

Christian NFL Player Who Walked Away: 'I Wasn't Living Right'

In a society where professional football players are put on a pedestal and worshipped at times, Christian Ballard doesn't buy it. The glitz and the glamor of the NFL that once fulfilled his wildest dreams simply doesn't jibe with his Christian beliefs anymore.

After only two-year playing career, the former Minnesota Vikings' defensive tackle walked away from the game in August, saying he just "wasn't living right."

"I wasn't really having a good time playing football. It wasn't fun for me," Ballard told *USA Today*. "It wasn't a blast for me. I could sit there and lie to myself for another two years, doing something that wasn't what I want to do.

"It made me selfish. It made me complacent. I just thought that I was better than everyone. Don't get me wrong—there are tons of people who play in the NFL and are strong believers in the Lord, and they have a great lifestyle. But for me, it really wasn't working out."

The 24-year-old had two years left on his contract with Minnesota. He scored a \$407,000 signing bonus in 2011 as a rookie after being drafted in the fourth round from the University of Iowa. He made nearly \$850,000 during his first two seasons with the Vikings and figured heavily into the team's plans for 2013-2014.

Ballard, who played in all 32 games his first two seasons with Minnesota, including two starts, told *USA Today* he has returned to church after a four-year absence.

“Making that much money—that was fun. But money is still a material thing,” he said. “You can always make money. You can’t make that time that you lose with your friends and your loved ones. Time is something you can never get back.”

Ballard’s new life hasn’t come without a few bumps along the way. He and his wife, Victoria, who were married on Aug. 30, were both arrested in Lawrence, Kan., for domestic battery, and Ballard spent more than a day in jail. The district attorney in Lawrence declined to press charges after neither he nor his wife were injured.

“I’m not saying that I left the NFL [and] now everything is just fine,” Ballard told *USA Today*. “It’s not. There’s still a lot of things I’ve got to work on—obviously—as being a husband and father.

“I can always treat my wife better, treat my son better, be a better brother, be a better son. But I know right now from being out of the NFL that it’s a lot easier to focus on those things because I have time. I’m not wrapped up in this whole other lifestyle.”

Ballard hasn’t ruled out a potential return to the NFL, but he has begun to focus on other ambitions. He is working toward finishing his undergraduate degree at Iowa and plans to apply to graduate school to pursue a career in art or music. Ballard plays the cello and keyboard and is learning the bass guitar.