

Former NFL, Tide player Kevin Turner dies after battling ALS

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(Photo: The Associated Press)

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Former NFL and Alabama fullback Kevin Turner died Thursday at the age of 46 after battling Lou Gehrig's disease.

Turner's father released a statement on Facebook announcing the death of the former Crimson Tide standout, which was also posted to the Kevin Turner Foundation's website.

Turner was drafted by the New England Patriots and went on to play for the Philadelphia Eagles from 1995-1999. He was diagnosed with the neurological disease ALS in 2010.

After the diagnosis Turner served as president of the Kevin Turner Foundation, which seeks to show the potential connections between repeated brain trauma and ALS in athletes. Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis

causes muscle weakness, paralysis and eventually respiratory failure, according to the ALS Therapy Development Institute.

Turner was the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit against the NFL. A league official, Jeff Miller, senior vice president for health and safety, acknowledged earlier this month a link between football and brain disease as a U.S. appeals court reviews a potential \$1 billion settlement that would cover about 20,000 retirees.

"I want our role to get through to the old school coaches and players that, you know, yeah you can play through a bruised shoulder or you know maybe a bruised elbow or whatever but concussions are serious," Turner said in the documentary "American Man" featured on the foundation's website. While helmets protect player's heads, they don't protect their brains, Turner said.

"I believe this is the most important thing I'll ever do in my life, other than raising my kids. This is by far bigger than any game or practice or tryout or whatever," he said.

Attorneys representing Turner and retired players issued statements Thursday evening, noting Turner's brain will be donated for research.

"Despite the difficulties he faced, he was always concerned about his NFL brothers and ensuring they had the care and support if faced with similar circumstances," said Steve Marks, Turner's attorney and an attorney for the NFL concussion settlement. "As selfless as Kevin was in life he is in death, as he agreed to donate his brain and spine for research into concussions and ALS. We will miss Kevin greatly, but know he is at peace."

Christopher Seeger, an attorney for the retired NFL player class plaintiffs, said: "Kevin selflessly fought for compensation and benefits for retired players who suffered from concussion-related illnesses by pushing to finalize the settlement. He was always concerned about the interests of the broader retired NFL player community — never himself — and worked tirelessly on their behalf so they could receive the care and support they needed."

Turner helped lead the Crimson Tide to a national championship title in 1992. University of Alabama Director of Athletics Bill Battle called Turner a "true warrior" in an emailed statement and said he had served as one of the team's captains.

"Kevin's spirit, his toughness, and his courage in life and on the football field inspired us all," Battle said.

Philadelphia Eagles Chairman and CEO Jeffrey Lurie recalled in a statement how excited the franchise was when Turner was signed in 1995.

"But as good of a football player as he was, he was even a better man. His high character, kindness and respectful nature stood out to me the most," Lurie said.

Head coach Doug Pederson — who played alongside Turner in 1999 — praised Turner's work ethic and said it didn't take long for him to realize how great of a leader the team had in Turner.

"I will always remember the great work his foundation did over the years and I will always remember the way he fought until the very end," Pederson said.

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