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**RAY LEWIS:
LEGACY IN
MOTION**

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LEGACY IN MOTION: RAY LEWIS ON AGING, CAREGIVING, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

By Carolé Dacey-Young

Ray Lewis at Baltimore Ravens vs. Indianapolis Colts, Home Game, M&T Bank Stadium, Baltimore, Maryland. January 6, 2013. 24-9 Win. NFL Playoffs Wild Card Round.

Baltimore Ravens

When you reach a certain point in life, the questions shift. It's less about the career and more about who you are as a person. For NFL legend Ray Lewis, the question he faced after retiring was simple yet profound: *What comes next?* After a career defined by victories, two Super Bowl titles, and legendary pregame speeches, the answer didn't come in stats or trophies. It came in a deeper purpose.

I didn't want to just leave the field. I wanted to leave a legacy," Lewis said. "Now, it's not about what I won on the scoreboard—it's about what I can give back to others, what I can do to help people understand that strength isn't just physical; it's emotional, spiritual, and generational."

This August, Lewis returned to Canton, Ohio—not for another accolade, but to help shape a new vision of aging, leadership, and longevity. He was the keynote speaker at the *NFL Alumni Health Legends of Longevity: Huddle for Health Symposium*, a gathering of health leaders and former NFL players. The event focused on caregiving, resilience, and what it means to lead with purpose in the second half of life.

But it was Lewis's raw vulnerability that captured the crowd, sparking a deeper conversation about aging and caregiving.

FROM GAME DAY TO EVERY DAY: LEADERSHIP, REIMAGINED

Ray Lewis's football career is nothing short of legendary. Over his 17 years in the NFL with the Baltimore Ravens, Lewis became one of the most dominant linebackers in football history. Known for his fierce passion, unmatched leadership, and ability to inspire teammates, Lewis was a pivotal figure in

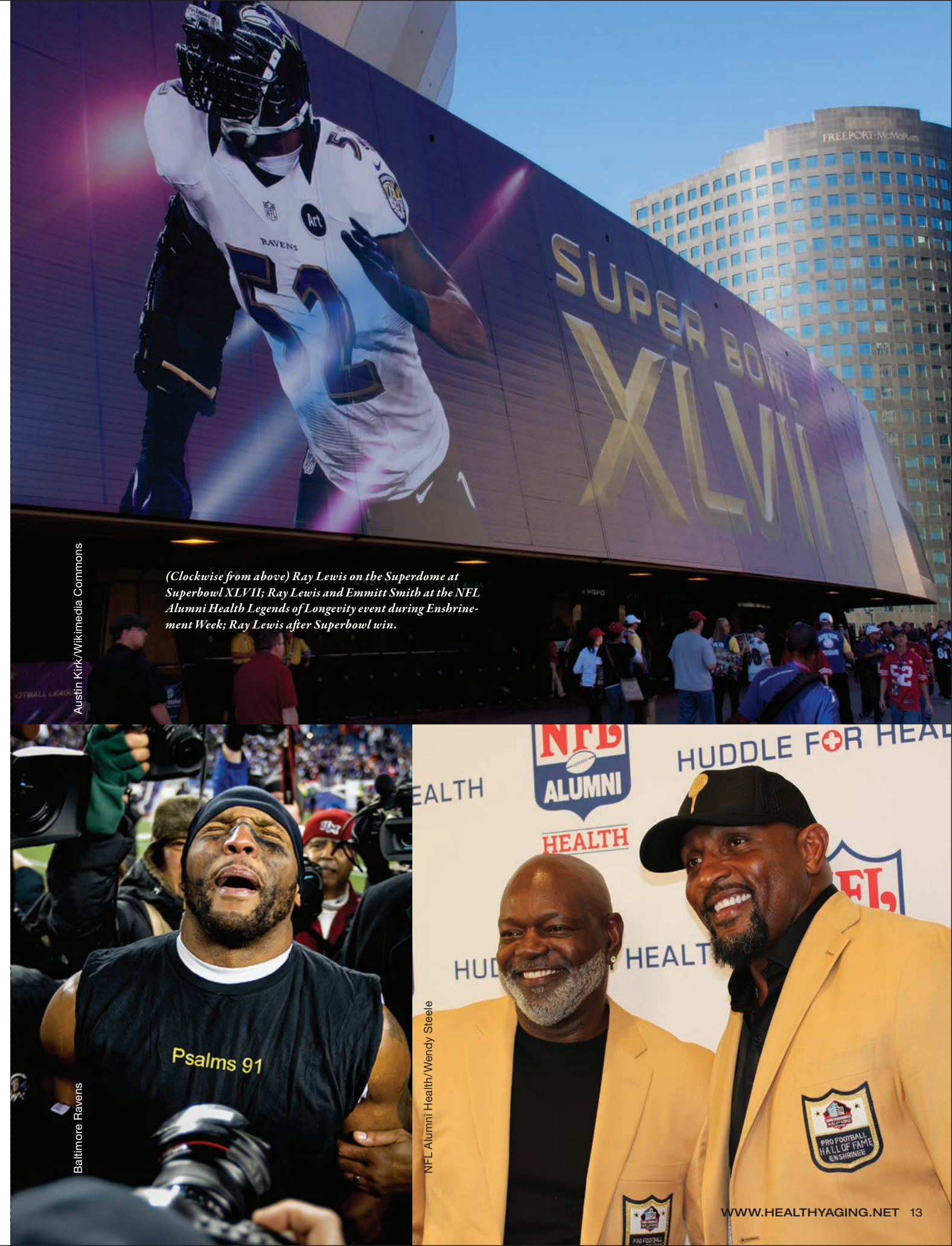
the Ravens' two Super Bowl championships (XXXV and XLVII).

A two-time Super Bowl MVP, 13-time Pro Bowler, and the 2000 NFL Defensive Player of the Year, Lewis is widely regarded as one of the greatest linebackers to ever play the game. His pregame speeches, filled with raw emotion, became iconic, capturing the heart and soul of his team. Despite retiring in 2013, his impact on the sport endures, with his number 52 jersey retired by the Ravens in honor of his unmatched legacy.

Today, as he reflects on life after the NFL, his mission has evolved. Leadership, he says, is no longer about winning on the field—it's about showing up fully in life, especially during its most difficult moments.

"I've led a team onto the field. Now I lead my family through life's tougher plays," he shared with the audience. "If we don't talk about caregiving—if we don't normalize that conversation for men—we're going to miss what strength really looks like."

For Lewis, strength has evolved beyond brute force. It now includes emotional depth, spiritual growth, and responsibility for the next generation. "I didn't grow up talking about mental health," he said. "But I grew up watching stress. I watched my mother sacrifice everything, and no one asked how she was doing. That stays with you."



(Clockwise from above) Ray Lewis on the Superdome at Superbowl XLVII; Ray Lewis and Emmitt Smith at the NFL Alumni Health Legends of Longevity event during Enshrinement Week; Ray Lewis after Superbowl win.

Austin Kirk/Wikimedia Commons

Baltimore Ravens

NFL Alumni Health/Wendy Steele

FAMILY FIRST: CAREGIVING AS A CALLING

Raised in Lakeland, Florida by his mother, Sunseria, Lewis grew up watching caregiving in action. He credits her sacrifice for shaping his values and molding him into the man he is today. At just 10 years old, he made her promise he would someday “take care of her the way she took care of him.”

Today, as a father of six and son navigating aging-related health challenges within his own family, Lewis sees caregiving as a full-circle experience and a powerful form of leadership. “Caregiving is leadership,” Lewis said. “Whether you’re taking care of your mother, your children, or your team—it’s about presence, not perfection.”

Those early lessons in caregiving shaped Lewis’s personal and professional journey. He supported both his mother and grandmother through serious health challenges, providing constant care, love, and financial support.

“I do everything I can to keep my grandma alive,” he said. “Money is no obstacle.”

This deep connection to caregiving is at the heart of Lewis’s advocacy for men, especially in communities of color, where caregiving is often stigmatized. “We need to normalize this conversation,” Lewis insists. “We have to show that it’s okay to ask for help, to acknowledge vulnerability.”

These deeply personal experiences paved the way for Lewis’s broader advocacy and philanthropic efforts.

TURNING PAIN INTO PURPOSE

For Ray Lewis, legacy isn’t just about achievement—it’s about how you respond when life brings you to your knees. His passion for helping others has long shaped his philanthropy through the *Ray Lewis 52 Foundation* and, more recently, the *Ray of Hope Foundation*, which focuses on leadership, mental

wellness, and strengthening communities.

In the face of personal tragedy with the passing of his son, Ray Lewis III, Lewis found new clarity in his mission. Rather than retreat, he chose to step forward—channeling grief into a renewed focus on mental health awareness, emotional resilience, and mentorship for young athletes and families. His message is one of compassion and commitment: making sure others know they’re not alone in their struggles.

“You can’t always control what happens,” Lewis said. “But you can choose how you show up afterward. You can choose to be a light.”

That light now guides his work—whether through youth programs, community partnerships, or public speaking. For Lewis, purpose is no longer just a personal journey—it’s a collective calling to heal, grow, and uplift the next generation.

THE POWER OF PRESENCE

At 50, Lewis describes this phase of his life as his “third quarter”—a time to focus not on physical stats, but on emotional and community impact. He’s mentoring young athletes, speaking openly about men’s health, and advocating for caregivers. He also addresses the stigma around vulnerability, particularly in communities where discussing mental health has been taboo. At the Huddle for Health event, Lewis challenged the audience to rethink aging:

“We don’t age out of relevance. We age into responsibility,” he said. The crowd nodded, and his words resonated deeply with those who, like him, had navigated the challenges of aging, caregiving, and resilience.

HEALING OVER HUSTLE

While he no longer spends his days fighting to win games, Lewis continues to fight—for healing, connection, and peace in his life. He’s a man of ritual and reflection, making time for prayer, family, and causes rooted in healing.

“I spent years fighting to win,” Lewis shared.



Baltimore Ravens

Ray Lewis classic entrance.

“Now, I fight to heal. I fight to connect. I fight for peace in my house and in my soul.”

Healing hasn’t come easy. He’s candid about the toll his years in the NFL took on his body and mind. But rather than regretting the past, Lewis has chosen to meet these challenges with purpose. “I’m still training,” he said, “just for a different kind of life.”

LEGACY IS THE ULTIMATE PLAY

For Ray Lewis, aging gracefully isn’t about chasing youth. It’s about embracing responsibility, connection, and the legacy we leave behind. “Your life doesn’t stop when your career does,” he said. “It starts. So who are you going to be, now?”

Ray Lewis is answering that question every day—with presence, with purpose, and with

a legacy that’s only just begun.

His story reminds us: the most enduring legacies are not built on titles, but on the lives we touch along the way.

ABOUT NFL ALUMNI HEALTH

NFL Alumni Health is a national initiative committed to improving quality of life through innovation, education, and advocacy. A subsidiary of the NFL Alumni Association, it was developed and is managed by former NFL players Kyle Richardson and Billy Davis. The initiative promotes health equity and supports former players, families, and underserved communities. Grounded in the mission, “Caring for Our Own, Caring for the Community, Caring for Kids,” NFL Alumni Health empowers alumni to lead the charge for wellness, prevention, and health equity across generations.

Learn more at NFL Alumni Health.”

