

Renowned Activist Rodrigo Barnes, NFL Super Bowl Champion, and Rice University 'First Four' Hall of Famer, Dies

Trailblazing NFL Player and Outspoken Civil Rights Activist Rodrigo Barnes, Who Pioneered Integration at Rice University's Sports Program, Dies at 73.

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES, May 19, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Rodrigo Barnes, a courageous Super Bowl champion with the Oakland Raiders and a pioneering Rice University Athletic Hall of Famer, died Tuesday, May 16, at the age of 73. Barnes, who played as a linebacker in the National Football League (NFL) and is often compared to Colin Kaepernick, shattered racial barriers throughout his career, including during his time at Rice University and in the NFL. In 1968, he became part of the esteemed 'First Four' at Rice University, a group of African American student-athletes that integrated the university's sports program, alongside notable individuals such as Stahle' Vincent, Mike Taylor, and LeRoy Marion.



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

Renowned for his unwavering commitment to combating [racial inequality](#) both on and off the field, Barnes emerged as a prominent leader during his time at Rice. He played a pivotal role in organizing protests, co-founded the Black Student Union, and advocated for increased representation of African American professors at the university. Barnes' exceptional talent was recognized during his sophomore year when he was named the Southwest Conference's sophomore defensive player of the year. Two years later, he was honored by UPI as the conference's defensive player of the year.

During the 1973 NFL draft, Rodrigo Barnes was chosen by the Dallas Cowboys in the seventh

round. This marked a significant milestone as he became the franchise's second African American linebacker. Unfortunately, Barnes' tenure with the Cowboys was cut short when he sustained a knee injury later that same year, leading to his release.

Nevertheless, he continued his football journey with various other teams, including the New England Patriots, the Miami Dolphins, and ultimately the Oakland Raiders, where he achieved the pinnacle of success by securing a Super Bowl XI ring in 1976 under the guidance of the legendary coach John Madden. Retiring from professional football in 1977, Barnes transitioned into a new role as a general manager

and coach in the United Football League, further contributing his expertise to the sport.



Rodrigo Barnes During Oakland Raiders Game

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

“

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Rodrigo Barnes

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.

“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

Media Contact /Family Representative

[email us here](#)

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