



## **Athletes Give Thanks, Give Back**

*True stories of pro and amateur athletes whose passion for helping others off the field is as strong as their competitiveness on the field*

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By Rick Horrow and Karla Swatek

### **Heath, Striving for Peace**

Ten-year NFL veteran Heath Evans was a vocal advocate for children and families affected by sexual abuse long before “Jerry Sandusky” became part of the national conversation. His passion about the issue began as close to home as you can get, as his wife Beth Ann had been sexually abused when she was a child.

Evans was raised in Florida by parents who were determined to protect him from the dangers and pitfalls of life. They instilled in him strong Christian values, warning him to be aware of the consequences of the choices he made. At a very young age, Evans expressed a strong desire to be a good Christian. As he grew up, Evans continued to strive to do right by his parents and the teachings of his church, especially as he sought out a highly public life by playing in the NFL after a star turn at Auburn University.

Beth Ann was a woman who had all the qualities he admired in his mother and really seemed to understand him. Evans had never met anyone who made him feel so happy. And he was pretty sure he made her happy, too. But sometimes Beth Ann seemed sad and withdrawn, and Evans could not figure out why. One day she shared some painful memories that had haunted her since childhood. When she was in third grade, she had been repeatedly sexually abused by an older classmate.

At first she told no one but finally got the nerve up to tell her parents when she was in sixth grade. Still, her parents didn't really know what to do, and she hadn't gotten any treatment. The issue was swept under the rug. When Heath heard her story, he was filled with compassion, as well as anger at her abuser. He was shocked that she had had to suffer in silence all these years.

He knew her parents loved her and realized that it was the culture of the times that had led to the secrecy that had made Beth Ann feel so alone for so many years.

When Heath and Beth Ann started the [Heath Evans Foundation](#), their goals were to raise the curtain of secrecy on the subject of child sexual abuse and to provide financial assistance for therapy for victims. Beth Ann encourages children who have suffered such abuse to contact the foundation, which provides counseling and other services.

“I am grateful for Heath Evan’s dedication to supporting children who are victims of sexual abuse,” says author Chrissy Carew, who included Evans’ story in her new book *The Insightful Player*. “The Heath Evans Foundation is giving these children the love, hope, and healing that has not been available to them before. Thank you, Heath, for touching and saving so many young and innocent lives.”