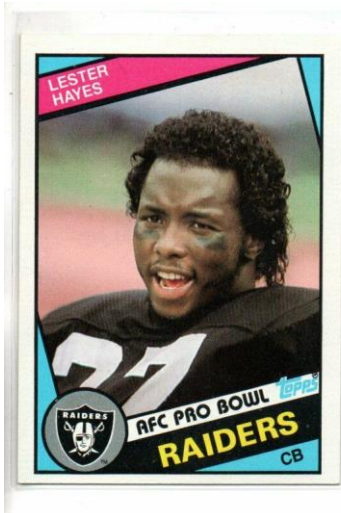


Lester Hayes

This article was written by Rich Shmelter

During the 1980's, "the Judge" presided over the Raider secondary, dishing out his brand of justice on all who tested him. In the mid-1980's, Lester Hayes teamed up with Mike Haynes to become the most dominant set of cornerbacks in the game.



With the legendary Willie Brown's stellar career nearing its end, the Raiders braced themselves for the vacuum created by drafting Lester Hayes in 1977. To replace one of the best cornerbacks in history is obviously a tough mountain to climb. However, the task was made easier once the Raiders saw Hayes make a name for himself by emerging into one of the most respected defensive backs of his time.

At Texas A&M, Hayes played two years at linebacker, and finished out his college career at safety. On the day he was drafted, Hayes was disappointed when 14 other defensive backs were selected ahead of him. The Raiders got Hayes in the fifth round, and it was then that he decided to make all the other teams in the league regret their grave mistake.

At first Hayes was faced with a challenging roadblock. The Raiders wanted him to play cornerback, which he never did before. He worked hard prior to his rookie training camp to familiarize himself with the new position. Helping his confidence once at camp was



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the fact that Hayes had to cover the great Fred Biletnikoff in practice and did well. By the final game of his rookie season, he captured a starting job and held it for the next decade.

Not only did covering Biletnikoff help Hayes learn to be a cornerback, but the Hall of Fame receiver also introduced him to the world of Stickum, which was a substance that allowed anything it came in contact with to immediately stick to the goo. It was during his rookie year when he went to intercept a pass and it went off his fingertips. He then noticed Biletnikoff's old pal Stickum, put some on his fingers, and then everywhere. The love affair with the flypaper in a can lasted until the NFL banned the substance in 1981.

Hayes became a master at man-to-man coverage and the bump and run. He would line up across from a receiver, crouch down low, and then explode into the opponent at the snap, bumping him for the allowed five yards downfield. The shuck allowed Hayes to disrupt the receiver's timing on pass routes, and then he had the ability to stay right with the receiver throughout the play.

Hayes worked hard on the field to establish himself as a top-rate defender, and off the field, he studied film to find even the most remote tendency that could allow him an edge. He came onto the team with the most intimidating secondary possibly of all-time. A few years later, he established himself as the leader of another group of defensive backs that ruled the early to mid-1980's. Hayes helped the Raiders win two Super Bowls, was selected to five Pro Bowls, four All-Pro teams, and was the 1980 NFL Defensive Player of the Year. Upon his retirement following the 1986 season, his 39 regular season interceptions tied him with Willie Brown for the all-time lead in Raider history, and he added eight more in the post-season.

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