Roy Simmons, HIV-Positive Former NFL Player, Dies

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Roy Simmons, a former National Football League player for the New York Giants and the Washington Redskins, died in his apartment in the Bronx, New York, on February 20, The New York Times reports. He was 57.

Simmons was an offensive lineman for the Giants from 1979 to 1983. He played in the Super Bowl for the Redskins in 1984, but the team lost to the Los Angeles Raiders. He played in the United States Football League in 1985 before retiring from football.

In 1992, Simmons came out on the Phil Donahue talk show as gay. At the time, only one other NFL player, Dave Kopay, had come out as gay. Both men did so only after retiring. To date, the NFL has not had an active player who is openly gay.

Simmons tested HIV positive in 1997. His brother Gary said he died of pneumonia-related complications. Although Simmons was a born-again Christian from Georgia, his brother Gary disputes reports that Simmons believed homosexuality was wrong.

“At no time has he ever shied away from being who he was,” said his brother Gary. “Those who knew Roy know where he stood. Roy was a gay black man who came out of the South.”

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