

Pro Football Hall of Fame Class of 2004

Carl Eller

In 1964, Carl Eller, a consensus All-America with the University of Minnesota, was a first-round draft pick of both the National Football League's Minnesota Vikings and the Buffalo Bills of the then-rival American Football League. A 6-6, 247-pound defensive stalwart, Eller opted to stay in a familiar environment and signed with the Vikings. For the next 15 years through 1978, he was a fixture in one of pro football's most effective defensive alignments. He finished his career with one final season with the Seattle Seahawks in 1979, having played in 225 regular season games.

During Eller's career, the Vikings enjoyed great success on the field. Starting in 1968, Eller's fifth campaign, Minnesota won 10 NFL/NFC Central Division titles in the next 11 seasons. The Vikings won the 1969 NFL championship and NFC crowns in 1973, 1974, and 1976 and played in four Super Bowls.

A major factor in this long string of successes was a ferocious defensive line often referred to as "The Purple People Eaters." Eller was the left end of a line that included Jim Marshall at the opposite end and Hall of Famer Alan Page and Gary Larsen at the tackles. Extremely quick and mobile for his size, Carl was an excellent defender against the run and superb as a pass rusher. In one three-string season from 1975 to 1977, he recorded 44 sacks, according to unofficial statistics (sacks did not become an official NFL statistic until 1982).

He also was effective in blocking kicks and, during his career he recovered 23 opponents' fumbles, the third best mark in NFL annals at the time of his retirement. It was Eller who caused the now infamous fumble that led to teammate Jim Marshall's wrong-way run for a safety in 1964 in a game against the San Francisco 49ers.

Super-stardom was predicted for Eller from his first day in training camp following the 1964 College All-Star Game. He didn't disappoint as he went on to become one of the most honored defensive players of his time. He became a regular his rookie season and was named first- or second-team All-Pro every year from 1967 through 1973. He was All-NFL or All-NFC 1968 through 1973 and then All-NFC again in 1975. In 1971, he won the George Halas Award as the NFL's leading defensive player and was selected to play in six Pro Bowls (1969-1972, 1974, and 1975).

Defensive End

Carl Lee Eller 6-6, 247 Minnesota

Born January 25, 1942, in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

1964-1978 Minnesota Vikings, 1979 Denver Broncos

Selected in 1st round of NFL draft by Minnesota and AFL draft by Buffalo, 1964. . .Quickly established himself at left defensive end on the Vikings' "Purple People Eaters" defensive line. . .Excellent at stopping run, devastating pass rusher. . .Amassed 44 sacks, 1975-1977. . .Named first- or second-team All-NFL each season, 1967-1973. . .Played in six Pro Bowls.