

Rodrigo Barnes, Activist, NFL Super Bowl Champion, and Among First to Integrate Rice University's Sports Program, Dies

Rodrigo Barnes, Fearless Civil Rights Activist, Trailblazing NFL Player, and Pioneer in Rice University's Sports History, Passes Away at 73.

WASHINGTON, D.C., UNITED STATES, May 19, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Rodrigo Barnes, an influential African American NFL football player and civil rights activist, passed away Tuesday, May 16, at the age of 73 in Dallas, Texas. An outspoken Oakland Raiders Super Bowl champion, Barnes shattered racial barriers in the NFL and at Rice University where he was a member of the highly-esteemed 'First Four' - the first African American student-athletes, including Stahle' Vincent, Mike Taylor, and LeRoy Marion, to integrate the university's sports program in 1968 during the turbulent civil rights movement.



Former Linebacker Rodrigo Barnes During His First Stint with the Dallas Cowboys

Often compared to Colin Kaepernick due to his strong stance against [racial inequality](#) on and off the football field throughout his career, Barnes was a leader of several protests at Rice, co-founding the university's Black Student Union, and advocating for the hiring of more African American professors. During his sophomore year, Barnes was named the SWC's sophomore defensive player of the year and two years later UPI would name him the conference's defensive player of the year.

In 1973, Barnes was selected by the Dallas Cowboys in the seventh round of the NFL draft continuing his fearless activism with a focus on racial inequity in the NFL which caused friction between him and management, according to Barnes. Becoming the second African American linebacker in the franchise's history, Barnes was released from the Cowboys after suffering a

knee injury later that year and would go on to play for several other teams including the New England Patriots, the Miami Dolphins, and the Oakland Raiders where he won a Super Bowl XI ring in 1976 under legendary coach John Madden. He retired from football in 1977 and became a general manager and coach in the United Football League.

Barnes, who released his memoir [The Bouncing Football: Life Lessons on the Gridiron](#) (Fulton Books) in 2021 and was recently honored at Rice in 2022, initially made his mark in high school as a highly-regarded athlete before making history as a no-nonsense civil

rights activist and football player at Rice and in the NFL. A native of Waco, Texas, Barnes excelled in football and track-and-field at the segregated Carver High School before earning 3A second-team All-State honors and a football scholarship to Rice.



Rodrigo Barnes During Oakland Raiders Game

“

...The big lie was centuries old saying that Black people could not accomplish too much....We took on that challenge because...the Bible said that we w[ere] equal, and so we put our heart in that.”

Rodrigo Barnes

“1968. Let’s think about it. The world was a different world. Rice University was one of many universities that were trying to put out the big lie. The big lie was centuries old saying that Black people could not accomplish too much. The answer in the textbook was that I was inferior. The preachers preached that I was inferior. Everything was, “I was inferior.” We took on that challenge because for some reason the Bible said that we w[ere] equal, and so we put our heart in that,” said Barnes at the 50th anniversary celebration of his and other African American student athlete’s accomplishments held in 2022.

A third-generation descendant of the Shelton family who founded a historic settlement in 1874 on what is now known as Berry College’s Possum Trot in Rome, Georgia, Barnes would return to college at Prairie View A & M earning a master’s in education, with certifications in guidance and counseling and midmanagement. Most recently, he served as a high school assistant principal at the Garland Alternative Education Center in Dallas, Texas. Barnes leaves behind four children, including daughters Reca Shabazz, a former sports broadcaster in Waco, Texas and Tonya Feggett of Dallas, Texas in addition to sons Paul Garrett and Terrence Monroe, also of Dallas, Texas. A public memorial service (black tie) in celebration of Barnes’ life will take place in Waco,

Texas during the weekend of June 17-19. More details are forthcoming. The public can check the family's Instagram page, @1874SheltonFamilySettlement, or their Facebook page, Shelton Family Settlement at Possum Trot, for updates about the memorial.

Reca Shabazz

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