

NO FOOTBALL? NO PROBLEM FOR ANTONIO GATES!

He didn't even *play* football in college. Yet, in 2004 **ANTONIO GATES** enjoyed one of the finest seasons ever by an NFL tight end. In only his second full year, the San Diego Charger was voted an NFL all-star, hence in large part to catching an NFL tight end season record 13 touchdown passes. Gates also finished the season sixth in the AFC in receptions with 81.

Gates led Kent State's men's basketball team to an appearance in the NCAA Elite Eight in 2002. He often relates catching a football to going for a rebound. "When the ball is thrown to me, I'm in an attack mode because I'm so used to boxing out guys who are taller then me", says Gates. "Granted I get jammed, but I feel when a guy's holding me man-to-man, he can't guard me because he couldn't do it with a basketball in my hand, and now I'm free." He said one thing is different. "There are no fouls. You catch it, you still get hit." Some active NFL players who did not play football in college:

PLAYER	TEAM	COLLEGE/SPORT
P Darren Bennett	Minnesota	None
DL Coach Sam Clancy	Oakland	University of Pittsburgh/Basketball
TE Wesley Duke	Denver	Mercer University/Basketball
TE Antonio Gates	San Diego	Kent State/Basketball
S Clinton Hart	San Diego	Central Florida CC/Baseball
WR Michael Jennings	New York Giants	Florida State/Track & Field
WR Michael Lewis	New Orleans	None
TE Marcus Pollard	Detroit	Bradley University/Basketball

TIGHT END TONY

No one in the NFL caught more passes than Kansas City Chiefs tight end **TONY GONZALEZ** (102) last season. Entering his ninth year, the 6-5, 251-pounder continues to ascend on all-time league charts. With nine touchdown catches this season, Gonzalez would surpass **SHANNON SHARPE** (62) to become the NFL's all-time leading tight end in TD receptions.

Sharpe caught his 62 touchdowns in 203 games from 1990-03. Gonzalez has played in 127 games entering 2005.

Prior to Gonzalez's standout 2004 season, the last time a tight end led the NFL in receptions was in 1986 when **TODD CHRISTENSEN** caught 95 passes for the Los Angeles Raiders. Having played in six consecutive NFL All-Star Games, Gonzalez has solidified himself among the league's top performers by making plays that most others cannot.

"The biggest advantage Tony gives us is his ability to catch the ball in crowds," says Chiefs head coach **DICK VERMEIL**. "He runs well, but he doesn't have to outrun people to catch the ball. The contact around him when he's going for the football doesn't bother him. That makes him exceptional."

CBS/Westwood One Radio NFL color analyst **BOB TRUMPY** played 10 seasons at tight end for the Cincinnati Bengals under Hall of Fame coach **PAUL BROWN**. A 12th-round pick from Utah who racked-up 4,600 career receiving yards and 35 touchdowns, Trumpy has seen his position evolve over the years.

"Tony is the biggest threat at the position," says Trumpy. "He is 50 pounds heavier and faster than any tight end of my era (1968-77). He is a gifted athlete and a wonderful receiver. Defenses don't hold the tight end up at the line of scrimmage anymore and he and the Chiefs take advantage of his free release to tear up the coverage." A look at the top tight ends in career touchdown receptions:

PLAYER	YEARS	TD RECEPTIONS
Shannon Sharpe	1990-03	62
Jerry Smith	1965-77	60
<i>Tony Gonzalez</i>	<i>1997-Present</i>	<i>54</i>
Wesley Walls	1989-03	54
Dave Casper	1974-84	52

BEST BLOCKING RECEIVERS

NFL wide receivers make themselves known by their acrobatic catches and touchdown receptions, but the most valuable wide receivers are also ones that add one simple function to their repertoire—blocking.

Great blocking receivers are hard to come by today, but are extremely desirable since pushing a defender out of the way can mean the difference between a five and 50-yard gain by a running back.

"For some reason, NFL receivers don't block a lot," New York Giants' wide receiver **AMANI TOOMER** says. "It's just such an advantage to a team when you've got guys ducking away from you. You've got safeties paying more attention to the receivers than the running backs so the backs can come down full speed."

Buffalo Bills defensive coordinator **JERRY GRAY** points to good blocking by receivers as critical to a great running game. "Anytime you find a good running back that gains 15-, 16-, 1,700 yards, the receivers have to block effectively down there," Gray says.

Who might be the best blocking wideout in the NFL? Well in a survey of league coaches, the name **HINES WARD** of the Pittsburgh Steelers kept popping up. "No one else is even close," says Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive backs coach **MIKE TOMLIN**. Ten of the best blocking wide receivers in the NFL, as chosen by league coaches:

BEST BLOCKING WIDE RECEIVERS

RECEIVER	TEAM	RECEIVER	TEAM
Mark Clayton	Baltimore	Kassim Osgood	San Diego
David Givens	New England	Rod Smith	Denver
Joe Horn	New Orleans	Amani Toomer	New York Giants
Andre Johnson	Houston	Javon Walker	Green Bay
Muhsin Muhammad	Chicago	Hines Ward	Pittsburgh

