

"I want to help kids get on the right path. There are not enough role models pointing kids toward college and getting active."

— Mike Rosenthal

# NFL lineman tackles Austin

By Tonya Cone

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**W**hen Mike Rosenthal was a kid in Indiana, he played football in his backyard. There was not much emphasis on padded football at the time, and while some of his friends played for a team in seventh grade, his mother would not let him play for his school.

When Rosenthal continued to grow and was the biggest student in his eighth-grade class, however, he was a natural fit for the team. Although it was difficult for her, his mother finally let him play, and eventually he went on to play in the National Football League.

"I'm not sure she still really likes it," said Rosenthal, who became bar mitzvah, was confirmed and observed Shabbat and other holidays while growing up.

After high school, Rosenthal was recruited by Pennsylvania State University, the University of Michigan and the University of Notre Dame. He chose to attend Notre Dame, where he played guard as a sophomore and junior and offensive tackle as a freshman and senior, because of its football and academic programs. He did not allow religion to influence his decision.

When Lou Holtz, Notre Dame's coach at the time, visited their home, Rosenthal's mother asked him what it would be like for a Jewish student to attend the Catholic university. Holtz, referring to Mary, answered, "The lady on the dome was Jewish."

While at Notre Dame, Rosenthal took two theology courses. He said he enjoyed the opportunity to learn about different religions and cultures. The only Jewish player on the school's football team, he attended a short, mandatory mass each week that was a buildup to the team's Saturday games. Rosenthal said the inspirational pre-game speech given at the service made it like any other business meeting.

"It got me focused for the game," he recalled. "I was there to observe. To me it wasn't a decision. Nobody persecuted me. It was an open school to any religion."

After college, the New York Giants drafted Rosenthal in 1999. He was signed as a free agent in 2003 by the Minnesota Vikings and in 2007 by the Miami Dolphins. He played as an offensive lineman for each team. Rosenthal injured his neck and shoulder in August and was placed on injured reserve for the season. He repeat-



Mike and Lindsay Rosenthal with their children: Kasen, 4; Tread, 18 months; and Tanon, 2.

edly pinched nerves in his neck by blocking players and now lacks feeling in his left shoulder. While doctors told him the feeling eventually would come back, his nerves have been slow to regenerate.

Noting that the NFL has had around five Jewish players recently, throughout his career his religion has never been a big deal.

"There are so many cultures in the NFL, so many people who are Christians, Muslims and Jews, you really come together to do your work, prepare for game and then go home to your family," he said. "You can live a totally separate life."

Religion is rarely brought up in the locker room, and while some players participate in Bible study, players who choose not to attend are not frowned upon, Rosenthal said. He has never felt uncomfortable, even when his team has said the Lord's Prayer before games.

"Sometimes I kneel, sometimes I stand, whatever I felt like doing," he said. "I've said my own little prayer or saying, or thought about the game. It's just if you want to say it, great. If not, that's great also."

Holidays have also not been problematic for Rosenthal, and he has never had a game that fell on Yom Kippur.

"I viewed my football teams as a family," he said, "and I would have played on Yom Kippur to help my teammates win



**Mike Rosenthal (#75) played as an offensive lineman for the Minnesota Vikings in 2003-06. He was drafted by the New York Giants in 1999 and played there four seasons. The Miami Dolphins signed him in 2007. Rosenthal was inducted into the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 2002.**

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had thought it'd be the Green Bay Packers facing them Sunday, Feb. 3. The New York Giants eliminated the Packers, winning the honor to represent the NFC.)

In 2005, the couple started a children's clothing store, called 1379 Kids. Named after his wife's college volleyball jersey number, 13, and his college football jersey number, 79, the store offers athletic clothes that Rosenthal and his wife enjoyed wearing but could not find for their children elsewhere.

"Austin is a great place for it," he said. "It's fit and active."

The store, which sponsors kid zones at many local running events and triathlons, will celebrate its second anniversary this year. Located at 2727 Exposition Blvd., 1379 Kids gives back to the community by donating 5 percent of its sales to physical education programs in the school of each customer's choice. With under-funded physical education programs contributing to childhood obesity and diabetes, Rosenthal said, it is important to bring an active, healthy lifestyle to kids when they are young.

Since moving to Austin full-time, Rosenthal's family has started becoming involved in the Jewish community. His three children — ages 18 months to four years — attend the Early Childhood Program of the Jewish Community Association of Austin.

"It's a great program for us," he said. "They do Chanukah prayers and Shabbat at school. They're getting pretty good at the prayers and Hebrew because of the ECP."

Rosenthal, who is featured on two local football radio shows each weekend, said that, due to his injury, he is probably at the end of his NFL career. Between raising his family, running 1379 Kids and his community involvement, he is excited about the next stage of his life.

"Right now my energy is going toward helping with my kids and the store," Rosenthal said. "I want to help kids get on the right path. There are not enough role models pointing kids toward college and getting active."

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the game."

In 2002, Rosenthal was inducted into the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame along with Hayden Epstein, Jay Fiedler, Lennie Friedman, Sid Gillman, Marv Levy, Josh Miller, Josh Taves and George Young. Located at the Suffolk Y Jewish Community Center in Commack, N.Y., the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame and Museum honors Jewish individuals who have distinguished themselves in sports. When inducted, Rosenthal and the others spent the weekend in Commack, where they took part in a ceremony, signed autographs and shook hands.

"There are very few of us," he said. "We're pretty proud of our group that we have."

Rosenthal's wife, Lindsay Treadwell Rosenthal, who he met at college, was born and raised in Austin. The couple made this their home believing that, as a clean, progressive city with good weather, Austin would be a great place to raise their family.

Rosenthal's family also has football ties to the city. His wife's father, Johnny Treadwell, played linebacker and guard at the University of Texas, in 1960-62.

"If we're not cheering for Notre Dame, we're cheering for Texas," Rosenthal said.

(In an interview, he correctly picked the New England Patriots as the team representing the AFC in Super Bowl XLII, but