



Greene, Charles Edward (“Mean Joe Greene”)
Born: September 24, 1946, in Elgin, Texas
Vocation: Athlete

Abstract: Born in 1946, Charles Edward Greene, more commonly known as “Mean Joe Green,” was a member of the Steel Curtain defense of the Pittsburgh Steelers. He led them to four Super Bowls and received ten pro-bowl invitations. Later he would star in a famous Coca Cola commercial that would eventually spin off into a movie called *The Steeler and the Pittsburgh Kid*.

Biography:

Charles Edward Greene, known as “Mean” Joe Greene was born September 24, 1946, in Elgin, Texas. His only family was his mother Cleo Thomas; his father abandoned the family. He was born in Elgin, Texas, but grew up in Temple, Texas. Joe Greene started his football career in high school at a segregated school, Dunbar High School, in Temple, Texas. Greene was huge even in high school. He towered over his high school teammates and opponents at 6’3” tall, 225 pounds. He would later become known for his aggression, but in high school he was afraid. “When I started playing, I was very timid,” Greene said. “I used to get beat up quite a bit, on and off the field. But something happens when you’re out there on the field: You want to win. You’re oblivious to everything else. Eventually, my desire to win overcame my fear.”

Charles Edward Joseph Greene was better known by his nickname “Mean Joe” Greene. The 6’3”, 270-pound tackle acquired his nickname in reference to his school’s nickname, the North Texas State University Mean Green.

Greene played defensive tackle for North Texas; the Mean Green posted a 23-5-1 record. His coach, Rod Rust, said “There are two factors behind Joe’s success. First, he has the ability to make the big defensive play and turn the tempo of a game around. Second, he has the speed to be an excellent pursuit player.” In 1969, he was selected by the Pittsburgh Steelers with the fourth pick in the first round of NFL draft and spent his entire career with them until his retirement in 1981.

As a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers, Greene became a part of what is known the “Steel Curtain.” He established himself with speed, quickness, strength, and determination. Chuck Noll, the head coach of the Pittsburgh Steelers from 1969-1991 once said, “I had never seen anybody block him one-on-one,” in reference to Joe Greene’s outstanding football playing. Due to his great qualities and leadership, he captained the Steelers’ defensive unit beginning in 1977. Greene opened his career with a 91-game streak, and he played in 181 of a possible 190 regular-season games. As left tackle he was named the NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year in 1969 and also received the first of ten Pro Bowl invitations. He also participated in and made several plays that insured playoff victories for the Pittsburgh Steelers. His skill and determination led the Pittsburgh Steelers to four Super Bowls under the “Steel Curtain,” he was named All-NFL five times, earned all-conference recognition 11 straight years from 1969-1979, and named Defensive Player of the Year in 1972 and 1974. Several his plays are etched in many memories, including an 11 sack season in 1972 that led the Pittsburgh Steelers to playoff season ever and a pass interception and fumble recovery that led to a win against the Minnesota Vikings in Super Bowl IX. Despite his fame, Joe Greene was never one to give out autographs, and Andy Russell, a member of the early “Steel Curtain,” once described a different behavior of Joe Greene’s. On many occasions, Russell heard Joe Greene say too several young kids, “I don’t give out autographs, but why don’t you kids get on the bus and talk to me?” He would sit on the bus and answer questions and talk about football until the rest of his teammates arrived.

Football was Mean Joe Greene’s life, but during his career he made several TV appearances and movie appearances. Most notably, Greene appeared in a several commercials, the most famous of which first aired in October of 1979 in which a child gives him a Coke, in response “Mean Joe” smiles and gives the kid his game jersey. The commercial was listed as one of the top ten commercials of all time by *TV Guide* magazine and *USAToday.com*. His movies included *The Black Six* (1974), *Horror High* (1974), *Lady Cocoa* (1975), *Fighting Back: The Story of Rocky Bleier* (1980), *Smokey and Bandit II* (1980), *All the Marbles* (1981), and *The Steeler and the Pittsburgh Kid* (1981). *The Steeler and the Pittsburgh Kid* was a spin-off of his famous Coca Cola commercial.

After retiring from the NFL, Greene became an assistant coach under Steelers' head coach [Chuck Noll](#) in 1987. He spent the next 16 years as an assistant coach with the Pittsburgh Steelers, Miami Dolphins, and Arizona Cardinals. In 2004, he was named the special assistant for player personnel for the Steelers.

He was inducted to the Pro Football Hall of Fame (1987), the Texas Sports Hall of Fame (2017), the College Football Hall of Fame (1984), and the Texas Black Sports Hall of Fame (2015).

Sources:

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