

Second &

THE ANIMAL

RAY LEWIS WANTS YOU TO BE AFRAID.

Very afraid.

"If you put a steak in front of a pit bull's face and take it away from him, he's going to chase you all over the place," the 6-1, 235-pound Baltimore Ravens middle linebacker explains. "It doesn't matter to him if he breaks some skin or hurts somebody, as long as he gets what he wants. And that's the way I am when I'm on the field. I play with reckless abandon. I sacrifice my body on every play."

Before each snap from scrimmage, Lewis can be found wagging his finger at the quarterback, faking blitzes, talking mad trash and shaking his head back-and-forth at opposing offensive lineman, as if to say: you can't touch me.

"If you ever watch me play and you see my mouth stop, you'll know my body is stopped," he says. "My mouth is my motor. For me to be on the field and keep quiet, that's not Ray Lewis. That's not the player that everybody saw something in or the one that I fell in love with."

Baltimore was so enamored of Lewis that they selected the U of Miami linebacker 26th overall in '96 and signed him to a five-year, \$5-million deal. The Ravens then released veteran Pepper Johnson and handed over signal-calling duties to the hot-

shot rookie.

The 22-year-old menace responded by leading the team in tackles (142) and doing what he does best: fighting through blocks, delivering jarring hits and running down ball carriers from all angles of the field.

"When I'm on the field, if I can hurt somebody, I'll do it just to see him lying in pain because of a lick that I threw on him," Lewis says.

"That's the way Dick Butkus, Ronnie Lott and big John Riggins played their positions," he continues. "They were the best because they were animals. And that's how

I want people to talk about me when I'm through playing. I want them to know that I loved this game and that I always played it at 100 mph."

God help us all.—Grant Glickson

