

Rodrigo Barnes, Trailblazing Activist, NFL Super Bowl Champ and Member of Rice University's Athletic Hall of Fame, Dies

Outspoken NFL Player and Outspoken Civil Rights Activist Rodrigo Barnes, a Pioneer in Integrating Rice University's Sports Program, Passes Away at 73.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- Rodrigo Barnes, an NFL linebacker known for his fearlessness on the field and his relentless activism for civil rights, passed away Tuesday, May 16, at the age of 73. Barnes, often compared to trailblazer Colin Kaepernick, broke down racial barriers throughout his illustrious career, including his time at Rice University. In 1968, he made history as part of the esteemed 'First

Four,' a group of African American student-athletes that integrated Rice University's sports program, alongside notable individuals such as Stahle' Vincent, Mike Taylor, and LeRoy Marion.

Barnes was widely recognized for his unwavering commitment to combating [racial inequality](#) both within and beyond the realm of sports. 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. His exceptional skills were acknowledged when he was named the Southwest Conference's sophomore defensive player of the year during his sophomore season, and later received the prestigious UPI Defensive Player of the Year award.

In the 1973 NFL draft, the Dallas Cowboys selected Rodrigo Barnes in the seventh round, making him the franchise's second African American linebacker. Unfortunately, his time with the Cowboys was cut short due to a knee injury he suffered later that year, leading to his release. Nonetheless, Barnes persevered and continued his football journey with several other teams,



Rodrigo Barnes During Oakland Raiders Game

including the New England Patriots, the Miami Dolphins, and ultimately the Oakland Raiders, where he reached the pinnacle of success by winning a Super Bowl XI ring in 1976 under the legendary coach John Madden. Retiring from professional football in 1977, Barnes embarked on a new chapter as a general manager and coach in the United Football League, leaving a lasting impact on the sport he loved.

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.



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

“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.

“

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Rodrigo Barnes

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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