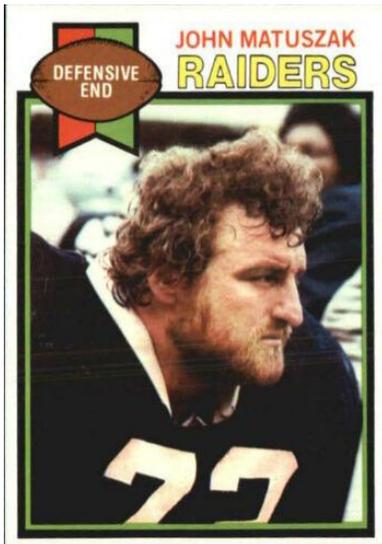




John Matuszak

This article was written by Rich Shmelter

The “Tooz” embodied the outlaw image of the Raiders. Whether it was opposing quarterbacks, running backs, or the wild-life, Matuszak pursued it all with the same voracious intensity. On the football field this quality allowed him to become a driving force and inspirational leader of a Raider defense that helped win two Super Bowl titles during his watch. Off the field, this same passion led to altercations with law enforcement, substance abuse, and eventually his demise.



The “Tooz” was a massive, powerful, and extremely imposing figure who could disrupt the flow of an offense with his fierce reckless abandon style of play. He was also an avid weightlifter, able to bench press well over 400 pounds. He was also a force to be reckoned with in everyday life as well. While in college at Missouri, an altercation resulting in a man needing plastic surgery to repair damage inflicted on his face after he insulted Matuszak’s girlfriend.

Matuszak later transferred out of Missouri after not getting along with head coach Dan Devine. His next stop was the University of Tampa. While there, an altercation during a basketball game caused another person’s face to be rearranged, and this time it cost Matuszak hundreds of thousands of dollars in an out of court settlement.



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On the field he was so impressive that the Houston Oilers made him the number one pick in the entire 1973 draft. After making some All-Rookie teams, his feelings toward Houston's coach, the legendary Sid Gillman, and mentor to Al Davis, turned sour. One day, he was tired of the way he was being treated after the NFL strike in 1974 and went to the Houston Texans of the World Football League. Even though he was signed to a long-term contract with the Oilers, Matuszak decided to play for the Texans. Within five minutes of his first game in a Texans' uniform, twenty sheriffs converged on him with a summons to appear in court. A judge decided that Matuszak was in breach of his contract with the Oilers and ordered him back to that team.

Needless to say, his time in Houston did not last much longer, and he was traded to the Kansas City Chiefs at mid-season. While with the Chiefs, Matuszak's wife at the time tried to run him over with her car, and on another occasion, he overdosed after mixing about four beers with Valium. His heart stopped, but thanks to quick thinking on the part of Kansas City head coach Paul Wiggin, who pounded on his chest until a heartbeat was restored, "the Tooz" lived to play another day. The incident proved to be the end for Matuszak with the Chiefs. He was traded to the Washington Redskins, but cut right before the regular season opener. Totally dejected, Matuszak returned home to Milwaukee, Wisconsin where he pondered the idea of going to play in the Canadian Football League.

Over in Oakland, John Madden was faced with a serious dilemma. The Raiders' defensive line was quickly depleted by major injuries to ends, Tony Cline and Horace Jones, and tackle Art Thoms. To counteract the problem, Madden decided to go with a 3-4 alignment, and needed a big, physical end. At the suggestion of Al Davis, The Raiders signed Matuszak.

The Raiders prided themselves in taking in outcasts and hell raisers, and Matuszak fit the mold. They also knew that men like "the Tooz" would play their hearts out for someone who believed in them. In no time, Matuszak proved himself, and became the force that many felt he could become. He was still capable of wild times off the field, like the occasion when "the Tooz" set a team record for getting seven naked young women to join him in a hot tub. However, on the Raiders, he fit in as just another guy letting loose from time to time. He finished out his career with the team, retiring in 1982 after back problems hampered his performance.

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Already having appeared in the films *North Dallas Forty* (1979) and *Caveman* (1981), during his playing days, Matuszak looked to the acting profession as his next endeavor. He added *The Ice Pirates* (1984) and *Goonies* (1985) to his film credits, as well as appearances in many of the popular television series of the 1980's. The man who once boasted that vodka and Valium was his breakfast of champions, claimed in his popular autobiography, *"Cruisin' With the Tooz"*, in 1987, that he was clean and looking forward to getting on with life. Unfortunately, even though the book had a happy ending, Matuszak did not. On June 17, 1989, his girlfriend called for an ambulance after Matuszak suffered what was later ruled a heart attack brought on by drugs and alcohol. Some claim that cocaine also played a part in his demise.⁹ He died enroute from his Hollywood home to St. Joseph Medical Center in Burbank.¹⁰ He was only 38 years old. Despite his walk on the wild side for many years, Matuszak gave countless hours of himself to helping charities involving children. Like everyone on this planet, the "Tooz" was a human being who fought demons, but unfortunately, he lost in the end.

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