

COMING OUT IN THE



Story By
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THE STORY OF MICHAEL SAM

Michael Sam, Defensive End for the St. Louis Rams, was born on Jan 7, 1990 in Galveston, Texas. His story begins in Texas, playing Defensive End and Offensive Tackle for Hitchcock High School. After a highly successful four years and scholarship offers from numerous high profile universities throughout the country, this All-American chose to make the University of Missouri his home for the next four years of his career. Michael Sam continued his impressive run from 2009-2013 accumulating numerous honors and an impressive record. In August of 2013, prior to his graduation from the University of Missouri, Michael Sam courageously came out as gay to his fellow teammates. In the 2014 NFL Draft, as a 7th Round Draft pick for the St. Louis Rams, Michael Sam overcame a long up and down ordeal, to become the first openly gay football player ever drafted into the NFL.

It's possible that the most revolutionary moment in Michael Sam's courageous journey toward a position with the St. Louis Rams football team was 'The Kiss.' When he was finally chosen as a rookie Defensive End, he instinctively kissed his boyfriend, Vito Cammisano - cameras rolling and the international media watching. It was a tender, moving gesture and completely in keeping with the moment. It would have been nothing special if Michael were kissing a girlfriend - but he wasn't - and that's why it was a revolutionary moment.

Michael Sam's decision to come out shortly after finishing an illustrious college football career at the University of Missouri (All-American, Southeastern Conference Player of the Year) was startling and brave. The decision by the Ram's organization to recognize his talent and draft him was also a breakthrough. But the spontaneous kiss when he heard the news was the real revolutionary moment.

The kiss meant Michael Sam was a real person with a life and feelings, not just an abstract symbol of gay progress. The semi-shocked press reaction and the turmoil on Twitter were indicators that this country might be ready for the idea of an out gay football player, but not quite prepared for the reality of a full bodied flesh and blood person moving about on the football stage.

Good for Michael Sam. He shoved the story in the right direction. We don't need an abstract symbol of liberation. We need actual people. Haters have an easier time attacking abstractions. Real living people with partners and families and struggles and laughter and tears are harder to trash and marginalize.

It remains to be seen how far Michael Sam's career will go or how accepting the NFL will ultimately be, but what Michael Sam accomplished this year was enormously important. He moved the gay liberation narrative forward. He moved it into the heart of football culture.

The culture of football is vitally important because it's the place where many Americans forge their identities, their notions of success and their sense of what's permissible and what's not. To change football is, in many ways, to change America.

This is a lot to put on football - a dangerous sport run as a ruthless business. It's facing enormous challenges at the moment: racism, locker room bullying, the ongoing tragedy of head injuries. But if football can evolve - become more accepting of diversity, draw the proper locker room boundaries for behavior - perhaps America can also evolve.