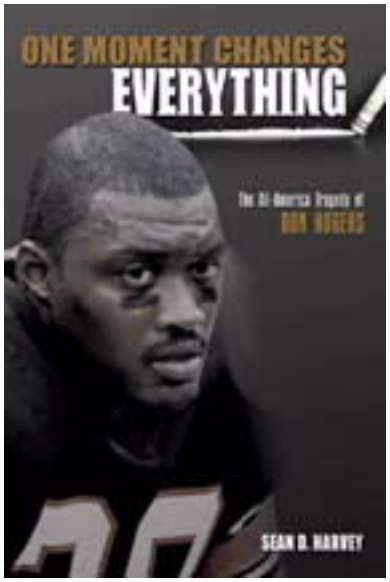
It doesn't get much sadder than the story of Don Rogers. The Browns first round pick in 1984, Rogers immediately established himself as a fierce, hard hitting presence in the Browns secondary ... winning Defensive Rookie of the Year honors that season. Just over a year after winning that award, Rogers died, in the summer of 1986 from cocaine poisoning. Author Sean D. Harvey sent us some copies of the book, and Brian McPeek was so moved by it ... he felt compelled to pen this piece.



On June 26, 1986, Don Rogers, the 1984 NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year, had the world by the proverbial tail. He, his younger brother Reggie, and his sister Jacqueline were royalty in Sacramento where they all attended high school. Don Rogers was regarded with awe and respect in Sacramento and you couldn't find a soul there who didn't speak highly of his intelligence, maturity and character.

After a standout career at UCLA that included 1982 Rose Bowl MVP honors, Rogers had come to Cleveland as the Browns first pick in the 1984 draft and immediately established himself as a fierce, hard hitting presence in the Browns secondary. He was entering the final year of his rookie contract and was looking forward to a huge contract that would provide for him as well as for his entire, impoverished family after that '86 season. Rogers had also been blessed with a son and was deeply looking forward to being married two days later in his adoring hometown.

But before any of that could take place, on June 27, 1986 Don Rogers was dead from cocaine poisoning.

His life was over at the age of 23. The heartache and misery for the rest of the Rogers family was just beginning.

In his book " **One Moment Changes Everything- The All-America Tragedy of Don Rogers** ", author Sean D. Harvey takes us back to perhaps one of the darkest periods of time in Cleveland and national sports history. In just more than a week, Len Bias, the Boston Celtics 1st round draft pick in 1986, and Don Rogers, a young, established NFL star, were dead from cocaine use.

Harvey, who lives in Berkeley, CA, has first hand knowledge of the Rogers family. He played against both Don and Reggie Rogers while in high school and also coached Jackie Rogers, one of the most highly recruited high school basketball players in the country at the time of her graduation, in various summer leagues. He also still maintains contact with Reggie and Jackie whenever possible.

Harvey details the lives of Don, Reggie and Jackie and also documents the struggles of their mother Loretha to make ends meet in one of Sacramento's most violent and impoverished neighborhoods, the "Strawberry Manor" section of Del Paso Heights.

A vivid portrait of Don Rogers emerges from Harvey's work. Don Rogers was the de facto father and stabilizing influence for the family. A single parent, Loretha moved Don from Texarkana to Del Paso Height when he was young. Rogers grew up poor but disciplined. Not only was he a standout athlete at Norte Del Rio High, playing both basketball and football at all-state levels, but he was also a solid student and, by all accounts, a better person.

At UCLA he studied his craft under All-America safety Ken Easley before making his own mark. Never in serious trouble, Rogers was just a class or two away from earning his degree, something he coveted as much as earning a living in the NFL, when he died.

After being drafted by the Browns Don Rogers returned to his hometown and started a youth football league for the children still grinding out an existence in his old neighborhood. This was not the typical situation where an athlete cuts a check and walks away. Both Don and Reggie Rogers were actively involved in the league and the lives of the kids who came to play. Don required each child looking to play in the league to bring a report card and a letter from his teacher to impress upon them the value and importance of an education.

Through Harvey's exhaustive research, contacts and interviews you come to understand that Don Rogers had his head on straight and his priorities in order. His description of Don Rogers has you nearly begging that the tragedy you know is coming is somehow averted.

But it still happens. On the day before his wedding (after being the first to leave a party held in his honor the night before that was attended by Browns teammate Hanford Dixon and others) Don Rogers ingested a lethal amount of cocaine and died hours later. At the press conference a couple days later to announce the cause death his mother Loretha suffered a heart attack upon hearing that cocaine had killed her oldest child and the family's provider.

It would only get worse from there.

Without Don's guidance and presence the Rogers family struggled mightily and still does today. Reggie went to the University of Washington on a basketball scholarship but struggled to mesh with various personalities on both the team and the coaching staff. He also appeared to battling depression and was developing an alcohol habit that would nearly kill him and did contribute to the deaths of three others.

Reggie's physical talents were too much to ignore. The Detroit Lions made Rogers, a consensus All-American choice during his senior season as a Huskies defensive lineman, the 7th overall pick in the 1987 draft. But Reggie, never comfortable in the spotlight and without Don around to guide him, suffered a nervous breakdown and missed most of his rookie season. He was also treated for the alcohol problem. The fans of Detroit cared less about the circumstances and more about the fact that their 1st pick was on the road to Bustville.

In October of 1988, after missing more time on the field due to an ankle injury, Rogers went out for a few beers and on the way home was involved in a spectacular accident that killed three teenagers (who were allegedly also drunk and using marijuana). Rogers suffered a broken neck and a severed finger and, though he would reappear briefly in Buffalo and Tampa Bay after he rehabilitated, his career essentially ended that night as well.

Jackie Rogers was also deeply affected by the loss of Don. She

received a basketball scholarship to Oregon State but resigned it a year into her time there. She came home and slipped into the Del Paso Heights time honored role of a drug addict and she apparently is still battling that addiction today.

Don's mother Loretha did in 2000 and is buried next to Don.

Harvey's book is well written and well researched. His writing style is perfectly suited to sports fans given his own athletic background (Harvey was a two-year varsity letter winner as a receiver at San Jose State). Readers early on will have to adapt to the way Harvey interweaves the stories and life-defining moments of the Rogers children. It was a bit awkward at first but adapting to his style will ultimately reward readers. It's that style that ultimately assists in telling his story.

There's plenty more to be gained from reading "One Moment Changes Everything". The book goes into detail about the country's social and political reactions to the deaths of both Len Bias and Don Rogers. It also touches on agent scandals (and what passed for reform) as well as mafia affiliations, each of which have Reggie Rogers as a central character.

Any Browns fans old enough to remember Don Rogers would be well served to read Harvey's book for a closer look at a franchise-shaking event and a definitive look at Rogers himself. Younger fans will benefit from the above and the history lessons Harvey provides. They will also gain an appreciation for just how invasive and extensive the drug culture was in the mid 80's.

"One Moment Changes Everything- The All-America Tragedy of Don Rogers is available on **amazon.com** as well as at **sportspublishingllc.com**
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