

Rennie Curran – From NFL Linebacker Preparing for Gameday to Inspirational, Motivational, Keynote Speaker Preparing to Bring Value to an Organization’s Event



Rennie Curran
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Game Changers Foundation

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Interview conducted by:

Bud Wayne, Editorial Executive
CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. Curran, you had a storied career at the University of Georgia as a three-time All-American linebacker, Team MVP, Butkus Award finalist, and a permanent captain. Then you went on to play professional football with the Tennessee Titans, Tampa Bay Bucs, Edmonton Eskimos, and the BC Lions. As the son of Liberian immigrants, growing up in Atlanta Georgia, did you ever imagine reaching such heights?*

Mr. Curran: It was a dream. As a child, I imagined doing great things. Never did I think it would turn into this. Every morning when I wake up, I think about the people that believed in me before I believed in myself. Teachers, coaches, mentors, and trainers allowed me to train for free when nobody knew my name. I am a product of my community and environment. That built the momentum to allow me to believe that I can be where I am in this position today.

I am the typical underdog which is one of the beautiful things about being in the United States. There are a lot of great things that are happening here and a lot of opportunities.

CEOCFO: *You are now a keynote speaker, author, and leadership coach. Where did it come from for you to want to do this? What was your inspiration?*

Mr. Curran: My parents were the first ones to represent everything I do now. My dad was an entrepreneur and was my first example of what entrepreneurship looked like and being a leader. My mother was a nurse who showed me about caring and empathy. I had different influences early in my life and how they treated people left a huge mark. My grandfather is a bishop of the Methodist church in Liberia and he would come from Liberia and give speeches. Watching him being at church and seeing my pastor William Harris, left a huge mark on me.

As I got into sports started to find myself in a leadership position a lot of times. I would give the pre-game speech and do a lot of post-game interviews.

The last aspect that put me in this position was the fact that I was labeled undersized my entire career, which put me in the mindset that the smaller you are, the more strategic you have to be and the more innovative. It allowed me to develop the perspective and get the intangibles to allow me to be a good leadership coach and speaker and a good offense. I can find strategies and principles that help people.

CEOFCO: *They say in basketball that being a point guard lends itself to being a good head coach because you are the general on the court. What did being a linebacker in football mean for you, as to how it relates to being a keynote and inspirational speaker?*

Mr. Curran: Being a linebacker directly correlates with what I do now. When I go in as a speaker, I set the tone for the conference and get everybody on the same page and focused for the upcoming event. I did the same thing as a linebacker. My job was to go in a huddle and get everybody fired up and ready. I am the communication between my teammates and the defensive coordinator.

Another big part of being a linebacker is the anticipation piece and that comes from preparation. I spent more time preparing for a game than playing against my opponent. As a speaker it is a big part of what I do, the preparation I put into understanding the organization, their body language, tendencies, and patterns. The more I prepare, the more I can deliver value for my audience and the organizations I work with.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about the Game Changers Foundation? Why did you found it and what is your focus with it today?*

Mr. Curran: I have two different entities. The first one is Game Changer Coaching. It entails speaking, coaching, and consulting. Then I have the Game Changers Foundation, which was founded in 2019, not long after I retired. I realized that just as I have the experience of being the product of my environment, having a lot of mentors and trainers, there are people who call into me that are in the same position that I once was; young guys and girls who are transitioning and needed support.

"I can reach different types of people because I have been in big positions but I have also been an underdog and labeled undersized. Everybody can relate to that. Maybe not everyone relates to being a success, but everybody can relate to being not enough in some shape or form, or undersized in some way. That is why I can not only inspire but help move the needle for a lot of organizations."

Rennie Curran

I would go and visit small towns where there was not a lot of opportunity and I saw how the young athletes were struggling and the older athletes who were in that position of transitioning. I saw a way to create what was almost like a Big Brothers/Big Sisters for athletes.

Our mission with the Game Changers Foundation is to help athletes to become leaders. We do it through community engagement. We go out to speak to younger athletes and teams at schools. With the mentorship, we match former athletes with current athletes like Big Brothers/Big Sisters. We also have workshops for leadership development periodically to teach athletes life skills that will help them on and off the field.

CEOFCO: *How do you get the athletes to participate?*

Mr. Curran: It all starts with relationships. We also have a free camp where we partner with high schools or with youth associations. We have former athletes who serve as the coaches for those events. That brings everybody together and from there once we have them in our system, then that opens the door for the mentorship piece and leadership development.

CEOFCO: *I see you have your Athlete 2 Athlete TV series that you host. Tell us about that and your sponsor, the Sports Turf Company.*

Mr. Curran: That is another opportunity for us to engage with current and former athletes. We have former athletes come on the show from different sports, from track to basketball to baseball. We had guys like Jess Francoeur, former star outfielder for the Atlanta Braves, New York Mets, and 6 other teams. We have many different athletes from different backgrounds. They share the challenges they have overcome, the things they did to separate themselves, and where they are going with their career after they take the jersey off. It is about sharing the tips and tools that help the current generation of athletes.

That show usually airs during the high school game of the week on Peachtree TV (WPCH-TV). Through Sports Turf generous donations, we have been able to not only do the show but do the camps and we can support a lot of the different youth organizations and high schools we work with by making donations to them as well.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about sponsorships? Are you currently looking for sponsors?*

Mr. Curran: We have different events that we put on. Our next event is going to be a 12:39 event. It is going to be November 9th, the day before my birthday. We recently had a charity combine; it was a PROS VS. JOES charity combine and we are always looking for sponsors.

We are open to talking to companies who want to sponsor and support our foundation. They may have a young child who is currently playing who they want to be mentored or they may be looking to hire athletes. We are willing to work with them to make that possible.

CEOFCO: *Would you tell us about your team and the board members at the Game Changers Foundation?*

Mr. Curran: We have a high-level team at the board of directors, starting with our Board Co-Chairman Rob Kremer. Rob works with Rhythm Communications and helps a lot with public relations. He is someone I have known over the years who has worked with several athletes, current and former, and always does a great job.

We also have Natifa Mustafa, who is the Founder and CEO of The Bridge Athletic Scholars Program. I met Natifa at one of our camps as she has a son that is currently in high school and he helps with programming and everything that is on the ground in terms of events.

CEOFCO: *You are a keynote speaker. Would you tell us some of the events you have been invited to speak at and the focus of your presentation?*

Mr. Curran: I started speaking in small towns just locally around Georgia but it has grown to speak at several different businesses, associations, and non-profits. My recent speaking engagements include one I did for Gwinnett County, Georgia, where they had a lunch manager conference. There was also one for Transport Enterprise Leasing LLC, which is based out of Chattanooga, Tennessee. There was also speaking engagements for the Court Administrators Association of Georgia, Rotary Clubs, Equitable, Fidelity. There are a number of companies where I have spoken at their events.

CEOFCO: *Who in your life made the greatest impact? Was it your coaches, parents, a friend, someone you met on the street, or a politician?*

Mr. Curran: Several coaches played a major role, coaches and trainers. The first Little League coach I still talk to today, his name is Ronny Benton. We had one of the best teams and only lost six games and we are still all connected to this day. We all played together in Little League and it was a real family. That was the foundation of my career and who I am as a man today because he was in my life during one of the toughest times. My dad had lost his business and my mom had almost died from a surgery she had. I was around eleven or twelve and they stepped in and helped me big time. He took me to my first Georgia game.

He got me with my first trainer and you cannot play in college nowadays unless you are getting special training with a personal trainer which costs tons of money. That is a huge barrier for many athletes. You need to have the financial means to get extra training and I was able to get that because he was in my life. He also connected me to Chip Smith and Chip Smith just happened to live twenty minutes down the road. After my Little League coach started making payments, Chip allowed me to train for free along with tons of other trainees. I would go to each one of them and they would tell me to come and join in and they would not ask me for payment.

There was Champ Bailey and so many amazing athletes. Georgia Bulldogs Coach Mark Allan Richt who played a major role in my life as I got to Georgia. I started to learn what it looked like to manage success and still be a man of faith and a man of character. My pastor William Harris, who passed away about two years ago, played a major role in terms of my foundation of faith.

CEOFCO: *You have had great success as an athlete, as the founder of your foundation, and as an inspirational speaker. Where do you go from here?*

Mr. Curran: It is now about serving others and using my success and the principles I have learned through success and failures, to provide as much impact as I can whether to the company executives and entrepreneurs I work with or the next generation of athletes. To me, it is about leveraging all those experiences, relationships, and resources to provide value and recreate myself. That is my ultimate goal.

I try also to give those who may never get the same experiences that I have, a way to use my opportunities and privileges to impact someone else who may not have the same opportunity.

CEO/CFO: Final question. There are so many companies, groups, and organizations that are looking for someone to stand up in front of their people and inspire them to be greater achievers, to succeed in their jobs, missions, and of course their sports. Why choose Rennie Curran?

Mr. Curran: The reason they should choose me is because I always go the extra mile. It is not just a canned speech; it is a customized experience full of engagement. They are getting somebody who is going to get to know their organization speak from the standpoint of relevance, and make sure they have done their background work. They will get somebody who understands the highs and the lowest of the lows. I can speak to somebody who is in that position where they do not want to be, maybe they failed or they are trying to become a leader and they do not know how. I can also speak to that person who is a leader but maybe they are getting to comfortable or maybe they are high performers but not a leader.

I can speak to a very diverse group of people from different perspectives. I can reach different types of people because I have been in big positions but I have also been an underdog and labeled undersized. Everybody can relate to that. Maybe not everyone relates to being a success, but everybody can relate to being not enough in some shape or form, or undersized in some way. That is why I can not only inspire but help move the needle for a lot of organizations.

