

## The rundown of the runaround: Michael Sam's senior season sacks

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Missouri defensive lineman Kony Ealy, left, and Michael Sam team up to sack Florida quarterback Tyler Murphy in the third quarter Oct. 19, 2013 at Memorial Stadium. : [Quint Smith](#)

In his senior season as a Missouri defensive lineman, Michael Sam boosted his profile as an NFL prospect. The Southeastern Conference defensive player of the year recorded a league-best 11.5 sacks, eighth-most in the nation. His most memorable sack clinched a Cotton Bowl win for the Tigers.

So how do these accomplishments translate to Sam's National Football League potential?

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After announcing that he was gay, Sam fell 70 spots in CBS Sports' online draft ranking overnight, and there is concern

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that some NFL executives might take issue with his sexuality and pass on him in the draft.

But there are concerns with Sam's ability to produce in the NFL that aren't related to his recent announcement. At 6-foot-2 and 255 pounds, some scouts consider Sam to be an undersized defensive lineman. An attempt to play Sam at linebacker in the Senior Bowl went poorly, and his ability to convert to that position is highly questionable because of his lack of agility.

At the NFL Scouting Combine on Monday, his three-cone drill time (an exercise that measures agility) ranked 26th out of 36 defensive linemen.

Additionally, he bench pressed 225 pounds just 17 times — worst among all defensive linemen. His 40-yard dash time, 4.91 seconds, was also below average.

Given the increased scrutiny Sam faces because of his newfound fame, any holes in his game will be found and analyzed.

But what about his 11.5 sacks?

Ten of them came in one-on-one scenarios, in which he speed-rushed around an offensive tackle.

Eight of his sacks came after second down. Sam was a situational player for Missouri, who largely lined up on passing downs.

Nine of the sacks came during a four-week stretch in September and October — including three each against small-conference foe Arkansas State and an injury-ravaged Florida.

In other words, Sam showed the ability to be a productive speed rusher on passing downs. That's an asset NFL teams will want. However, he doesn't have the profile of an every-down force, and he padded his resume against some weaker teams in his senior season.

So if his draft ranking is lower than you'd expect from the supposed best player from the best defensive conference, it might not be because of homophobia in the NFL.

Here's a comprehensive look at all 11.5 of Sam's sacks. (Each number links to a video of that sack.)

- **No. 1** — **Sept. 28, Arkansas State, 11:20 remaining in first quarter, 3rd down and**

## **12 yards to go**

After failing to record a sack in the first three games of the season against Murray State, Toledo and Indiana, Sam went on a mid-season tear. The Arkansas State Red Wolves were his first victims.

With Arkansas State deep in Missouri territory, the Missouri defense showed blitz, with six men crowding the line of scrimmage. The Red Wolves were expecting pressure up the middle, but linebackers Kentrell Brothers and Andrew Wilson and lineman Harold Brantley fell back into coverage. Meanwhile, both defensive ends, Sam and Shane Ray, sped around their offensive tackles. It was a race to quarterback Adam Kennedy, and Sam got there first. He followed his first sack of the season with his first 2013 sack dance — a few stutter steps followed by a right hook. Arkansas State took a 3-0 lead with a 41-yard field goal on the next play.

- **No. 2 — Arkansas State, 11:49 in the second quarter, 3rd-and-10**

In what was practically a mirror image of his first sack, Sam and Ray raced around the offensive tackles once again, and Sam latched onto Kennedy's right leg before the quarterback could escape. Either the Red Wolves couldn't handle the Tigers' speed rush of Sam and Ray, or they couldn't react quickly enough to Missouri's defensive packages. Once again, two Tigers dropped back into coverage after showing blitz. Once Sam finished his sack dance, the Red Wolves punted, and Missouri took over in Arkansas State territory.

- **No. 3 — Arkansas State, 1:44 in the fourth quarter, 4th-and-6**

Once more, Sam raced a Missouri defensive end to the quarterback, but this time it was Kony Ealy. Ealy was originally was credited with the sack, but it was Sam who got to Kennedy first and poked the ball out of his hands. Kennedy recovered, but it did not matter, as Missouri took over on downs and knelt on its 41-19 win.

- **No. 4 — Oct. 5, at Vanderbilt, 12:26 in the second quarter, 2nd-and-8**

Sam recorded his first in-conference sack of the season with the help of Ray and defensive lineman Lucas Vincent. Missouri only sent three rushers, but Vincent took two Vanderbilt linemen up the middle, and Ray helped push the pocket back, giving quarterback Austyn Carta-Samuels nowhere to hide. Sam caught him after driving his blocker for a few seconds and speeding around the edge.

- **No. 5 — Vanderbilt, 12:39 in the fourth quarter, 4th-and-12**

Again, Missouri rushed three and, with Vanderbilt's attention on Harold Brantley, Sam had his

blocker man-to-man and beat him around the outside. Carta-Samuels stepped up in the pocket, but linebacker Donovan Bonner came forward to prevent a quarterback run, and Sam recorded his second sack of the game.

- **No. 6 — Vanderbilt, 7:29 in the fourth quarter, 4th-and-8**

Sam had a tougher route to the quarterback when completing the third leg of his second consecutive three-sack game. Missouri rushed three defenders again, and Sam had two linemen in his way. No matter — he pivoted around the outer blocker and pushed off the Vanderbilt guard before chasing Carta-Samuels past the hash marks toward the opposite sideline. The Tigers finished the 51-28 win with seven sacks.

- **No. 7 — Oct. 19, against Florida, 13:11 in the second quarter, 3rd-and-9**

Sam's sack streak paused in Athens when the Tigers defeated seventh-ranked Georgia, 41-26, and Sam failed to bring quarterback Aaron Murray down for one. He found his groove again in Columbia when the Tigers hosted the Gators, ranked No. 22 at the time.

Unlike his sacks against Arkansas State and Vanderbilt, Sam's pressure on Florida quarterback Tyler Murphy came with four Missouri rushers. In his first sack, Sam got his blocker one-on-one and speed-rushed around him. Sam held off sophomore Tyler Moore by ripping his right arm underneath the Gator lineman's reach. After a short chase, Sam downed Murphy before the quarterback could reach the hash marks.

- **No. 8 — Florida, 10:40 in the third quarter, 3rd-and-7**

Missouri showed blitz before the play, but Brothers and Wilson dropped back. Sam drew Moore to the outside and slid underneath him again. Sam wrestled down Murphy, who had stepped up in the pocket. By now, Moore looked helpless against Sam, and Florida left guard Max Garcia would replace him at right tackle.

- **No. 9 — Florida, 5:37 in the fourth quarter, 1st-and-10**

Garcia wouldn't fare much better. With the ball at Florida's 38-yard line, Missouri's rushers angled right. The Gators bit. Garcia, perhaps longing for his old position, blocked to his left and essentially left Sam free. He ran upstream and bounced outside as Murphy tried to scramble to Sam's left. Sam caught him by the left arm and threw him down with just enough force to record Missouri's sixth and final sack of the day in a surprisingly thorough 36-17 beat-down of Florida. It was Sam's only first-down sack all season.

- **No. 10 — Oct. 26, against South Carolina, 13:25 in the fourth quarter, 2nd-and-**

Facing 6-foot-6, 323-pound offensive tackle Brandon Shell, Sam used a swim move to get past his lone blocker. On a speed rush to the outside, Sam was able to angle himself past Shell and collapse the pocket. Sam arrived milliseconds before Ealy and recorded his only sack of the game.

- **No. 10.5 — Nov. 30, against Texas A&M, 9:28 in the second quarter, 2nd-and-10**

Sam substituted for Ray after Ray unsuccessfully chased Aggies quarterback Johnny Manziel on the previous play. The Tigers rushed three men, and Sam fought off two linemen at the line of scrimmage. The right offensive guard and left tackle then ran downfield as if the play was a designed run. Manziel followed a running back, and two Texas A&M blockers ran down field and appeared to be blocking. Sam sped around the tackle and caught the mobile Manziel two yards behind line of scrimmage at the same time as Hoch. Perhaps most tellingly, instead of dancing after the play, Sam put his hands on his hips — almost as if he didn't think he sacked anyone.

Regardless, Sam and Hoch were each credited with half a sack, and the Aggies punted two plays later. Missouri only recorded one other sack the whole game. The Tigers' 28-21 win clinched a spot in the SEC championship game, where Sam went sackless against Auburn.

- **No. 11.5 — Jan. 3, against Oklahoma State in the Cotton Bowl, 1:09 in the fourth quarter, 3rd-and-7**

Missouri held a 34-31 lead late, but Oklahoma State was driving. On the previous play, Cowboys quarterback Clint Chelf floated a pass in the end zone to wide receiver Charlie Moore that would have given Oklahoma State the lead. The pass fell incomplete, and Oklahoma State remained at Missouri's 23-yard line. If the Tigers could keep the Cowboys from gaining seven yards, Oklahoma State would presumably attempt a game-tying field goal.

Sam did one better. The Tigers rushed three and, as he had done throughout the season, Sam had sped around his lone blocker. Chelf saw him and tried to step to his left, but Sam's right arm knocked the ball free on its way to wrapping up the quarterback. Chelf flailed, the ball skipped toward three gold jerseys, and Ray scooped up the ball and ran 73 yards to a win-securing touchdown. Sam might not have followed his most memorable sack of the season with a signature dance, but his team did the celebrating for him.