

NFL: Ngata a big part of Ravens, community



OWINGS MILLS, Md. -- Haloti Ngata, to get away from the pressures of pro football, will take a walk with his wife, Christine, and their two dogs at their home in nearby Carroll County.

But the Salt Lake native does not always keep to himself when he is away from the field.

He also participated in a Walk for Juvenile Diabetes in Baltimore this spring and is involved in several other charities. His involvement in diabetes prevention was an easy call since his late mother had diabetes.

Ngata knew hardly a soul in Maryland when he was drafted by the Baltimore Ravens in the first round in 2006. His defensive line coach at Oregon, Michael Gray, is a native of Baltimore and was an assistant at Weber State from 1994-95. "I never thought I would end up on the East Coast," said Ngata, a Highland High graduate who still has cousins, aunts and uncles who live in Utah.

But the former University of Oregon star is starting to feel at home in the mid-Atlantic region. Among the sites he has seen is the LDS Temple in Kensington, Md. "It is really nice. It looks like a castle," he said.

He has also taken in some of the national monuments in nearby Washington, D.C., and is active in the Baltimore community, some 30 miles north of the nation's capital.

"Knowing the players better and knowing the community better and knowing the city of Baltimore has helped. I am getting more comfortable," he said. "It helps to be out on the field as well."

He is more than out on the field. Ngata, in his third year as a lynchpin on the defensive line, was seventh on the team with 18 tackles in the first five games this season.

He started all 16 games last season and had 63 tackles. Ngata was named all-rookie in 2006 by Pro Football Weekly/Professional Football Writers of America.

"I think I have improved the most on technique, thanks to being around Trevor Pryce and Kelly Gregg," he said of two defensive linemen with the Ravens. "I am trying to make my own way of playing. I can still improve the pass rush and getting to the quarterback."

Ngata was rated as the top defensive player in the nation in high school and was the 2001 Utah Gatorade player of the year as he had more than 100 tackles and 30 sacks.

He was a consensus All-American as a junior in college and was the first player to do that at Oregon since 1962 when defensive back Mel Renfro, who later played for the Dallas Cowboys, pulled it off. Ngata, listed at 6-foot-4, 345 pounds, then had the good fortune to get picked by a pro team known for its defense.

"When I got drafted I was so happy to be a part of this team and part of this defense," he said. "They are known for defense. It is great to have these guys around and feed off them."

Ngata and his wife were married at the LDS Temple in Bountiful in June 2007. Since coming to Baltimore he has appeared at a holiday party for needy youth, helped Baltimore city police give out coats to men in need and taken a Polar Bear plunge in the Chesapeake Bay to raise funds for Special Olympics.

He also joined an all-Polynesian group to host a football game this past June in Utah. But his main focus is the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, of which he hosted an essay contest for youth in Maryland to describe ways to increase awareness of the disease.

"I am an athlete, so I am helping those kids get out there and do things," he said of his work with Special Olympics. "It is great to be out there and help with what I can do."