

## Anthony Munoz: Character builder

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*NFL Hall of Famer Anthony Munoz holds an inspirational talk with kids and parents in Deer Park.*

### ANTHONY MUNOZ FILE

Age: 54

Born: Ontario, Calif.

Residence: Deerfield Township.

Family: Wife Dede (married since 1978); two grown children, Michael and Michelle.

College: University of Southern California

Resume: First-round draft pick by Cincinnati Bengals and third overall pick in 1980; played 11 years in the NFL and was enshrined in the Hall of Fame in 1998; named NFL's Man of the Year in 1991;

his career as an All-Pro lineman earned him membership on the NFL's 75th Anniversary All-Time Team in 1994; in 2010, he was ranked No. 12 on the NFL Network's Top 100 players list and was the highest-ranked offensive lineman.

Retired from NFL: 1992

There's more: In 2002, Munoz created the non-profit Anthony Munoz Foundation, which works with youth camps throughout Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky and with the NFL's Play 60 national camps. Since its founding, the foundation has raised \$10 million for youth programs. Information: [www.munozfoundation.org](http://www.munozfoundation.org)

Few professional athletes in America have shifted so spectacularly from the playing field to religious mission field as has Anthony Munoz.

The former Cincinnati Bengals star – and only member of the franchise to win election to the coveted NFL Hall of Fame – has logged two decades of high-profile charitable work and youth advocacy since retiring from the game in 1992.

But the end of his playing career didn't mark the beginning of the longtime Deerfield Township resident's work for others. That moral compass was set long before, Munoz says.

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Raised in California by a single mother working three jobs, responsibility was thrust on Munoz at an early age. Christianity found him young too and he married wife Dede, who shares his faith devotion, during his sophomore year at the University of Southern California in 1978.

Munoz says his NFL playing days – drafted in the first round in 1980, he went on to earn Pro Bowl honors from 1981 to 1991 before retiring in 1992 – provided his first venue to show his faith.

“It was a great platform,” he recalls during a break from speaking to a youth football group in Deer Park.

“A lot of times in that sort of high-profile situation you can be verbal about your faith or you can be about the lifestyle,” Munoz says. “While I was playing it was more about lifestyle evangelism. It was about how consistent I can be and I found out quickly that a lot of it is about how I live my life and the guys around me would then notice.”

“A lot of people say football builds character, but I totally disagree. God builds character and then the sport allows you to exhibit and display the character. God has given us a mind to think and gave us free will. You have to educate yourself about God if you are going to stand for something; if not, you can fall for anything.”

Munoz then excused himself to deliver an inspiring pep talk to the Deer Park football players and their parents. He peppered his message of always striving to do your best with sage advice from a man who has known success in

many fields.

It's all more love than labor for Munoz, who says he uses such public stages to spread the message of Christian-based conservatism and promotion of American values.

"I'm a conservative and I love this country and I care about it," says Munoz, who in 2002 created the Anthony Munoz Foundation, a non-profit organization that works with youth through sports and character-building camps. The foundation has raised more than \$10 million in the last decade for youth programs.

A Hollywood movie star – look for his cameo as an intimidating hospital worker in the 1983 hit "The Right Stuff" – Munoz has been a constant presence for years on local TV and radio ads. He has done color commentary for preseason Bengal games and represents various companies, including furniture stores, banks and auto dealers. In 2011, he joined a USO tour to Afghanistan to visit American soldiers and regularly speaks to military units nationwide.

### Character camps expand profile

Munoz's public profile continues to expand. Earlier this year his Munoz Agency partnered with the NFL Play 60 Character Camps for youth in six eastern seaboard cities, with plans to expand to all 32 NFL cities.

Working with him on the program is Kings High School football Coach Andy Olds. Olds says Munoz talks and walks his faith.

"We all see pro athletes come and go as common as the rising and setting of the sun," Olds says. "But the great ones who choose to exercise and share great character and great faith are the ones standing in the end. Anthony will be the last man standing. I'll bet my bass boat on that."

Munoz's first two years in the NFL were spent living in California but "we wanted to get some breathing room" for his two children, Michelle and Michael, so they moved to a 10-acre estate in Deerfield Township.

Their "kids" have long ago grown, married and moved on. Michelle starred at Mason High School in girls' basketball and later at University of Tennessee and Ohio State University. Michael was one of the nation's top football recruits out of Moeller High School and also starred at Tennessee.

Michelle is a former teacher, who is expecting a third child in December. Michael – a former Hamilton Township Trustee and father of three – is director of the Munoz Agency, which provides private companies consultation on reaching the Latino community.

### Popular in GOP political circles

If popularity among conservative politicians also had a hall of fame, Munoz would get in on the first ballot.

During the fall presidential campaign, he made appearances at Southwest Ohio rallies endorsing presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Often sharing the stage with him was U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-Terrace Park), a longtime friend and another Republican Munoz has helped win election to state and congressional office.

"He is a guy of unique integrity and decency. I don't know any former NFL player who has commanded more respect. He is a guy who wakes up every day and asks 'how can I help my community and my country,'" Portman says.

"Anthony is a family man and his faith is really important to him. He relies on his faith and he is outspoken about it."

Mason Mayor David Nichols, who also heads the Warren County Republican Party, echoes Portman's praise.

"I had no idea when I first heard of him how much (Munoz) gives back. A lot of people like to talk but he lives it,"

Nichols says. “His persistent message is to overcome and give back.”

After Munoz’s speech to the budding football stars, youth football coach Ron Armor of Deer Park walked away impressed, saying “I consider him to be in the hall of fame of life.”