

The Ten Greatest Buckeyes Of All-Time: #3 Jack "The Assassin" Tatum

Written by {ga=furls}

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Jack Tatum was one of the most prolific defensive backs in the history of college football, and had the Thorpe Award been established, Tatum would have likely won it three consecutive times in '68, '69, and '70. Known for his jarring hits and intimidation tactics, Tatum was the first true hybrid LB/S in college ball. Furls countdown continues of the ten greatest Buckeye football players of all time trudges on, and heads down the home stretch.



[10 - Rex Kern](#)

[#9 - Jim Stillwagon](#)

[#8 - Randy Gradishar](#)

[#7 - Vic Janowicz](#)

[#6 - Troy Smith](#)

[#5 - "Hopalong" Cassady](#)

[#4 - Orlando Pace](#)

Although the "Assassin" nickname did not take hold until his days with the Oakland Raiders, it is definitely an accurate description of the way that Tatum prowled the secondary for the Buckeyes. As the third and final member of this list from the 1968 "Super Sophomores" team, Tatum dominated and intimidated opposing receivers and running backs.

At 6'1", 208 lbs, Tatum was the original defensive hybrid. He had the speed and quickness to cover the most elite receivers in the NCAA and the strength and power to hit like a linebacker. Tatum would often fill both rolls in the same game, spending a significant portion of the game playing the run like a linebacker in the "box" from his safety position, or lining up on the outside to cover a team's best receiver.

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Tatum was widely feared by opposing players in both the NFL and NCAA, and opposing coaches would spend a significant amount of their time game planning for him in particular. Tatum's style in the secondary was very much like his "assassin" moniker would imply, oftentimes he would hang back, waiting for the lazy pass over the middle and the swoop down upon his prey, delivering a devastating blow. It was this devastating blow that left a lasting impression on opposing receivers resulting in a pandemic of "gator arms" in games against the Buckeyes, for an opponent's fear of Tatum was every bit as important to his actual coverage skills as his speed. Tatum knew this and capitalized on it.

His intimidation tactic was not only effective against receivers. He could punish a running back with the best of the linebackers. In the 1969 Rose Bowl the Buckeyes faced a rather formidable running back, USC's O.J. Simpson. While Simpson started the game with a bang and would finish with 171 yards on the ground, it was his sloppy play following a punishing blow by Jack Tatum near the goal line that would decide the game. A touchdown seemed assured as Simpson was breaking free near the goal line with only one man to beat. Tatum met him one on one and PUNISHED him, driving the 1968 Heisman Trophy winner out of bounds and changing the momentum of the game. That was a moment that defined the career of Jack Tatum.

Tatum would finish his career with a National Title and two unanimous All American selections, but unfortunately the Thorpe Award had not been created yet to recognize the superior play of defensive backs yet, otherwise he may have won the award in 1968, 1969, and 1970. Tatum was so dominant and ground breaking in his play in the secondary, that he has been selected as a starter on most "All Century" college football teams and modern day greats like Ronnie Lott list him as a key influence in the development of their playing style. Not bad for a guy that Woody Hayes brought to Columbus to play running back.