

# True calling for former Florida State star Myron Rolle revealed itself to everyone in coronavirus pandemic

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The former top-ranked high school football recruit in America walks into Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston most days around 5 a.m. He wears an N-95 mask, spends more than 60 percent of his day working with COVID-19 patients and works stretches where he executes 24-hour shifts every other day.

Myron Rolle hasn't seen his wife, Latoya, since February. They live apart while she's finishing her pediatric dental residency in Alabama. The fear of exposing her to COVID-19 has halted visits in the short term.

Rolle stresses that he's just a foot soldier amid a much bigger army at Mass General fighting the pandemic. He is a third-year neurosurgery resident, part of a larger crew that's volunteered to help the [hospital's "surge clinic,"](#) a unit created to relieve the hospital's emergency services amid one of the American cities hit hardest by COVID-19.

For the sports world, the publicity surrounding Rolle's job fighting the coronavirus has offered a prism to better understand the realities of the risk, work and precision required of all the medical personnel on the frontlines. His athletic profile has allowed him to become one of the faces for medical workers in this pandemic.

Along the way, it has helped explain the path he'd prioritized all along, choosing long-term career altruism over grinding out a career on the fringes of the NFL.

“It was a bit uncomfortable making all these decisions in a world where maybe they just didn’t understand my other ambitions and passion,” Rolle told Yahoo Sports by phone on Sunday. “All the decisions that have been made since fifth grade have led me to this point.”



Former Florida State and [Tennessee Titans](#) defensive back Myron Rolle, pictured in Boston on April 3, is currently a third-year neurosurgery resident at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. (Photo by Barry Chin/The Boston Globe via Getty Images)

## Myron Rolle’s star turn bigger in medicine than football

Rolle, a former star defensive back at Florida State, has received nearly the same amount of high-profile attention for his work on the frontlines of fighting COVID-19 than he did playing football.

The 2020 NFL draft featured an extensive interview with him, giving him more exposure than the 2012 draft when the Tennessee Titans selected him in the sixth round. Rolle recently did a Zoom call with the [Boston Celtics](#) and their staff, and he left with an appreciation of coach Brad Stevens’ intellect and the engagement of all the players. His “Good Morning America” interview with Robin Roberts proved a thrill if only because she’s “my mother’s favorite person in the world.”

Dr. Myron Rolle, the burgeoning star neurosurgeon, has solidified a much higher upside than the five-star prospect who had a solid college career and spent two seasons in the NFL. This is mostly notable because of the football sacrifices he made in the short-term to fulfill the potential of his medical career.

“There’s no obstacle that could stop me from my ultimate goal, to serve the communities of disadvantaged and marginalized people through medicine,” he said.

After completing medical school at Florida State in 2017, Rolle remained a coveted recruit. There are just 21 neurosurgery residents in his program at Mass General and Harvard Medical School. They accept three each year, and Rolle was selected from a pool of 300 applicants.

“In terms of the program here,” said Dr. Bob Carter, the neurology chief at Mass General, “he’s really a 1 percenter.”

During this time of crisis, that means living alone, working out by running the stairs in his 35-floor apartment building and FaceTiming with his wife.

“We pray a lot together, and she tries to get my mind off the day-to-day challenges of being in a COVID-19 hospital,” Rolle said. “She tells me, ‘God placed you in this position for a reason.’ ”

Prior to the pandemic, Rolle’s typical duties included complex brain and spine surgeries. He plans to specialize in pediatric neurosurgery and eventually use those skills around the world. For now, he’s seeing American inequities up close.



In 2017, Myron Rolle opens his "Match Day" letter that shows where he will continue his medical education and residency. (Photo by Toni L. Sandys/The Washington Post via Getty Images)

## Seeing coronavirus' impact on minority communities

It has struck Rolle that there's such a [statistical disparity in minority populations contracting and dying from COVID-19](#).

These are the types of social issues he'd have discussed back in his NFL days with Titans teammates Vincent Fuller II, Chris Hope and David Thornton in their daily lunches after offseason workouts during Rolle's two season with the Titans. Now, he's seeing them up close.

“The health care disparity gaps that already existed are illuminated right now,” he said. “The population that’s being affected by this, it’s really important to raise the light that a lot of underserved and black and brown and poor [that are being impacted].”

In the next 18 months, Carter said Rolle has set up experiences with two top neurosurgeons — Dr. Kee Park and Dr. Benjamin Warf — who’ve traveled extensively internationally to perform neurosurgery in underserved areas.

“Not only does Myron have a desire to see the inequities,” Carter said, “he has a plan to address them and be part of the solution.”

And he’s already acted on it. In September, Rolle got a glimpse of the type of help he hopes to bring communities in the future. He was part of a team of nine medical professionals from Mass General who spent more than two weeks as part of a larger international initiative in the Bahamas helping residents recover from the devastation of Hurricane Dorian. Rolle is the youngest of five from a family with strong Bahamian roots, and the spirit of the work fit with what he plans to do in the future.

Rolle helped at a clinic in Freeport that was set up to deal with overflow from all the hospitalizations, doing everything from administering tetanus shots to stitching wounds. He also was part of a group that went door-to-door in the community to offer services to those who couldn’t get to the clinic. (Rolle stressed the importance of social workers on the trip to help patients’ mental health through the devastation and loss of loved ones.)

“Myron’s future is just starting,” said Fuller, who went on to Fordham law school after the NFL and is a third-year associate at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson. “He can add so much more value to society as a whole than 99.5 percent of athletes are able to accomplish.”

Rolle’s view from the frontlines comes with a unique perspective for a sports world that’s seemingly inching toward some form of comeback every day. His advice to league leaders around athletics is simple: “Be conservative and go slow.”

While there’s early optimism about anti-viral therapies, there’s likely a long way to go. Rolle said that the state of hospitals should be a barometer that leagues use: What are ICU admission levels? Are elective cases being rescheduled? Is there still a need for surge clinics and impromptu emergency floors?

“If these things are turning back into normal flow at hospitals,” Rolle said, “then I think that you can start to have the consideration of leagues resuming.”



Florida State safety Myron Rolle is congratulated after the Seminoles defeated Maryland 37-3 in a 2008 game. (AP Photo/Rob Carr)

## Here's why Rolle chose this path

Along Rolle's journey, his ability to have a greater impact in the medical world wasn't always obvious. As Rolle carefully curated his path to become a doctor, much of it defied football convention.

Back when Rolle attended Florida State, he drew criticism from the Seminoles' defensive coordinator, Mickey Andrews, for studying too much. Rolle was a very good player at Florida State, best remembered for flying in a private plane to a road game at Maryland in 2008 after attending the ceremony where it was announced he won a Rhodes Scholarship. He arrived late to Florida State's 37-3 victory, and Bobby Bowden still recalls the scene of him arriving.

"When he came on the field," Bowden said in a phone interview, "it was the highlight of the game."

When Rolle left FSU after three seasons and delayed his entry to the NFL draft to accept the Rhodes Scholarship, his draft stock slipped. Former Florida State assistant Chuck Amato recalls pundits second-guessing Rolle's decision to attend Oxford: "People said, 'What is he nuts? He's giving away a couple of million dollars.'"

It was all part of a broader view outside of the lines. Rolle chose FSU because Bowden promised to accommodate an academic schedule filled with labs and shadowing doctors. He sacrificed the potential draft money because he knew his master's degree in medical anthropology from Oxford would help him become a better doctor. And after two seasons in the NFL, Rolle got cut by the Steelers and

chose to head back to FSU for medical school instead of languishing on the fringes of the NFL.

Reflecting on his path Sunday, Rolle said he's grateful.

"I feel like it was worth it," he said. "I got both experiences and I learned a lot from both those experiences and it made me better."

Rolle, 33, is just beginning to have his impact on the medical world. Most gratifying, perhaps, is that he's beginning to find himself amid a flattering role reversal. After growing up idolizing famed neurosurgeon Ben Carson and Bill Bradley, the Princeton basketball star turned Rhodes Scholar and senator, he's realizing that he's becoming the source of inspiration for a new generation.

"I've heard from a lot of people going into medicine who've drawn inspiration from my story," Rolle said. "It feels amazing. It makes your journey that much more fulfilling."

Rolle is hopeful more athletes go into medicine. To do so, they'd need to overcome the pressures that exist in many sports to take the paths of least academic resistance. The skills translate from the field to the operating room.

"Some of the things he brings from college football and sports have been so valuable in the team environment in medicine," Carter said. "He's a natural leader in a team setting. That's very important, and it sets the stage for others who want to follow a similar path."

In many ways, we're just starting to see the impact that Rolle can have on society. After cutting his football career early, Rolle is in the first quarter of helping the underserved around the globe. All these years later, Myron Rolle is again a coveted recruit.