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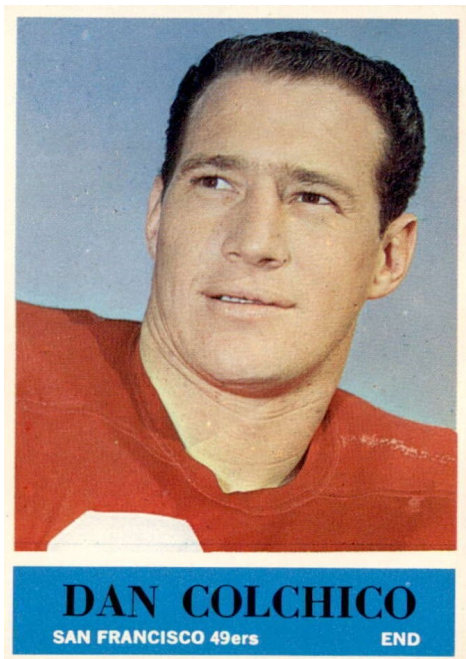
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### Dan Colchico

This article was written by Matthew Keddie.

Dan Colchico might not be tabbed by fans as one of the toughest players in football history, but just ask his teammates or the media because they will disagree with that sentiment. In 1964, the 49ers players voted him as the recipient of the prestigious Len Eshmont Award, given to the 49ers player who demonstrates the highest degree of team spirit and inspiration.<sup>1</sup> Award winning author Dave Newhouse wrote about him, “There are more famous 49ers than Colchico, but none more committed. There are none who sacrificed as much physically as Colchico.”<sup>2</sup> On his physicality and toughness throughout his career Colchico said, “Crack back blocking was wide open in those days, and they used to get us pretty good. One season, I had 140 cortisone shots in my knees and shoulders – two, three shots a day sometimes. I had an operation in January, another one in March. But I played every game that year.”<sup>3</sup> It was not just his toughness that defined his character, rather his determination and hard work fueled his NFL career as a member of the San Francisco 49ers and New Orleans Saints.<sup>4</sup>

Colchico was drafted in the seventh round of the 1959 NFL Draft by the 49ers, and in the 1960 AFL Draft by the Boston (now New England) Patriots. Having grown up in the Bay Area, and spent his college years at nearby Diablo Valley Junior College and San Jose State University, he signed with the 49ers.<sup>5</sup>





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Colchico earned his stripes immediately as a rookie in 1960. Standing at an immense 6'5" and over 240 pounds, he fit perfectly along the defensive front. Wanting to make an immediate impact, at summer training camp he challenged the team's best players. He recalled, "I picked out the biggest, toughest guy around, Bob St. Clair, and figured if I did good against him, my chances were good."<sup>6</sup> On describing the results he said, "We had a pretty good battle. I never went to the back of the line to wait my turn. I'd sneak back in to face the tougher guys on the team. I became a starter by the second game."<sup>7</sup> It turned out well for Colchico, as he became a solid fixture, making 11 starts in 12 games as a rookie, on the NFL's top ranked scoring defense, that yielded roughly 17 points per game. The 49ers defensive front also included Monte Clark, 10-year veteran and future Hall of Famer Leo Nomellini, and Pro Bowler Charlie Krueger.<sup>8</sup>

The 49ers finished at 7-5, tied for second in the NFL Western Division, and one game behind the leading Green Bay Packers. The offense ranked 10<sup>th</sup> out of 13 teams in scoring, likely preventing the team from earning a playoff berth.<sup>9</sup> The 49ers lost the tiebreaker to the Detroit Lions for the right to play in the Playoff Bowl, a game in which the Lions defeated the Cleveland Browns, 17-16, for third place. On a personal level, in addition to earning the spot in the starting lineup, Colchico finished fifth in the UPI's Rookie of the Year voting.<sup>10</sup> The only defensive player finishing higher was linebacker Maxie Baughan of the Philadelphia Eagles.<sup>11</sup>

- 1 "Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76," NFL.com, April 29, 2014, [Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76 \(nfl.com\)](#).
- 2 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 118.
- 3 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 118-119.
- 4 "Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76," NFL.com, April 29, 2014, [Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76 \(nfl.com\)](#).
- 5 "Daniel Colchico," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Daniel Colchico Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 6 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.
- 7 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.
- 8 "1960 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1960 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 9 "1960 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1960 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 10 "Daniel Colchico," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Daniel Colchico Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).
- 11 "1960 Awards Voting," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1960 Awards Voting | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).



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The next season the 49ers plummeted to a fifth-place finish in the NFL Western Division with a 7-6-1 record. The offense improved to fourth in scoring, but a winless four-game (0-3-1) stretch in the middle of the season hurt their chances of improvement. After a two-game win streak, the 49ers lost two of their final three contests to the Baltimore Colts, both three-point decisions.<sup>12</sup> Colchico started in all 14 contests and recorded a career best 9.5 unofficial sacks.<sup>13</sup>

Colchico continued his strong play in 1962, amassing an unofficial 8.5 sacks and recovered a fumble. Meanwhile, the team regressed to a 6-8 mark, its first losing season since 1956. San Francisco lacked playmakers on both sides of the ball, as the team featured just one Pro Bowl player, fullback J. D. Smith.<sup>14</sup> Quarterback John Brodie was sacked an unofficial career high 33 times, while the defense allowed 4.8 yards per rush. A 3-2 start in the first five games showed promise, but was halted following four consecutive double-digit defeats.<sup>15</sup>

Head coach Red Hickey was on the hot seat entering the 1963 campaign. However, after the team started 0-3, he resigned. Defensive backs coach Jack Christensen was named the interim head coach. San Francisco sported the league's most anemic offense that scored just 198 points.<sup>16</sup> Brodie started in just three games due to injury and the team never found any sort of momentum with backups Lamar McHan and Bob Waters. Their 2-12 record and last place finish was the worst in franchise history. On a positive note, the team acquired several players from the 1963 and 1964 NFL Drafts that would help San Francisco return to its competitive nature.<sup>17</sup> Its first-round choice, the eighth pick overall in the 1963 draft was Kermit Alexander, a defensive back who would become a reliable starter in the defensive backfield. In the 1964 draft, San Francisco had quite a haul, choosing receiver Dave Parks with the top pick overall, quarterback George Mira in the

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1 2 “1961 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1961 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sf/1961-roster.htm).

1 3 “Daniel Colchico,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Daniel Colchico Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/players/C/ColchiDa.htm).

1 4 “1962 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1962 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sf/1962-roster.htm).

1 5 “1962 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1962 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.pro-football-reference.com/teams/sf/1962-roster.htm).



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second round, future Hall of Famer Dave Wilcox at No. 29, and offensive guard Howard Mudd, a two-time All-Pro, in the ninth round.<sup>18</sup>

Under Christensen, the offense saw vast improvement by 1965, when they were the top ranked scoring unit, averaging over 30 points per game. Parks became Brodie's go-to target. Running back Ken Willard averaged 4.1 yards per rush. San Francisco was in the playoff hunt right to the end of the season, but their hopes were dashed in a 61-20 crushing defeat to the Bears in Chicago's Wrigley Field.<sup>19</sup> 1965 was Colchico's final playing season in San Francisco. He suffered major injuries that allowed him to play in just one game, that included rupturing his Achilles tendon. The rehabilitation process took more than a year for him to recover. In the interim, during the 1966 season he worked in the team's front office in an administrative role.<sup>20</sup>

In 1967 he worked as a defensive line coach, then finished his career with the New Orleans Saints when he was traded for running back Jim Jordan.<sup>21</sup> Jordan ended up playing in one career NFL contest, while Colchico played in nine games for New Orleans in 1968 and 1969 combined.<sup>22</sup>

He retired at the of the 1969 season, totaling 76 career NFL games, making 66 starts. Colchico recorded an unofficial 27.5 career sacks and recovered seven career fumbles. He never earned an All-Pro selection or Pro Bowl honors, but there is no doubt that Colchico gave his all to the team on every snap in every game.<sup>23</sup> Charlie Krueger said of him, "Danny was the greatest competitor I ever knew in football."<sup>24</sup> Bob St. Clair remarked, "Colchico knew only one pace and that was full speed ahead."<sup>25</sup>

Over the years, Colchico built a strong camaraderie with his teammates. Of note were all the stories they told of him. Colchico told one saying, "One game, Charlie Krueger had to tell me which way to move on every play, because I had a concussion."<sup>26</sup> Colchico took

1 6 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [San Francisco 49ers Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/san-francisco-49ers/franchise-encyclopedia/).

1 7 "San Francisco 49ers Franchise Encyclopedia," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [San Francisco 49ers Team Records, Leaders, and League Ranks | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/san-francisco-49ers/franchise-encyclopedia/).

1 8 "San Francisco 49ers Draft History," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [San Francisco 49ers All-Time Draft History | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/san-francisco-49ers/draft-history/).

1 9 "1965 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [1965 San Francisco 49ers Rosters, Stats, Schedule, Team Draftees | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/san-francisco-49ers/1965-rosters/).

2 0 "Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76," NFL.com, April 29, 2014, [Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76 \(nfl.com\)](https://www.nfl.com/news/dan-colchico-former-san-francisco-49ers-de-dies-at-76).

2 1 "Daniel Colchico," ProSportsTransactions.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Football Transactions Search Results \(prosportstransactions.com\)](https://www.prosportstransactions.com/search/daniel-colchico).

2 2 "Daniel Colchico," ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Daniel Colchico Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](https://www.profootballreference.com/san-francisco-49ers/daniel-colchico/).



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quite a beating during his playing days. Some of his injuries were downright gruesome. He remarked, “There was nothing there in both knees after I was done playing, because it was bone on bone. I've had both knees replaced since.”<sup>27</sup> His opponents respected him to a very high degree as well. Colchico said, “I made a lot of tackles on the other side of the field, because they weren't running my way. There were some good offensive tackles, like Forrest Gregg of Green Bay, but I held my own. ... The hardest guy to tackle was John David Crow. He hit harder than anyone. He was tough.”<sup>28</sup>

Born Daniel Memetta Colchico on May 27, 1935 in Port Chicago, California, he endured a rough life growing up. His father worked in industry and was killed when Dan was six years old. Newhouse described it as, “Dan Colchico was a hardscrabble kid from Port Chicago, a tough waterfront municipality northeast of San Francisco Bay. It was a no-frills, lunch pail town that put the bluest dye in 'blue collar.’”<sup>29</sup> On discussing his father, Dan said, “My dad was maybe five foot nine, but he never backed down from anything. When he died, my mom was handed a check for \$19.50. I still have that check. My mom worked all her life. She never learned how to drive, and she never missed a day of work. She did the best she could.”<sup>30</sup>

As a result of his upbringing, Dan found an outlet in competitive sports, specifically on the football field. He attended and graduated from Mount Diablo High School. Colchico then spent two years at nearby Mount Diablo Junior College continuing his pursuit of football.<sup>31</sup> He then transferred to local San Jose State College (now San Jose State University) in 1957, being recruited by first-year football coach, Bob Titchenal.<sup>32</sup> The Spartans played home games at Spartan Stadium and were not a local powerhouse,

2 3 “Daniel Colchico,” ProFootballReference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [Daniel Colchico Stats, Height, Weight, Position, Draft, College | Pro-Football-Reference.com](#).

2 4 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.

2 5 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.

2 6 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.

2 7 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 119.

2 8 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 121.

2 9 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 118.

3 0 Newhouse, Dave. *Founding 49ers: The Dark Days before the Dynasty* (Kent, OH: Black Squirrel Books, 2015), 118.

3 1 “Ten Junior College Athletes Enter San Jose State College,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, February 13, 1957, 8.

3 2 “Ten Junior College Athletes Enter San Jose State College,” *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, February 13, 1957, 8.



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compared to the likes of Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, Fresno State University, and the College of the Pacific. The Spartans went 3-7 and 4-5 in Colchico's two seasons at the school.<sup>33</sup> Two of their wins were over a 7-3 Arizona State team and California Collegiate Athletic Association (CCAA) champion Fresno State. Colchico wore number 88 and played at the right end position.<sup>34</sup>

Colchico passed away on April 27, 2014 at the age of 76, from complications of heart surgery. He was survived by his wife, Nancy, six children, and 11 grandchildren.<sup>35</sup> Dan is an inductee of the San Jose State University Sports Hall of Fame and in 2003, he was inducted in the inaugural class of Mt. Diablo High School Sports Hall of Fame.<sup>3637</sup>

End Notes:

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- 3 3 “San Jose State Spartans School History,” sports-reference.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [San Jose State Spartans College Football History, Stats, Records | College Football at Sports-Reference.com](#).
  - 3 4 “Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76,” NFL.com, April 29, 2014, [Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76 \(nfl.com\)](#).
  - 3 5 “Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76,” NFL.com, April 29, 2014, [Dan Colchico, former San Francisco 49ers DE, dies at 76 \(nfl.com\)](#).
  - 3 6 Esper, Damin, “Mount Diablo High honors rich sports history with Hall of Fame.” sfgate.com, November 7, 2003, [Mount Diablo High honors rich sports history with Hall of Fame \(sfgate.com\)](#).
  - 3 7 “San Jose State University Sports Hall of Fame,” SJSUspartans.com, accessed February 4, 2024, [HallOfFameAlpha 2020 \(storage.googleapis.com\)](#).