

A Conversation With The Athlete Michael Oher

Written by Kam Williams

Monday, 24 October 2011 19:10



Michael Oher was born on May 28, 1986 in Memphis, Tennessee, where he negotiated a perilous path through the foster care system, experiencing periods of homelessness. He eventually attended Briarcrest Christian School and met Sean and Leigh-Anne Tuohy, who became his adoptive parents. His inspirational story is the subject of Michael Lewis' book, *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, which was adapted to the screen in 2009 as *The Blind Side*, starring [Sandra Bullock](#) in an Oscar-winning performance.

Oher currently lives in Maryland where he is an offensive lineman for the Baltimore Ravens of the National Football League. After playing college football at the University of Mississippi for the Ole Miss Rebels, he was drafted by the Ravens in the first round of the 2009 NFL Draft.

Following his first year in the league, he was named to both the Pro Football Weekly All-Rookie team and the USA Today All-Joe Team. He also earned NFL Rookie of the Month honors for December and recently completed a second successful season with the Ravens, making the playoffs.

Here, Michael talks about his new autobiography, *I beat the odds*.

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KAM WILLIAMS TALKS TO MICHAEL OHER:

Kam Williams: Hi Michael, thanks for the time.

Michael Oher: ☐ ☐

KW: You and the Raven's had an excellent season. How'd you feel when your season ended in Pittsburgh with that loss to the Steelers on a last-minute Roethlisberger TD pass?

MO: It wasn't a good feeling losing to those guys. It really stung.

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KW: What'd you think of the Super Bowl?

MO: I just couldn't bear to look at it. I watched a total of about four minutes.

KW: I told my readers I'd be interviewing you and they sent in a million questions.

MO: Hopefully, you won't give me a million, right?

KW: Well, we have limited time, so let's see how many we can get to. Let me start by asking how did you manage to make it all the way to the NFL, given the neighborhood you came from and your challenging childhood?

MO: There's a big difference between where I came from and the NFL. Things like this don't happen to people from there often. It just took a lot of hard work and dedication, staying on the right path, believing in myself, and having an inner drive.

KW: Peter Keough asks: Why did you write your autobiography? Was it because you felt misrepresented by *The Blind Side*?

MO:

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KW: Kathy Ancar says: In the movie, there is a restaurant scene where you embrace a young waiter who turns to be your brother. Have you reconnected with your biological siblings?

MO: I've always been connected to them and maintained those relationships. That scene in the movie was just Hollywood.

KW: Yale grad Tommy Russell asks: What do you think can be done on the national level to increase awareness about the size of the foster system in America and to help kids caught up in it?

MO: As you know, I put a lot of the unfortunate statistics in my book. But there are a ton of us who've been through the foster care system who are successful. Basically, I hope I've started something off by putting my story out there. Now we need others to share their stories and let everybody know what the real deal is and that it is possible to beat the odds.

KW: Larry Greenberg says: You have a personal story that seems like the stuff of an epic saga. Where do you weigh in on the relative importance of destiny, luck, and perseverance?

MO: All of them are important factors. I'd say you need all three.

KW: Mirah Riben asks: What was it like being black and joining a white family?

MO: That really wasn't a big deal for me, although obviously there were some adjustments, since the Tuohy's had a different lifestyle from what I was accustomed to. But there was a lot of love, and that's what helped to spark a great relationship.

KW: Teresa Emerson asks: Are you still close with the Tuohys?

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MO: Yes, they're still family. We talk every day, and they come to every one of my games.

KW: Teresa would also like to know if you have any contact with your birth mother.

MO: We're not as close as we used to be but, hopefully, we'll get back to where we once were in the future.

KW: Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier [of www.megadiversities.com] was wondering if you have a message of hope for kids and young people who are in a similar predicament to the one that you were in.

MO: You don't need to win the lottery or for somebody to come save you. I'm a living testimony to that. If you want to do it, it is possible.

KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman says: Your story is incredibly moving and it's a joy to see your success. Many African-American youth who have not been blessed with the same good fortune of a loving adoptive family and benefactors suffer from an incredible achievement gap, mostly due to lack of educational opportunities. How do you think we can help them?

MO: By devoting the time to sit down with a kid, one-on-one, and just letting them know that they can do it. That's all that it takes, giving them the confidence.

KW: Harriet Pakula Teweles says: Your story is not just about beating the odds; it's nothing short of a miracle. Can we engineer miracles—without the help of angels?

MO: That's the same as asking do you believe in God. Of course, we all need angels. I had to have one over my head throughout my life, even right now. The odds of my making it were slim

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to none. So you have to have an angel. You have to believe.

KW: Felicia Haney asks: Do you plan to be a foster or adoptive parent?

MO: I can't say right now. I'd have to see down the road. But I'd love to look into it and, hopefully, save a life as well.

KW: Reverend Florine Thompson asks: What would be the one thing you would most like to change about the foster care system?

MO: I think there's a need for more oversight by social workers, because there are a lot of foster parents who are just collecting checks. They need to look closely into the backgrounds of the people whose hands you're putting the kids into and then continue to monitor them.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

MO: No.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

MO: Very.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

MO: I have a good laugh all the time. Very often.

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KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

MO: I Beat the Odds. <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1592406122/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: Thanks again for the interview, Michael, and best of luck with the book and with the Ravens next season.

MO: Thank you, Kam.

[Note: This interview was conducted in February 2011]

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