

Kevin Reilly 52

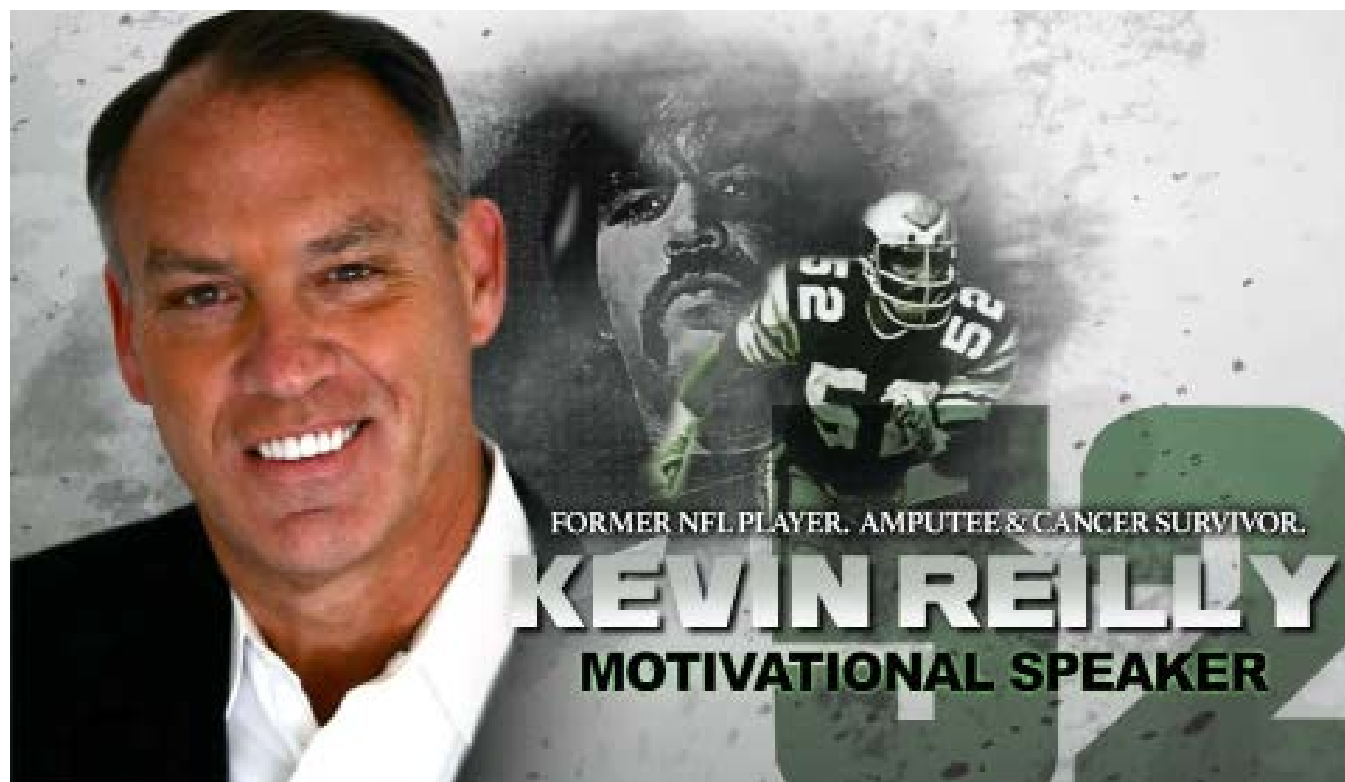
About Kevin Reilly

Originally drafted in 1973 in the seventh round by the Super Bowl champion Miami Dolphins, Kevin Reilly would spend three years with Philadelphia Eagles, where he captained the special teams, and the New England Patriots. A sore shoulder turned out to be a rare tumor and after years of searching for answers, in life saving surgery, his arm and shoulder were amputated at Sloan Kettering hospital in 1979. With the end of his football dreams he went on to a successful corporate career plus a career in broadcasting and as a motivational speaker. Kevin and his wife, Paula live in Wilmington, Delaware.



In the Media

Motivational Speaker video clip (please click to play)



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In the Media

Washington Times, November 30, 2017

Tackling life after loss: 'I have taken hold and will not let go'



By Kevin Reilly

In my recently published book, "Tackling Life: How Faith, Family, Friends and Fortitude Kept an NFL Linebacker in the Game," I tell of my story of how my Catholic faith helped me endure the challenge that ended both my athletic career and my marriage.

In 1979, as I was working to get in shape to resume my career in the National Football League, I was diagnosed with a rare desmoid tumor. The large, aggressive, cancer-like growth required the complete amputation of my left arm and shoulder and removal of four ribs. Even though I was an otherwise healthy 28-year-old, there was a strong possibility I would not even survive the 11½-hour surgery.

As I was being prepped for surgery that fateful day, I was approached by a Catholic priest who, in his capacity

as hospital chaplain, gave me the "last rites." I describe in my book how several other patients of different faiths in pre-op asked to join in a prayer. It seems to be a part of our nature that whatever our faith, we turn to God in a moment of extreme danger or risk. Prayer for me was consistent with my upbringing, and looking back now on the trauma of that experience, I believe my faith helped provide strength in the crisis itself and in the years of recovery.

I have had many years to adapt to my one-arm world and eventually became pretty good at it. In my speeches, I often tell the story of the hospital counselor who suggested I buy clip-on ties because I would never be able to tie my own necktie. As I tell the story, I tie my necktie one-handed — always good for a laugh and some applause. But although I survived my physical health crisis, I did not think I would make it through the depression that I experienced with the end of my marriage of 20 years. Once again, my faith became part of a support network that included friends, family and professional counseling. As a result of that experience, I made many changes in my life and believe I am a better person because of it.

I was raised as a Catholic and attended a parochial school where I was exposed to the fundamentals of my faith. I then attended an all-boys Catholic school famous for its football team. It was on the football field where my dreams were focused, but I soon found that there was more to the institution known as Salesianum than undefeated sports teams. The school was founded

by the Oblate order, followers of St. Francis de Sales. The culture was personified by the motto, "Tenui Nec Dimittam" (I have taken hold and will not let go), and led by men like my baseball coach and mentor, Father Robert Ashenbrenner, who personified the qualities of Saint Francis, "The Gentleman Saint," in his everyday life.

Salesianum had a profound effect on my life and many other young men, including the current commander of the Navy SEALs, a school graduate who returned to speak to the students this year. The priests, teachers and coaches taught us to respect and support our fellow man and to understand that faith can be a force for good in your life. Recalling

the quote, "You may be the only bible that your neighbor ever reads," I am hoping my book helps to spread the message.

Today, I tour the country speaking to groups from all walks of life: corporations, schools, athletic teams and faith-based groups. I tell my personal story with the hope that my experience will help others face the demons in their own life.

One speaking opportunity affected me more than any other and that was the time I was asked to address the Amputee Ward at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in 2005. Just standing before those brave young men and women was an honor I will never forget. They were looking for answers about what lay ahead, and I stood before them as an expert on life after traumatic amputation. As I got ready to speak that day, I was once again asking God for strength — the strength to make a small difference in the life of these heroes who had taken the risk for all of us. Take hold and never let go.

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Former Philadelphia Eagles linebacker Kevin Reilly is a motivational speaker and author of "Tackling Life: How Faith, Family, Friends and Fortitude Kept an NFL Linebacker in the Game" (2017, Faith & Family Publications) <http://tacklinglifebook.com>. He lives with his wife, Paula, in Wilmington, Delaware. Reach him at www.kreilly.com and @KevinReillyNFL52Eagles.



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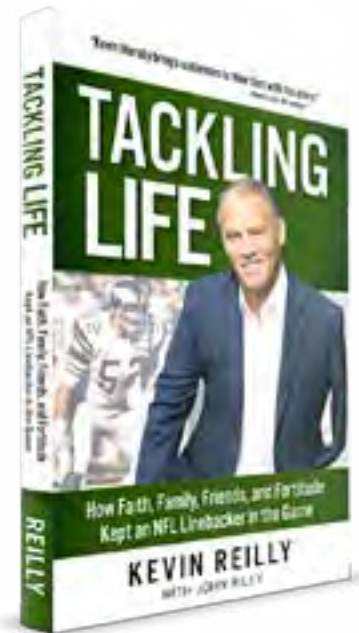
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About the book *Tackling Life*

Until his late 20's, Kevin Reilly seemed to be living a charmed life. The handsome high school and college football star had fulfilled his lifelong dream of not only playing in the National Football League, but playing for his beloved Philadelphia Eagles. But before we learn about how Kevin achieved his athletic dreams, we find him in the opening chapter of "Tackling Life" receiving the devastating news from a prominent surgeon at Sloan Kettering Hospital, that his nagging shoulder problem is due to a rare tumor and he may be facing a radical amputation.

Following this shocking revelation, the reader is transported back to Kevin's formative years in the northern Delaware suburbs. This is not only where his football dreams are developed, it is also where the four pillars of his life begin to take shape: faith, family, friends and fortitude. This foundation will sustain him through the crushing end to his dreams, the battle to live, followed by his long running recovery story. Kevin has been inspiring audiences for years through his public speaking, but now through "Tackling Life" his audience will learn the full story of his survival and success.

The first half of "Tackling Life" is told in a riveting "flashback" style. From Kevin's encounters with doctors, nurses, and other patients during the most traumatic days before and after his surgeries, the story shifts to his ascension in the football ranks and exploits both with and against some of the great names in the football world. In the second half, readers will learn how he went about constructing a new life in the corporate and broadcasting worlds, even including a stint as a boxing manager before being knocked down again by the divorce he never saw coming. Readers will laugh, cry and be inspired by Kevin's deep faith and incredible resilience. While football fans will certainly enjoy the ride, this book is more about life and the challenges and moments that most of us face at one time or another.



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Praise for *Tackling Life* ...

“Kevin literally brings audiences to their feet with his story!”

–**Howie Long, NFL analyst**

“Every morning I need a little inspiration without perspiration, and Kevin’s story does that for me. Seeing Kevin attack life’s challenges with passion for what he is doing and compassion for those he is doing it with, is really an inspiring story in itself!”

– **DICK VERMEIL, former coach of the Philadelphia Eagles**

“Kevin Reilly teaches us the greatest accomplishment in life is not in never falling, but in rising again after you fall. This is a story of faith and resilience.”

– **ROCKY BLEIER, Vietnam veteran and four-time Super Bowl champion**

“Over the years I have had the great pleasure of meeting successful business people, star athletes, prominent celebrities and even American heroes. As you will learn from this book, Kevin’s perseverance and resolve rival them all.”


– **STEVE KUPCHA, Navy SEAL (Ret.)**

“Kevin Reilly made it to the NFL on heart and desire, and those same qualities enabled him to overcome even greater challenges off the field. This is an inspiring story and a wonderful read.”

– **RAY DIDINGER, award-winning sportswriter, author, and member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame**

“I was close to Kevin during his darkest days. His courage and faith against almost insurmountable odds inspired those of us around him, and we urged him to write a book. As I worked with him through this project, I discovered his story was even better than I thought.”

– **JOHN RILEY, friend and “Tackling Life” contributor**



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From the Introduction


Like many, particularly some of the veterans I have been privileged to know, my life is divided into two distinct phases—before the loss of my arm and shoulder and after. No doubt, some of the amputee combat veterans I have counseled had other events and experiences affect them both before their injury and afterwards. But I must believe that their combat exposure and traumatic injury establishes a division for them in much the same way that my amputation and long recovery has done in my life.

Many who go through such serious trauma do not always completely recover, either because the physical damage is so severe and lasting or the psychological scars are just too deep. I am convinced that my ability to have made it through the darkest days was mostly predetermined by my early physical, spiritual, and psychological development. I was blessed with wonderful parents and nurturing Catholic educators and coaches who taught me how to compete and how to win or accept defeat without losing perspective.

In Part I of my story, I weave together my early development up to achieving my dream of playing for the Philadelphia Eagles in the National Football League. As this dream of a lifetime was unfolding, however, there was a demon growing inside of me—a rare tumor that would either dramatically alter my body or take my life. I hope you will gain a sense of how each stage of my development helped to prepare me in some way for what I was facing.

In Part II, I share how the rest of my life unfolded after my four surgeries and the loss of my arm, shoulder, four ribs, and more.

This book is a story about achieving my dream, having it crushed, and then creating a new dream. The critical ingredients of my survival were faith, family, friends, and fortitude. Everyone has something they must survive, so I share my journey in hopes of encouraging others along the way.



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Interview Questions

Why did you write this book?

For many years I have been telling my personal story at speaking engagements around the country. No matter where I go, people ask me if I have written a book. They seem to want more details about my formative years and football experiences; my health issues; the role of faith during the stressful times in my life; and even how I recovered from my divorce. Many have said they wanted to share my experience with another friend or family member.

How did you settle on the title?

The book was 95 percent complete before we settled on the title. I always wanted something with a football angle but somehow would immediately convey that this was about a great deal more than football. I asked for suggestions on my Facebook page and received over 300 responses. Many of the suggestions focused on my amputation or they connected to my Philadelphia Eagles' experience. "Tackling Life" came out of several long conversations and idea exchanges with John, our copy editor and publishing consultant. Interestingly, the idea had been offered by someone of Facebook a month prior, but it didn't sink in at the time.

Facts and Figures

While it feels almost natural to me to tell my story to an audience of a thousand people, I always struggled with the thought of putting it down on paper. I became determined a few years ago to get started and at first just sat for hours writing it down in longhand. My daughter-in-law Erica Reilly would type and edit what I had drafted. Following his retirement, my close friend of forty years, John Riley jumped in and we spent many hours together recalling various events that I hadn't thought about in a long time.

As I mention in the book, despite the radical nature of my "four quarter amputation" it was a blessing that it was my non-dominant arm. Thanks to the nuns in grade school I developed excellent penmanship, so I was able to write and hand-off my work for typing. I tried other methods such as dictation but it never seemed to work well with my thought process.



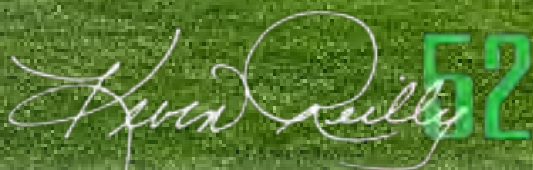
To schedule a speaking engagement:

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web: www.kreilly.com

facebook: www.facebook.com/kevin.reilly.33633

The logo features the name "Kevin Reilly" in a white, cursive script font. To the right of the name is a large, bold green number "52".

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