

Mark Pike, one of top standouts on the Bills special teams coverage units of the 1990's AFC champion Bills, has passed away Wednesday following a courageous battle with Non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

Pike, who spent his entire 13-year NFL career with the Bills, suited up for 173 games for Buffalo after the club made him a seventh-round pick in 1986.

"He was a big man who played special teams which was a matchup nightmare for our opponents," said Bills Wall of Famer, Steve Tasker, one of his longest-tenured teammates. "He was a unique specimen. His ability to run and play special teams with his versatility was unbelievable."

The key to Pike's effectiveness was his ability to run despite being a defensive lineman. He would routinely bust up wedges and run through blocks to make plays on Buffalo's coverage units.

"Mark was really the centerpiece of our league-leading coverage units," Tasker said. "I was kind of a wide guy. I was a gunner, and I was an L-2 on the outside. I wasn't in there with the threes, fours and fives very much. Mark was. So, the physicality of special teams was his wheelhouse, and he would routinely blow people up. So, while I would draw some people out and they would have to defend my speed and my ability to keep leverage and cut the field off, he was a freaking bulldozer man. He was an absolute freight train."



Pike led the Bills in special teams tackles in seven of the last eight years he played for Buffalo and is still the franchise's all-time leading special teams tackler with 255 career takedowns. That total also ranks

second all-time in NFL history to only former New England special teamer Larry Izzo (298).

Pike added another 34 special teams tackles in the postseason for Buffalo.

Special teams coordinator, Bruce DeHaven, would often use the double-team attention both Pike and Tasker demanded to a strategic advantage.

"Mark certainly was a player that had to be double teamed," said Tasker. "He was, as was I, and we had that where a lot of people didn't have a big guy and a small guy."

Tasker recalls pre-game conversations with Pike where they would plan to be the spark for their defense if they lost the opening coin toss. "I remember him and I sitting and talking about how we wanted the game to begin," said Tasker. "We felt like we needed to set a tone. We always put that on ourselves. If we're able to do something on a kickoff make sure we stay out there and celebrate, especially at home. Get (the crowd) whipped up. Let's turn it up right away and let's do something. We'd tell Scott (Norwood), 'Don't kick it out of the end zone, so we can make a play.'"

Pike was as revered off the field just as much. Marv Levy coached Pike for 11 years in Buffalo "It had been such a great privilege for me to have been his coach with the Buffalo Bills during the 1990's when Mark had been such an integral part in contributing to the success our teams enjoyed during our four trips to those Super Bowl games and beyond," said the Hall of Famer. "Mark was not only an outstanding defensive lineman, linebacker, and special teams standout, but he was the epitome of all that I had ever hoped our players would be like."

Bill Polian, the General Manager who drafted Pike felt similarly, "Mark epitomized the high character that we valued so greatly and was the hallmark of our teams. He gave one hundred percent effort on every play and that same commitment to charitable and community endeavors off the field . There was never a better role model as a player and a person than Mark."

As he battled cancer this fall, Pike recently attended the Week 4 home game against Houston to serve as the club's Crucial Catch honoree,

which is the NFL's program to fight cancer through early detection and risk reduction.

Pike's condition was recently complicated by a Covid-19 infection, which was followed by pneumonia.

He is survived by his wife Sharon, their two sons, Ezekiel and Malachi, and their daughter Kramer. He was 57-years old.

