



Ravens NT Ngata proving he belongs among elite at his position

By Mike Wilkening

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Oh, the defensive tackles that could be playing on the AFC side in the Pro Bowl. The Titans' **Albert Haynesworth** looks to be a surefire selection. The Jets' **Kris Jenkins** has recaptured his dominant form with his new club. So, too, has the Browns' **Shaun Rogers**, whose work might go unappreciated because of Cleveland's disappointing season.

On the other end of the spectrum from Rogers is Ravens NT **Haloti Ngata**, who has been overlooked for his work on a star-studded Baltimore defense. But that is quickly changing.

Ngata is simply playing too well for that to happen any longer.

Haloti Ngata

The 6-4, 345-pound Ngata has played exceptionally in his third NFL season. In addition to being a force vs. the run, he's having a remarkable season defending the pass. Through Week 11, Ngata has defended five passes and intercepted two. In Baltimore's 41-14 win over Houston on Nov. 9, Ngata did something you seldom see from a defensive tackle: He dropped into coverage, leaped to deflect a **Sage Rosenfels** pass with both hands, tracked down the ball and caught it in the endzone, ending a Houston scoring opportunity.

How strong and quick is Ngata? The Ravens occasionally use him on offense, where he has made appearances in the team's goal-line package, as well as on special teams.

The way we hear it, there are some around the Ravens who believe Ngata has been playing this well the past two years, but only now is he starting to get widespread recognition.

His teammates are doing their share in that regard. Ravens RILB **Bart Scott** recently ended an interview with ESPN's "Pardon the Interruption" by singing the praises of Ngata unprompted. "Make no bones about it, the best defensive lineman in the game right now is Haloti Ngata, and I dare you guys to put on the film and compare him to anybody you got in the league," Scott said.

"He's a phenomenon," Ravens LILB **Ray Lewis** told Baltimore reporters recently of Ngata. "... He's playing the game at a very, very high level. It's surprising when you do see it. I've been around football a long time, but to see that guy's gifts athletically and what he does to destroy offenses, it's really special — definitely when you're playing behind him."