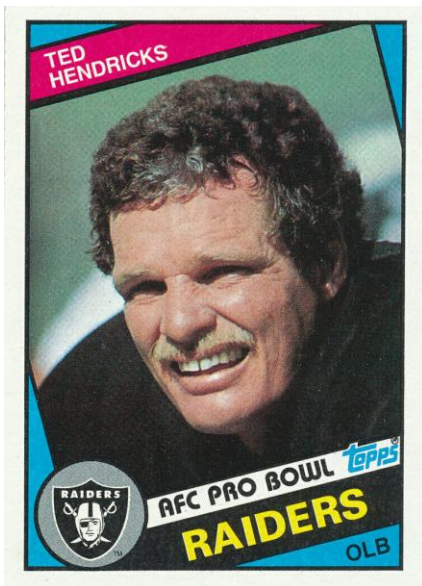




Ted Hendricks

This article was written by Rich Shmelter

Never let it be said that Ted Hendricks did not enjoy having fun. The free-spirited Hendricks often entertained teammates with antics a bit eccentric, but highly humorous. He once rode a horse onto the practice field and wore a harlequin mask during a Monday Night Football telecast and a camera picked it up for the whole nation to see. He knocked over a yield sign and delivered it to John Madden's home upon hearing of the coach's retirement from the Raiders because he did not want to arrive empty handed. These were just a few of the prankster's antics out of a long list.



He also earned two nicknames during his playing days, the first being “the Mad Stork”, due to his height. The second came while with the Raiders after accidentally kicking a ball carrier in the head with his foot and knocking him out during practice. He quickly became “Kick Em’ in the Head Ted”, which was shortened to “Kick Em”, and it was the one that Hendricks liked over “the Mad Stork”. Besides providing laughs, Hendricks also provided amazing talent that took him from a three-time college All-American to enshrinement in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. In between these incredible accolades, he



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put together a 15-year career beginning in 1969 as a second-round draft pick of the Baltimore Colts.

At 6-7, 215 pounds, Hendricks was considered too light to play defensive end in the pros, and too tall to be a linebacker. The Colts at first felt the same about Hendricks and did not know what position he was best suited for. In his rookie year, they used him primarily on special teams for half the season. At the halfway point of the year, head coach Don Shula did not like the way his team was playing and looked to make some changes. It was then that Hendricks saw action at right linebacker, and from that time on, all the critics were silenced.

In his second season, the Colts won Super Bowl V and Hendricks received his first All-Pro honor. After five great seasons with Baltimore, the Colts surprised many by trading Hendricks to the Green Bay Packers while at the top of his game in 1974. What became even more of a shock was when Green Bay let him get away after one season. In his lone season with the Packers, Hendricks intercepted five passes, blocked seven kicks, recorded a safety, and made his second All-Pro team.

In 1975, the Packers traded Hendricks to the Raiders for two first round draft picks, but it was Oakland that made out the best in the deal. However, at first it did not appear that way. Once again in his career, for reasons not quite clear, the Raiders used Hendricks only sparingly during the 1975 season. It seemed that they just could not find a regular spot for him. Oakland played a 4-3 defense, which meant four down linemen and three linebackers. When Hendricks arrived, the team had three starting linebackers that they were satisfied with. For this reason, Hendricks was only used in frequent passing situations, or when the opposition was forced to punt. To say the least, the All-Pro linebacker was getting frustrated as each week passed, and he was still standing on the sideline watching the action instead of being a part of it.

An opportunity to start his first game for the Silver and Black arose in a divisional playoff matchup with the Cincinnati Bengals after defensive end Tony Cline went down with an injury prior to the game. The Raiders shifted into a 3-4 defensive alignment, which called for the use of three down linemen and four linebackers. Hendricks set up a few steps back from where the defensive end lined up and remained in the upright stance of a linebacker. At the snap, it was his job to stop anything run around the end. In passing situations, it was his responsibility to rush the quarterback. He did a fantastic job all afternoon, and sacked Cincinnati quarterback Ken Anderson four times in a 31-28 Oakland win.

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By 1976, head coach John Madden realized that Hendricks was going to be a force to be reckoned with, and over the next nine seasons, the All-Pro linebacker did indeed wreak havoc on opposing offenses, helping them win three Super Bowls in the process.

Madden knew that the best place to play Hendricks was everywhere. This might seem impossible, but actually it was quite clear. His assignment became that of a freelance defender, who would go up and down the line of scrimmage behind the defensive linemen while the opposing quarterback was calling the signals prior to the snap. He would then set himself up where he thought the play was going to be run. The job was based on experience and reaction, and he was right almost every time. It was designed to disrupt the flow of the offense, because they never knew where Hendricks was going to be coming from. It was also impossible to create a scheme in practice to defend against him.

Hendricks was strong, solid, powerful, quick, and had great balance. With his long arms, he was able to wrap them around a ball carrier and clamp down like a vice. Once he got those arms around someone, they were not going to get away. The only place the opposition was headed after the grip was applied, was down onto the turf with incredible force. His height was also used to disrupt plays by obstructing the quarterback's view, batting down passes, and jumping up to block kicks. Whatever was asked of him he did very well, and his great sense of humor kept teammates loose on the field and in the locker room.

His excellence did not go unnoticed, as he earned eight trips to the Pro Bowl (1971-74, 1980-1983), All-AFC (1976, 1980, 1981, 1982), and in addition to his All-Pro seasons with Baltimore and Green Bay, he was twice honored while with the Raiders in 1980 and 1982.

Other highlights from the outstanding career of Ted Hendricks included playing in 215 consecutive games, which was the most by any linebacker in pro football history, 25 blocked kicks, an NFL record four safeties, 26 interceptions, and a post-season NFL record of four fumble recoveries in a career. He was honored with the 1978 Lineman of the Year Award presented to him by the Raiders' Lineman's Club, selection to the 1970 and 1980 All-Decade NFL Teams, and to the 75th NFL Anniversary All-Time Team.

His football career began in the Sunshine State of Florida on the high school and college level and reached its climax in magnificent fashion there as well. On January 22, 1984,

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the Raiders defeated Washington in Super Bowl XVIII in Tampa, Florida, to earn Hendricks his fourth championship ring. At the beginning of his pro career, it appeared that no one knew where to put him in the lineup, but 21 years later, on August 4, 1990, the Pro Football Hall of Fame had no trouble finding a spot for him among the game's immortals in his first year of eligibility.

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