

THE FEARSOME FOURSOME'S DEACON

David Jones was top man on pro football's top defensive line last year. He was also one of pro football's most outspoken, colorful stars

By **BILL LIBBY**

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DAVID is built like Goliath. He stands 6-5 and weighs 255. He is thick and square. He is also fast. He can run 50 yards in 5.6 seconds and 100 yards in 9.8 seconds. When he gets rolling, he is awesome, like a railroad train plummeting downhill. You would not want to get in his way. Yet, people are paid to get in his way.

He is a football player. He is David Jones of the Los Angeles Rams and he is called "Deacon." Most times he says he doesn't remember why and when he began to be called Deacon. Sometimes he says it began when he led his college team in prayers. His opponents need the prayers. He is not saintly.

He has a small head and small, bright eyes, which give him an ominous expression. He looks mean and, on the football field, he is mean. Off the field, he is a gentle, good-natured man. He speaks with a soft, deep voice and he laughs a lot, his little bit of a mustache bobbing.

Though he does not laugh on the football field he is often happy on the football field. "If I can hit a man clean, but hard enough he has to be carried off the field, I'm happy," he says.

"He has more natural ability than any defensive player I've ever known," says Harland Sware, who coached the Rams from 1963 until last December. "But he has no football background. He did not know anything when I got him and he has only recently become outstanding. Now, he is a finished player, a complete player, the best there is."

He played football at Mississippi Vocational and South Carolina State and the training there is not Big Ten training. But at 27, after five years apprenticeship as a pro, he has learned a great deal. He and Willie Davis are the best defensive ends in football today.

In one game Jones knocked down Green Bay quarterback Bart Starr four times. "He got in on me so quick, I thought he was one of my own backs," Starr said later. Said Deacon grinning: "It was my greatest of many great games."

When 6-5 Deacon, No. 75, charges in, it is hard to pass over him.



Photo by J. Blane

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continued

Cleveland's Frank Ryan rolled out to the opposite side of the field to avoid Jones in one game, but when he looked up, he was down and Jones was on top of him. "Please," said Ryan, "admit you were hiding out here waiting for me all the time." Pittsburgh's speedy, 195-pound Marv Woodson once had the ball and a 20-yard lead on Jones. Deacon hauled him down from behind. "Oh, no, baby," said Marv, "say it's not you." Said Deacon: "It's me, baby, it's me."

Another time Jones caught up to Bobby Mitchell, then ran alongside the speedster for several yards before knocking him out of bounds. The Ram coaches asked why he hadn't stopped Mitchell immediately. Said Deacon: "I just wanted to see if I was as fast as he was."

With Deacon and Lamar Lundy at the ends and Merlin Olsen and Roosevelt Grier at the tackles the Rams have the best front four in pro football. Ram publicist Jack Teele has nicknamed them "The Fearsome Foursome." The fans love them. When the fans first began displaying this love, the Ram linemen, accustomed to anonymity, were rather startled. "What's this for?" Olsen asked when a standing ovation followed a goal-line stand by the Foursome against Baltimore. "It's not for the Baltimore offense, daddy," said Grier.

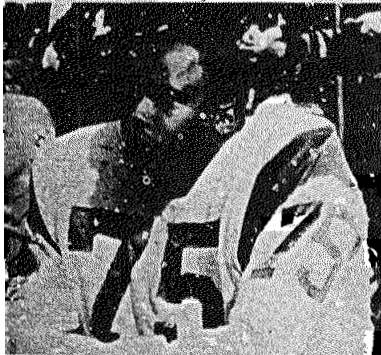
Jones, Olsen and Grier are 6-5, Lundy is 6-7. Jones weighs 255, Olsen 275, Grier 290 and Lundy 260. "We are so tall, that when we stand at the scrimmage line or go running in with our arms up, the quarterback needs a step-ladder to see his receivers," Grier says. "We are so heavy we would flatten a Cadillac if we climbed on the roof."

"And we are so fast, me in particular," Jones says, "that there is not enough room to get away from us."

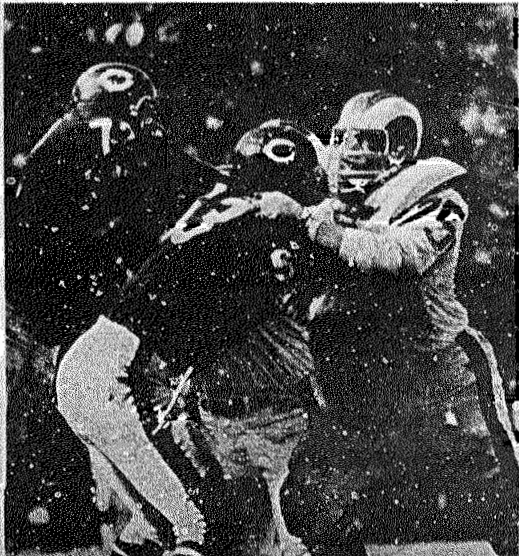
They work well together. "We have our own signals," Jones says. "We let each other know what we're going to do. Maybe one is going to rush inside, so the other rushes outside. Maybe two are going to fire in, so the other two lay back. Of course, things usually go different than you plan them. You got to change what you start out to do a lot. But, we have played together long enough now so we know instinctively how one of us is going to react to something. And we always cover up for each other."

Olsen is 24, Jones 27, Lundy 30 and Grier 32. Olsen and Jones are spectacular gamblers. They can gamble because they know the older veterans, Lundy and Grier, will cover up for them. "I was playing alongside a stiff," says Jones, "I couldn't do half the things I do with Grier by my side. If I showed up much better than Olsen early this season, it was because Lundy was hurt and Olsen had a rookie, Tim Powell, alongside him. Now, Powell is no (—→ TO PAGE 84)

Don Sparks



Don Sparks



The Fearsome Foursome is a smooth-working, closely knit unit. "We are so fast, me in particular," says the Deacon, No. 75, of the group, "that there is not enough room to get away from us."

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stiff. He is going to be very good. But he is inexperienced and makes mistakes. Olsen is so busy watching out for his side of the line, he can't do his best stuff. When they moved Grier over to fill in that side, I sure missed him."

In 1964, Olsen made first-team All-Pro and Jones made second-team.

"I was very happy to make anything at all because it was a long time coming," Jones said afterward. "But I feel like I played some great football. I waited for those selections like a kid waiting to see what toys he gets on Christmas and it really hurt me to be passed over for the first team. Now that I am having stories written about me and am getting a name, maybe I'll make the All-Star teams long after I deserve them, which will maybe even things out a bit. In any event, while it is plain playing great isn't enough, I plan to play greater than ever in 1965 so they will have no excuses not to pick me."

He played greater than ever in 1965 and they picked him. Deacon Jones made first-team All-Pro. He had come a long, unlikely route to the top.

HE was born on December 9, 1938, in the little town of Eatonville, Florida, and raised in nearby Orlando. His parents, Ishmael and Mattie Jones, had two other sons and five daughters. Ishmael worked as a carpenter and gardener and general handyman, but money was scarce. It was not easy to support his family and it was not always a happy home. "It was real tough for us," Jones says. "We did not have very much and we did not have much to look forward to. I will not say people were exactly mean to us, but I don't think I have to explain what it is like for poor Negroes in small southern towns, especially some years ago. I felt neglected. Certainly, there wasn't much opportunity."

Until he reached the pros, David worked from boyhood through college as a waiter, busboy, bellboy, short-order cook, chauffeur, handyman and personal servant.

Pop Jones is 6-1 and 230 and Mom is 5-9 and 150 and though they could not give their sons wealth, they were able to give their sons size. Using the size for football, the sons played their way out of poverty. Judson, 6-2 and 230, played at Xavier University in Louisiana and is now coaching at Lincoln High in New Orleans. Harold, 6-4 and 245, is playing at Grambling College in Louisiana now.

"My folks wanted their kids to go to college and they helped us all they could," David says. "Judson and I hear from them a lot, because we have done well and they are proud of us. They are going to be proud of Harold, too, who is a tight end, bigger than I was in college, and faster. Yes, he is going to be a pro. I am going to see that he is drafted and I am going to see that he is paid a bundle of loot for his services."

Deacon played football, basketball and baseball and ran track at a Negro high school. Hungerford High in Orlando, and at two Negro colleges, Mississippi Vocational in Itta Bena, Mississippi, and South Carolina State in Orangeburg. South Carolina State was certainly a good enough athlete to play in tougher places, but he says,

"you took what you could get when you were in my position, you used any means to get ahead. I played a year of varsity ball at Mississippi Vocational as a freshman, then a friend of mine arranged a better scholarship for me at a better school, South Carolina State, so I switched over and finished up there."

Not too many of the pros took notice of him. Ram scouts Eddie Kotal and Johnny Sanders were studying films of a back on another team and noticed that one big boy, Jones, was continually flattening their prospect. They jotted down a memo on Deacon, which led to his being picked by the Rams on the 14th round.

Jones was a two-way tackle and end in both high school and college. "The best players went 60 minutes every game, 'cause we couldn't afford no one on the bench," he said last fall. "I even place-kicked. I kicked a 48-yard field goal in college once. I not only played defense, but I caught passes and ran beautiful with them. I ran 75 yards with a pass to score against Florida State, which is about the best Negro team there is. I still run beautiful, I think. With what I got, I would be a great tight end or fullback in the pros."

"Actually, I was a big star, all everything, wherever I was, but that is just there, and it didn't go beyond there. Even today, no one scouts Negro high schools and colleges as much as they should. And they don't seem to realize that the level of coaching and competition in most Negro schools is so poor that the kids don't show nearly all they can do. If one of these kids does get to a pro camp, what chance does he have beating out a polished All-American with a big name? I would bet my life, or at least a year's salary, that I could find Negroes who didn't make the pros this year, or didn't even get a shot, with as much, or almost as much talent as I have."

"I SEE guys every year who don't know how tough it's gonna be and get scared away when they find out. Maybe they've got talent, but they're too nervous and they don't have the techniques to use it. Me, I soon found out I didn't know a thing, but I was real hungry and I had made up my mind this was my one chance and I was going to give it my best shot. If I didn't make it in football, where would I go, what would I do? You don't get anything in life without working and sacrificing for it. I just literally took a hold of the one rung on the ladder that was open to me and hauled myself up."

When Jones reported to the Rams as a rookie, they had established ends in Gene Brito and Lundy. So, Jones, lying, said he was primarily an offensive tackle. The Rams were thin there and David hung on to the ladder. During the exhibition season Brito was hospitalized and Jones played the opening game of the year at defensive end. That was 1961, and he has started every game since.

At the beginning, he lacked fitness and stamina and was very inconsistent. When he turned up fat and played at 290 in 1963, the Rams almost traded him. But he was so spectacular in spots they were reluctant to give up on him. He became consistent in 1964. "I was credited with

79 unassisted tackles," he says, "which I believe is a record for this league, to say nothing of the assists on tackles I got."

At the beginning he may have moved better off the field than on it. He didn't smoke and he didn't drink much, but he loved pretty girls and hot music and he partied quite a bit. "I said to myself, hey look where I am. L.A. is a swinging town and I had a ball and you better believe it," Jones recalls delightedly. "And I'll tell you, I don't regret it a bit, I was entitled. But it was too fast a life for me. This is a contact sport and you have to watch your body if you want to get ahead and last a while. I want to last a hundred years, so I told myself I better settle down. So I got married."

HE married Iretha Overton in 1962 and got fat and then slimmed down in '63. And he began to master his job. There were many things to master. For example, he has long legs and has trouble getting comfortable in a three-point stance and exploding out of it. It sounds like a minor thing, but it is vital. He got down on three points in his living room recently to demonstrate. "I got up clumsy," he explained as he lurched forward. "Whoop! When the blockers would blast-block, fire away right at me, I was helpless. I found out I couldn't get nowhere with someone's head in my gut. I tried to jump around them, but the quick ones would ride me so far out of the play I needed a ticket to see the game. Sweete changed my stance around until I was comfortable and could get out quick, so I could hit them first and go past them, before they could hit me and take the fast out of me."

"When I got David," Svare said, "he didn't even know how to take a stance, which kids learn in high school. People thought he was lazy and dogged it sometimes and gave me credit for needing him into action, but he doesn't need any more needing than anyone else. The way he was lurching into action, he would be easy for any smart lineman to handle, he'd get lost and discouraged. We had to teach him everything. But he wanted to work and learn. And, of course, he had that fantastic talent, rare natural speed to go with such size. Learning the fundamentals freed him to exercise his native ability. Now he has it all and he could become the greatest defensive end ever."

Assistant coaches such as Jack Patera and veteran linemen helped but, mostly, David helped himself. He worked hard and in his spare time he borrowed films and a projector from the Ram office and sat up late watching great defensive ends work, particularly Gino Marchetti. "He was beautiful, the only perfect defensive end," Jones says. "His hands were so quick, he could brush the blockers away. He taught me a lot, though he doesn't know it. I will die happy if I can get to play like him. Maybe I will. I've got a lot of improving to do, though. We watch so many films in our house, my wife would rather see a football movie now than a double bill at the Bijou."

Opponents who give him the most trouble are those who cheat, who grab him by the hands, the arms, the shirt, the pants. "Man, it really burrs you when you've beaten a man bad and he grabs you," he says. "They grip you so hard, they leave finger-marks on your jersey. Some guys leg-whip

you. They trip you or kick you. They do anything. I guess it's their job. It's like a bunch of animals kickin' and clawin' and scratchin' at each other."

To protect himself, Dave wears all the pads he can find, even hand pads, and mummies himself up with adhesive tape on his fingers, hands, arms, legs. He adds 30 pounds to his weight. "Man, I wear everything I can lay my hands on," he grins. "But it don't stop me from getting beat up something awful."

He played against Baltimore in 1964 with an ulcerous eyeball, which was painful when he as much as blinked and which made him dizzy and sick to his stomach. He fell on a fumble against Cleveland once, he says, "it felt like the whole stadium fell on me. They got my spine and my legs were paralyzed at first, which scared me. It went away after a while."

But don't feel too sorry for him unless you are ready to feel sorry for the backs this 285-pounds of man and equipment bashes at top speed. "Some backs if you hit them hard a couple times early, it takes the brave out of them," Deacon says. "The runner starts runnin' head up, lookin' for you, careful-like. The passer starts to hurry his passes. Rack 'em up, maybe they drop the ball. Or go home early. If I can hurt a guy a legal way, I'll do it. Those shoulder tackles are just beautiful. Wham! I'll be glad to help carry 'em off. But I play it clean. Most guys do. The proof is that there aren't more injuries."

The Deacon takes pride in his toughness and greatest pride in his speed. "I never lost a race in camp," he says, "but I think now maybe our rookie back Clancy Williams could out-run me. Probably not any of our defensive players. Certainly no linemen, not in the whole league. I'm not

as fast as when I was a rookie, but I'm stronger and I'm smarter. You get knocked down, you got to get up. It's never too late. I've caught most of the scutbacks from behind—Lenny Moore, Tommy Mason, Tommy McDonald. That's what gives me the biggest kick. I just love to see their expressions when they realize it's big old me caught 'em."

The only current end he rates in his own class is Davis of Green Bay. "He is better against the run, but I am better against the pass," he says. Svare agrees. "Davis is really great, but he's more experienced and Jones is already a better rusher." Cleveland's Paul Wiggin says, "Davis comes close, but Jones is faster." San Francisco coach Jack Christiansen says, "Jones is the greatest defensive end in the game today."

The performances which earned such praise have raised David's salary from \$10,000 his rookie year to \$25,000 now. He has invested his money carefully in some stocks and a few businesses and has a healthy bank account. "I've seen how some athletes blow their dough," he says. "I never had nothing in my life and I know I can't play football forever, so I'm gonna be darn sure I come out of this game with something."

In his off-hours and off-seasons he has been selling cars for L.A.'s Downtown Imports. "I've been selling about 15 Volkswagens and Porsches a month," he says. "I drive a Thunderbird myself, but it is such a sight me squeezin' into one of those little jobs, it puts the customer in a good frame of mind right off. I tell a few jokes. I'm friendly. My name don't hurt. I'm a good salesman. I'd like to land a Chevy agency of my own. There are no Negroes in this area with a dealership. But Negroes are good car customers. They'll spend what little they have on a fancy car.

Not that I'm prejudiced. I'll sell to anyone."

He's explored other avenues of income. Recently, Jones, Olsen, Lundy and offensive tackle Charley Cowan cut a 45 RPM Capitol record, *Fly in the Buttermilk*. They call their group "The Fearsome Foursome" and Jones deep-voices the lead on the title tune. It is rock 'n' roll, and he is good, leading him to think of pursuing the entertainment field further. He plunks on a big bass fiddle from time to time and says, "I get a kick out of singing and plunking."

Though he sings rock 'n' roll on his record, his favorite music is jazz, preferably light, swinging pop jazz of the Ramsey Lewis variety. Such music often fills the rooms of his apartment in the Crenshaw section of L.A. He, of course, fills the rooms, too, but Iretha, who calls him Jones or Jonesy, says, "He carries his size well. He's a nice guy and good-natured. He has a quick, bad temper, but he controls it well. The only thing that really depresses him is losing games. He snaps back at me and I've learned to leave him alone at those times. When the Rams were going bad and people were hard on us, it was just awful. But, it's better now. And he bounces back real quick."

"Being big never made me self-conscious," says the Deacon. "Gals look up to big men. I was never the bully on the block, either. I didn't have to be. Guys look at me, they don't want to pick fights with me. I live a normal life, except on the football field. I don't look for fights, except on the football field. Guys run away from me there. Not the blockers. But the quarterbacks. But I catch 'em. Man, they're always running away from me. You'd think they were scared of me."

The Awesome Power Of Deacon Jones

His pride, strength,
speed, quickness, anger and
dedication make Jones,
says the author, "the greatest
football player alive"

By Arnold Hano

Color by Fred Keplan



When you enter the bar and trophy room of David Jones' house two-thirds the way up Baldwin Hills in Los Angeles, you are underwhelmed by the modesty of the collection. I mean, those two dinky cups? A couple of player-of-the-week awards, from a local dairy and the Los Angeles football writers? Thursday night bowlers boast more brass. I've got more silver in my teeth.

Do not be deceived.

When you enter this room or any room in Deacon Jones' house, you are in the presence of the greatest football player alive. He may be among the finest three or four ever to play the game. Think of him the way you think of Bill Russell, essentially a defensive player, yes, but a defensive player who makes the offense go. It's easier for Russell than it is for Deacon Jones. Russell grabs the ball off the backboards, or blocks it underneath, and then he whirls and feeds and the Celtics swish home two points. Jones can't quite do all that. Two-platoon football deprives him of joining the offensive squad. (Only two-platoon football. Jones would make a marvelous battering-Ram fullback or a great tight end. And how would you like to see Jones, with that quickness and speed, as a pulling guard?) Still, he destroys offenses. He harasses and hurts quarterbacks, thwarts runners and blockers, and turns the ball over to his own offense, ala Bill Russell. Like Russell, Deacon Jones has made defense an art. They have a new word for what Jones does best. When a defensive man creams the quarterback, it's called a "sack." In 1967, Jones sacked quarterbacks 26 times.

So cry not over the scarcity of trophies. Jones has his own trophies. The sacked? hides of quarterbacks. Merlin Olsen, who stands next to Jones on this most formidable four-man defensive line football has ever seen, says of his teammate: "I suspect that there has never been a better football player than Deacon Jones." Jack Christiansen, former 49er head coach, calls him "the greatest defensive end in the game today." He is

so good you must go to Gino Marchetti for anyone to equal Jones, and the chances are—though we'll never know—Jones is right now better than Marchetti ever was. He may be a shade less strong than the great Colt whose hands could flip a 260-pound tackle 15 yards, but he is more agile, a good bit quicker, and with an unrelenting dedication that keeps him coming, always coming, play after play, until he has worn down his opponent, discouraged the offense, and turned the game into a shambles. Not just one game, the big game, against the Packers or the Colts or the Cowboys. Every game, week after week. This year Cleveland, against the Rams, did not run a single play from scrimmage inside the 50-yard line. This year Atlanta gained 32 yards on the ground all day against the Foursome and, by the second half, Falcon tackle Errol Linden, playing against Jones, had become gunshy. Twice Linden rose up before the snap, just so he could have an extra step, an extra quarter-second, to prepare himself for Jones' rush. (And twice incurred offside penalties.)

Jones keeps coming, even in bad games, like the late-October game against Baltimore, won by the Colts, 27-10. On the worst day for the Foursome in memory, Jones was still stacking blockers and sacking quarterbacks. He blocked a point-after kick. He pursued (and caught) running backs halfway across the field. He remained the one Ram who kept on coming all that black afternoon.

Jones knows this. He is not terribly modest about his skills. Why should he be? He is an honest man. "You are either a great football player or you're not," he says. "The secret is facing up to a different challenge every week. You've got to be ready every week." For years the Rams walked at or near the bottom of the league, 4-and-10 in 1961, Jones' freshman year; last the next year with a miserable 1-and-12 mark; still last three years later, with another 4-and-10 record. Yet in 1965, Jones was a two-year All-Pro. "It was horrible," recalls Jones of those dreary seasons, a dull, spirited club, coaches coming and going, and fans just going. "You had to have a lot of pride just to show up. It ain't easy. Suck it up and keep going."

He keeps going. Credit Jones with all his physical attributes—more speed and quickness than any defensive lineman alive; enough brute strength to handle tackles, tight ends, blockers, runners; slithery moves and fakes; the body balance of an Elgin Baylor; complicated stunts timed to perfection with Merlin Olsen and the others of the Foursome, Roger Brown and Lamar Lundy, along with linebackers Jack Pardee, Myron Pottios and Maxie Baughan. Grant him all these, and you haven't given him the edge he has over the rest of the world. Throw in violence, and you may increase the gap, but only slightly. Jones allows no niceties to interfere with his job. "If I hit a man clean, within the rules, and they carry him off, I am happy. I'll be the first to send him flowers." But no regrets.

Yet other footballers are more violent. Jones' philosophy is not "kill, kill, kill," as a banner proclaimed in the 1967 Ram-Colt game. It is one of simple dedication to the job. Jones always comes, keeps coming. "I have to keep coming," Jones says. It is an obsession, a fishwife shrewing him on. "I might be blocked 40 out of 41 times, but I must keep coming, because I never know when that one time will come when my opponent breaks down. A lot of defensive players don't have it. They don't keep coming. No matter how tired you are, how hurt you are, you must keep coming."

He keeps coming, despite an ulcerous eyeball, a broken nose, a cracked spine and a thumb dislocated and split open so badly you could see the 90-degree bone through the blood.

The thumb happened in Milwaukee last October 20, against the Packers, Jones sacking Zeke Bratkowski, and then getting his thumb caught in Bratkowski's helmet. Jones looked down at his hand, and ran off, to miss just two plays. The thumb was ice-sprayed, bandaged and yanked cruelly back into place by linebacker Pardee. And yanked back after nearly every scrimmage that day, when the bone would slither out of its joint. "It was agony," says Jones. "I never felt such pain." But he kept coming, and later Bratkowski fumbled when Jones sacked him again, and Travis Williams fumbled when Jones hit him, and the Rams recovered each time, and after the second fumble, scored a field goal, to win by two points. You never know when that man in front of you will break down, so you keep coming, the thumb be damned.

With this, you start to see Deacon Jones, all six feet five inches, all 250 violent pounds of him that melt down to 245 and even 240 by season's end, every inch and ounce funneled into a cone of dedication, aimed at the enemy like some gleaming black arrowhead. And then you must throw in one last essential element: anger.

Some of you may be bored or upset or made uneasy by the constant reference to anger in the black athlete today. But you must understand that this is as much a part of the man today, the essential man, as his fury on the athletic field. To ignore this anger, or to evade what is the condition of our society in America today, would be a cheat. It would be a cheat not only to the athlete himself, but a cheat to you. Because it would not give the full dimension of the man. So try to understand the black athlete in his anger as well as his glory.

David (Deacon) Jones—named because he led his team in prayers before games at South Carolina State back in 1958-1960—says, "It's good being a star, it's good to be recognized. But how can I accept doors open to me when my black brother is turned around? Unless I am accepted as a man, not just as an athlete, I have no meaning in life." He does not say things like the above sitting down, though maybe he begins sitting down, in his bar and trophy room, a man externally relaxed on a Monday after a ballgame, the emotion drained away, the Sunday contest now a moment in the past. But when Deacon Jones starts in, he keeps coming. And soon he stands, a mammoth dark figure.

"Damn all that fanfare," he says. "We're tools. The black athlete is drained of his athletic ability. They—the white people—get the utmost out of the black athlete, and then they throw him into the pen. They say to the black athlete, 'We got nothin' to give you. Not even a job.'"

Anger. Loathing for what he calls the hypocrisy of a country "with two Constitutions, one for white, one for black." He speaks of dignity being stripped away. "It has to be restored," he says, "if the country is to stand."

You ask Jones: "Does anger inside black men play a part in their success in athletics?"

"I think it does," he says. "You acquire the drive from all that frustration. You develop intestinal fortitude. You are in the constant thick of things in the ghettos. You have to push yourself."

So add them all—speed, strength, quickness, agility, pride, violence, dedication and anger. You get a picture of almost total power, awesome power. You get a picture of Deacon Jones, standing in his trophy room, a man on fire, and you get a picture of Deacon Jones, in his Ram uniform, right hand touching the ground, left arm dangling, and then exploding out of the low stance, clubbing with his left forearm, then his right, pushing, grabbing, shedding his man like a man shucking his dirty clothes. If anything is in his way, he deals with it.

Things had to be dealt with, from the start, Jones was

born on December 9, 1938, in Eatonville, Florida, four miles out of Orlando, a tiny black ghetto. He was born at home, an old framehouse that had no indoor plumbing until David was in high school, and his father, Ishmael, a carpenter, handyman, common laborer, found time and money to put it in. Black babies were born at home—says Deacon Jones—because all the hospitals in the South had separate areas for black patients. “You’d wait, lined up in the damn hall, until they’d let you in. People died, waiting in those damn halls, not getting attention. Why go to the hospital? I’d rather die at home.”

The house held eight children, three boys, five girls, plus Ishmael and Mattie Jones. Big people. Ishmael Jones stood 6-1 and weighed 230; Mattie Jones, a maid then, was 5-9 and 150. (They both are alive, today. Deacon Jones has moved them from the old framehouse to a better house, in Eatonville.) Deacon’s brothers, older Judson and younger Harold, are strapping men; Judson played football at Xavier U. in Louisiana, and now teaches school; Harold, 6-4, 245, played tight end at Grambling, and today is on the Rams’ taxi squad.

No matter how big, it was tough. “My father was a provider. My mother was a provider. They gave us all they could. We had food on the table, clothes on our backs, a roof overhead, and all the doctors’ bills paid. But my father was no Rockefeller. There never was much opportunity in the ghetto.” So Deacon Jones set out to be independent of need. He began working in grade school, after classes, weekends, summers; waiter, busboy, bellboy, cook, chauffeur, handyman, even the personal servant for a one-time Pittsburgh Steeler football player, laid up with Parkinson’s Disease.

At Hungerwood High, in Orlando, he played baseball, basketball and football, and ran on the track team. He sensed something was vaguely wrong at high school, but he did not know what. “I never knew how bad it was until years later I visited other schools. We had limited facilities. Limited number of courses. We had no foreign language classes. The history books didn’t mention that Negroes even existed.”

A handful of black colleges offered him scholarships. “The Big Ten,” he says dryly, “wasn’t looking my way.” People tried to talk him into attending Florida A&M, where he’d play ball for Jake Gaither and his Rattlers, but Jones wanted out of Florida entirely. He took a scholarship to Mississippi Vocational, in Greenwood, and when you ask Jones why he went there, he shrugs and says, “I must have been out of my mind.”

He lasted a year at Mississippi Vocational, playing varsity football, and then a friend helped him get a scholarship to South Carolina State, a land-grant college, and football conscious enough to have five coaches at the varsity level. Jones played two-way football, offensive end, defensive tackle. One day he caught a pass and ran 75 yards for a touchdown. “I ran beautiful,” he says. Another time he kicked a 48-yard field goal. He also ran the 100 at college, in 9.7, “damned good,” Jones says, “for 230 pounds.”

At South Carolina State, teammate Leslie Seays hung the name “Deacon” on Jones after Jones had begun to lead the lockerroom pregame prayers. Jones liked the name. “With a name like David Jones, you need a ‘Deacon’ to make it stick in people’s minds.”

Not necessarily. Ram scouts Eddie Kotal and Johnny Sanders went through their film library one day, to check out a running back, and all they saw was their prospect flat on his back, a big kid lying on top.

“Who’s the big kid?” one of the scouts said.

They found out his name. It stuck. On the 14th round following Jones’ senior year, the Rams tapped the big

kid, and Jones reported to his first pro camp. Unfortunately, the Rams had clever quick Gene Brito and mammoth quick Lamar Lundy as defensive ends, so when Jones was asked what he did, Jones harkened back to the day he lied about his table-waiting experience, “just to get inside that door.” “I’m a tackle,” Jones said, seeing as how the Rams were less thick at tackle. He hung on. He was incredibly green, but he also was incredibly fast. The Rams held 40-yard dashes in camp, and not only did Jones beat all the linemen, he beat everybody. The Rams knew they had something, even if they didn’t know what.

Then Brito became seriously ill, and they knew what. Jones opened the season at defensive end. He’s started every game since, 14 games a year for seven-plus years, one of the true iron men of the sport.

Which isn’t the same as saying he was a great end ever since he broke in. Making the Ram starting team in 1961 was like getting elected best-dressed man at a nudist camp. All you need is a necktie. If you were warm and reasonably big, you could make that 1961 Ram team.

Jones had a lot to learn. It took years to learn it. Harland (Swede) Sware would say later, “Jones did not know anything when I got him,” and Sware did not become Ram head coach until 1963, when Jones began his third season. Sware has said more, and some of it razzles Jones. “When I got David,” Sware once said, “he didn’t even know how to take a stance, which kids learn in high school.”

Jones flatly contradicts Sware on the business of stance. “I had an excellent stance when I joined the team,” he says. “Sware changed it. Then I studied the movies one day and I could see what I was doing wrong. It was the new stance. I got out of it, and back to my comfortable stance. The next year I was All-Pro. . . . But I did have a poor background. I did not know much more than the basics. I was inconsistent in the beginning. I’d run into our own linemen, trying to stunt.”

Stunt. The stunt, or loop, is that quick-change act you see Jones and Merlin Olsen perform to perfection. Just before the snap, Jones steps to his right—to the inside—and Olsen loops behind Jones, to the outside. The purpose is to confuse the offense, create a gap for one or the other, or both, to pour through, and sack another quarterback, or plug the would-be path of a runner. It comes hard, stunting. “It took a while to become coordinated to each other’s moves,” Jones says.

He had other problems, too. One year he got fat, blowing up close to 290, which, he says, reduced his stamina. Jones likes it when he melts down to 240 by season’s end. He says it’s easier to carry around 240 than 260 or even 250 pounds. He doesn’t wear out as quickly. “It gives me a certain amount of quickness and endurance. I need to have to move all the time. I will receive X number of blocks a game. You have to be conditioned for it.”

Jones, for all his strength, does not like to have to rely on brute strength alone. “It’s stupid,” he says, “trying to blow on by against a man who may be as strong as you, maybe even stronger. I like to give him a fake, show him a move, and make him move some of that big weight of his.”

Not that Jones runs from a head-to-head struggle. Exactly the opposite is true. He enjoys the essential violence of a pro game. “Unless some injury is nagging you, you look forward to the hitting. As the game progresses you don’t feel it. You long for the hitting. It feels good.” He says he doesn’t like the hitting when it isn’t legal, but even then a note of admiration creeps into his voice.

“Man, it really burns you when you’ve beaten a man bad and he grabs you. They grip you so hard they leave fingerprints on your jersey. Some guys leg-whip you. They

trip you or kick you. They do anything. I guess it's their job. It's like a bunch of animals kickin' and clawin' and scratchin' at each other."

When it comes to skirting the lines of legality, Jones does not pretend total innocence. Late in the second quarter of this season's Ram-Packer game, Green Bay leading 7-3 and driving, Jones sacked Zeke Bratkowski, and then took his time getting up. Time kept running. Bratkowski struggled and then snarled a few words at Jones. An official also chewed out the Deacon. Jones explains it this way: "Technically a pro has to pull every trick he can. I knew time was running out, and the Packers wanted to get the ball in play, to try to score again before halftime. I held Zeke on the ground. He tried to get up. He got sore and said so. He knew what I was doing. The ref got on me, too, so I said, 'He's lying on my thumb,' which broke everybody up. The game continued."

Those were not the only words Deacon Jones has had with an official at halftime this year. The next week, Jones shoved Falcon tackle Errol Linden (6-5, 260 pounds) into the way of a running back, all three men very gently falling to earth, like a circus tent collapsing. As Jones lay sprawled on the Coliseum ground, the official fired his gun to indicate the end of the half. Nothing unusual, except this time the official fired his gun right in Jones' face. Jones got up and bellowed, "What are you trying to do, kill me?" Later Jones said, "I knew it was a blank. But it felt like I'd been assassinated."

No such luck, for the Falcons. Or the Packers. Or the Browns. Or anybody, except Baltimore, through the first half of 1968, through nearly all of 1967, right on back through the years, beginning with his first great season in 1964, when Deacon Jones made All-Pro for the first time.

So the learning Jones has had to absorb, has been absorbed. We do give him a disservice by stressing how much learning he required. A man seldom looks good on losing teams. Jones had to play with Ram squads that won 15 games his first five years, while losing 48. The year Jones made All-Pro—1964—the Rams were fifth out of seven in the West, with a 5-7-2 record; the next year, when Jones repeated, the Rams dropped to last.

Playing with a not-so-hot club posed more problems. Bread and butter problems. Last-place teams do not pay as much in salary as do champions. Second-place teams don't even pay as much as do champions. This year's Ram team paid its average player in salary \$6000 less than did the Packers.

So if stardom has not been terribly elusive, a star's salary has. In 1966, Jones committed himself to a five-year pact, beginning at or around \$30,000, with a slowly escalated built-in pay raise, adequate enough, but not spectacular. After a spectacular 1967 season, both for Jones and the Rams, the Deacon felt his bosses owed him more money. "I am sacrificing my body, so to speak, for the team cause," Jones said early this season, referring to the lumps he takes every Sunday. Jones expects his bosses to make an equivalent sacrifice. In the summer of 1968, Jones held out, asking that the remainder of his five-year contract be renegotiated in terms more flattering to Jones' past dedication. But the Rams remained adamant, at least on the surface. The story has it that Jones eventually bowed. Today Jones says, "I am happy right now with my contract." The feeling persists the Rams helped make him happy.

Reporting late meant more trouble. "I never knew how tough it was to play yourself into shape. I hadn't enough time to train myself into shape." Merlin Olsen concurs. "It is impossible for any pro to get in condition in less than a month, even a superman like Jones."

It wasn't until the Rams beat a good San Francisco

club, 24-10, on October 6, in the fourth week of the season, that Jones began to put his game together in his old style. The 49ers, with Gary Lewis and Ken Willard healthy, gained just 62 yards on the ground. "They're all tough games," Jones said after that Ram win. "Yes, I feel beat up. But I'm in shape finally." And the league began to shudder.

Not everybody. You can give Jones an edge over any other defensive man alive, but the edge is often no wider than a sideline stripe. It is a cliché, and a truth, that many NFL games pivot on intangibles, on factors other than physical. Call it desire, call it getting up, or whatever, you must have it to win, or at least to play your game. "Emotion is 80 percent of the game," Jones says. "Whatever emotion you take into the game will determine how you will play."

On October 20, the Rams beat a mediocre Atlanta club, and looked flat in the process. (Flatness is a relative term. Flat as they were, the Rams held Atlanta to 32 yards on the ground.) Nobody seemed perturbed. The Rams were looking ahead to Baltimore. Atlanta played a zone defense, somewhat like Baltimore's, so the game was really good practice. The team would be up for Baltimore. Wait and see. Etc. The Rams, instead, were far flatter for Baltimore. Not that you can blame it all on emotion. For all of the Fearsome Foursome, the Rams did have weaknesses in '68. It was not a particularly strong offensive club, even with 14 straight wins. Injuries to Les Josephson, Dick Bass and Tommy Mason weakened Los Angeles' running attack, and the Rams were obliged to go with powerful but slow Henry Dyer, and fast but fumbly Willie Ellison, both inexperienced runners. Offensive linemen Joe Scibelli and Charlie Cowan were hurt and in and out of the lineup. The team would not let you score much, but on most days it seemed incapable of scoring much itself. At least the offense seemed incapable. The defense scored, or forced scores; fumbles, interceptions, blocked punts.

All this provided an even better showcase for the Foursome, especially Jones and Olsen. Jones and Olsen are a superb team. They stunt like carnival men flashing the shell game. You never know where the pea is. You never know who is going to come from where, with Olsen and Jones. In this year's Green Bay game, the Packers decided to scrap the 1967 winning formula, when offensive tackle Forrest Gregg got a lot of help from tight end Marv Fleming, in containing Deacon Jones. This time Green Bay freed Fleming for blocking on the linebacker, and for occasional pass pattern-running. Which left Gregg one-on-one on Jones. Gregg is All-Pro, a great tackle, but nobody can play Jones one-on-one these days, and get away with it all afternoon. Jones applied pressure all through the opening minutes of the game, moving in a small semicircle to the outside, trying to break down Gregg from the flank. It was all a decoy. "Finally," says Jones, "I felt I had Gregg set up for an inside move. In the defensive huddle I told Merlin I wanted to go inside. We prepared to stunt."

On a stunt, Jones and Olsen quickly change places, Jones going inside and Olsen, to protect the now exposed flank, going outside in a loop behind Jones' back. For the maneuver to succeed, certain things must happen. For one, Olsen must get to the outside, to protect the flank, and he must take Packer guard Jerry Kramer with him. But mainly, Jones must move so quickly inside that his man, Forrest Gregg, does not get a good shot at him, barreling through.

"I made a beautiful inside move," Jones said later. "A most gratifying move. I am blessed with quickness and speed. I started out as if to the outside, and then,

"I might be blocked 40 out of 41 times, but I must keep coming, because I never know when that one time will come when my opponent breaks down ... No matter how tired you are, how hurt you are, you must keep coming."

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boom, I cut inside. Olsen adjusted, as planned, and came wide, taking Jerry Kramer with him. This gave me the inside. There was nobody between me and Bratkowski." A smile grows on Jones' face at this point in the retelling. Another sack. In this case, another football turned over to the offense. Bratkowski fumbled; the Rams recovered. Jones calls it: "The best inside move I've made all year."

The Packer game had other meaning for Jones. "We waited ten months for this rematch," he says. Green Bay had thoroughly beaten the Rams in frozen Wisconsin for the NFL title. Jones loathes his play of that 1967 contest. "I did not adjust to what was going on on the field," he says.

What was going on was double coverage, Gregg holding off Jones, and Fleming blocking down on Jones. To which the Packers added indignity. They ran not away from Jones, but at him. Jones had Gregg and Fleming. Plus a blocking back coming at him, with a running back behind. Plus an occasional pulling guard, to lead the whole shebang. Bang, it was, as many as five Packers hitting Deacon Jones, play after play.

The Packers have since rubbed it in. Ray Nitschke put it all in print recently: "We set out to whip Deacon Jones, and that's just what we did. First we ran at him, double-teaming him on sweeps and plays to his side until he became so conscious of the run and runblocking that he hesitated on his pass rush. When he hesitated on the rush, he was whipped on the block by Forrest Gregg, and so he was never a factor in the game."

He was a factor ten months later, when the Packers set Gregg one-on-one. "I guess they should have double-teamed me," Jones gloated the next day, after the 16-14 Ram win. "They wished they had."

But beyond the battle of psyches, Nitschke pointed to the one weakness in Jones' armor. Jones is the finest defensive end in the world today, because he is perfection against the pass. Nobody questions this. But he is not quite perfection against the run. "On the Rams, we don't play the run," he says. "We react to the run. We play that damn pass. If they run, we figure we can stop them, or make them fumble. We play the pass. That is what hurts you."

Nearly all the time, it works. Up until Baltimore this season, it worked spectacularly, the Rams holding the opposition to 2.6 yards per run. Then Baltimore shattered the statistical wall, running for 180 yards on the ground, running the first half away from Jones, at the vulnerable, still hurting Lamar Lundy, and then the second half at Jones and Olsen. Colt tackle Sam Ball did a superb job on Jones, either blasting straight at Jones, to tie him up briefly, or else peeling Jones off to the outside, on quick trap plays past the vacated spot. You can react only so well to the run, if you relegate it to second place. The Colts understood Jones and his philosophy and promptly kicked a small dent into it. The key word is "small." A small dent. No matter what, that was still Deacon Jones pursuing and catching halfbacks, on the other side of the field, and flattening them for tiny gains. That was Jones handling Sam Ball nearly all day, shedding the block and sacking Earl Morrall, or downing Tom Matte or whoever. The philosophy holds up, by and large. It is the pass that destroys you. And Deacon Jones destroys the pass.

Jones' reputation gets in his way these days. You expect a superstar every Sunday. That is the price of stardom. One of the prices. Even between Sundays, Jones is a marked man. People recognize him on the streets of Los Angeles, and in the hotel lobbies all across the nation. Kids beg for autographs. He obliges. "I like the popularity. All the kids, black and white, come around. They idolize you. One has to carry himself in dignity before the kids. That's all beautiful. I approve of that." He does not approve of well-meaning adults who insist on accosting him wherever he may be, to talk football. "I hate talking football to people who don't know it well. I practice from 11 to five four days a week. I eat football. I sleep football. I have little time to socialize, and I'd rather do it with friends who are outside of football and who know enough to talk of other things."

So Jones is happier eating in a small Cantonese restaurant, with his wife, Iretha, or when he is listening on records with his friends to the late jazzman, Wes Montgomery, or watching a TV western, at home. His vices are small—an occasional drink, which is usually a beer; a few cigarettes, most of them before a game when his nerves are stretched to a thin scream. He attends religious services on Sunday morning; he does not eat solid foods before a game (his stomach will not hold them); he gets to the stadium very early, because his nerves also will not tolerate waiting too long on line to be taped. He dresses slowly before the game; he talks with defensive linemen before the kickoff, on what to look for, how to stop the draw, defend against the screen. But outside the stadium, he prefers to be less a football player and more a person. He is a member of the Fearsome Foursome, an alliteration coined by Ram publicist, Jack Teele, but he says: "I don't think of myself as fearsome or fierce, or anything. I am no more fearsome than any other man. I am a human being, trying to do a job on Sunday."

He is, as of this past December 9, 30 years old, an age that sometimes begins the slide downhill. "Thirty does not bother me," Deacon Jones says. "I am playing the best football of my career. I am going to get better. I will reach my peak at 31 or 32, and I ought to remain there until 35 or so. Maturity in pro football often comes late. It takes a long while to learn the game."

With the years will undoubtedly come more stardom. After the Falcon game, on October 20, played at the Los Angeles Coliseum, Jones stood in the corridor outside the Rams' dressing room, chatting with newsmen and other people. It is the other people who are coming to dominate these post-game periods. It is a status symbol, in

Hollywood, to be admitted to the dressing room area, and the people you see nowadays are entertainers and politicians. Jim Nabors went by, and hugged Jones. The man with the deep voice, standing next to Jones, offering to help peel off a bandage from Jones' right arm, was the most powerful Democrat in California, Assembly speaker Jess Unruh.

This is stardom, superstardom. The politicians search you out, and you move into different, widening circles. Jones has interests outside of football. He hires an accounting firm to look after his investments. He is buying up apartment buildings, stocks, mutual funds. He works for Schlitz brewery during the offseason, and he may receive a Schlitz dealership before long. He drives a Cadillac; his wife drives a Mustang.

He is more and more surrounded by the creature comforts. A bottle on a shelf above his bar is marked "Especially for Deacon Jones." Almost perfectly, he owns a year-old Doberman, even more perfectly named Rommel. The day I visited Jones' house up in the Baldwin Hills, the black dog was locked outside, wandering about the pool area, uncaring of the rain pelting down. He was busily eating a chaise longue. Deacon Jones eyed the dog sympathetically.

Yes, it has become a comfortable life (outside of the 90-degreed thumbs, that is), what with the Cadillac, and politicians courting, but don't ignore the Doberman. Rommel is a symbol, black and beautiful. Don't forget that part of Deacon Jones. Creature comforts have not softened his anger. In a way, they have sharpened it.

Like many other blacks (and Jones prefers the word "black" to "Negro," though he uses both), Jones is amazed that so many white people seem to have so many remedies for black people. "Whites cannot tell me anything about the black man. Ninety-eight percent of whites do not take time to know the black man. People live right under their noses, and they don't know them. The only reason whites have rallied around the blacks these days is because the blacks have rebelled."

Lots of aspects of life in America today anger Jones. The words "law and order" infuriate him. "This Governor Wallace can get up and talk about law and order," he says in rage. "While he was governor of Alabama, black people were lynched, their homes were bombed, churches were bombed. Four little black girls were murdered in a church bombing. That's violence! That's sickening! I'll be damned if I understand it!"

So this is Deacon Jones, who went to a black high school, not intending to get much of an education, going there just to start to work his way up the apprenticeship that leads to professional athletics. But someplace along the line, even in a school where the facilities were limited, and even in colleges where he was an athlete first and a student second, he has become educated, articulate, a man of power. "Since I lifted the veil of ignorance from my face," Deacon Jones says, "I can't remove the thought and idea of living in ghettos, of people deprived of education, deprived of living."

Maybe none of this has much to do with Deacon Jones, the football player. Maybe it has lots. You ask Jones why he plays professional football, and he answers quickly, "I love it." Then he adds: "It is a means of survival."

Survival. Survival is living, something the people back in the ghettos were, and are, deprived of. Deacon Jones had to survive, had to live. "Some people are bankers, lawyers, doctors," Deacon Jones says. "I couldn't be. I am a football player."

Nobody argues.

