

Rams Draft First Openly Gay Player Michael Sam—Does It Matter?

Defensive end Michael Sam of the University of Missouri became the first openly gay player to be selected in a National Football League draft when he was taken in the seventh round by the St. Louis Rams on Saturday.

Sam, the co-defensive player of the year in the Southeastern Conference who announced he was gay in February, would become the first openly gay player in the NFL should he make the team's 53-man regular season roster this summer.

The defensive end was taken on the 249th pick in the last round of the three-day draft at Radio City Music Hall.

Television cameras captured Sam receiving the phone call informing him of his selection, the Texan breaking into tears and shaking with joy at the news.

"Thank you to the St. Louis Rams and the whole city of St. Louis. I'm using every ounce of this to achieve greatness!!" He posted on his Twitter account.

Rams coach Jeff Fisher told the NFL Network: "I'm excited about our draft and excited about the possibility of adding him to our defensive front.

"After doing the studies, he's a good football player," Fisher said about the pick.

The NFL (@nfl) tweeted: "Welcome to the NFL, @MikeSamFootball."

Sam would become the second openly gay player in one of North America's four major professional team sports following

basketball's Jason Collins, who joined the NBA's Brooklyn Nets this season.

The 6-feet-2 (m), 260-pound (118 kg) Sam led the conference in sacks and in tackles for a loss, but waited until seven picks before the end of the draft to hear his name called after his stock fell following mediocre results at February's scouting combine.

Despite his success at Missouri, talent evaluators had said Sam might struggle to fit in on the field over concerns he might be too small to play regularly on the defensive line and not athletic enough to play in space as a linebacker.

Rams coach Fisher did not think that would be an issue.

"He's a player who was graded much higher on our draft board and he fell and we weren't going to miss out on this opportunity to add an outstanding football player to our program," Fisher told ESPN.

Sam might benefit from a comfort level with his NFL team only a two-hour drive from the Missouri campus in Columbia.

Fisher said he was unconcerned about an anticipated media crush to cover Sam at training camp or about any problems within the clubhouse over welcoming a gay player.

"I don't have any concern whatsoever," said Fisher. "We drafted a good football player. I'm excited to get him on the practice field and get him going.

"There's going to be a little extra attention for a couple of days but ... we're looking forward to this opportunity.

"We have a young team, (but) a very mature team. We're not going to let any kind of distractions affect this football team."

Charisma News Editor's Note: Does this issue matter to you? Is

it a sign of the times? Should it be the major story it is in sports? Sound off.