

Karras passes away at 77

By Brendan Stiles

HawkeyeDrive.com

Former Iowa defensive lineman Alex Karras passed away Wednesday morning at his home in Los Angeles. He was 77.

Reports circulated Oct. 8 that Karras had gone into hospice care after suffering from kidney failure. According to a statement released by his family, Karras had family members by his side when he died and was dealing with kidney disease, heart disease, dementia and stomach cancer prior to his death. The family statement in its entirety can be read [here](#).

During his collegiate career, Karras was a member of the 1956-57 squad that was the first in Iowa history to win the Rose Bowl, defeating Oregon State, 35-19. In 1957, Karras won the Outland Trophy, was a consensus All-American and was the first of four all-time Iowa runner-ups for the Heisman Trophy, being edged out by Texas A&M tailback John David Crow.

Following his career with the Hawkeyes, Karras was taken by the Detroit Lions with the 10th overall pick in the 1958 NFL Draft. He played 12 seasons in the NFL – all of which were with the Lions – and was named an all-Pro on four occasions. In 161 games with Detroit, he compiled 16 fumble recoveries and four interceptions – his number of career tackles is not documented. Karras was suspended for the entire 1963 NFL season in light of a gambling probe involving him and former Green Bay Packers running back Paul Hornung.

When his football playing days were over, Karras had a career as an actor. He starred in movies such as “Blazing Saddles,” “Porky’s,” and “Paper Lion,” which was based on a book written by George Plimpton that prominently featured Karras. He also had an acting role on the TV show, “Webster.” In addition to

acting, Karras had a three-year stint as a Monday Night Football analyst for ABC, working alongside Frank Gifford and the late Howard Cosell.

Karras never was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame. He was enshrined into the Iowa Varsity Club Hall of Fame in 1989 and two years later was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame.

Prior to his death, Karras was among a litany of former NFL players suing the league for its lack of preventing head injuries when he and others from his era played.

Karras is survived by his second wife Susan Clark, six children (five from his first marriage, one from his marriage to Clark), four siblings and five grandchildren.