



By Steve Adubato

**POWER OF WORDS**

Eric LeGrand speaks at a 2022 event for the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, which focuses on causes related to spinal cord injury.



## OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

Former Rutgers football star Eric LeGrand is working to walk again while inspiring as many people as he can along the way.

**E**ric LeGrand is a motivational speaker, sports analyst, philanthropist, entrepreneur, author and all-around amazing young man. He is a former Rutgers University football standout whose life was dramatically changed while making a tackle against West Point in a game at MetLife Stadium on October 16, 2010, suffering a severe spinal injury that left him paralyzed from the neck down.

Despite having experienced a life-changing injury, he quickly turned his focus to educating himself on spinal cord injuries and using that information to help others. “I heard devastating stories of how people get injured and what they are going through. Some have a support system, and some do not,” says LeGrand. “I realized how blessed I was to have what I had and the people that are there for me. So it was about two years into my injury when I asked myself, *How can I help others?*”

In 2012, he reached out to the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, which is dedicated to curing spinal cord injury. In 2013, he launched Team

LeGrand, which has raised well over \$1 million for supporting quality-of-life initiatives and accelerating the discovery of treatments and cures for spinal cord injuries.

That is just the type of person Eric LeGrand is—always thinking of others.

But LeGrand didn’t stop there. He became a motivational speaker, talking to students and professionals. “The best part about it is I get to share my story of adversity, overcoming and pushing through,” he says. “No matter who you are or what age you are, we all have adversity. We all have times of doubt. When people hear my story, I share that if I’m going through a tough time, look what I am able to do. So why can’t you do the same thing?”

Because of his service to others, he was presented in 2012 with the Unsung Hero Award by the New Jersey Hall of Fame and the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance at the 20th annual ESPY Awards. He later received the WWE Warrior Award in March 2017 for his unwavering strength and perseverance.

In March of 2020, the pandemic challenged LeGrand and millions of people across the globe. But in true Eric LeGrand fashion, he continued to share his powerful message with young adults. Says LeGrand, “Stay on task. Obviously, this is not a task that we ask for. Stay disciplined, stay hard thinking. Don’t only think about yourself. Think about other people, because no matter how hard your situation may be... there is always someone that has it worse than you.”

LeGrand shows no signs of slowing down. In 2022, he opened LeGrand Coffee House in Woodbridge, where, he says, “you can get your ‘daily cup of bELieve,’ which reminds customers to attack their goals.” An online store can be found at [legrandcoffeehouse.com](http://legrandcoffeehouse.com).

What’s next? “The next step for me to accomplish,” he says, “is getting back on my feet, walking again, and inspiring as many people as I can along the way. The awards are great, the accolades are great, but until I’m up out of this wheelchair, and the 5.6 million people that are dealing with some sort of paralysis have hope and belief that they can go back to live their able-body life, the job is not done.”

I’ve been a student of leadership for well over two decades. Leaders come in all shapes and sizes and in different forms. But one thing I know for sure: Eric LeGrand is an extraordinary leader who makes a difference in the lives of others every day. That’s what great leaders are supposed to do. Job well done Eric LeGrand—one of New Jersey’s finest. **♣**

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