

FOOTBALL AND FAITH

Darryl Stingley was declared dead in a Chicago hospital on April 5, 2007, after having been found unresponsive in his home. He was 55.

Stingley spent 29 years of his life in a wheelchair, and his death was related to an injury he suffered on August 12, 1978. A top receiver for the New England Patriots, he was leaping for a pass thrown by quarterback Steve Grogan. Jack Tatum of the Raiders laid a hit on him that broke Darryl's neck and left him a quadriplegic.

When the press interviewed Stingley ten years after his injury, he said, "I have relived that moment over and over again. I was 26 years old at the time, and I remember thinking, *What's going to happen to me? If I live, what am I going to be like? And then there were all those Whys, whys, whys?*"

He then commented, "It was only after I stopped asking why, that I was able to regroup and go on with my life."

A crucial part of moving on was forgiving Jack Tatum, the Oakland Raider who had ended Stingley's career. Tatum hit violently, and how he played has been debated in football circles for years. He even wrote a book entitled *Final Confessions of an NFL Assassin*. Though disturbed by reading it was Tatum's intent to hurt those on the opposing team, Darryl Stingley forgave the man who changed his life.

"For me to go on and adapt to a new way of life," Stingley said, "I had to forgive him. I couldn't be productive if my mind was clouded by revenge or animosity."

When Darryl learned Jack Tatum had to have part of a leg amputated because of diabetes, he felt for him. When interviewed by *The Boston Globe* in 2003, Stingley said, "You can't, as a human being, feel happy about something like that happening to another human being. Maybe the natural reaction is to think he got what was coming to him, but I don't accept human nature as our real nature. Human nature teaches us to hate. God teaches us to love."

The Reverend Edward C. Brown, Stingley's cousin, conducted the paralyzed player's funeral. He stated, "Darryl was a good man. He didn't stop serving God just because he had a life of suffering and pain ... he lived a life focused on the future and not on the past."

Darryl visited others in the hospital who were paralyzed, helped the inner city youth of Chicago, and wrote a book, *Happy to Be Alive*, that told of his trying experiences.