

San Francisco 49ers Give Back: Michael Lewis, a Player With Heart

By
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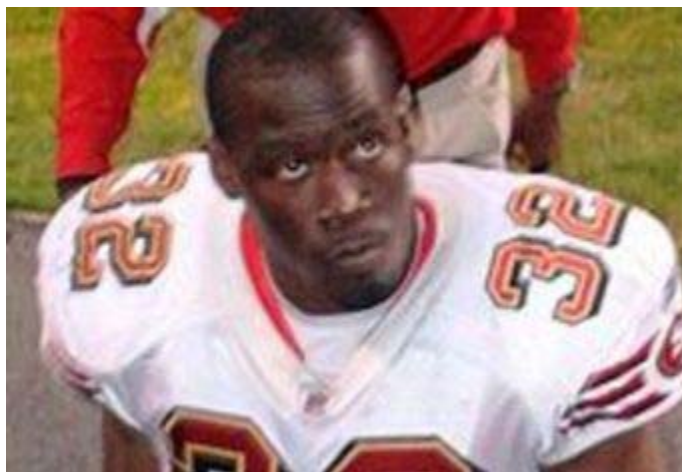
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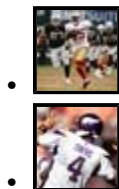
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I recently wrote an article about the importance of finding a player with not only skill, but heart as well (The San Francisco 49ers Current Draft Class: Skill and Heart).

In that article, my definition of “heart” might look something like this:

Heart: Intestinal fortitude, spirit, courage, earnestness, zeal, or enthusiasm: *Patrick Willis played his heart out.*

With over 40 definitions and idioms listed, I just wanted to make sure that readers understand when I say that Michael Lewis gives a whole new meaning to the word "heart." What exactly that is, is for the reader to decide.

During his sophomore year at the University of Colorado, Lewis was undergoing his annual physical. Doctors discovered that Lewis suffers from a cardiac condition known as atrial fibrillation. His reaction upon learning of his condition,

"I was scared. It was something I didn't know anything about," Lewis said.

"He was well aware of other athletes succumbing to heart conditions and dying on the field." — From Dean Dennis, The Daily Pennsylvanian.com

I believe that a lot of people dismiss this as nothing serious when they read that the condition is "not life threatening." In Lewis' case that may be true, but it is only because the condition was found early and was treated with medication.

A type of arrhythmia, or tachycardia, atrial fibrillation causes the two upper chambers of the heart to beat uncontrollably fast and out of sync with the two lower chambers. Blood flow is restricted and can pool in the heart. When blood pools like this, there is a danger of clotting.

If one of these clots leaves the heart and becomes lodged in an artery of the brain, the resulting outcome is a stroke.

Unlike ischemic heart disease which is nearly undetectable, (the condition that killed 49ers offensive linemen, Thomas Herrion, in 2005) atrial fibrillation can be detected fairly easily, sometimes with something as simple as a pulse reading.

But it can't be detected unless you get to the doctor and have a physical examination.

That is why Lewis has decided to use his condition and his stature as an NFL player to speak out and raise awareness.

As a member of the Philadelphia Eagles, Lewis served as the Honorary Chairman of the American Heart Association's 2005 Philadelphia Heart Walk.

As part of his duties, Lewis visited local hospital's cardiac care units to raise awareness of the event.

Steven Sabb, a 43 year-old heart transplant recipient, was impressed by Lewis' visit and underscored the importance of the visit by exclaiming that it, "...shed more light on the situation," —from Dean Dennis, theDP.com

When Lewis signed with the 49ers in 2007, he brought his "heart" to San Francisco.

According to the official website of the San Francisco 49ers, *49ers.com*, undetected heart disease is the number one killer of child athletes.

Earlier this year, doctors from Stanford challenged the 49ers to a push-up contest in order to raise money for Stanford Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy Center.

Hypertrophic cardiomyopathy is a genetic condition that causes the walls of the heart to thicken and can cause death.

Participating in the event were Lewis, Alex Smith, Nate Byham, Chris Maragos, the 49ers Gold Rush Cheerleaders, Team Doctor Dan Garza, Head Athletic Trainer Jeff Ferguson, and Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach, Mark Uyeyama.

Following the event, Lewis addressed the crowd,

“I’m excited to be back again this year, and take part in this great fundraising event for cardiac research,” said Lewis a nine-year veteran. “I have a heart condition and it’s important for this research to continue. I hope this event will raise awareness to the issues of heart problems so people can better understand how to handle heart conditions and still live a healthy life.”—from *49ers.com*.

Lewis then went on to educate the audience of the importance of getting regular cardiac checkups.

Lewis and the rest of the group also went inside the Stanford Medical Center Cardiac Care Unit to visit with, encourage, and lift the spirits of the many heart patients residing there.

When Lewis’s condition was originally made public, his first round draft stock disappeared. The Eagles selected him in the second round at number 58 overall during the 2002 NFL Draft.

He was down at first, but he didn’t let the condition stop him or control his life.

He learned more about the condition, how to control it, and became a starting safety for the Eagles the last four games of his rookie year.

Lewis’ message is clear. You can still live a normal and healthy life with most types of heart conditions. Eating right and exercising are important.

But it *can’t* be treated if it isn’t diagnosed.

Writers note: *Nearly 2.2 million Americans suffer from atrial fibrillation putting them at risk of clots and stroke. To learn more about the condition, or to learn how you can help, contact the American Heart Association at <http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>*



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