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MIZZOU

Football Player Michael Sam Announces he is Gay

Community responds with respect.



Michael Sam, shown here before Mizzou's 41–31 win over Oklahoma State in the AT&T Cotton Bowl Classic, is poised to become the first openly gay active player in NFL history. Sam's fourth-quarter sack of OSU quarterback Clint Chelf forced a fumble which Mizzou defensive-line mate Shane Ray picked up and returned 73 yards for a game-clinching touchdown. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

Story by Marcus Wilkins

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Mizzou football star Michael Sam made international news Feb. 9 when he announced via The New York Times and ESPN he is gay.

It was not, however, news to the defensive end's teammates and coaches to whom Sam had revealed his sexual orientation in August before the Tigers' 12–2 season. It was even older news to Marvin Foster, one of Sam's best friends and cohorts on the defensive line. The two were smoking cigars and listening to Al Green earlier in the summer when Sam proclaimed what Foster already assumed.

“We all kind of already knew, but I was going to let him tell me in his own time,” says Foster, echoing the statements of multiple teammates this past week. “He just said, ‘By the way, I’m gay,’ very matter-of-fact. After that, we could talk about pretty much anything.”

Sam will likely be selected in the NFL Draft, which begins May 8, making the All-American and Associated Press SEC Defensive Player of the Year the first openly gay active player in NFL history.

MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin commended the team for respecting Sam's right to come out on his own terms.

“This is Michael's story, and I think it's clear that this is a very supportive community,” Loftin says. “So many people knew about [Sam's orientation] long before he made this announcement, and the

interesting thing is it was no news. It was simply treated as a private thing.”

Hundreds of Mizzou students and Columbians furthered support for Sam during a counter-protest in response to an antigay demonstration before Saturday’s Tennessee-Mizzou basketball game. Holding “Stand With Sam” signs and similarly themed T-shirts, the group bordered the intersection of Stadium Boulevard and Providence Road.

The football team was introduced during halftime of Mizzou’s 75–70 win over Tennessee at Mizzou Arena. Sam received a standing ovation.

“[Michael] wanted to focus on football and not do anything to add pressure for him or for his teammates, and I think that’s a great example of the kind of person he is,” said Missouri football Coach Gary Pinkel at a Feb. 10 press conference. “We left it that whenever he felt the time was right, however he wanted to make the announcement, that we had his back and we’d be right there with him.”

Michael Sam returns to Mizzou



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