



Celebration and Censure Surround NFL's First "Gay" Draft Pick

This year's NFL draft featured a new low for professional sports as the St. Louis Rams became the first pro football team to draft an openly homosexual player. In a celebratory media event that overshadowed many more important stories surrounding the draft, the Rams selected linebacker Michael Sam in the seventh round. Sam, who [came out publicly as "gay" earlier this year](#) as a student athlete at the University of Missouri, reacted to the news by sharing an emotional and thoroughly inappropriate kiss with his male partner — a kiss that became part of the media celebration and a subsequent story in and of itself.



Describing the anticipation of the historic event, [CBS News](#) reported that Sam was in San Diego watching with friends and family with ESPN and the NFL Network on hand with cameras to record the emotional moment when Sam was selected. As the call came from the Rams organization, "Sam was on the phone bending over, with his boyfriend hugging him and rubbing his left bicep," reported CBS. "When Sam got off the phone, the tears started. He gave his boyfriend a big kiss and a long hug as he cried and his eyes reddened. After, they shared cake — and another kiss."

Not surprisingly, Barack Obama got in on the story, sending a congratulatory message to the NFL's token gay athlete in keeping with his efforts to make homosexuality a central issue of his administration. "The President congratulates Michael Sam, the Rams, and the NFL, for taking an important step forward in our nation's journey," said the White House in a prepared statement. "From the playing field to the corporate boardroom, LGBT Americans prove everyday that you should be judged by what you do and not who you are."

But the media circus proved that the story had more to do with Sam's homosexuality than with his talent, which is noteworthy. [Yahoo Sports](#) pointed out that Sam is a one-time Defensive Player of the Year with the college football's SEC. But even so, there was a real possibility that he wouldn't be drafted, for a number of reasons, including the fact that most NFL teams weren't interested in having their season compromised by all the hype that will no doubt go into Sam's debut in the league. As it happened, Sam was still waiting until the tail end of the draft before being selected by St. Louis.

Yahoo noted that the Rams "saved the NFL from a very negative story by taking Sam right before the end of the draft, with one of the two compensatory picks they had late in the round."

Members of Sam's new team tried to make the most of the situation, with Rams cornerback Janoris Jenkins tweeting that "football is all about making plays, welcome to the Squad." He added that the "nation accepts you for who you are."

Similarly, Rams coach Jeff Fisher insisted to reporters that "in a world of diversity we live in, I am



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 14, 2014

honored to be a part of this.”

Not all football pros, however, were as conciliatory in their reactions, particularly to Sam’s high-profile kiss with another man on national TV. “I’m sorry but that Michael Sam is no bueno for doing that on national TV,” tweeted Derrick Ward, a retired player and Super Bowl champ with the New York Giants. “Man U got little kids lookin at the draft. I can’t believe ESPN even allowed that to happen.” Ward later noted that he and his family had been threatened for his candid reaction to Sam’s inappropriate televised kiss.

While the NFL could not punish Ward for his comment, the league made it clear that the only acceptable response by players and others to Sam’s draft and his behavior would be celebratory. The NFL quickly chose Dolphins safety Don Jones as scapegoat when he tweeted “horrible” and “OMG” in disgust upon viewing Sam passionately kissing his homosexual partners. [CNN](#) reported that the Dolphins responded quickly to Jones’ tweets, “ordering Jones to pay an undisclosed fine and barring him from team activities until he finishes ‘training for his recent comments made on social media.’”

In its own statement the team said that management had “met with Don today about respect, discrimination, and judgment. These comments are not consistent with the values and standards of our program.” In a coerced expression of contrition, Jones said, “I want to apologize to Michael Sam for the inappropriate comments that I made last night on social media. I take full responsibility for them and I regret that these tweets took away from his draft moment. I remember last year when I was drafted in the seventh round and all of the emotions and happiness I felt when I received the call that gave me an opportunity to play for an NFL team and I wish him all the best in his NFL career.”

[ESPN commentator Stephen Smith](#) was one of the few journalists who took issue with the Dolphins’ decision to censure Jones for his tweets. “I’m of the mindset that there is freedom of speech,” said Smith, adding, “I think it’s a very, very dangerous thing when people see something and they have a problem with what they’re seeing and they express themselves and ultimately they’re fined.”

Fellow ESPN commentator Skip Bayless, who is a vocal Christian, added that he defended “the right of those who believe that the Bible says a man should not be with a man and a woman should not be with a woman. If you believe that, then because your country was founded on religious freedom, then you have the right to believe that.”

Donald Trump noted that there is an obvious double standard at work in reporting on professional sports, noting the extent to which Tim Tebow was criticized for openly expressing his Christian faith both on and off the field, while Sam was lauded for his homosexual kiss, with any expression of opposition quickly silenced.

“We’ve become so politically correct in this country that the country is going to hell,” Trump told Fox News. “People are afraid to talk. They’re afraid to express their own thoughts. I’ve heard many people ... that thought the display after he was chosen was inappropriate.”

Trump emphasized that he was happy Sam was drafted. “I’m all for it,” he said. “I think it’s great that he got chosen. I hope he does so well. But I thought he was really going at it. I haven’t seen anything like that in a while. He was really going at it. Yet when Tebow did his thing ... he was just criticized so badly. I guess you could say there is a double standard.”



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