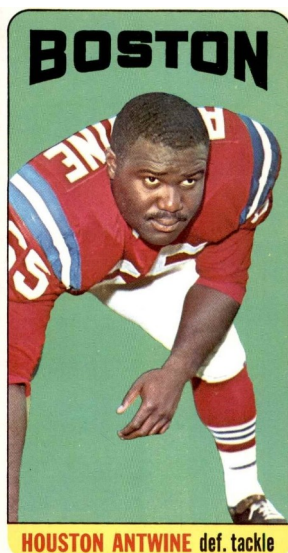


Houston Antwine

This article was written by Matt Keddie.

Houston J. Antwine was a menace for opposing offensive linemen during his AFL days with the Boston Patriots. He displayed a perfect combination of run stopping and quick passing rushing capabilities that tormented opposing offenses. Buffalo Bills Hall of Fame offensive guard Steve Shaw routinely went up against Antwine saying of him, “I look the way I look today – bald – because of Houston Antwine. I worried about him. He was one of the best pass rushers in the AFL. He was my nemesis.”¹

Antwine was a six-time AFL All-Star (1963-1968) and six-time All-AFL (1963-1968) player during his 11 seasons (1961-1971) with the Patriots.² Though sacks were not an official statistic until nearly two decades later, he compiled 38.0 unofficial sacks that ranks twelfth in franchise history. He also led the team in unofficial sacks three times from 1967-1969.³



Gino Cappelletti, the team's premier offensive player at the time, raved about Antwine's abilities stating, “He was quick as a cat. He was an every-down player who could rush the passer with his great speed and technique but was strong enough to stop the run.”⁴ Antwine teamed with Jim Lee Hunt and Larry Eisenhauer to form a formidable defensive front that became among the league's best. From 1963 to 1969, the line solidified a Patriots defense that ranked in the top 5 in points allowed four times (1963-1966).⁵



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Patriots CEO and Chairman Robert Kraft vividly remembers those days recalling, “In the 1960s, the defensive tackle tandem of Houston Antwine and Jim Lee Hunt was as good as any in the league. Houston's play helped push the Patriots to our first division championship in 1963.”⁶ The 1963 team finished at 7-6-1, tying the Buffalo Bills for first place in the Eastern Division. The result forged a divisional playoff game, the first in AFL history, in which the Patriots won convincingly, 26-8, at Buffalo's War Memorial Stadium.⁷ Boston boasted the second ranked defense in points allowed, with six starters named AFL All-Stars (Antwine, Bob Dee, Eisenhower, Tom Addison, Nick Buoniconti and Ron Hall). The Patriots advanced to play in the AFL Championship Game, but fell to the San Diego Chargers, 51-10.⁸

Boston rebounded with a 10-3-1 mark in 1964, but earned a second place finish behind the 12-2 Buffalo Bills. Buffalo went on to beat the San Diego Chargers in the AFL title game. The Patriots would finish no higher than second from 1964 until after the AFL-NFL merger.⁹ In 1966, the team turned in an 8-4-2 mark, which would be their last winning record until over a decade later (1976).

Part of the team's success can be attributed to head coach Mike Holovak, who started as a scout, then an assistant under Lou Saban.¹⁰ Once Saban was fired, Holovak was named the head coach mid-way through the 1961 season. Holovak guided the team to a 52-46-9 record in eight seasons, earning the Associated Press Coach of the Year award in 1964

¹ “State Your Case: 'Twine could unravel an offense with a rush,” SI.com, April 10, 2018, <https://www.si.com/nfl/talkoffame/nfl/state-your-case-twine-could-unravel-an-offense-with-a-rush>.

² “Houston Antwine,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.

³ “New England Patriots Career Defense Leaders,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/nwe/career-defense.htm>.

⁴ “State Your Case: 'Twine could unravel an offense with a rush,” SI.com, April 10, 2018, <https://www.si.com/nfl/talkoffame/nfl/state-your-case-twine-could-unravel-an-offense-with-a-rush>.

⁵ “Boston/New England Patriots Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/nwe/>.

⁶ “Houston Antwine dies at age 72,” ESPN.com, December 27, 2011, https://www.espn.com/boston/nfl/story/_/id/7393543/ex-new-england-patriots-standout-houston-antwine-dies-age-72.

⁷ “Divisional Round – Boston Patriots at Buffalo Bills – December 28th, 1963,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/boxscores/196312280buf.htm>.

⁸ “Boston/New England Patriots Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/nwe/>.

⁹ “Boston/New England Patriots Franchise Encyclopedia,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/nwe/>.



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and the UPI AFL Coach of the Year in 1966.¹¹ His utilization of the Patriots' talent led the team to five winning seasons in eight years.

Antwine was born on April 11, 1939 in Louise, Mississippi. He played college football at Southern Illinois as a standout two-way lineman. His size of 6'0" and 270 pounds coupled with his athleticism and speed turned heads not only from his teammates, but from professional scouts. As a result, he earned the status as one of the best linemen in school history.¹² The Salukis won the Interstate Intercollegiate Athletic Conference championship during his senior season in 1960, then voted Antwine the team MVP. Antwine carried over his skill set to the wrestling mat, where he was a two-time NAIA wrestling finalist, winning one NAIA championship.¹³ His wrestling days earned him the nickname, "Twine."

He was drafted by both the AFL and NFL in the 1961 draft. The Detroit Lions selected him with the 38th pick in the NFL draft, while the Houston Oilers chose him in the eighth round of the AFL draft.¹⁴ Shortly thereafter, Antwine was traded to the Boston Patriots for a fourth round draft choice in the 1962 AFL draft.¹⁵

Antwine saw limited action in his first two seasons, making just a start each in 1961 and 1962. In 1963 he took over the starting duties, earning consensus first-team All-AFL status from outlets such as the Associated Press, *Newspaper Ent. Association*, *NY Daily News*, and the UPI.¹⁶ He also earned a spot on the AFL All-Star team, a distinction he received each season from 1963 to 1968. He recorded 5.5 unofficial sacks in 1964 and his only career interception came during the 1965 campaign, while adding 3.5 unofficial sacks.¹⁷

¹ 0 "Boston/New England Patriots Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/nwe/>.

¹ 1 "Mike Holovak," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/coaches/HoloMi0.htm>.

¹ 2 "Houston Antwine," siusalukis.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://siusalukis.com/honors/saluki-hall-of-fame/houston-antwine/8>.

¹ 3 McGuire, Steve. "65 Days to Kickoff: Houston Antwine," lastwordonsports.com, July 5, 2019, <https://lastwordonsports.com/nfl/2019/07/05/new-england-patriots-of-the-past-houston-antwine/>.

¹ 4 "Houston Antwine," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.

¹ 5 "Houston Antwine," prosportstransactions.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.prosportstransactions.com/football/Search/SearchResults.php?Player=antwine&Team=&BeginDate=&EndDate=&PlayerMovementChkBx=yes&submit=Search>.

¹ 6 "Houston Antwine," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.

¹ 7 "Houston Antwine," ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.



Antwine's two best statistical seasons were 1967 and 1968 when he recorded 6.0 and 7.5 unofficial sacks, respectively. He was a four-time second-team All-AFL choice from 1966 through 1969.¹⁸ In 1972, he was traded to the Philadelphia Eagles in exchange for linebacker Bill Hobbs, where he played in nine of 14 games.¹⁹

In 11 seasons with the Boston/New England franchise, Antwine played in 142 games, making 115 starts.²⁰ He was inducted into the Patriots Hall of Fame (2015), named to the Patriots All-1960s Team (1971), and was included on the Patriots' 35th and 50th Anniversary Teams.²¹ Antwine was also named to the AFL All-Time Team as the starting defensive tackle alongside the Buffalo Bills' Tom Sestak. He beat out Hall of Famer Buck Buchanan and standout Tom Keating.²²

Outside of football, Antwine had a presence as a civil rights activist. A particular example is the 1965 AFL All-Star game that was to be held in New Orleans. Twenty-two players decided to boycott the game, which was successful. Antwine said, “[The boycott] didn't get the publicity that I think it should have. We didn't feel it was properly addressed. ... The hostility and the treatment that we received in New Orleans was never, never really publicized. I've talked to Cookie (Gilchrist) and he was really ticked off about it. Right now, if you ask somebody, 'Do you remember the AFL All-Star Game that was supposed to be played in New Orleans?' Nobody remembers what happened.”²³ However, the boycott did force racial changes in New Orleans for the city to secure an NFL franchise a few years later.

Antwine died on December 26, 2011. He is still remembered fondly by Patriot fans.

¹ 8 “Houston Antwine,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.

¹ 9 “Houston Antwine,” prosportstransactions.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.prosportstransactions.com/football/Search/SearchResults.php?Player=antwine&Team=&BeginDate=&EndDate=&PlayerMovementChkBx=yes&submit=Search>.

² 0 “Houston Antwine,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed September 18, 2022, <https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/A/AntwHo00.htm>.

² 1 McGuire, Steve. “65 Days to Kickoff: Houston Antwine,” lastwordonsports.com, July 5, 2019, <https://lastwordonsports.com/nfl/2019/07/05/new-england-patriots-of-the-past-houston-antwine/>.

² 2 “State Your Case: 'Twine could unravel an offense with a rush,” SI.com, April 10, 2018, <https://www.si.com/nfl/talkoffame/nfl/state-your-case-twine-could-unravel-an-offense-with-a-rush>.

² 3 McGuire, Steve. “65 Days to Kickoff: Houston Antwine,” lastwordonsports.com, July 5, 2019, <https://lastwordonsports.com/nfl/2019/07/05/new-england-patriots-of-the-past-houston-antwine/>.