

# WEIRD WAS NEVER SO COOL.

BY GAIL WOOD

Another football practice was over.

As his teammates wearily headed for the locker room, Michael Boulware, his football jersey already soaked in sweat, ran sprints. Alone.

Under the hot eastern Washington sun, the Seattle Seahawks safety (a Seahawks' second-round draft pick in 2004) decided he needed some extra conditioning. It was classic Boulware. Always determined. Always focused. Never a compromiser.

Raised with what he called a "tough love" from his Christian parents while growing up in Columbia, S.C., Boulware was always in church Sunday morning, often sitting next to his older brother, Peter, now an NFL linebacker.

"At 9, I went forward in church and accepted Jesus Christ into my life," Boulware says.

It wasn't a one-time, forget-about-it decision. That decision put him on a road that separated him from the crowd and forced him to face tough decisions throughout school.

"In high school and college I was always 'that Christian guy' who didn't hang out, who didn't party," Boulware says. "People called me weird."

Weird meant being the tireless worker. Weird meant always doing what coaches told him to do. Weird meant not getting drunk. From high school, when he was South Carolina's Gatorade Player of the Year as a senior playing on both offense and defense, to college, when he was an All-American at Florida State, Boulware didn't waver from that decision he made as a 9-year-old boy.

"People in high school would wonder why I'd work so hard, or why I wouldn't talk back to the coaches," Boulware says. "Sometimes I wanted to, but I didn't."

Now, in his third season with the Seahawks, Boulware is still facing those same decisions. Money, fame and a fulfilled dream haven't insulated him.

"Being a Christian is definitely not easy, especially in this atmosphere," Boulware said after a Seahawks practice. "People

will pick on you. But if you fight through, if you persevere, in the end you will be victorious."

That attitude helped Boulware adjust to the NFL. A linebacker in high school and college, he switched to safety with the Seahawks. He made a quick adjustment as he finished his rookie year with one quarterback sack,



five interceptions and starting the final five games. From the beginning, he had a knack for dramatic late-game heroics.

MICHAEL  
BOULWARE

AP photos

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AP photos

He made game-saving interceptions against Minnesota and Tampa Bay, and returned an interception for a touchdown against Miami.

Despite being a player scouts labeled as too small to play linebacker and too slow to play safety, Boulware made game-saving plays in four of the Seahawks' nine wins his rookie season.

"He's getting publicity and he is not the type of player who lets that stuff go to his head," Seahawks coach Mike Holmgren says. "He's a great guy and a hard worker."

But the hard work didn't make him immune to injury. In the 2005 season Boulware was carried from the field on a stretcher with a back injury against St. Louis and had surgery on a knee he injured in the first quarter of the Seahawks' Super Bowl loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers in February. In the St. Louis game, Boulware was injured when a lineman hit him head-on and



then fell onto Boulware's back. Both of Boulware's legs went numb.

"I tried to get up and there was nothing in my legs," Boulware told reporters after the game.

But that injury hasn't changed Boulware's intense style of play.

He also hasn't let fame and wealth

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replace his reliance and need of Jesus Christ. To ensure he doesn't get sidetracked, Boulware surrounds himself with friends who give him godly counsel.

"If you have people who will tell you the truth, you won't lose where you came from or you won't lose what you're about," Boulware says. "More than the fame, more than the money, it's about advancing God's kingdom."

He is convinced the biggest key is accountability.

"I don't believe it's possible you can be a successful Christian doing it alone," he says.

Friends and family help him keep on track. Boulware is especially close to brother Peter, who is seven years older. Michael

Boulware remembers going as a grade-schooler to his brother's high school games. He remembers watching him play at Florida State and then in the NFL.

Boulware has always been the adoring younger brother.

"He set a great example," he says of Peter.

As an athlete and as a Christian.

Like his brother, Boulware doesn't buy into the theory that Christians are soft, that their commitment to winning is somehow compromised by a commitment to God.

"Am I soft when I play?" Boulware says. "No, I'm like David. I'm out there to slay a giant."

No compromise. It's been

Boulware's attitude since he was the high school senior who caught 56 passes for 1,028 yards and had 91 tackles with six quarterback sacks. He always strives to do his best, whether on the football field, in the classroom or now as a husband.

"I can't say I'm sinless," Boulware says. "I try to do what's right. If you do what God wants you to do, He'll bless you. I'm a testament to that. Things will work out in the end."

Things certainly have worked out well for the kid who made weird cool. **tpe**

GAIL WOOD is a sportswriter in Washington and freelance writer for *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*. E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

## SIBLING NONRIVALRY

Boulware says his favorite sport was basketball. His favorite food is crab legs. And his favorite Bible verse is 1 Corinthians 6:9,10.

The three things he considers a necessity at training camp are "a Bible, his A-game and a lot of enthusiasm."

When Boulware was asked who his role model is, he asked, "Besides Jesus?"

In addition to Jesus, Boulware says, "My brother, Peter."

Peter, a former linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens, is seven years older than Michael.

Michael says his favorite book is the Bible. And if he wasn't playing football he says he'd "be doing a little bit of real estate or back home running my mom's business."

— Gail Wood

Peter Boulware

AP photos



Matt Russell

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