Patriots' Head Coach Chuck Fairbanks remarked that Mike "hadn't seen a ball come his way in over three weeks."

In 1980, Haynes missed the first three games of the season due to a contract dispute. Used sparingly in his first game back, a 23-14 win over the Denver Broncos, Haynes returned with a vengeance in week five against the New York Jets. The multi-dimensional defensive back demonstrated his tremendous versatility -- much to the dismay of the Jets -- when he raced 65 yards with a blocked field goal attempt to score a touchdown. The Patriots went on to defeat the Jets 21-11. Despite his early-season absence, Haynes still earned All-AFC honors and was selected to play in the Pro Bowl.

In 1983, Haynes sat out the first 11 games of the season. Technically a free agent, he played out his option with the Pats and was prepared to sit out the entire season if his new contract demands weren't met. After weeks of negotiating, Haynes' playing days with the Patriots came to an end, as a deal was made that sent the seven-year veteran and a mid-round draft pick to the Los Angeles Raiders. In return, New England received a No.1 draft choice in 1984 and a No.2 pick in 1985.

During his seven seasons with the Patriots, Haynes recorded 28 interceptions and 1,159 yards on 111 punt returns. He was named to the Pro Bowl six times and earned All-AFC recognition five times (1977-1980, 1982), and all-pro honors twice (1978 and 1982).

Haynes was pleased to be able to return to Los Angeles and play in front of family and friends. He was also pleased and impressed with his new team's winning attitude. "They say attitude is everything in sports," he said. "Being around the Raiders when I came in 1983, they had the proper attitude to win. They knew they had the best team. Their attitude was 'We believe in ourselves.'"

His impact with the Raiders was immediate. Paired with Lester Hayes at the other corner spot, Haynes became the final piece of the Raiders' championship season puzzle. He played in the final five regular season games plus the Raiders three playoff wins.

In Super Bowl XVIII the Raiders crushed the Washington Redskins 38-9. Haynes, with his tight coverages, complemented by a fierce Raiders' pass rush, completely stymied Redskins' quarterback Joe Theismann. Haynes, who intercepted one pass and defended another blanketed Washington receivers, including all-pro Art Monk, who on the day, caught just one pass. "I never enjoyed playing with a team more than I did that '83 Super Bowl team," Haynes stated.

"What made him unique was his height (6-2) and reach," Theismann later said of Haynes. "He could keep an arm on people and they couldn't get away. He had great hips. They gave him a wonderful ability to turn and break on the ball."

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In seven seasons as a Raider, Haynes earned three more Pro Bowl bids and added 18 more interceptions for a career mark of 46. Two of Haynes interceptions came in a December 2, 1984 game against the Miami Dolphins. For the Raiders, that late-season game was crucial. A loss would have severely damaged their playoff hopes. Analysts made frequent mention of the "pressure" the Raiders team faced. But if Haynes was feeling the "pressure," it didn't show.

On the Dolphins' first possession, he intercepted a Dan Marino pass and returned it a team-record 97 yards for a 7-0 lead. Later he grabbed a second Marino pass and returned it 54 yards to set up another touchdown. The Raiders coasted to a 45-34 victory. The 151 return yards is still a Raiders single-game record.

Throughout his collegiate and professional careers, Haynes always lined up against the oppositions' best receiver. "It's often a one-on-one situation, especially when you're going against the top guys in the league," he once explained. "You know it's going to be a tough day for you because the other team is going to be looking for this guy all day, as opposed to somebody who just comes into the game on third downs."

With the Raiders, Haynes routinely faced great receivers, including future Hall of Famers Charlie Joiner of the San Diego Chargers and the Seattle Seahawks' Steve Largent. "When you're playing against that caliber of receiver," he once offered, "every game is like playing in the Super Bowl."

Ironically, Haynes originally envisioned himself as a receiver. In fact, as a freshman at ASU, he was projected as a wide receiver. However, that changed when coach Kush successfully recruited John Jefferson, who later starred with the Chargers and Green Bay Packers "I wanted to play," Haynes reflected, "so I had to learn to run backwards." Needless to say, he became very adept at the maneuver.

In addition to having great athletic skill, Haynes was also a student of the game. He spent countless hours studying game film looking for tendencies in opposing receivers and quarterbacks alike. "Receivers do a lot of things to try to break your concentration -- moving their arms, sboulders, knees, feet, what-have-you," Haynes noted. "That's why I watch the belt buckle. It's pretty bard to move that part of the body if that's not where he's going."

Haynes realized the public perception of a defensive back was simple. "You're always either bad or great," he said. "There are no in-betweens. I wish the public was more educated about defenses but they're not ... I've had some of my best games when I've completely shut out a guy and it goes unnoticed."

However, his play didn't go unnoticed by the Raiders "other" Hall of Fame cornerback Willie Brown who had retired shortly before Haynes joined the squad. "Haynes played man-to-man better than anyone," Brown said in a 1993 interview. "There's no question about it, Mike will be in the Hall of Fame."

The Pro Football Hall of Fame's 36-man Selection Committee obviously agreed.

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### **MIKE HAYNES**

Haynes, Michael James  
Arizona State

B: 7 / 1 / 1953, Denison, TX

Drafted: 1976 Round 1 NE

1976 NE 14	1977 NE 14	1978 NE 16	1979 NE 16	1980 NE 13
1981 NE 8	1982 NE 9	1983 LARd 5	1984 LARd 16	1985 LARd 16
1986 LARd 13	1987 LARd 8	1988 LARd 16	1989 LARd 13	

### **DB**

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HS: John Marshall [Los Angeles, CA]