N.F.L. Prospect Michael Sam Proudly Says What Teammates Knew: He’s Gay

By JOHN BRANCH

Coaches at the University of Missouri divided players into small groups at a preseason football practice last year for a team-building exercise. One by one, players were asked to talk about themselves — where they grew up, why they chose Missouri and what others might not know about them.

As Michael Sam, a defensive lineman, began to speak, he balled up a piece of paper in his hands. “I’m gay,” he said. With that, Mr. Sam set himself on a path to become the first publicly gay player in the National Football League.

“I looked in their eyes, and they just started shaking their heads — like, finally, he came out,” Mr. Sam said Sunday in an interview with The New York Times, the first time he had spoken publicly about his sexual orientation.

Mr. Sam, a senior who was listed at 6 feet 2 inches and 260 pounds, had a stellar season as Missouri finished 12-2 and won the Cotton Bowl. He was a first-team all-American and was named the Associated Press defensive player of the year in the Southeastern Conference, widely considered the top league in college football. Teammates voted him Missouri’s most valuable player.

Now Mr. Sam enters an uncharted area of the sports landscape. He is making his public declaration before he is drafted, to the potential detriment to his professional career. And he is doing so as he prepares to enter a league with an overtly macho culture, where controversies over homophobia have attracted recent attention.

As the pace of the gay rights movement has accelerated in recent years, the sports industry has changed relatively little for men, with no publicly gay athletes in the N.F.L., the N.B.A., the N.H.L. or Major League Baseball. Against this backdrop, Mr. Sam could become a symbol for the country’s gay rights movement or a flash point in a football culture war — or both.

Mr. Sam, 24, is projected to be chosen in the early rounds of the N.F.L. draft in May, ordinarily a path to a prosperous pro career. He said he decided to come out publicly now because he sensed that rumors were circulating.
“I just want to make sure I could tell my story the way I want to tell it,” said Mr. Sam, who also spoke with ESPN on Sunday. “I just want to own my truth.”

But the N.F.L. presents the potential for unusual challenges. In the past year or so, it has been embroiled in controversies ranging from antigay statements from players to reports that scouts asked at least one prospective player if he liked girls. Recently, Chris Kluwe, a punter, said that he was subject to homophobic language from coaches and pushed out of a job with the Minnesota Vikings because he vocally supported same-sex marriage laws. And last week, Jonathan Vilma, a New Orleans Saints linebacker, said in an interview with NFL Network that he did not want a gay teammate.

“I think he would not be accepted as much as we think he would be accepted,” said Mr. Vilma, a 10-year league veteran.

In a statement Sunday night, the league said: “We admire Michael Sam’s honesty and courage. Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the N.F.L. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014.”

At a showcase game for seniors last month, several scouts asked Mr. Sam’s agent, Joe Barkett, whether Mr. Sam had a girlfriend or whether Mr. Barkett had seen him with women.

The league, which has a policy prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation (among other things), is the largest of the major sports leagues in the United States, with about 1,600 players on rosters at any time during the season. But it has never had a publicly gay player.

Over the decades, some players in the major sports leagues did little to conceal their sexual orientation, but they were not out to the public during their careers. A few players have come out upon retirement, like the N.F.L. player Dave Kopay in the 1970s and the N.B.A. player John Amaechi in 2007, both considered pioneers by many gay people.

Last spring, Jason Collins, a 12-year N.B.A. veteran, mostly as a little-used reserve, came out after the season. A free agent, he has not been signed by another team.

Also last year, Robbie Rogers, a former member of the United States national soccer team who later played professionally in England, revealed that he was gay after he announced his retirement. Encouraged by the supportive response, he resumed his career, playing for the Los Angeles Galaxy of Major League Soccer.

While Mr. Sam’s pro prospects are far from certain, several N.F.L. draft forecasters have predicted that he will be chosen in the third round. (Thirty-two players are selected in each round.) Rarely are players who are drafted that high cut by teams; they often become starters, sometimes as rookies.

Between now and the draft, Mr. Sam plans to attend the scouting combine, where players are put through a gantlet of physical and mental tests to judge their readiness for the N.F.L. Mr. Sam might be considered too small for an N.F.L. defensive end, meaning he would have to learn to
play as an outside linebacker. But it is reasonable for Mr. Sam to wonder what sort of effect — positive or negative — his declaration will have on his prospects.

“I’m not naïve,” Mr. Sam said. “I know this is a huge deal and I know how important this is. But my role as of right now is to train for the combine and play in the N.F.L.”

Mr. Sam graduated from Missouri in December, the only member of his family to attend college. He grew up in Hitchcock, Tex., about 40 miles southeast of Houston, the seventh of eight children of JoAnn and Michael Sam. It was a difficult childhood; three of his siblings have died, and two brothers are in prison, Mr. Sam said. He was raised mostly by his mother, and he spent some years with another family. All have been supportive of his coming out, he said.

Mr. Sam said he began to wonder if he was gay in his early teens, though he had a girlfriend in high school. It was after he arrived at Missouri in 2009 that he realized for certain that he was gay. Teammates increasingly suspected as much, and some knew that he dated a man on the university’s swim team, but it never prevented Mr. Sam from being one of the most popular players on the team. He was known for his intensity on the field and his booming voice off it.

“When I first met him, you could be downstairs and you could hear Mike all the way on the second floor of the dorms,” said receiver L’Damian Washington, who met Mr. Sam on a recruiting trip and quickly became a close friend. “He’s just a loud guy. Everybody knows when Michael Sam is in the building.”

Mr. Sam came out to two of his friends on the team, Mr. Washington and Marvin Foster, about a year ago. It was not a huge surprise. Mr. Washington was with Mr. Sam when Mr. Sam said he needed to go pick up a friend. He told Mr. Washington that the friend was gay and asked Mr. Washington if that would bother him. Mr. Washington said no, and Mr. Sam came out to him.

“Michael is a great example of just how important it is to be respectful of others,” Missouri’s football coach, Gary Pinkel, said in a statement released Sunday night. “He’s taught a lot of people here firsthand that it doesn’t matter what your background is, or your personal orientation, we’re all on the same team and we all support each other.”

Last April, the Missouri athletic administration held diversity seminars for all athletes, part of the You Can Play project, focused largely on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. Mr. Sam was one of several athletes to approach Pat Ivey, the associate athletic director for athletic performance, to compliment him for the lesson. But Mr. Sam was the most effusive, Mr. Ivey said, as if trying to tell Mr. Ivey something.

“When Mike finished the conversation, he said, ‘Coach, I know I can play,’ ” Mr. Ivey recalled. “And we kind of had an understanding of each other, that this wasn’t just him saying, ‘Good job.’ This was him saying: ‘Coach, I’m involved in it. I’m a part of what we just discussed.’ ”

During practices in August, Missouri mixed players from different position groups on the team and put them into small meetings of 8 or 10. Mr. Washington, a wide receiver, happened to be in the same group as Mr. Sam.
“I knew that something was about to come because of the way he was balling up the paper in his hands,” Mr. Washington said. “He kept rolling it up. So I kind of knew something was coming, but I didn’t think it was that.”

Mr. Sam was a senior and a longtime friend to other team leaders. Younger players looked up to him. But on a team with about 100 players, of different backgrounds and beliefs, there was varying discomfort.

“I think there were, just like in society, there are people who don’t understand, and don’t want to understand, and aren’t accepting,” Mr. Ivey said. “And we worked through those issues.”

Mr. Sam played down any repercussions, saying he had the full support of teammates, coaches and administrators. One teammate, he said, accompanied him to a gay pride event in St. Louis last summer, and others went with him to gay bars.

“Some people actually just couldn’t believe I was actually gay,” Mr. Sam said. “But I never had a problem with my teammates. Some of my coaches were worried, but there was never an issue.”

One lingering issue, Mr. Washington said, was trying to get players to change casual language in the locker room. Loosely lobbed homophobic remarks suddenly had a specific sting.

Mr. Sam played down that, too. For him, coming out to his team was a positive step, on a path that seems as if it will lead to the N.F.L.

“Once I became official to my teammates, I knew who I was,” Mr. Sam said. “I knew that I was gay. And I knew that I was Michael Sam, who’s a Mizzou football player who happens to be gay. I was so proud of myself and I just didn’t care who knew. If someone on the street would have asked me, ‘Hey, Mike, I heard you were gay; is that true?’ I would have said yes.”

No one asked.

“I guess they don’t want to ask a 6-3, 260-pound defensive lineman if he was gay or not,” Mr. Sam said. And he laughed.

Mizzou's Michael Sam says he's gay

By Chris Connelly
Michael Sam, an All-American defensive lineman from Missouri and the Associated Press' SEC Defensive Player of the Year, said that he is gay in an interview with ESPN's "Outside the Lines" on Sunday.

Sam stated publicly what his teammates and coaches at Mizzou have known since August: "I am an openly, proud gay man."

Sam is eligible for the NFL draft in May. Assuming that he is drafted, Sam could become the first openly gay player in the history of the NFL.

"I understand how big this is," he said. "It's a big deal. No one has done this before. And it's kind of a nervous process, but I know what I want to be ... I want to be a football player in the NFL."

In 2014, "Gay Man to Enter Workforce" has the everyday-occurrence sound of a headline in The Onion. But when the NFL is involved, it's a first -- and potentially a landmark moment -- in the history of American sports.

Sam's decision to speak out now -- in interviews with ESPN and the New York Times -- comes after his experience two weeks ago at the Senior Bowl, where, he said, many already seemed aware of his sexual orientation.

"I didn't realize how many people actually knew, and I was afraid that someone would tell or leak something out about me," he said. "I want to own my truth. ... No one else should tell my story but me."

He had already confided in a few close friends, Sam recalled, and had dated a fellow athlete who was not a football player -- so while coming out to his Mizzou teammates last year was a key moment, it came almost as an afterthought, during preseason training camp.

"Coaches just wanted to know a little about ourselves, our majors, where we're from, and something that no one knows about you," Sam said. "And I used that opportunity just to tell them that I was gay. And their reaction was like, 'Michael Sam finally told us.'"

Asked what that moment felt like, Sam said, "I was kind of scared, even though they already knew. Just to see their reaction was awesome. They supported me from Day One. I couldn't have better teammates. ... I'm telling you what: I wouldn't have the strength to do this today if I didn't know how much support they'd given me this past semester."

He did not ask them to keep his revelation a secret.

Missouri coach Gary Pinkel said in a statement that he's proud of Sam.

"We're really happy for Michael that he's made the decision to announce this, and we're proud of him and how he represents Mizzou," Pinkel said. "Michael is a great example of just how important it is to be respectful of others, he's taught a lot of people here first-hand that it doesn't
matter what your background is, or your personal orientation, we're all on the same team and we all support each other."

Raised in the small town of Hitchcock, Texas, Sam said he grew up uncertain about what his sexual orientation was.

"I knew from a young age that I was attracted to guys," he said, "I didn't know if it was a phase ... I didn't want to say, 'Hey, I might be gay. I might be bi.' I just didn't know ... I wanted to find who I was and make sure I knew what was comfortable. So I didn't tell anyone growing up."

It was an upbringing, he said, filled with adversity.

"I endured so much in my past: seeing my older brother killed from a gunshot wound, not knowing that my oldest sister died when she was a baby and I never got the chance to meet her. My second oldest brother went missing in 1998, and me and my little sister were the last ones to see him ... my other two brothers have been in and out of jail since 8th grade, currently both in jail.

"Telling the world I'm gay is nothing compared to that."

Sam had dinner on Saturday with Dave Kopay, a former NFL player who said he was gay in 1975 -- three years after his playing career ended.

On Sunday night, the NFL released a statement supporting Sam.

"We admire Michael Sam's honesty and courage," NFL senior vice president of communications Greg Aiello said in the statement. "Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014."

Among other male pro athletes who have said they are gay, Jason Collins, a 12-year NBA veteran, came out in a Sports Illustrated article at the end of the 2012-13 regular season, but has not played for a team since. Midfielder Robbie Rogers became first openly gay male athlete to play in a U.S. professional team sports league when he entered a MLS game in May 2013.

Conner Mertens, a kicker for Willamette University, last month became the first active college football player in the U.S. to come out publicly.

Collins took to Twitter to praise Sam's courage.

Sam said that he realizes his revelation may engender a variety of reactions in the football world. "There will be negativity, negative reactions," he said. "I expect that. ... Everyone can say hurtful things and hateful things; I don't let stuff like that distract me. But there are going to be positives. The positives will outweigh the negative."
Public reaction has been impressive so far. Within the first hour of his announcement Sam gained over 18,000 Twitter followers.

Sam led the SEC with 11.5 sacks, and 19 tackles for a loss. Most NFL draft projections see him as a likely mid-round pick, with some saying Sam could go as high as the third round, with a possible position switch to outside linebacker. He is rated as the 12th-best outside pass rusher in the draft by ESPN Scouts Inc.

"I just want to go to the team who drafts me," he said, "because that team knows about me, knows that I'm gay, and also knows that I work hard. That's the team I want to go to."

Sam said that despite some comments from current players, he doesn't anticipate difficulty gaining acceptance in an NFL locker room.

"Hopefully it will be the same like my locker room," he said. "It's a workplace. if you've ever been in a Division I or pro locker room, it's a business place. You want to act professional.

Sam rejects the appalling slanders that sometimes have been hurled at gay men.

"I mean, people will talk about the stereotype of gays being in the locker room ... to me, I think that it's a little stereotyped that gay people are predators. It's just very offensive."

Other such negative stereotypes seem too absurd for him even to consider.

"If you led the SEC with 11.5 sacks and 19 tackles for losses?" he said, laughing. "If a gay person did that, I wouldn't call that person weak."

Just last week, he said, he came out to his parents, during a phone call.

"I told my mom and dad last week, and they just pretty much said, 'We knew and we love you and support you,' " he said. "I'm their baby boy. I'm the first to go to college. I'm the first to graduate college. Something like this is just another milestone.

"And I love my hometown. I think when this story breaks, I think they're just going to love me even more for who I am."

Sam understands that his life is about to change forever; he said he is happy and proud to be speaking out at last.

"I'm not afraid to tell the world who I am. I'm Michael Sam: I'm a college graduate. I'm African American, and I'm gay," he said. "I'm comfortable in my skin."
Michael Sam, SEC Defensive Player of the Year, says he is gay

Yesterday, Michael Sam was known principally as a fierce and ferocious 260-pound Missouri defensive end, the 2013 SEC Defensive Player of the Year and a potential high-round pick in May's NFL draft. From the draftnik's notebooks: He holds the point of attack. He has a good motor. He can play 4-3 or 3-4. True, Sam played unremarkably at the Senior Bowl last month, but he was stationed for the first time at outside linebacker. His maturity -- he's already 24 -- and work ethic reside on the extreme edge of the bell curve.

Yet for all he accomplished in four years at Columbia, today Sam became known as something else, something unique in the history of football: an openly gay player on the cusp of his career. Regardless of his 40 time or his performance in the three-cone drill or his Wonderlic score, Sam is now the most intriguing prospect in the NFL. In an act that is at once courageous, unprecedented and postmodern, he has asserted that he is gay. "I'm Michael Sam. I'm a football player and I'm gay," he told The New York Times.

A year ago, NFL teams were rightfully criticized for asking potential draft picks questions on the order of "Do you have a girlfriend?" This year, Sam will save them the trouble of having to ask.

If Jason Collins demolished one barrier last year -- declaring that he was gay within days of finishing his 12th NBA season -- Sam laid ruin to another by coming out before the draft. Where Collins is a Stanford grad from Los Angeles, Sam is more than a decade younger and hails from Hitchcock, Texas (pop. 7,200). And unlike Collins -- who surprised his twin brother with his revelation -- Sam's sexuality was not a closely guarded secret at Missouri. Sam says he came out to his Missouri teammates last August. Coaches and classmates also knew he was gay well before today. Multiple sources have told SI that Sam strongly considered making an announcement late last summer and was willing to play his senior season as an openly homosexual athlete. (He decided against it at the last minute.)

Word of Sam's intentions to come out spread beyond Mizzou. Last month, an SI writer approached Sam at the Senior Bowl and asked whether he would like to collaborate on a piece about his sexuality. Sam politely demurred, but he hardly appeared troubled or surprised by the inquiry. He assured the writer that it was okay that he had asked and added matter-of-factly, "It's going to be a big deal no matter who I do it with."
It's telling, too, that no one in Sam's orbit "outed" him, enabling him to tell his story on his terms and timetable. At some level this is a story about a generation gap. Sam and his cohort were raised in the era of *Will & Grace* and *Modern Family*, not *The Brady Bunch*, let alone *My Three Sons*. Friends, coaches and teammates all invoked the same line: *It just wasn't a big deal.*

It remains to be seen, of course, whether Sam's sexuality will be a big deal in the NFL. The history is stubbornly uneven. As intensely analyzed as Sam will be, the NFL and entire Republic of Football will come under great scrutiny. When it was recently revealed that multiple key members of the 1993 Houston Oilers were gay, the response -- then and now -- was a collective shrug. "Listen, those guys that we're talking about were unbelievable teammates," said Pro Bowl linebacker Lamar Lathon. "And if you wanted to go to war with someone, you would get those guys first. Because I have never seen tougher guys than those guys." On the other hand, it was barely a year ago that 49ers cornerback Chris Culliver warned that a gay teammate wouldn't be welcome in the locker room, and barely a week ago that Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma expressed concern that a gay teammate might look at him in the shower.

There were murmurs last season that four prominent NFL players were going to come out en masse, buffered by "straight allies" such as punter Chris Kluwe and ex-linebacker Brendan Ayanbadejo. While the rhetoric of acceptance suggested that perhaps a football locker room wasn't the benighted cave it's been cracked up to be, the fact remains, the players never emerged. Instead? There were Kluwe's allegations that his special teams coach in Minnesota expressed a desire to "round up all the gays, send them to an island, and then nuke it until it glows." And the troubling free agency of Kerry Rhodes.

As for where Sam will get drafted, consider that he is the 11th man to win the SEC Defensive Player of the Year award. Each of the previous 10 winners was drafted prominently, eight in the first round.

Sam is a trailblazer and, by definition, that means embarking with no map or template. Nevertheless, he has equipped himself. His team of advisors includes Howard Bragman, an L.A. publicist with experience helping celebrities come out. Sam met with Collins in L.A. and spoke to Ayanbadejo. Last week plans were also afoot to put Sam together with former NFL cornerback Wade Davis, who came out in 2012, and Robbie Rogers, the openly gay L.A. Galaxy midfielder. As more athletes come out, a community of support has formed and fortified.

This we know: All the inevitable homophobic tweets and slurs will be offset by overwhelming support. As state after state recognizes marriage equality and Google devotes its daily "doodle" to protest Russia's homophobic legislation, and even the sitting Pope appears to accept homosexuality, figures like Sam are respected far more than they're reviled. For whatever short-term grief or dissonance he may encounter; for however many NFL teams decline to draft him, preferring not to deal with sexuality issues (or, in fairness, the attendant media circus); for whatever catcalls he hears in stadiums and in the trenches; he will be celebrated globally.

Consider: Barely a week after attending the State of the Union as a guest of Michelle Obama, Collins plans to spend much of Monday flying back to Washington, D.C., for a White House
"Any stigma is fading," said Martina Navratilova, one of the first in the lineage of openly gay athletes. "It's all becoming a question of when not if. The next when is an active gay athlete. It's happening brick-by-brick, and pretty soon, we'll have the whole house." She then took a second to chuckle in happy disbelief. "We've hit this tipping point, this flood, this ... I don't know what the term is."

Actually, there is a word for this: progress.

**College Football Star Michael Sam: 'I'm an Openly, Proud Gay Man'**

*By Jeff Black*

A University of Missouri star projected to be drafted into the NFL looks set to become the first publicly gay pro football player.

All-American defensive lineman Michael Sam said he told his teammates and coaches last year, “I’m gay,” according to interviews with The New York Times and on ESPN's "Outside the Lines" program on Sunday.

"I am an openly, proud gay man," Sam told ESPN.
He recounted telling his teammates at Missouri at a preseason practice. "I looked in their eyes, and they just started shaking their heads — like, finally, he came out," he told The New York Times.

The 6-foot-2, 260-pound senior was the defensive player of the year in the Southeastern Conference, widely regarded as the top league in college football. He is projected to be a high draft pick in May's NFL draft.

“I understand how big this is,” Sam told ESPN. "It's a big deal. No one has done this before. And it's kind of a nervous process, but I know what I want to be.... I want to be a football player in the NFL."

Other pro athletes who have said they are gay include Jason Collins, a veteran of 12 NBA seasons who came out last year but has not played on a team since. Robbie Rogers, a Major League Soccer midfielder with the Los Angeles Galaxy, also has said he was gay.

But Sam would be the first active openly gay NFL player.

Sam told ESPN the trial ahead pales against those he faced growing up in Texas.

"I endured so much in my past: seeing my older brother killed from a gunshot wound, not knowing that my oldest sister died when she was a baby and I never got the chance to meet her. My second oldest brother went missing in 1998, and me and my little sister were the last ones to see him ... my other two brothers have been in and out of jail since 8th grade, currently both in jail.

"Telling the world I'm gay is nothing compared to that."

Support for Sam’s public announcement came swiftly from several quarters.

GLAAD, a national lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender advocacy group responded to the news Sunday night.

"By rewriting the script for countless young athletes, Michael has demonstrated the leadership that, along with his impressive skills on the field, makes him a natural fit for the NFL," GLAAD president Sarah Kate Ellis said in a statement. "With acceptance of LGBT people rising across our coasts — in our schools, churches, and workplaces — it's clear that America is ready for an openly gay football star."

"We're really happy for Michael that he's made the decision to announce this, and we're proud of him and how he represents Mizzou,” Missouri head football coach Gary Pinkel said in a statement. “Michael is a great example of just how important it is to be respectful of others, he's taught a lot of people here first-hand that it doesn't matter what your background is, or your personal orientation, we're all on the same team and we all support each other.”
"With Michael Sam’s brave step, he emboldens LGBT athletes and straight allies everywhere,” added Hudson Taylor, the founder and executive director of Athlete Ally, a nonprofit group focused on ending homophobia in sports. “We are in the midst of incredible transformation in American professional sports. In a very short period of time, athletics has gone from being known as ‘the last closet in America’ to being in a position to lead on this issue. This is the power of sports.”

A statement from the NFL said: "We admire Michael Sam's honesty and courage. Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014."

The NFL also noted the league’s policy forbidding discrimination or harassment based on race, sex, religion or sexual orientation.

However, Dallas Cowboys and San Diego Chargers wide receiver Patrick Crayton posted on Twitter that "a lot of players and execs will get asked about playing with a gay guy and they are going to have to lie about how they really feel."

Michael Sam: NFL draft prospect reveals his gay sexuality

American Michael Sam could become the National Football League's first openly gay player after revealing his sexuality.

The 24-year-old completed his college football career at the University of Missouri in December and is expected to be drafted by an NFL franchise in May.

"I came to tell the world I'm an openly gay man," the defensive lineman told ESPN. "If I work hard, if I make plays - that's all that should matter."
The NFL welcomed Sam's announcement.

Should Sam be drafted as expected and make an NFL roster in the 2014 season, he would become the first openly gay player to compete in any of North America's four major professional sports leagues - football, baseball, basketball and hockey.

He had revealed his sexuality to his former college team-mates at the University of Missouri's Mizzou Tigers, but admitted doing so publicly was "a weight off his chest".

"I probably may be the first but I won't be the last. And I think only good things will come from this," he added.

In April 2013, basketball player Jason Collins came out during the sport's off-season but was not signed for the next campaign, meaning he never competed as an openly gay player.

Sam is expected to be a mid-draft pick when the NFL's teams hold their annual draft meeting, a process where players from America's college football system are signed for professional franchises.

Former players from the league have come out since retiring, but none have done so during their careers.

In a statement, the NFL said: "We admire Michael Sam's honesty and courage. Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL."

"We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014."

Sam, who was born in Texas, was named Defensive Player of the Year in the Southeastern Conference before graduation.

Carolina Panthers running back DeAngelo Williams said a person's sexuality did not matter to him, adding: "I care about winning games and being respectful in the locker room."

NFL hall of famer Deion Sanders tweeted: "Michael Sam isn't the first gay player in the NFL although he is the first to come out. Let's show him love like a family member. Truth."

Sam's decision to disclose his sexuality has been welcomed by campaigners and comes at a time when the US government and 17 states have moved to expand gay rights.

Brian Ellner, a gay rights activist said: "We expect the leadership at NFL teams around the country, and the league itself, to wholeheartedly embrace the change that is not only sweeping our nation in the form of law, but also defining our playing fields and culture."
Michael Sam: 'I am gay'

By Dave Matter dmatter@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8508

COLUMBIA, Mo. • Fresh off becoming Missouri’s first unanimous All-American in 50 years, defensive end Michael Sam made bigger news Sunday.

He is gay.

Sam, who is training for the upcoming NFL draft, came out publicly Sunday in interviews with The New York Times and ESPN.

“I’m not naïve,” Mr. Sam told the newspaper. “I know this is a huge deal and I know how important this is. But my role as of right now is to train for the combine and play in the NFL.”

Sam, who was voted the AP Southeastern Conference defensive player of the year after leading the league in sacks and tackles for loss, said in both interviews that he came out to his Missouri teammates and coaches during a team-building exercise before the 2013 season.

"Just to see their reaction was awesome," he told ESPN. "They supported me from Day One. I couldn't have better teammates. ... I'm telling you what: I wouldn't have the strength to do this today if I didn't know how much support they'd given me this past semester."

"We’re really happy for Michael that he’s made the decision to announce this, and we’re proud of him and how he represents Mizzou," Missouri coach Gary Pinkel said in a statement released by Mizzou Sunday night. "Michael is a great example of just how important it is to be respectful of others, he’s taught a lot of people here first-hand that it doesn’t matter what your background is, or your personal orientation, we’re all on the same team and we all support each other."

Donovan Bonnner, a senior linebacker on last year’s Mizzou team, said he and other players from Sam’s 2009 freshman class had known for years that Sam was gay. Bonner said Sam seemed relieved this past season after he told the rest of the team.

“Once he told people, it was normal for everyone,” Bonner said. “He was comfortable.”
“You take that off your shoulders,” Bonner added, “and it relieves a lot of stress in the locker room, where the smallest things can build up. And then he turned into a beast (last year).”

Howard Bragman, Sam’s Los Angeles-based public relations representative, said in an email that Sam will not be available for further interviews. In a lengthy story posted on Outsports.com, a website devoted to gay athletes, Bragman said Sam and his agents, Joe Barkett and Cameron Weiss of Empire Athletes, initially planned for Sam to come out at the end of this month following the NFL scouting combine.

But Sam’s support team decided to make the announcement Sunday, arranging interviews with two national outlets, ESPN and The New York Times, after reporters began asking questions about Sam’s sexuality at last month’s Senior Bowl all-star game.

"We admire Michael Sam’s honesty and courage," NFL senior vice president of communications Greg Aiello said a statement released Sunday. “Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014.”

Bragman held a coming out party for Sam at his Los Angeles home Saturday night, he told Outsports.com, where they were joined by former NFL running back Dave Kopay, who came out publicly in the 1970s, along with other former NFL players.

Sam, projected as a mid-round selection in April’s draft, will become the first openly gay NFL player when he enters the league next season.

“I just want to make sure I could tell my story the way I want to tell it,” Sam told The Times. “I just want to own my truth.”

Sam did not do interviews with local media throughout Mizzou’s regular season. Reporters were told Sam wasn’t attending weekly Monday media session because of a scheduling conflict. Reporters continued to request interviews, including after games, but Sam consistently avoided media sessions.

He broke his silence Dec. 17 after a bowl practice in Columbia, spoke with about a dozen print and TV reporters for 10 minutes and answered a variety of questions about his breakthrough season and his reluctance to talk to the media.

“Because I was focusing on playing football and focusing on graduating,” he said. “I think it was an outside distraction.”

“Looking back, I take great pride in how Michael and everyone in our program handled his situation,” Pinkel said. “This past August, Michael was very direct with the team when he decided to let everyone know that he is gay. We discussed how to deal with that from a public standpoint, and ultimately Michael decided that he didn’t want that to be the focal point of the season. He 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. 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.”

“We’re very proud of Michael and the courage he has displayed for coming out. We look forward to following his career, and the success he’s going to have.”

Also releasing a statement Sunday, Missouri athletic director Mike Alden praised Sam for “being a leader in his personal life.

“We work very hard at the University of Missouri to provide an environment that is respectful and inclusive of all people,” Alden said. “We’re pleased with the strides we’ve made over the years with our student-athletes, coaches and staff about respecting and celebrating our differences. … We wish Michael all the best in all that he does.”

Michael Sam: 'I am an openly, proud gay man'

By DAVID MORRISON

Sunday, February 9, 2014 at 7:46 pm

Michael Sam is hoping to become the first openly gay NFL player.

Sam, a unanimous All-American defensive end for Missouri this past season, came out to ESPN and the New York Times on Sunday night, telling his story of personal discovery and his hopes for the future.

Michael Sam is gay. And he’s proud of that fact.

"I am an openly, proud gay man," Sam told ESPN.

Sam told both outlets he let the team know at a meeting before the season, uncrumpling a balled-up piece of paper and telling everyone who he is.

"I knew I was gay. I came out to my teammates in August," Sam said in a phone interview with the Tribune. "They could have tweeted, or whatever, that Michael Sam came out and it could have been a big deal then. But they didn’t."
“My teammates were very supportive. They rallied around me, and they support me even now.”

Sam went on to put up one of the finest seasons for a defender in Missouri history, tying the program record with 11.5 sacks and helping lead a line that played no small part in pacing the Tigers to a 12-2 record, a No. 5 final ranking and a win in the Cotton Bowl.

The senior put up a trio of three-sack games in the span of four weeks against Arkansas State, Vanderbilt and Florida and ended the season with an SEC-best 11.5 sacks and 19.0 tackles for loss, earning first-team All-SEC honors and being named a finalist for the Lombardi Award and Nagurski Trophy.

He made a name for himself on the field with his relentless energy, pass rush and sack dance -- clap, clap, punch.

Sam also had an infectious smile and a penchant for singing at practice to keep his teammates loose.

Now, he'll get the chance to be a pioneer.

"I wanted to own my truth," Sam told the Tribune. "I was just ready to get it over with. I don’t know why I have to get on ESPN or the New York Times and tell people I happen to be gay. Straight people don’t have to do it. I don’t know why gay people have to do it.

"During the season, my main focus was winning games, trying to go to the SEC championship and trying to go to the national championship. That was my main focus. I was not trying to focus on coming out to everyone. I don’t know why I have to. I came out to my team. That’s all that should matter."

Sam said Missouri’s coaching staff was supportive as well, telling him "if I ever wanted to tell my story, they would support me 100 percent."

Coach Gary Pinkel said as much in a statement released Sunday night.

"We’re really happy for Michael that he’s made the decision to announce this, and we’re proud of him and how he represents Mizzou," Pinkel said. "Michael is a great example of just how important it is to be respectful of others, he’s taught a lot of people here first-hand that it doesn’t matter what your background is, or your personal orientation, we’re all on the same team and we all support each other. If Michael doesn’t have the support of his teammates like he did this past year, I don’t think there’s any way he has the type of season he put together.

"We talk all the time here in our program about how one of our core values is to respect the cultural differences of others, and this certainly applies. We view ourselves as one big family that has a very diverse collection of people from all walks of life, and if you’re part of our family, we support you.

"Looking back, I take great pride in how Michael and everyone in our program handled his situation. This past August, Michael was very direct with the team when he decided to let everyone know that he is gay. We discussed how to deal with that from a public standpoint, and ultimately Michael decided that he didn’t want that to be the focal point of the season. He 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. 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.

"We’re very proud of Michael and the courage he has displayed for coming out. We look forward to following his career, and the success he’s going to have."

Sam declined to show up for group interviews with local media throughout the season, finally speaking with a handful of reporters in the lead-up to the Cotton Bowl on Dec. 17.

"I was focusing on playing football and focusing on graduating," Sam told reporters then about his decision not to talk with the media. "I think that was an outside distraction."

Sam also did interviews in Dallas in the week before the bowl game.

Now, he’s squarely in the spotlight.

Sam set up his Twitter account (@MikeSamFootball) Friday, and it had less than 10 followers before his announcement.

Less than 90 minutes after the news broke, he had nearly 25,000 followers.

"Dare to be different and stand for what you believe in! Congrats to my brother," former Missouri wideout L’Damian Washington tweeted at Sam after the announcement.

Sam said his main focus is his burgeoning NFL career. He’s not thinking about his role as a trailblazer for other gay football players.

He said he’s hopeful about how his sexual orientation will be perceived by his prospective future employers.

"Seeing how my teammates reacted last year and how much support they’ve given me, I’d like to think that whatever team I end up going to will be the same," Sam said. "Very positive and supportive. And soon, it wouldn’t even be an issue."

The 6-foot-2, 255-pound Sam, who played in the Senior Bowl on Jan. 25, is generally regarded to be a second- to fourth-round pick.

He is one of seven former Tigers to be invited to the NFL Combine, which will take place in Indianapolis from Feb. 22-25.

"We admire Michael Sam’s honesty and courage. Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014," the NFL said in a statement through spokesman Greg Aiello.

Sam graduated from Missouri in December.

"We are so proud of Michael for what he has accomplished at Mizzou academically, socially and competitively," athletics director Mike Alden said in a statement. "This is a young man who earned
his degree from MU, was a unanimous All-American on the football field and now he's being a leader in his personal life. He continues to display great character, courage and compassion. We are proud of him on every level.

"We work very hard at the University of Missouri to provide an environment that is respectful and inclusive of all people. We're pleased with the strides we've made over the years with our student-athletes, coaches and staff about respecting and celebrating our differences. We continue to grow every day. We talk all the time about our core value of respect, and we emphasize that in a number of ways, whether it's through individual actions, team settings, public efforts such as our ‘If You Can Play, You Can Play’ video, and even our Men-for-Men and Women-for-Women programs.

"The University's theme is called ‘One Mizzou.’ What that theme represents is that we are all family, we are all Tigers, and we should all respect and appreciate each other.

"We wish Michael all the best in all that he does."

For Sam, it's a big weight lifted, even if he's just the same player and person he was before.

"I don't feel any different," Sam said. "I was Michael Sam when I woke up, and I'll be Michael Sam when I'm going to go to sleep."

Here's a link to the OutSports.com story on Sam's coming-out process.

And here's a link to the Missouri athletic department's "You Can Play" video for LGBT athletes from last April.

UPDATE: Missouri defensive end Michael Sam comes out publicly as gay

COLUMBIA — Missouri defensive end Michael Sam has a challenge in front of him.

**He already went from being a two-star recruit out of Hitchcock, Texas, to an All-American and the 2013 Southeastern Conference defensive player of the year. He was the breakout star on a Missouri team that reached the SEC Championship game in 2013.**

Now, Sam is preparing for the 2014 NFL Draft, which could be his biggest challenge yet. After announcing publicly Sunday he is gay, Sam is attempting to become the first openly gay player in the NFL.
"This is the most important story in the history of gay sports," said Cyd Zeigler, publisher of outsports.com, a website that covers gay sports.

"This is going to dominate headlines and really change how people see football and all of sports."

Sam, who is projected as a mid-round pick in May's NFL Draft, could become the first openly gay athlete in the NFL — or any major American professional sport.

Sam first came out to his team during fall camp in August and played the best football season of his life in 2013.

"We're really happy for Michael that he's made the decision to announce this, and we're proud of him and how he represents Mizzou," Missouri coach Gary Pinkel said in a statement.

"Looking back, I take great pride in how everyone in our program handled his situation. This past August, Michael was very direct with the team when he decided to let everyone know that he is gay. We discussed how to deal with that from a public standpoint and ultimately Michael decided that he didn't want that to be the focal point of the season."

Sam entered his senior season with 17 career tackles for loss and 9.5 sacks. As a senior, he led the SEC with 19 tackles for loss and 11.5 sacks.

After fall camp, Sam stopped doing interviews with the media in an effort to focus on school and football. His 2013 success suggests the decision paid off. In a span of four games during September and October, Sam collected three sacks in three different games and returned a fumble for a touchdown in Missouri’s upset victory over Georgia on Oct. 12.

On Jan. 25, Sam competed in the 2014 Senior Bowl, a postseason all-star game showcasing the best senior prospects for the 2014 NFL Draft.

Sam recently hired publicist Howard Bragman, who is openly gay. Bragman has represented LGBT athletes, including three-time Olympic women’s basketball gold medalist Sheryl Swoopes and retired NBA player John Amaechi, according to OutSports.com.

Sam is scheduled to participate in the 2014 NFL Scouting Combine in Indianapolis from Feb. 20 to Feb. 25. ESPN NFL Draft analyst Mel Kiper Jr. said in a conference call last week that he expects Sam to be drafted between the third and fifth round.

Sam attended Hitchcock (Texas) High School. The 6-foot-2, 255-pound defensive end was a member of the Missouri team from 2009 to 2013. He redshirted during the 2009 season.

Sam is one of at least 10 former Division I football players to come out as gay after his college football career. No Division I football player has come out during his college career, according to OutSports.com.
The only Missouri athlete to previously announce publicly that he was gay is four-time All-American diver Greg DeStephen, who dove for Missouri from 2006 to 2010. DeStephen came out in 2008.

“I would like to congratulate Michael and say how inspiring his courage is to come out publicly,” DeStephen told the Missourian on Sunday. “I wish him the best. I hope this sends the message that the sports world is becoming an inclusive environment that allows athletes to excel no matter who they are or what they are. Young athletes will now be able to see that they can be top athletes gay or straight. I can’t say how excited I am that a Missouri Tiger has taken it on himself to be the first top level football player to come out. I’m proud to say that I am part of the Missouri Tiger family that has created an atmosphere of acceptance and a tradition of excellence.”

Missouri football star Michael Sam announces he is gay

February 9

By VAHE GREGORIAN

University of Missouri senior defensive end Michael Sam on Sunday became one of the few active male athletes on the major U.S. sports scene to announce that he’s gay and is poised to become the NFL’s first openly gay player.

“Once I became official to my teammates, I knew who I was,” Michael Sam says. “I knew that I was gay. And I knew that I was Michael Sam, who’s a Mizzou football player who happens to be gay. I was so proud of myself.”

His declaration to two national media outlets Sunday night was a bold contradiction of stereotypes and possibly stakes new ground in one of the prominent civil rights issues of our time.

A unanimous All-American, the 2013 defensive player of the year in the Southeastern Conference, the nation’s roughest and best, is a gay man, and it’s sure hard to reconcile that with the enduring and mean-spirited myth of sissification.

His decision at last to do so, and how to do it, came in the last few weeks as Sam almost simultaneously told his story to ESPN and The New York Times on Sunday.
Sam’s announcement surely was no surprise for Mizzou football teammates or coaches, to whom he had come out, and others around campus.

But his right to privacy was honored by multiple media outlets, including The Star, as a simple matter of his choice to publicly discuss it or not.

“Once I became official to my teammates, I knew who I was,” Sam told The Times. “I knew that I was gay. And I knew that I was Michael Sam, who’s a Mizzou football player who happens to be gay. I was so proud of myself, and I just didn’t care who knew. If someone on the street would have asked me, ‘Hey, Mike, I heard you were gay; is that true?’ I would have said yes.”

Sam’s decision to go public makes him potentially a pioneering face and force in the gathering movement for equality at a time when acceptance of gay rights is emerging legally and socially but intolerance still rages.

Even if his impetus to do so may have been less about taking a courageous step for gays than it might have been as a necessary pre-emptive maneuver regarding his NFL prospects, the risk and prospective impact and fallout are the same.

As a projected third- or fourth-round NFL pick (though one some consider an in-between size for a pro defensive end at 6 feet 2 and 255 pounds), Sam figures to be in a visible position going forward.

While he probably will be targeted by some groups, Sam’s stature also might stand as a further example and hope for those who are bullied for being different or suffer in silence rather than risk the consequences of bigotry.

Just what it might mean in the most practical sense — his budding NFL career — is an unknown, as one AFC executive, speaking in generalities, told The Star.

“You’ve got 32 different entities, 32 different teams,” he said. “Everybody drafts players differently. Now, with that being said, we’re now in a new era … of football where stuff like this is becoming part of the fabric of society.

“The bottom line is, can the guy still play? I think history has shown that if you can play and contribute, depending on the locker room, it will be accepted.”

He added, “We’re at a crossroads with regards to these types of players.”

Although he’s not yet formally in the NFL pool, Sam’s proclamation harkens to perhaps the most similar previous case among male athletes in the so-called big four sports (MLB, NBA, NFL and NHL).

And it triggers anew broader questions about the pace of routine acceptance of gay people.
When Jason Collins came out as his NBA career was ebbing last year, he received wide league and public support, including from former tennis star Martina Navratilova.

Her words, decades after her own revelation that she is a lesbian, were a reminder of the glacial pace of change.

“I can’t believe it’s 32 years after I came out, but better late than never,” she told the “Today” show, adding: “I think Jason coming out this way is going to push that forward a little bit, and most of all, he is going to save lives, there is no doubt in my mind. There is some kid out there who is not going to commit suicide because Jason is out.”

Collins’ career stalled after his announcement. He has not been signed to a contract since, and it’s unclear to what degree that’s because he was in decline at 35 and to what degree it’s because of possible concerns about his place in a locker room.

More recently in the public eye, President Barack Obama named another gay former tennis star, Billie Jean King, among the athletes to lead the U.S. Olympic delegation in Sochi — where Russia’s gay “propaganda” law and incidents of hostility toward gay people have drawn international concern.

“A lot of countries, you’d be in jail if you’re gay; in some countries … we would be executed, so it’s still very serious,” King, who missed the Opening Ceremony because of the death of her mother, told CBS, adding: “We just happen to be gay. It’s interesting why people think that’s so major.

“We need to really shift where it’s a non-issue. When it’s a non-issue, it will mean we’ve arrived. It won’t happen in my lifetime, but it definitely is a civil rights issue of the 21st century.”

That plea of live and let live, of course, certainly remains an issue now.

And that will soon be seen through the prism of Sam stepping into unprecedented and complicated territory.

While he’s obviously not the first gay man about to get a chance in the NFL, he’s certainly the first whose orientation has been publicly stated beforehand.

That means that no matter how self-assured, no matter what ways he was supported or ostracized in his hometown of Hitchcock, Texas, or at MU, there’s likely to be a new frontier of resistance in the form of the macho NFL locker room and perhaps in the eyes of fretful executives.

“Our policy is not one of just tolerance but acceptance,” NFL commissioner Roger Goodell said at a meeting with sports editors last year in New York.

But as much as that may be true philosophically in the ivory tower, it’s hard to know what that means in the trenches.
And there’s probably never been a test of that “policy” quite like this.

Only last week, as noted by The Times, New Orleans Saints linebacker Jonathan Vilma told the NFL Network he did not want a gay teammate.

One of the most vivid recent demonstrations of the potential pitfalls can be seen in the case of former Minnesota Vikings punter Chris Kluwe.

In an article for Deadspin last month, Kluwe suggested he had been harassed and released in 2012 merely for his outspokenness on marriage equality.

Special teams coordinator Mike Priefer, Kluwe wrote, “said on multiple occasions that I would wind up burning in hell with the gays, and that the only truth was Jesus Christ and the Bible.”

Priefer denied the allegation or that he in any way discriminates. The Vikings promised to conduct a “thorough investigation.”

But last week Kluwe’s attorney, Clayton Halunen, told the St. Paul Pioneer-Press that was “a charade” and that he’s ready to file a lawsuit.

Perhaps more encouraging for Sam was the experience of former Baltimore Raven Brendon Ayanbadejo, a longtime advocate of support for gay marriage.

Ayanbadejo’s stance perhaps became most widely known in 2012 after a Maryland politician wrote a letter to Ravens owner Steve Bisciotti asking him to “take the necessary action … to inhibit such expressions from your employee.”

In the aftermath, the Ravens publicly supported Ayanbadejo’s right to express himself. And he told NPR the episode had fortified his cause.

“The support’s been coming worldwide. I’ve heard from other players on other teams. I’ve heard from fans from other teams. I’ve heard from people that didn’t even care about football that are now football fans and, of course, the LGBT community. …

“This is something we need. We need it here in the United States, and the world needs it, and it’s time we start treating our brothers, sisters, friends, relatives equally just like anybody else is treated.”

Most likely, Sam will be stepping somewhere between the worlds that Kluwe and Ayanbadejo describe. And the scrutiny will be intense for an athlete who avoided the media almost altogether last season.

It’s believed Sam’s media shutdown was his own decision, and he told The Times he had the full support of teammates, coaches and administrators.

He did not elaborate on what tensions he had to contend with along the way.
But there were times of conflict to weather at MU, as would be expected in any large group from such divergent backgrounds, and the ultimate result appears to have been one that says all are welcome under Mizzou’s tent.

“Looking back, I take great pride in how Michael and everyone in our program handled his situation,” MU football coach Gary Pinkel said in a statement released Sunday. “This past August, Michael was very direct with the team when he decided to let everyone know that he is gay.

“We discussed how to deal with that from a public standpoint, and ultimately Michael decided that he didn’t want that to be the focal point of the season. He wanted to focus on football …

“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.”

Mizzou athletics is known to have been taking measures to promote an atmosphere of inclusion with awareness workshops, known as “Men-for-Men” and “Women-for-Women,” and also by joining the “You Can Play” initiative.

That group’s mission “is dedicated to ensuring equality, respect and safety for all athletes, without regard to sexual orientation.”

Athletic director Mike Alden appears in a related video MU released last April:

“The University of Missouri and the Mizzou athletic department strive to provide a safe environment for our lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender student athletes,” he says. “No individual shall be judged on the court, in the locker room or amongst each other based on their sexual orientation (or) their gender identification.

“Mizzou (athletics) strive to provide acceptance through understanding, refraining from the use of homophobic language and rhetoric and all the while respecting the abilities and talents of all within the athletic department.”

From that backdrop, Sam has told what he wanted to now.

In his time and on his terms, as it should be.

How much he can keep things on his own terms now is just one of the many questions that come with this brave act.

It’s a moment that figures to change his life, and, alas, maybe not always happily.

But it’s also a moment bigger than him, and one that may represent another merciful step toward changing other lives for the better.
Michael Sam: Is NFL ready for openly gay player?

Michael Sam, an all-American defensive end at the University of Missouri, is ready for the NFL. Is the NFL ready for him?

Sam announced Sunday night in interviews with ESPN and the New York Times that he is openly gay, something he had told his Mizzou teammates last summer. “I just want to make sure I could tell my story the way I want to tell it,” Sam told John Branch of the Times. “I just want to own my truth.”

Now, as he prepares for the NFL combine later this month and the NFL draft in May, the NFL will have to own that truth as well. Sam, who is projected as a third- or fourth-round draft pick, would be the first openly gay player in the league and would step into a league that has been preparing for a moment like this. The difference, and it probably isn’t surprising, is that the first openly gay player in the NFL will be a rookie and not an established veteran.

For the last year, the issue has been building in the league and in the sports world. Now-former players Brendan Ayanbadejo and Chris Kluwe publicly supported same-sex marriage initiatives in the fall of 2012. The idea of an openly gay NFL player bubbled up as a topic of conversation at the Super Bowl last year, when Chris Culliver of the San Francisco 49ers questioned whether players would accept a gay teammate — and later apologized for his insensitivity. Less than two months after the Super Bowl, Britney Greiner, the top pick in the WNBA, announced that she is gay. Less than a week later, Jason Collins, now a former NBA player, became the first active male athlete in a major U.S. sport to come out. The table seemingly was set for the NFL and, last fall, Mike Freeman of the Bleacher Report wrote that an active player was set to come out until he changed his mind.

Now there presumably will be fewer whispers, with fewer players feeling compelled to address them. At the end of December, Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers, one of the league’s biggest stars, announced on his weekly radio show: “I’m just going to say I’m not gay,” Rodgers said on 540 WAUK-AM in Milwaukee. “I really, really like women. That’s all I can really say about that.”

It is in this rapidly changing yet still uncertain sports environment that Sam has arrived. He has been greeted with welcoming, supportive comments on social media and on TV. What happens next may be more daunting. He’ll go to the annual NFL scouting combine in Indianapolis later this month, where his physical talents, his intellect and his emotional maturity will be evaluated. Questions at the combine have, in the past, been tough. Dez Bryant, three years ago, was asked whether his mother was a prostitute. Kluwe last month alleged that that he was cut by the
Minnesota Vikings because of his support of same-sex marriage and Sam will join a league that is investigating its locker-room culture after the Miami Dolphins’ incidents involving Richie Incognito and Jonathan Martin.

Still, the timing for this feels right. There have been increasingly influential campaigns, including It Gets Better and You Can Play, and Sam’s sexual preference was not unknown to NFL scouts or team officials, ESPN’s Chris Mortensen reports. The NFL, for its part, says it’s ready. “We admire Michael Sam’s honesty and courage,” NFL spokesman Greg Aiello said in a statement. “Michael is a football player. Any player with ability and determination can succeed in the NFL. We look forward to welcoming and supporting Michael Sam in 2014.”

There will be trials, moments when insulting words may be hurled, whether by fans or teammates in the heat of competition. But if Sam can rush the passer and stop the run, he’ll have a future in America’s most popular sports league. Sam, who graduated in December, will be a visible, articulate spokesman for his sport — and more.

Burwell: Sam's 'secret' was not a secret at all

7 hours ago • BRYAN BURWELL • bburwell@post-dispatch.com > 314-340-8185

JUPITER, Fla. • If you were paying enough attention and knew what you were looking for, Michael Sam’s “secret” was actually something he never invested much effort in trying to hide.

There were subtle touches that didn’t go unnoticed among a lot of us, like the rainbow-colored wrist bands he wore on game days. There were the knowing whispers — and almost universal acceptance — among many students on Missouri’s sprawling Columbia campus that for perhaps nearly a year or so, the star of the nationally ranked football team was comfortably living a fairly open gay lifestyle.

There was the acceptance among his teammates, who quite frankly suspected all along that the consensus All-America defensive end had a different sexual orientation from those in the rest of the locker room.

Michael Sam’s story really isn’t that much different from all the other openly gay athletes we now know, of course with the exception of the extraordinary detail that he is coming out of the closet not at the end of his college career, but at the very start of his professional journey. The rest of his tale is quite familiar. People knew. Teammates knew. Lots of them easily accepted.

Yet that didn’t guard him against the fear of what it would mean to come out of the closet. So in the closet is where he stayed until Sunday, when he revealed to ESPN and the New York Times that he is gay.
On the verge of his journey into a career in the National Football League, one of the most celebrated players in Mizzou football history has shattered a lot of stereotypes about what it’s supposed to mean to be gay.

On the football field, he cut the profile of the ultimate macho man who stomped around the SEC all autumn long, playing with an uncanny manly rage that led him to the stunning achievement of being honored as the co-defensive player of the year in college football’s most celebrated conference.

On Sunday, we learned what being gay means to Michael Sam.

Soon, we’ll find out what his sexual orientation means to the NFL. On most draft boards, Sam is being charted as a third- or fourth-round draft pick. He is an undersized pass-rushing defensive end, and while his 6-foot-2, 255-pound frame is better designed to be a linebacker, Sam is what he is.

“The NFL scouts I’ve talked to who know what they’re doing say people need to stop trying to make him something he isn’t and just accept that fact that he rushes the passer for a living and he’s very good at it,” said NFL Network draft expert Charles Davis. “They need to forget about that linebacker stuff and just let him do what he does.”

That, of course, is the most important thing that needs to happen next for Sam. He needs to be allowed to be who he is and do what he does. It won’t be easy, because the swirl of a media storm has just started to build and will be off the charts by the time he shows up in Indianapolis for this week’s NFL scouting combine.

It was smart for him to make the announcement before the combine, because it would have been an even bigger storm if someone had confronted him in media interviews there and asked him about his sexual orientation in front of those NFL microphones.

As Sam said Sunday, it was important for him to be able to control his story, so that’s why he chose this moment to come out. It was rather interesting to hear him say in those interviews with the Times and ESPN that he didn’t know until recently how many reporters actually had suspicions that he was gay.

In reality, at the very least, he surely must have had strong suspicions how many members of the media covering Mizzou were aware of his so-called secret.

He spent most of the season not talking to the media right about the time quite a few in-state news organizations were apparently picking up the trail of this landmark story. It surely was no coincidence that Sam never came to the interview room after games, never came to the Monday afternoon weekly interview sessions during the season, or even after games in which he was the star of the day.

This was all going on right around the time that it was becoming common knowledge among those covering the team from Kansas City to St. Louis that he was gay. However, it was impossible from an ethical standpoint to write that story without Sam actually confirming it. What we largely suspected was that Sam’s season-long media blackout was in direct relationship to the rumors about his sexual orientation.
What we never learned was whether it was solely Sam’s decision to keep away from the media or if the team, athletics department or university established the media quarantine.

On Sunday, in a prepared statement, MU coach Gary Pinkel clearly suggested the quarantine was a strategy arrived at jointly by Sam and the team.

“Looking back, I take great pride in how Michael and everyone in our program handled his situation,” Pinkel said. “This past August, Michael was very direct with the team when he decided to let everyone know that he is gay. We discussed how to deal with that from a public standpoint, and ultimately Michael decided that he didn’t want that to be the focal point of the season. He 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.

“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.”

I wish I bought that explanation, but I don’t. Sam doesn’t strike me as someone who wanted to keep this a secret anymore.

“If someone on the street would have asked me, ‘Hey, Mike, I heard you were gay; is that true?’ I would have said yes,” he told the Times.

The truth is, he spent the entire season cloistered from the media, so no one ever could ask the question.

This is yet one more example of how awkwardly those in Mizzou’s athletics department handle big issues. They had a rare opportunity to make a bold and revolutionary statement about equal opportunity. Instead, they again fumbled badly.

I hope his new NFL team treats his news with a far more progressive stance.
"It takes an incredible amount of courage to break ground on a social issue on a national stage. Michael Sam is a young man of tremendous fortitude and confidence. It is these traits that make it possible for him to be among the best on the field and now to have an impact on the world of sport in a very important way. I also applaud the wonderful support given to him by his teammates and the University of Missouri." _Southeastern Conference Commissioner Mike Slive.

"I think a lot of guys in the NFL are going to say they will accept it, but there are a lot of guys who won't. The reality is Michael Sam is going to open himself up to a lot of criticism and a lot of challenges. Those are challenges most gay people have to go through, but when you are dealing with alpha males and some meatheads in an NFL locker room it's amplified. And there are some guys who have strong religious beliefs too, so he's going to be judged. He's going to face some things that are going to be very difficult to overcome." _Former NFL offensive lineman Frank Garcia, now a sports radio show host with WFNZ-AM in Charlotte.

"Had multiple convos with (at)MikeSamFootball this year, amazed at his honesty & courage! Once a tiger, ALWAYS a Tiger." _Kansas City Chiefs quarterback and former Missouri star Chase Daniel on Twitter (at)ChaseDaniel.

"Very happy for Michael Sam. His courage will inspire millions to live their truth." _MLS player Robbie Rogers, who is gay, on Twitter.

"I could care less about a man's sexual preference! i care about winning games and being respectful in the locker room!" _Carolina Panthers running back DeAngelo Williams on Twitter (at)DeAngeloRB.

"We are so proud of Michael for what he has accomplished at Mizzou academically, socially and competitively. This is a young man who earned his degree from MU, was a unanimous All-American on the football field and now he's being a leader in his personal life. He continues to display great character, courage and compassion. We are proud of him on every level." _Missouri Athletic Director Mike Alden.

"Best of luck in the draft (at)MikeSamFootball. (hash)respect (hash)YouCanPlay (at)YouCanPlayTeam" _Former NFL player Zak DeOssie on Twitter (at)zdeossie.
"There will be some interest early on (and missteps), but by week one, it'll be a non story. The way it should be from that point on." — Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher Brandon McCarthy on Twitter (at)BMcCarthy32.

Mo. lawmakers may fund university buildings

By DAVID A. LIEB, Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Missouri lawmakers appear to agree with Gov. Jay Nixon that public colleges and universities should get more money next year. But some lawmakers want to direct part of that money toward building improvements instead of devoting it to larger operating budgets as proposed by Nixon.

Those differing opinions about how best to aid higher education could be one of several key issues facing lawmakers as they begin piecing together a spending plan during the next few weeks.

Funding cuts during the recent recession have left colleges and universities with smaller core budgets than they had a decade ago. And many campuses also have a backlog of building maintenance and construction plans.

Nixon has proposed more than $120 million in new higher education funding for the 2015 budget, about one-third of which would be distributed as a performance-based increase to the
institutions’ core budgets. Other money would increase scholarship funding and expand the number of classroom slots available for certain professions, such as mental health workers.

But House Budget Committee Chairman Rick Stream prefers to spend more on building projects, with less of an increase for operations. He wants to take advantage of a 2012 law that authorizes the state to fund half of the cost of campus building projects that generate a 50 percent match through private donations.

Over the past several months, five universities have submitted a total of eight applications for projects seeking an aggregate of nearly $43 million in state funding to be matched with private donations.

Nixon didn't include any money for the projects in his budget.

"If we passed the bill, and then the universities went back and took our advice and guidance and actually followed through with it, I think they ought to be rewarded," said Stream, R-Kirkwood.

Missouri law allows the state funding to go toward new construction, renovation and maintenance at public colleges and universities, so long as the projects aren't for athletic facilities, parking garages or student housing. Colleges and universities are barred from using their operating budgets, bonds or student tuition and fees to come up with their half of the money.

"To me, this is a good way to encourage private donations," said state Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg. "And it's a way the state can get some much-needed projects done without having to fund 100 percent of it."

Pearce is a member of the Senate Appropriations Committee that helps write the budget and also was chairman of the Senate Interim Committee on Capital Improvement Assessment and Planning, which released a report in December recommending use of the matching-grant program.

The state Coordinating Board for Higher Education has received applications from all four campuses of the University of Missouri system plus one from Missouri State University.

The biggest is an $11.1 million request from the University of Missouri-Columbia to help construct a 70,000-square-foot "Applied Learning Center" for the business college. The Columbia campus also is seeking $6.1 million for renovations to an engineering building, $2.8 million to design plans for the music school and fine arts facilities and $1.5 million to help construct a "teaching winery" that would include movable winemaking equipment and walk-in coolers.

The University of Missouri-St. Louis is seeking $10 million in state aid for the first phase of a new business college building. The University of Missouri-Kansas City wants $7.4 million to help build a new "Free Enterprise Center" that could serve as the "visual gateway" for people approaching the campus from the nearby Country Club Plaza.
Missouri State University is seeking $2.3 million to help develop a new "student admissions and success center" that would include an auditorium and office space and serve as "a starting point for new visitors to campus." Missouri University of Science and Technology is seeking $1.2 million to replace a facility built in 1949 at its experimental mine near Rolla.

University officials say all of the projects already have the required amount of private donations or pledges.

Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia, said he doesn't believe the state has enough money for all of them but could fund some. His preference is to put the money toward buildings that could be completed instead of developed in phases.

Schaefer also is weighing Nixon's request for increased operating budgets.

But he said: "When we have a little bit of extra general revenue, I think that's the appropriate time to look at deferred maintenance, to look at capital issues. ...The problem with expanding the operating budget is once you do it, you're doing it in perpetuity."

Why does college cost so much?

February 08, 2014 11:05 pm  •  By Jim Gallagher jgallagher@post-dispatch.com 314-340-8390

MU MENTION P. 2

The trend in college costs should scare St. Louis families. Costs have been going up — a lot — while family income has been going, going, going down.

That's led parents to wonder why colleges can't keep their costs under control. Are today's kids getting a better education for their bigger tuition bucks? Has bureaucratic bloat fattened college payrolls on the backs of parents and kids? Have colleges gone bonkers on building, pampering students with plush dorms and palm-shaded indoor swimming pools?

Or have stingy state legislators starved their state universities, forcing up tuition?

First, let's look at the problem. This year, the sticker price for tuition, room and board ran an average of $18,391 nationwide at state colleges. Adjusted for inflation, that's up 38 percent over the last decade. The price at private colleges averaged $41,907, up 24 percent, according to the College Board.
College costs have been rising faster than inflation since the 1980s. “Students are now paying a much larger percentage of the costs than they used to,” said Donna Desrochers, principal researcher at American Institutes for Research in Washington.

Families can ill afford it. Adjusted for inflation, median household income, the best measure of the middle class, dropped 9 percent in Missouri over the decade ending in 2012, the last date available from the census.

That’s bleak, but here are some things to keep in mind:

• It’s not quite as bad as it seems. The fastest inflation has been in “sticker prices,” the published tuition, room and board rates. Most families pay less, after scholarships, grants and federal tax breaks. The real price of college has also risen faster than inflation, but not as fast at the sticker price.

• The cost increase has slowed recently, according to the College Board. This school year, the sticker price is up only 2.9 percent at state universities across the nation (inflation was 2 percent). That’s the smallest rise in at least 30 years. It followed hikes of 4.5 percent last school year and 8.5 percent the year before.

The sticker price at private nonprofit colleges was up 3.8 percent this year.

Missouri’s state colleges have been better than most at controlling costs. Adjusted for inflation, the price at Missouri state schools rose 9 percent over the past five years, compared to 29 percent for the nation, according to the College Board. The hike was over 20 percent in Illinois.

The University of Missouri cheered parents last month by freezing in-state tuition for the next school year. The curators cut a deal with the governor for a bigger share of the state’s rising tax revenue.

Why is the cost of college rising?

The Great Recession gets part of the blame at state universities. States took an ax to college budgets. Missouri cut its per-student appropriation for state colleges by 30 percent from 2008 to 2013. Illinois cut 23 percent.

Mizzou could freeze tuition come September because the recovering economy is refilling state tax coffers.

But state college costs were rising fast even before the recession. Private colleges never got state money and their prices are rising, too. So there are other reasons for the college cost squeeze.

Part of the reason may lie in a long hiring spree among college bureaucrats.
Desrochers’ institute runs the Delta Cost Project, which tries to explain trends in college spending. In 1990, there were more professors than administrators on big college campuses. Now it’s just the opposite, she notes.

The big-title bureaucrats aren’t the problem. The number of vice presidents and the like have pretty much kept up with enrollment.

Rather, the growth has been a notch below — admissions officers, computer analysts, counselors, accountants, HR bureaucrats and the like. Such jobs grew by 50 to 75 percent between 2000 and 2012.

But is this all bloat? College leaders note that administrators take on some jobs that used to be done by professors, such as student counseling. And new developments, such as over-the-Internet classes, require computer personnel. Still, 75 percent is a big boost in bureaucracy.

Although the mix of employees is different, and heavier on bureaucrats, the overall college employment headcount hasn’t risen much faster than student enrollment over the past decade. That would argue against the flabby-payroll theory of rising college costs.

**EDIFICE COMPLEX**

Parents who wander through campus may wonder if the academia has an edifice complex. At Mizzou, my alma mater, strollers can marvel at the opulent student recreation pleasure palace with its squash, tennis and beach volleyball courts. It beats the grubby old gym I remember from the 1970s.

“No matter what time of year, it’s always Spring Break in the Tiger Grotto,” says the Mizzou website, referring the palm-tree-studded indoor pool. “The Grotto will transform your dullest day into a vacation.” Nearby is Truman’s Pond, “your on-campus beach club.”

Mizzou is certainly not alone. The University of Georgia spent $200,000 on a climbing wall.

Actually, this is a minor part of the problem, according to the Delta Cost Project. “Climbing walls are easy targets, maybe even fair game, but they aren’t what’s behind the rising price of college,” the project’s Rita J. Kirshstein and James A. Kadamus wrote in a 2012 report.

But things such as on-campus beach clubs, big advertising budgets and the rising number of admissions bureaucrats raise another issue. Are colleges are spending too much recruiting students — and their money — as opposed to educating them when they arrive?
In fixing the blame for higher tuition, parents might look in the mirror. Colleges are raising their prices because families will pay it.

Parents are desperate to send their kids to college, knowing that it’s the ticket to the middle class. Meanwhile, government makes it easy for students and parents to get student loans. Colleges can raise tuition because we love our kids.

That doesn’t mean we’re getting our money’s worth. In fact, a growing number of college classes are being taught by part-timers, rather than real professors.

Community colleges and smaller state colleges have been cutting the ratio of full-time faculty to students, while hiring more part-timers. Big public universities have held the full-time professor count steady, but they are also hiring more part-timers for classroom instruction.

Could it be that students are paying more to learn less?

The Delta Cost Project doesn’t try to finger cost villains; it just points to factors. It seems that stingy legislatures, a boom in building and bureaucrats are all to blame, as well as college leaders who compete for students on amenities rather than price.

Letter to the Editor: College education helps generations of families

February 08, 2014 12:00 am

**UM President Tim Wolfe** ("A college education is still valuable," Feb. 5) clearly articulates the ongoing value of a college education in terms of higher lifetime wages and substantially lower unemployment rates. The reality is that not all college degrees are equal, nor are all college students and graduates. The rewards that can be gotten from a college experience depend ultimately on the determination, singularity of focus and dedication of the student to the learning enterprise.

Nearly 40 years ago, I became the first in my family to earn a college (and graduate) degree. I made it through with the financial support provided by work-study, government loans and a few scholarship dollars. Now, all my children are pursuing or have already earned college degrees, having grown up in a household with high expectations for educational achievement. They understand that the ultimate goal of this education is to make them self-sufficient, contributing members of their community, just as it did for me.
In my 25 years at UMSL, I have seen numerous students who have braved all sorts of obstacles to become the first college graduates in their families. I am particularly proud of the role UMSL has played in producing outstanding first-generation minority and female graduates. What is most gratifying is to see the success that is being achieved by the children of our former students. With college-educated parents in the household, these children face higher educational expectations. Just as importantly, they have parents who appreciate the role that a rigorous pre-collegiate education plays in unlocking the rewards of a college education.

There is a saying that “to save one person is to save the world.” I know I speak for my UMSL faculty colleagues in saying that we take seriously the intergenerational impact of our work and its potential to improve the economic and social well-being of families for generations to come.

Susan Feigenbaum • Town and Country

Department of Economics, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Performance-based funding bill heads to Senate Appropriations Committee

JEFFERSON CITY — Presidents from Missouri's public universities will meet with the Senate Appropriations Committee on Tuesday to discuss proposed changes to performance-based higher education funding models.

Though SB 492 has received support from university leaders, it will likely face tough questions Tuesday from one of its most public detractors, Sen. Kurt Schaefer, R-Columbia.

Under the bill, four-year institutions would receive 90 percent of new funding based on five criteria set by the individual universities in conjunction with the Coordinating Board for Higher Education. Though a version of these measures has been in place for the last two years, the bill would add legal backing to the performance-based funding system.
"It doesn't have the force of law right now. So if we had a different coordinating board, they could back away from this performance-based funding," said Sen. David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, the bill's sponsor and chairman of the Senate Education Committee.

Last year's proposal extended performance measures to include 10 percent of universities' core funding in addition to any new money added in the budget. Pearce said that by limiting the performance funding to 90 percent of new allocations, the bill has seen overwhelming support this year.

"I think because of (the changes), we're getting unilateral support for the bill," Pearce said, noting that the Council on Public Higher Education, which represents Missouri's 13 public universities, voted unanimously to support SB 492. "We just want to make sure that this is permanent, and that we can put in some stipulations for what we think is important with those standards."

SB 492 currently mandates that two of the five criteria must address graduation and retention rates. Pearce said that Sen. Brad Lager, R-Maryville, has offered an amendment to existing language that would include job placement as a criteria, but it has not gone to vote.

"I think this is a step in the right direction to hold universities more accountable and make them more efficient," Pearce said. "It's a good way for universities themselves to find areas where they want to excel, where they want to improve, and be rewarded for that behavior."

Pearce said that Schaefer, chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, will have three main questions for the presidents Tuesday: What's the graduation rate? What's the retention rate? What's the loan default rate?

Schaefer, who blocked a vote on last year's bill, still expresses doubts on the efficacy of performance-based funding.

"I don't know how effective that's going to be in truly allocating state dollars in the best possible use," Schaefer said. "Some of these schools, when you look at the data, do an excellent job of taking a public dollar that we give them and delivering a great product in the classroom for their students, and some of them don't. I'm hoping this year is the first year that we can really start looking into the accountability of how this money is spent."

Schaefer also voiced concerns about the bill's proposal for the remaining 10 percent for new education funding, which would be rewarded to all public schools as an equity payment.

"The institutions are not equal. They're not offering the same thing," Schaefer said. "It doesn't mean that they don't have value, but it's really not a reasonable way to budget."
Reflection: Curators discuss advancement efforts

By ASHLEY JOST

Friday, February 7, 2014

During last week's University of Missouri Board of Curators meeting, the curators, chancellors and vice chancellors for advancement took part in a brainstorming session.

They don't do these often. In fact, John Fougere, chief communications officer for the UM System mentioned this is the first "development session" since 2011.

This session was a chance for all of those previously mentioned folks to sit down and talk about “alternative sources of revenue,” board chairman Don Downing’s theme for the year.

The idea is simple: in an age of decreased state appropriations, how can the system work to raise money so it won’t have to put the costs on the backs of students through increased tuition or supplemental fees.

The curators hired a consultant from the Association of Governing Boards to provide a presentation about alternate revenue sources and to help organize the conversation the rest of the day. The AGB consultant was Carol Cartwright, former Kent State University and Bowling Green State University president. Cartwright steered conversation and logged some of the ideas discussion within the group.

The conversation was focused on increasing intake from donors, and during a break out session halfway through the development session, campus leaders and curators discussed their own strengths and weaknesses before reporting back to the group.

Tom Hiles, MU vice chancellor for advancement, spoke on behalf of MU after a breakout session, discussion how one of the areas that the Columbia campus can improve on is eliciting smaller donations from alumni.

The idea makes sense: ask for smaller donation from those who are just starting out in their career so that as their success increases, so do their donations.
But, with these ideas came discussion about how to engage donors throughout the year with events and connections - challenges that most universities face.

At the end of the brainstorming session, UM President Tim Wolfe told the chancellors and their staff that at the next general officers meeting, he wants the campus representatives to say what they are prioritizing and what Wolfe and the curators can do to help.

Downing, during a report at the end of the curators meeting on Friday, noted that “we don’t know when the next great recession or financial crisis will hit our state or nation,” so hopefully this discussion about alternative revenue sources will “shine some light” on other possibilities.

“Given the need for funding and our status as the low tax state, state appropriations can only be part of the answer, and so can tuition,” Downing said.

Be on the lookout for this week's round up this afternoon.

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Museum of Art and Archaeology opens in temporary location at Mizzou North

By JACOB BARKER

Saturday, February 8, 2014

Jan Goodman hesitated for a second while she pondered what Mizzou North had to offer the University of Missouri's Museum of Art and Archaeology that Pickard Hall didn't.

"Well," she said, surrounded by casts of Roman and Greek sculptures, "there's free parking."

The former Ellis Fischel Cancer Center does have plenty of spots in its ample parking lot, an amenity the museum didn't have when it was downtown. But that's probably not enough to convince the museum's many fans that it shouldn't eventually make its way back to MU's main campus.

For now, the museum will be 2 miles north on Business Loop 70, and the 100 or so people that made their way to its "temporary" home yesterday for a celebration of its first reopened gallery just seemed glad it wasn't closed anymore.
There's still more to do — only the Roman and Greek sculpture cast gallery is open so far. Other galleries will open in the coming months as the museum finishes moving and readying space on the first and second floors of the former hospital. The museum will be open to the public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. during the week, and when all the galleries are moved in this fall, the facility might establish weekend hours, said assistant museum director Bruce Cox.

It was the first time the museum reopened its doors after four months spent moving from Pickard Hall, which the university closed because of lingering low-level radiation from its former life as a chemistry building.

"I know moving was difficult, driven by some very difficult circumstances," MU Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, who started this week, told attendees at last night’s reception. For now, he said, the museum can "look forward to having some stability."

Whether Pickard can again house the museum someday is unknown. MU is determining the extent of contamination.

Moving back to the main campus, though, seems to be in the cards. Former MU Chancellor Brady Deaton said in a letter sent to the Columbia City Council that Mizzou North would serve as a "temporary" home. Museum backers have pledged some $100,000 to return it to MU’s main campus. Other groups have talked of making a home for the institution in a new downtown "museum district."

Scott Southwick, president of Museum Associates, a not-for-profit support organization for the museum, said friends of the museum still want to see it downtown, on or near the main campus.

"We conceive of the museum as a gateway between the community and campus," he said. "It's about teaching and learning, and it needs to be by students."

Still, "it's amazing what they've done" with the former hospital, Southwick said. Museum devotee Kent Anderson said the first gallery looks good, but parts of the building still feel like a hospital.

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Retirement of Dean Mills marks 'end of an era' for MU School of Journalism

Mills will take post at RJI.
The dean of the University of Missouri School of Journalism announced he is retiring after 25 years at his post. But he isn't leaving campus just yet.

Dean Mills announced his retirement yesterday morning in an email to journalism faculty, adding that he is accepting a part-time job as the director of the Reynolds Fellows program at the Reynolds Journalism Institute. His retirement is effective Aug. 31.

Mills had never had a position for more than four, maybe five, years until he came to MU. In his email to faculty, he wrote that he anticipated sticking around for five or six years, "a normal tenure for deans." But that didn't happen.

Mills arguably is the longest-serving dean in the history of the journalism school. Walter Williams, the school's founder, held the title of dean for 27 years, though the last five years he also was president of the UM System and wasn't the acting dean, according to university archives.

With a new chancellor and eventually a new provost coming to MU, Mills said now seemed like the time to retire. Mills led the search committee that brought in Chancellor R. Bowen Loftin, who started this week. The provost search is in progress.

"I can't be dean forever," Mills said. "It seemed like as good a time as any, so whoever the new dean is will have the chance to build those relationships with the new chancellor and provost."

During Mills' tenure as dean, the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute was launched with the help of a $31 million gift from the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation. Since then, the programs that the institute offers have expanded, including the area that Mills will now spearhead: the fellowship program.

Randy Picht, executive director of the institute, said Mills will be the go-to person for the coming year's fellows, who work in conjunction with the institute, and will help them with any research needs or contacts. "I was sad to hear he was retiring, but I was happy to hear he was not going to be gone without a trace," Picht said. "If he can't stay on as dean, this is the next-best option."

Picht said this is the first time the institute is accepting "institutional fellows," or companies that are interested in doing journalism research that can work with the institute.

Mills said he is looking forward to the new program and is planning to bring in St. Louis Public Radio, which recently merged with an online publication, St. Louis Beacon.

Their research will look at "sustainable ways to provide targeted public affairs news to a large, urban area," such as St. Louis, Mills said. He said projects such as this were envisioned when the institute was founded.
Phill Brooks, associate journalism professor who oversees Missouri Digital News, a leg of the journalism program run out of the Capitol, has been at the journalism school for 42 years and has worked under several deans. Under Mills, Brooks said, the school has expanded "dramatically," with international exchange programs and curriculum changes that recognize the shift in the industry with the increasing use of multimedia in journalism.

Clyde Bentley, associate journalism professor, said during his experience, Mills has always been supportive, accessible and an active listener to his employees.

"I was on Faculty Council for years and got to see other parts of the campus and hear about how their deans operate," Bentley said. "Not all departments are as interactive as ours. Dean has always kept us really abreast of what's going on at the School of Journalism and at the university."

The university is conducting a national search for a new dean.

Letter to the Editor: Bright Flight scholarships reward diligence and intelligence
February 09, 2014 12:00 am

NO MU MENTION

The writers of Thursday’s opinion "Money to boost Bright Flight can be better spent" mystify me. Where do they get the idea that "Bright is a reference to a test score and not to intelligence”? If a student is not intelligent, he will not be scoring well on tests. Granted there are intelligent people who are not applying themselves to their studies, but those people do not deserve scholarships.

The whole purpose of scholarships is to reward both intelligence and diligence. It’s a reason to strive all four years of high school. I raised three children and made sure they knew they depended on getting a thorough education during high school so they would win scholarships, as our family could not afford to send them to college. It was the carrot at the end of the stick, and they performed well and scored over 30 on the ACT test. And it was $2,000 a year my first two children received. As for my third, the amount awarded had gone down to $1,500 last year. I wonder where the writers came up with $2,500 figure.

I’m not sure why the writers of that article are so hell-bent on Access Missouri; what ax do they have to grind? Why do they feel it necessary to punish students who score well on ACT? I sense a personal agenda or some skew on their part.

Bright Flight was intended to give the best of Missouri’s students a reason to go to local state colleges instead of being lured away to out-of-state schools. It worked for my family. Two of my children went to the University of Missouri-Rolla and the third to St. Louis School of Pharmacy. Other schools were
considered, but knowing there was cash for staying in-state made a difference. I hope the legislators will realize the good that the Bright Flight has done and the good it will continue to do.

*Mary DuBois • St. Charles*

**Kids learn natural history at Dinosaurs and Cavemen Science Expo**

*By CATHERINE MARTIN*

*Sunday, February 9, 2014*

Six-year-old Hannah McCullem said she wants to be a paleontologist when she grows up.

"Because I like dinosaurs a lot," Hannah explained.

That was one of the reasons Hannah's parents decided to take her and her sister Claire, 3, to the Dinosaurs and Cavemen Science Expo at Rock Bridge High School on Saturday.

"It's just a good educational opportunity for them ... and it's a great opportunity for Hannah," mom Robyn McCullem said.

The event included hands-on activities for kids, including a “dinosaur dig” where children dug up miniature fossils with paintbrushes, a station where they strapped on sponges shaped like dino feet to make dinosaur footprints, and another where children looked at skulls and identified the animals the skulls belonged to.

Families could then watch "Earth's Wild Ride," a film that focuses on natural history, inside Columbia Public Schools' planetarium at Rock Bridge.

*The school district partnered with the University of Missouri to put on the event for the second year in a row.*

"Last year it was the most popular weekend event" at the planetarium, Casey Holliday, MU assistant professor of anatomy, said. "We added shows and filled the entire space. It was a great success."

This year, he said, organizers tried to advertise the event more and added some new activities, like a station where kids could map fossils. Kids were given a worksheet with a grid and were asked to
draw the bones of a bear cub that lay in front of them under a grid outlined with rope. Ian George, a graduate student at MU, said the activity replicated a real technique used to excavate fossils.

He said it had been popular with kids. "We have crayons, so that helps," he said.

George said he thought the expo was a good way for the university's science department to do outreach in the community.

"We do research and don’t always talk to the people that live around us," he said. "This shows them what all we do."

New to Dinosaurs and Cavemen were posters describing some of the MU science department's research projects, Holliday said, which also gave adults a chance to learn something new.

"We don’t have a natural history museum, but we do have natural history research in town," Holliday said. "The best way to bring natural history" to the public "is an event here at Rock Bridge."

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Guernsey cattle numbers decline in University of Missouri dairy program
University program started with breed.

By ASHLEY JOST
Saturday, February 8, 2014

More than 50 years after a philanthropist donated hundreds of Guernsey cattle to the University of Missouri in an effort to kick off the school’s dairy program, discussions about honoring his legacy are ongoing as the school changes breeds with the changing dairy industry.

Tom McFadden, director of animal sciences at MU's College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, met with Guernsey cattle enthusiasts Friday, including Dave Cochard with the American Guernsey Association, to discuss the history of the Guernsey cattle at MU, which were donated by J.C. Penney in 1952. According to records provided by the MU Archives, Penney donated more than 250 Guernsey cattle, multiple plots of land and $100,000 to go toward dairy research.
Penney, best known for his department stores, was a Guernsey enthusiast and breeder.

Cochard and other Guernsey enthusiasts have researched the Penney history and expressed some concern about the dwindling numbers of Guernsey cattle at MU. They met with McFadden to talk about how MU can continue research efforts with the remaining Guernseys, Cochard said, in addition to the school's Holstein cattle.

MU currently has 28 Guernseys producing about 15,600 pounds of raw milk each year, and 176 Holsteins producing about 23,000 pounds of raw milk each year on its 820-acre dairy farm. Guernsey cattle have more solids in their milk, so there's less usable milk after processing. Animal science and veterinarian students work with the cattle for research and skills training.

Holstein cattle have become the dominant breed at the university during the past few decades, McFadden said. Holstein cattle, with their greater milk output, now make up 90 percent of the country's dairy breeds, he said.

"They freely recognized that there's room within the" J.C. Penney "gift to pursue advancing dairy production in the most relevant way, which is work with Holsteins," McFadden said after the meeting with Cochard and another Guernsey fan. "I would like to honor the Penney legacy as well, but the challenge we face is meeting our mission with financial constraints."

McFadden and the Guernsey enthusiasts discussed potential funding sources for research projects, including a donation of Guernsey embryos to implant into Holstein cows. He said the university could also apply for an award from the Guernsey Foundation's research fund.

As long as the projects continue the school's mission of "research, teaching and extension," McFadden said they will continue to work with the Guernsey cattle and enthusiasts to keep Penney's efforts alive.