

# **FORMER STEELER BAKER STILL THE ENFORCER**

By Bill Utterback

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Y.A. Tittle of the New York Giants knelt in the end zone, blood seeping from a gash in his almost hairless head, his helmet and his senses removed in a terrific collision with John Baker of the Steelers. A press photographer snapped a photo, which became legendary. The fallen warrior. It was displayed in magazines and newspapers across the country in 1964. It has since been a standard feature in any football anthology.

In 1978, copies of the photo surfaced in Raleigh, N.C. "Look what John Baker did to Y. A. Tittle. He's going to do the same thing to crime in North Carolina," read the caption.

Baker's campaign for sheriff of Wake County was successful. He has held the office for eight years and figures to hold onto it for at least four more.

It is an election year in Wake County, which includes the capital of Raleigh, but Baker is unopposed in his bid for a third term. He was looking forward to a good fight, but nobody wanted to challenge him. Would you challenge a 6-6, 270-pound former All-Pro who carries a badge?

"I'm grateful to the people who wanted to keep me in office," Baker said. "But I was looking forward to campaigning. It's something I enjoy. I enjoy getting out and spending time with the people."

Sacking quarterbacks was also something Baker enjoyed.

"Getting a shot at the quarterback is every lineman's dream, and the shot I got at Tittle was a dream come true," he said. "People are still talking about that hit. Not a day passes when I don't get a letter about that or a copy of the picture to autograph."

At the time, Baker didn't realize his tackle was destined for immortality.

"I didn't think there was anything special about it, but I guess the photographer did. My mind was on the game and getting to the quarterback again."

Baker, a defensive end, played for the Los Angeles Rams and Philadelphia Eagles before joining the Steelers in 1963. He played in the Pro Bowl and served as the Steelers' defensive captain. He was traded to the Detroit Lions before the 1968 season.

"I was in Pittsburgh during the lean days," he said. "We came close (to the playoffs) a couple of times, but we never did cash it in. We were always noted for our defense. We took a lot of pride in that."

Baker was reared in Raleigh, where his father was a policeman for 45 years. He went to North Carolina College. In the off-seasons, Baker went back to North Carolina and worked in state correctional facilities.

After retiring from football, he joined the staff of U. S. Senator Robert Morgan. Most of his time was spent dealing with law enforcement agencies. In 1978, he ran for the office he still holds.

"We have a \$5 million budget and 230 people on our staff, so most of my time is tied up in administrative responsibilities. I don't get out in the field as much as I'd like. That's why I'll miss campaigning," he said. "I try to make time to get out and meet with kids. Anything I can do for the kids in our community, I will do."

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A phone call from Pittsburgh got him started thinking about football again.

"I thought the Steelers were calling me back to training camp," he said. "I'm just about at my playing weight. I jog 4 to 5 miles every day. I still lift weights."

Baker lives in Raleigh with his wife, Juanita. Their children -- John III and Jonnita -- are both recent college graduates. John Baker III -- 6-6, 220 -- played football and basketball in high school, but chose to play basketball at North Carolina- Greensboro. He was a starter in college and just returned from his first season of pro basketball in Argentina. Jonnita is a graduate of Campbell University and works for the state of North Carolina's personnel department.

"I'm still a football fan. I follow the Steelers very closely," he said. "The best part of playing pro football was working for Art Rooney. He's a terrific man. Every opportunity I get, I call him just to say hello. I've always stayed in contact with him. He was a fantastic man to work for."

### **BIG JOHN BAKER - John Haywood**

**DE**

6/10/35 Raleigh, NC

6-6 279 No. Carolina Central

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>TEAM</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>GM</b>
1958	LA	N	12
1959	LA	N	12
1960	LA	N	12
1961	LA	N	12
1962	Phi	N	7
1963	Pit	N	14
1964	Pit	N	14
1965	Pit	N	14
1966	Pit	N	7
1967	Pit	N	13
1968	Det	N	13
11 Years			130