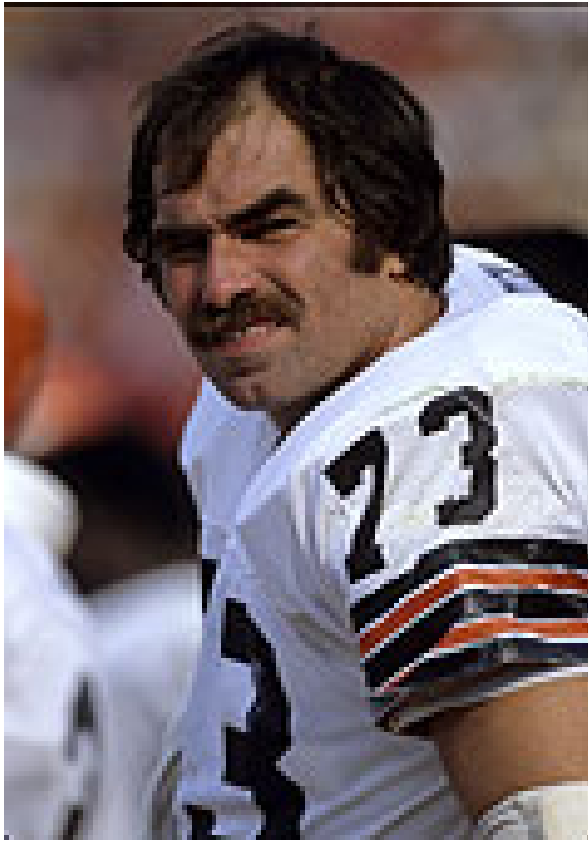


Blast From The Past: Doug Dieken (or, "Holding, #73, Offense")

Written by {ga=googleeph2}

Tuesday, October 18 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, October 19 2011 7:37 AM



I have the benefit of perspective (in other words, I am old). I have grown to hold the loyal and faithful of Cleveland sports figures near and dear to my heart. In contrast to the LeBrons and the Braylons, these guys seem to fall into one of two categories:

1) They were good, and upon being traded or released, they professed their love of the local fans, or

2) Over the years, they have become woven into the fabric of Cleveland sports.

Athletes falling into the former category always make me shake my head. They often clearly didn't want to leave Cleveland, and it usually seems we can use all of the goodwill we can muster. Some of these players included:

- Tom Candiotti. Traded to Toronto, when John Hart was giving up on 1991 and 1992 as he geared up for the opening of The Jake in 1994.
- Omar Vizquel. Might not have been wrong in principal to make room for youth; it just didn't

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work out with Jhonny Peralta.

- Earnest Byner. I suppose the Browns considered him damaged goods after his big fumble. Our loss was the Washington Redskins' gain.

- Steve Everitt. [He sported a Browns bandana on the Ravens' sidelines.](#) Actually, any of the Browns who ran over to the fans after the last game in 1995 fit here.

The latter category is familiar to most casual fans, and have included:

- The late, great Bob Feller.
- To some extent, Jim Brown. Regardless of his recent wacky divorce from the Browns, he's long been a supporter. During parts of the '80s and '90s, he was accessible to the casual fans mingling outside the old stadium after games.
- Shoot, Bernie Kosar fits both categories. This is at the core of his virtual sainthood in the lexicon of local heroes.



It's safe to say any ex-athlete who is a media analyst for a local team becomes part of the local landscape. And who better represents the Cleveland Browns and its fans than Doug Dieken?

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The lunch pail guy, with a sense of humor, who'd been a tight end for the University of Illinois (photo, right).

Notably, Dieken was a first-team All-Big Ten selection in 1970 after leading the Illini with 39 catches for 537 yards and four touchdowns. And he still holds the Illinois record for career receiving yardage by a tight end.

Upon Diek's being drafted in the sixth round by the Browns, head coach Nick Skorich put him at left tackle. He started 194 straight games over 14 years and 7 knee surgeries, following fellow long-time legends Lou Groza and Dick Schafrath at left tackle. He was a starter in the 1980 Pro Bowl.

An interesting fact I recently learned was that he was waived by the Browns, claimed by Miami, and brought back before his 1971 rookie season began. The Browns ended up waiving their third round pick that year, believing Doug Dieken to be the better special teams player. Dieken has said he kept his bags packed and his gas tank full during camp that year, just to be ready for his release at any moment.

Forty years later, as a Browns player (including a team record 203 straight games played) and as a broadcaster...

What most Browns fans love about Dieken is his knowing and living Cleveland Browns history, combined with the humorous accounts of his practical jokes through the years.

[For example, here is Diek as peacemaker during the highest intensity of the Browns-Steelers rivalry.](#) The guy knows what we Browns fans are all about.

But also:

Dieken's reputation has always been that he constantly was guilty of holding his opponent. His

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license plate read "MEHOLD" until his retirement, when he changed it to "MEHELD". Apparently, his current email address contains the "mehold" moniker as well. A story from the Browns forum has stuck with me: according to the teller, the Browns were once playing an intra-squad scrimmage in training camp, and were using NFL referees. The scrimmage was open to the public. During one play, a ref threw his flag and called holding on the offense. A fan sitting in the bleachers hollered, "It's Dieken. He's *always* holding." Diek ran off the field and up to the fan who'd made the announcement. He took the fan's beer, finished it, dropped the can to the ground, stepped on it, and told him, "Thanks, I needed that." Dieken then turned and ran back to the huddle for the next play!

Browns fans will remember the 1980 song, ["12 Days of Cleveland Browns Christmas."](#) Doug Dieken reportedly said, "I was so happy they said 'Doug Dieken blocking' instead of 'Doug Dieken holding!'"

In his book, *Crazy, with the Papers to Prove It: Stories about the Most Unusual*, Dan Coughlin notes that the penalty for Holding used to be 15 yards. Doug Dieken averaged twelve a year for fourteen years, and "when he reached 1,760 yards the Bay Village service department painted a stripe a mile long on Lake Road that began in front of his house."

[Check Google Books for some of the practical jokes pulled on each other by Coughlin and Dieken.](#)

Diek and Browns defensive lineman (and Cleveland native) Bob Golic held an annual contest to see who could put together the tackiest Christmas decorations at his locker. Dieken was tough to beat, and was likely to sport an artificial tree with tacky lights, music, and a photograph of head coach Marty Schottenheimer at the top.

[And you can check out comments by "Big Chuck" Schodowski from his recent book.](#)

Doug Dieken has always been likeable and accessible. I'd seen him down in The Flats in the 1980s, hanging out at an outside bar just talking to people who felt like talking to him. He started a conversation with me once. Although at my tender age, I froze and mumbled something stupid before walking away. I regretted that, because the guy is so down to earth and easygoing.

Dieken has also been involved in various charities such as the Special Olympics, and was NFL

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Man of the Year in 1982.

Thank you for reading.