



Al DelGreco with his wife Lisa and their three children Erica (14), Derrick (Bubba, 8) and Trey(12) with the family pet, Yahtzee.

AL DEL GRECO, Kicked Back!

AL DEL GRECO IS KNOWN in the National Football League for his powerful, precise kicks on the gridiron, but in Birmingham he is gaining recognition as “coach” and “scratch golfer.” DelGreco took what some might call a door closing on his career and turned into an opportunity. It is a character trait seen many times throughout his long football career. He possesses a “can do” attitude he attributes to the faith and sense of purpose he developed as a child.

DelGreco grew up in Miami playing sports year round and attending Catholic grade school. At 14, his soccer team won a state title and competed regionally. “I can remember talking with my mom and dad saying, ‘I hope we win’, and mom said, ‘Hey, it is already decided what is going to happen, you just go do the best you can and be a part of what is going to happen. The way it turns out is the way it turns out.’” It turned out a string of wins for DelGreco in soccer and football at Coral Gables High School and a football scholarship at Auburn University. DelGreco received the first football scholarship given to a kicker at Auburn. “Auburn recruited me all along, but Christmas of my senior year they told me they could not give a kicker a scholarship. Then, during the bowl season three or four games were won or lost by field goals. Auburn came back and offered me the scholarship,” says DelGreco with a smile. DelGreco looks back and believes it was all a part of a plan God had for him. “It was the

way it was supposed to work out. I look back and think, I have been so blessed.”

As a senior at Auburn, DelGreco’s future was again uncertain. “It was not like I was an ultra star that had a guarantee career in football. I was a free agent with a try out with the Packers.” DelGreco received a call from the Packers half way through the season and he embarked on what would be 17 years of pro football with four teams— the Packers, the Cardinals, the Oilers and a trip to Super Bowl 2000 with the Tennessee Titans.

During those 17 years, DelGreco says there were many times when he had to trust in God’s plan. “I have always had faith that everything happens for a reason...Even the rough times when I got cut a couple of times, something was always there. I had another chance and I was able to make good of it and continue my career.” DelGreco’s first experience with a lack of job security came in 1987 when Lisa DelGreco was 8 1/2 months pregnant with their first child. Green Bay cut DelGreco the day before Thanksgiving. Within two weeks DelGreco had a job with St. Louis where he stayed until he was cut in 1991. “I decided maybe it’s over. I came to Birmingham and accepted a job. The Sunday

While kicking school records at Auburn, DelGreco met his wife Lisa, a native of Huntsville. They have been married for fifteen years.

before I was to report to work, Houston called me for a try-out. It was the beginning of ten more years of football and I played better than I ever had.”

Through wins and losses, DelGreco says his parents have always been his biggest cheerleaders. “Until I went to college, my dad only missed one game I ever played in, in any sport. He was sick that game and I scored three goals,” remembers DelGreco. “Everything was always done for the kids. Our summer vacations centered around soccer trips for my sister Robyn and me.”

Growing up in such a tight knit family, DelGreco wanted his own children to experience what he had. In the early 90’s, DelGreco and his wife decided Birmingham would be their home in the off-season. “Until this year, the children have never gone to the same school, the whole school year. I thought it was more important for us to be together as a family then it was for me to go to Houston or Nashville and leave them in Birmingham without a dad around.”

Which leads to one of the many pluses DelGreco finds in last year’s cut from the Titans and a disappointing try out with Buffalo. “I promised my daughter Erica that I would either be done playing football when she went to high school or if I



was still playing the family would stay in Birmingham and I would go alone. If I had made it with Buffalo, I would have been miserable up there by myself...It's almost a blessing I did not make it."

With the cut, DelGreco did not forget about football. He simply took on the new role of Coach. DelGreco is the assistant football coach at the new Spain Park High School in Hoover. "I had a great time coaching football, every time I was at a practice I never wanted to be anywhere else, I love coaching kids." This spring, DelGreco will coach golf, the sport he may make his second career. "As much as football has given me, I love golf just that much more." DelGreco calls golf a character building experience. "I think because of the level of football I played, I expected golf to be just as easy and it was not. It was a big learning process to overcome my temper and it has made me play better golf." Better golf has led DelGreco to raise nearly a half a million dollars for charities. His winnings have



helped build Heardmont Park in Shelby County, expand Our Lady of the Valley Catholic School, and provide support to Make a Wish Foundation and Magic Moments.

DelGreco looks at his new opportunities in football and golf as "part of the plan." He explains, "It is not easy at times. Everybody has times when things look there bleakest but there's a reason that everything happens and you have to understand that and believe in it. That's what's made this year easier for me...Maybe it is time for me not to play football and instead coach and spend more time with my kids. I don't know, but that is the way it is supposed to be and that is okay with me."

— Laurie Stroud

(left) Golf magazine named DelGreco "best golfer" among athletes in other professions.

(right) DelGreco holds the NFL record for best field goal percentage. During the 90's he converted more than 80% of his field goal attempts.

