

Michael Sam cut by St. Louis Rams for underwhelming performance, not sexuality



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Back in late August, the first openly gay professional football player was cut from the team who drafted him.

This player is Michael Sam.



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Recent news has sparked debate on whether Sam was cut due to his play on the field or for his sexual preference. The latter is simply not true.

Unless a person has been cut off from social media since April, they have most likely heard of the Michael Sam story. Sam played college football for the Missouri Tigers, where he was a team captain. He finished his season leading Missouri in multiple categories and was named the Southeastern Conference Co-Defensive Player of the Year. He was also named a consensus first-team All American as a defensive end.

There were high hopes for his draft status, and then Sam announced that he was gay.

Sam came out back in February, about three months before the NFL draft. He received a lot of positive support via social media, as well as from those within the

football world. From here it was time for Sam to begin preparing for the NFL draft in April. Unfortunately it did not go as he would have hoped.

Sam, at six foot two inches tall, is undersized from an NFL defensive end standpoint. After underperforming at the NFL combine, his draft stock fell from what experts were projecting prior.

Despite that, many were impressed with how Sam handled himself when being interviewed post-combine.

"I just wish you guys would see me as Michael Sam the football player instead of Michael Sam the gay football player," said Sam in a press conference at the NFL combine.

When the draft came, Sam would have to wait a long time to hear his name called—the 249th pick (7th round), to be exact, by the St. Louis Rams. The news even prompted a press release from the White House: "The President congratulates Michael Sam, the Rams and the NFL for taking an important step forward today in our Nation's journey."

Being the first gay NFL player obviously came with a lot of media attention. Sam was followed by many of the major sports media outlets throughout training camp and into the preseason.

With this microscope put on

him, Sam had to show he was able to play as an NFL defensive lineman.

He showed glimpses throughout his preseason that he could one day be on a 53-man NFL roster, just not right now.

Despite tallying three sacks during the preseason, Sam was cut from the Rams and was not picked up by their practice squad. However, Sam was recently added to the Cowboys practice squad.

Seeing a seventh-round draft pick being cut is far from an anomaly. It has even been estimated that fewer than 10 percent of seventh-round draft picks end up making the team they were drafted by.

"Somebody is going to get cut or not play," said Carolyn Fowler, a former women's college basketball player at Appalachian State, in an interview with *The Guilfordian*. "Coaches take a lot of heat when the general public doesn't know what's going on."

Sam was competing for a spot among one of the best and deepest defensive lines in the NFL.

Guilford College football player Ben Winstead commented on whether he felt having a gay player on the football team would change things from a team perspective.

"As long as he is someone who is going to help us be successful, then he would always have a place on the team," said Winstead.

"Wait, you're a girl?" cries the high-pitched, microphone-distorted voice of yet another young male gamer.

"Yes," responds a confident female player.

What follows is a brutal demonstration of the rampant digital sexism found in a rapidly growing industry. Slurs, cat-calls, insults and other abuses rain down on the once eager participant until, in many cases, she is forced to leave the game.

This disgusting conduct cannot stand in gaming. And I, armed with the hope of shifting demographics, wait with bated breath for an industry already making strides to continue to move towards the infinitely promising future of a more open and respectful gaming landscape.

In April 2014, the Electronic Software Association published "Essential Facts about the Computer and Video Game Industry," a paper showing that women now make up 48 percent of the gaming industry, and women over the age of 18 are a larger demographic than boys 18 and younger.

This movement toward equilibrium has ramped up over the past few years, and everyone has an opinion about the industry's reaction to this rapid shift.

"It's not really surprising; over the years it's become easier and easier to get into video games," said junior Ryan Siebens, a member of Guilford's Yachting Club. "Over time, I've met more and more women who enjoy games."

More women who enjoy games means more people who enjoy games, which means more widespread appeal and acceptance. The more universal the medium is, the more relevant it becomes in the eyes of those who do not play. Games are beginning to accumulate cachet as works of art, even outside the more devoted community.

Unfortunately, many who call themselves "hardcore" gamers have taken up a harsh and unjustified crusade against

This Week's STAFF EDITORIAL

On combating racially motivated police brutality

On Aug. 9, Michael Brown, a young man on his way home, was shot dead. This tragic incident was a result of a system that lacks checks on police, leading to abuse of power and police brutality. According to the National Police Misconduct Reporting Project, in 2013, 3,814 unique reports of police misconduct were tracked in the U.S.

Racially motivated brutality especially has been historically invisible to the eyes of the public due to fear of repercussion when filing a complaint against the police. Although more than 60 unarmed civilians have been killed by the Dallas police since 2002, not one complaint has been filed, according to Mothers Against Police Brutality. And in the rare instances these crimes are reported and covered by the media, they often fade from the public mind within a week. We see and we forget.

But not anymore. Racially motivated police brutality is a part of a long history of institutionalized abuse of black bodies. The prevailing perception in police culture that black lives are disposable has allowed for generations of lives to be stolen. This is not an issue that is up for debate. It is about those who are meant to 'protect and serve' violating the right of the people to exist freely in America.

According to the News & Record, Greensboro has recently created a new independent police review board to ensure that all allegations of police misconduct and abuse of power are properly addressed, as well as remodeled the citizens' police review board after complaints that the board served more as a lackey for the police department.

Although this is a step in the right direction, a change in policy is not enough. We firmly believe that to achieve any great change in our community, we need to actively fight discrimination, as well as confront our own biases. When you see a black youth, do not make assumptions based on archaic stereotypes. When someone makes a harsh comment about a person of color—without knowing the person in the first place—stop them. And when an innocent person dies because of the melanin in their skin, fight for them.

Guilford, don't forget Ferguson.

Shifting gamer demographics should spell positive changes

anyone who is not obsessed with their medium of choice—or is a woman.

Early College junior Lin Lockhart, an avid gamer, describes what he sees when playing the popular arena combat game *League of Legends*.

"Most times, if a team of boys finds out there's a girl member joining their team, they aggressively push that player to play a support role on the team," Lockhart said. The trend spreads from there into other genres.

The wildly popular video-game franchise *Call of Duty* carries a horrendous reputation for toxic and abusive players. Early College junior Morgan Lano, another enthusiastic gamer, recounted one of her experiences in the game.

"I remember once a gamer commented on my voice being higher and I told him I was a girl," Lano said. "The rude, cruel jokes, asking to get with me, nasty terms for anatomy, and general harassment went on the entire game to the point where I had to find a new lobby to play in."

No respectful person would ever tolerate behavior this demeaning and destructive in a face-to-face setting. "It's a guy's thing," the painfully common excuse used by so many gamers, no longer holds water.

With the rapid industry-wide expansion seen over the past few years, gamers cannot allow digital sexism to denigrate the pastime they love so dearly.

