

## Pro Bowl is family first for Ngata, Rice

### For two Ravens, inaugural appearance is all relative

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As much as Pro Bowls are designed to honor the individual, they are also an opportunity to celebrate with family.

That's the approach Ravens defensive tackle **Haloti Ngata** and running back **Ray Rice** are taking as they get set to participate in the first Pro Bowl of their young careers.

Ngata was warned by his teammates who are veterans of the **NFL's** all-star game that he should be prepared to spend a lot of money.

"I brought 15 of my family members, so I had to find room on flights and hotels," Ngata said last week. "It's kind of like planning for a wedding. It's kind of crazy, but I've tried not to worry about it and just relax and have a good time."

Rice, the team's second-round pick in 2008, paid for his mother, who had some reservations about making the trip to Miami.

"She's petrified of flying, so I've actually got my cousin riding with her on the airplane," he said last week. "So she's going to make it down. That's one of those things where you don't take it for granted."

While this is their first Pro Bowl, Ngata - who turned 26 on Jan. 21 - and Rice - who turned 23 a day after Ngata's birthday - figure to be critical parts of the Ravens' foundation for a long time.

Since the Ravens drafted Ngata in the first round in 2006, their defense has ranked no worse than fifth in the NFL against the run and no worse than third in points per game allowed in three of the past four seasons.

Individually, Ngata's 41 tackles and 1 1/2 sacks in the regular season pale in comparison to 2008, when he made 77 tackles, one sack and two interceptions. Ngata was not invited to the Pro Bowl last season - the irony of which was not lost on coach John Harbaugh.

"Maybe I'm a little biased toward our guys, but I thought Haloti was a Pro Bowl player last year, and for him to be recognized this year as such is big," Harbaugh said. "But Haloti, he's going to be a guy that's going to work to get a lot better in the offseason. There are some things he can do better."

Ngata didn't seem perturbed at the perceived snub back then - and especially not now.

"Last year, so many people had said that I would be going to the Pro Bowl and this and that, and I was kind of paying attention to what was going on around the league with guys in my position," he said. "I think I kind of worried about it too much and didn't end up going. This year, I was kind of like, 'If it happens, it happens.' And I ended up going. Now I'm way excited and happy to get picked."

Ngata said the turning point of his season occurred Nov. 1 against the **Denver Broncos**. Ngata sprained his right ankle in the third quarter and was sidelined for two games.

"It's funny," he said. "I felt good and then I hurt my ankle, and I was like, 'That's one of those things that could mess up a season.' Ever since then, I felt like it could be a good season for me."

Unlike Ngata, Rice couldn't single out a specific game as the basis for his emergence. That's understandable, considering that the diminutive tailback had 12 games of 100 yards or more from scrimmage this season, second to the **Tennessee Titans' Chris Johnson** (13).

Despite finishing second in the league with 2,041 all-purpose yards to Johnson's 2,509, and scoring eight touchdowns, Rice said he didn't consider himself the centerpiece of the Ravens' offense.

"I see myself as a playmaker," he said. "I see this offense growing. I see us adding more playmakers to this offense to where I can do different things and **Joe [Flacco]** is doing different things. It's an ever-growing offense, and the more playmakers we have, the better we'll be."

Rice certainly made an impression with his teammates and the coaching staff.

"I think he's fulfilled and maybe exceeded any hopes we had for him in his second year," Harbaugh said. "And yet, we thought he was going to be a heck of a player. I just love his work ethic, I love his mind-set, I love the way he plays hard every single play. But I also know he can get better. From this year until next year, there's a lot of areas he can improve on, and he's going to go to work to do that. That's just the kind of guy that he is."

So what does a guy who led NFL running backs in catches with 78 and receiving yards with 702 and is one of only

eight players in league history to produce 1,000 rushing yards and 700 receiving yards in a season do for an encore?

Rice said he intends to use those figures as a springboard for next season.

"I'm never a guy who's satisfied with anything I've done," he said. "The Pro Bowl and everything else, that was a team honor, but you've got to set goals each day. This league is all about reinventing yourself, so every day, I just plan on reinventing myself and going out there and trying to accomplish more goals for next year."

#### **Ravens in the Pro Bowl**

Pos.	Player	Appearances
LB	<b>Ray Lewis</b>	11
S	<b>Ed Reed</b>	6*
FB	<b>Le'Ron McClain</b>	2
RB	Ray Rice	1
DT	Haloti Ngata	1

\* Will not play tonight