

# He's a big hit

## Vikings' McDaniel loves entertaining children, hammering opponents

By Jim Souhan  
Staff Writer

With his dark-visored helmet, he looks like Darth Vader to defensive backs. To neighborhood kids, he's more like Peter Pan. In the chasm between those images lies the reality of Vikings guard Randall McDaniel, who tries to be different things to different-sized people.

When he pulls out on a sweep or screen and turns cornerbacks into ground chuck, he is acting out his fantasy of becoming a perennial All-Pro. When he pulls into his driveway after a hard day at practice, he is acting out another fantasy — of becoming a father.

He and his wife, Marianne, hope to have children but for now are happy apprenticing. "I hang around everybody else's kids," McDaniel said. "Craig Wolfley's kids. Fuad's Reveiz's kids. Anyone's kids. I'm like a big kid myself. I enjoy hanging out with the little kids, helping them. That's the only way I get to be a kid again."

When you weigh 270 pounds and dunk basketballs as easily as doughnuts, you can intimidate pretty much anyone you meet. That's why McDaniel, who spends precious little time on his knees when he's playing football, can be found at ankle level when he indulges the neighborhood children.

"A lot of adults and jocks come in and tell people how it's going to be done," said former Vikings guard and KFAN radio analyst David Huffman, who correctly predicted when McDaniel was drafted that McDaniel would send him not only out of the starting lineup but into another business. "Randall comes in and gets down in their faces, at their level, and plays with them, and all of a sudden they can learn from him."

McDaniel is a teacher of vastly different lessons. When he's in his native Arizona in the spring, he visits as a regular guest reader at the elementary school where a friend teaches. When he's in Green Bay in the fall, he tutors larger humans in physics: Mass times velocity equals pain.

Packers cornerback Leroy Butler learned that lesson last week when the Vikings threw a screen pass to the left, McDaniel's side. Halfback Darin Nelson caught the pass and cut upfield. Butler rushed up to stop him.

That was Butler's first mistake. McDaniel hit him face to face, sending him spinning and flailing to the turf. Butler struggled to his feet.

That was his second mistake. McDaniel smacked him again for good measure, sending him sprawling. "Most of the time, you're inside run blocking and inside pass blocking," McDaniel said. "Whenever someone gives you the opportunity to get out there on the screen, and you've got the guy in front of you, you've got to take advantage of it. There was a big smile on my face afterwards."

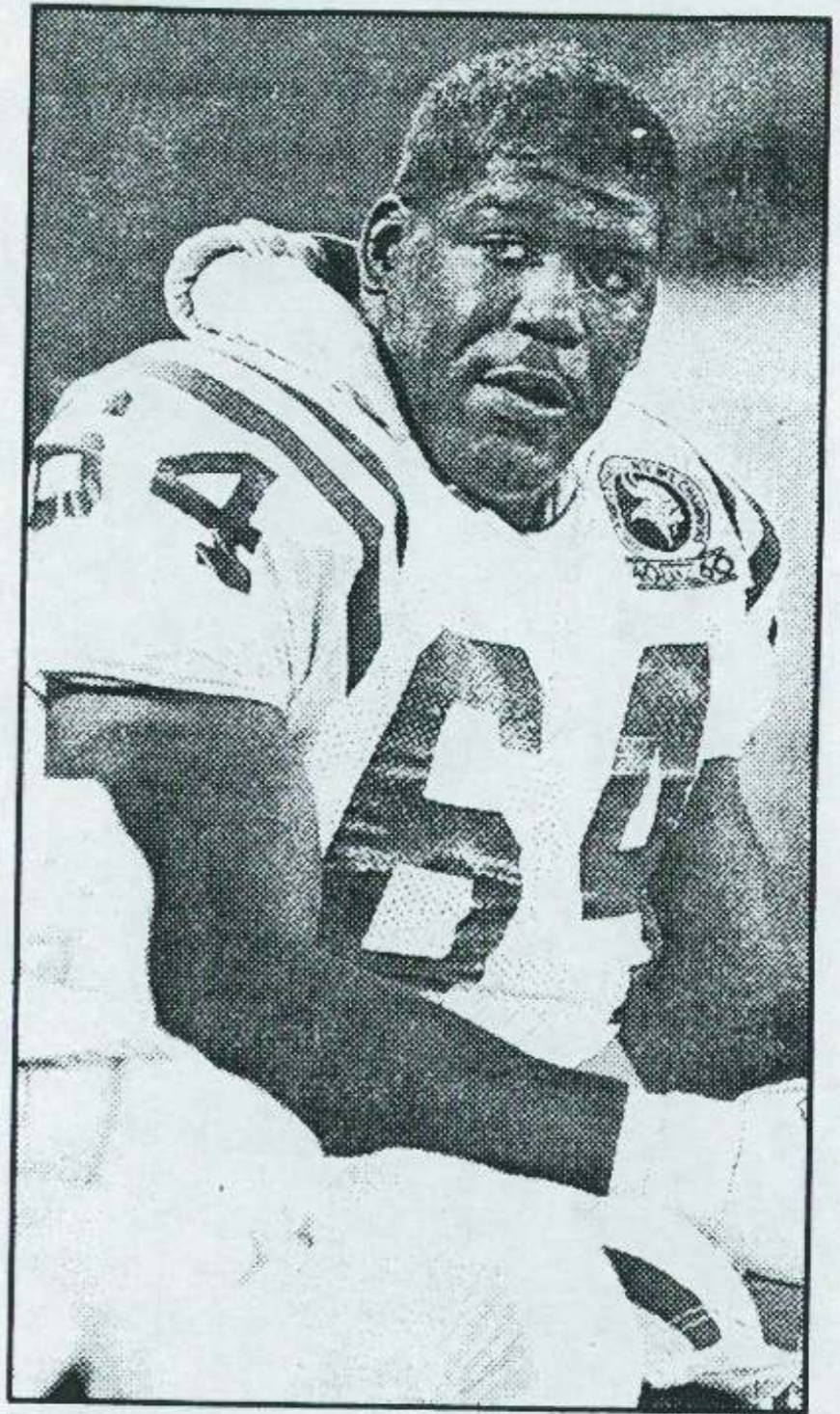
McDaniel was all-rookie in '88, a Pro Bowl pick in '89 and All-Pro last year. He clearly is the Vikings' best player and is on pace to become their best lineman ever. "I don't think he's hitting a peak; I think he's still going," said tackle Gary Zimmerman, who lines up next to him.

McDaniel belongs to a new breed of offensive lineman. Or maybe he has just started a trend. McDaniel is the rare athlete who could play a number of positions — any along the line, offensive or defensive; fullback, as he does in short-yardage situations, or tight end or linebacker, as he did in high school.

"He can do it all," Zimmerman said. "He's got the speed of a DB, he's one of our strongest guys. He's got all the physical talents. I've seen him make hits where he's off-balance and just roll people, and I don't know how he does it."

Said Huffman, who played with Philadelphia Eagles All-Pro defensive end Reggie White in the USFL: "He has more talent than I think I have ever played with."

In the visceral chess game played by offensive linemen, McDaniel is no pawn. He's more like a rook, slashing in each direction, cutting deep into the defense, a machete through



Randall McDaniel

weeds.

But he probably would prefer a more modernistic comparison — one that includes joy sticks and cartridges. He's a Nintendo nut. "I'm playing one now — Castlevania — and I'm almost to Dracula's Castle right now," he said. "I'm almost there, I need just about two more stages to get there. You go through about 20 different rooms, and I'm on the last two. I'm just about to crack it."

There is another game McDaniel must play, and it's in his mind. He hears and reads all the praise that has been heaped upon him this season, and he wonders.

"People say all that and I listen to it, and I think, 'People think I'm doing that great.'" he said. "But then I have my wife there, and she's sitting there with that pin ready to pop my bubble.

"Hey, I can always get better."

Notes/ Fullback Rick Fenney (groin) will not play Sunday against Detroit. The Vikings won't decide on receiver Hassan Jones (hamstring) until today. Nose tackle Henry Thomas (shoulder) will start but his status will be play-to-play. Safety Joey Browner (hamstring) won't start, and coach Jerry Burns said he would like to be able to rest him but will use him when necessary. . . . Rookie linebacker Carlos Jenkins paid \$453 to cover damages to the office of a towing company, settling a dispute that began last week when Jenkins' illegally parked car was towed. When Jenkins and fellow rookies Ivan Caesar and Todd Scott went to Cedar Towing to claim Jenkins' car on Nov. 13, a confrontation ensued between the players and Cedar personnel. A window and telephone were allegedly damaged in the incident, although no police report was filed.