



The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game

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The young man at the center of this extraordinary and moving story will one day be among the most highly paid athletes in the National Football League. When we first meet him, he is one of thirteen children by a mother addicted to crack; he does not know his real name, his father, his birthday, or any of the things a child might learn in school such as, say, how to read or write. Nor has he ever touched a football.

What changes? He takes up football, and school, after a rich, Evangelical, Republican family plucks him from the mean streets. Their love is the first great force that alters the world's perception of the boy, whom they adopt. The second force is the evolution of professional football itself into a game where the quarterback must be protected at any cost. Our protagonist turns out to be the priceless combination of size, speed, and agility necessary to guard the quarterback's greatest vulnerability: his blind side.

The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game Details

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Patrick says

On the merits of the story alone, I enjoyed this book. Lewis is a very good writer, and he is able to tell a compelling story and educate the less knowledgeable without coming off as condescending, which is more difficult than it sounds. The story of Michael Oher is compelling (and ongoing), and it's hard not to root for him.

That said, I have my suspicions about the altruism at the heart of the story. There are too many questionable motivations floating about, although, to Lewis's credit, he does acknowledge them. As much as Lewis tries to drive the point home that the Tuohy family are just generous, kind people, I do find the story of Michael's recruitment and subsequent (spoiler alert) commitment to Ole Miss very suspect. Consider the facts: 1)Ole Miss is far from a college football powerhouse, even (especially?) playing in the super competitive SEC; 2)Oher was recruited by literally every major college program in the country, many of which could have afforded Oher greater opportunities for national exposure and better quality education; 3)Ole Miss very sketchily hired Michael's high school football coach to their staff immediately before or after (I can't remember the exact timeline) Michael committed to Ole Miss; 4)The Tuohys are well known alumni and benefactors to Ole Miss; 5)Michael Lewis is an old friend of Sean Tuohy.

Taken individually, these factors can be dismissed as coincidence. Together, it adds up to something fishy. I simply don't believe the Tuohy's motives were pure in adopting Michael, and I don't like the way that Lewis casually brushes off the idea that this feel good story could have arose from more sinister origins. However, that said, he doesn't take the Michael Moore route and does, at the very least, address these issues, and it is a heck of a story. Maybe it's not the made for Hollywood story Lewis presents it as, but, then again, neither are most made for Hollywood stories.

Mary Ronan Drew says

Michael Lewis does it again, this time with football. This is the story of a black kid from the country's third poorest zip code in Memphis who was adopted by a wealthy white family (they own their own jet) and with lots of support from the father of a son and from coaches and teachers and tutors played football at Old Miss and made it to the NFL and multi-million dollar contracts.

Woven into the story of Michael Oher is the development of the importance of the left tackle in professional football. It's his job to block the guy whose job it is to approach the quarterback from his blind side and sack him.

Even for someone like me, a non-fan of football, Lewis makes the details of who played what position on what team when and against whom interesting and entertaining. And the story of Michael Oher, adopted by what would seem like the last family in the world to love and care for someone like him, is a delight. In fact, so delightful is it they made a movie, starring Sandra Bullock as the steel magnolia who is the mother of the Tuohy family of East Memphis.

Coleen says

9/25/09 - As a book club read, this was different. And as football is not my favorite sport (I don't dislike it, but for me it ranks below baseball & basketball), I wasn't sure how I was going to like it, but I went in with an open mind. It basically alternates between chapters about football player Michael Oher's "history" & the emerging importance of the position of left tackle in the NFL and in college football. Overall, a very educational story for me. For someone who doesn't necessarily consider themselves a true football fan, some of the football history may seem a little dry. I was okay with it, but tended to start skimming the further I got into the book.

The chapters specifically about Michael Oher were more engaging, although I feel myself left with a sour taste in my mouth as to the role the Tuohy family played in developing this young man's sports career. I have mixed feelings about that. If not for the financial & other numerous supports that the family provided him, he'd still be just another black kid on the street, struggling to survive. Hence, his is an inspiring story and the Tuohy's should probably be commended for their unfaltering support of Oher. But it reaffirms to me that in many cases, money makes the world go 'round, and in many instances, it was the Tuohy money that allowed all of this to happen. It makes one wonder about all of the other potential "stars" out there (athletes & other), who are unable to realize their potential because they're not fortunate to "fall into" the life-altering situation that Oher did.

Elisa says

This book has quite a few different stories going on:

1) the importance of and rise of the offensive lineman 2) the story of Michael Oher, 3)LT (as in Lawrence Taylor of the NY Giants)and Bill Walsh (football coach, 49er's) these are "supporting stories" amongst others

I heard of the movie and I like football books, so I thought I would enjoy this story about Michael Oher (and I did). I assumed it was just a story about Michael Oher, which it wasn't.

I read Lewis's book Moneyball awhile back and not only did I enjoy it, I winded up buying a few other books he had suggested etc.. and that book has really stayed with me.

Ok, so if you want to read this book- just know that it is not just an inspirational story about a poor kid who makes it to the NFL, it is also a very matter of fact book about the evolution of certain postions in football (mostly the left tackle, who protects the blindside of the QB) and also about some of the changes in the game of football.

Diane says

I read this after seeing the movie version and was amazed that many of the precious details I assumed had

been invented by Hollywood writers were real and actually happened. The book is mostly about Michael Oher, a homeless black teenager who was adopted by a white family in Memphis who then went on to be a successful football player. There are also a few dense chapters devoted to recent changes in professional football and how the player who guards the blind side of a quarterback now has greater value in the NFL. (Not being a football fan, I skimmed those sections.) But the chapters about Oher's rise and turnaround were fascinating and thoughtful. Michael Lewis is a gifted reporter and I plan to read more of his books.

Christine says

My husband read this as a sports book, but as an educator I was very interested in the barriers poverty presents for getting through (or even "to") school. My father-in-law recently reminded me of the book when he recalled that Oher and his brother grew up in a section of Memphis where Census results showed not a single father in the entire zip code. Is anyone starting a Memphis Children's Zone?

Melissa says

I'm not even going to bother putting the excerpt for this book since if you've seen the movie you know what it's about. I'm going to put it straight that I am not a sports fan. I know absolutely nothing about sports, nor do I care to learn. The reason I picked up the book was because I liked the movie. Whenever I see movies based on books and I like it I tend to read the book next. Unfortunately the book is nothing like the movie. In fact unless you're a sports or football fan that it's probably safer to stick with the movie. Many times while reading the book I felt like I was back in statistics class again. Reading the pages, but really having no idea what the hell is being said. I give this book three stars because of something new and interesting about Michael Oher, but it really wasn't my thing. I was eternally glad I checked this book out from the library rather than buying it.

Sherese says

Mixed feelings about this one. I'm huge NFL fan and Ravens are one of my favorite teams (mostly because of Ray Lewis) but I didn't know the Michael Oher story until the movie was released.

I found the Left Tackle/NFL history of the book very interesting. But I can totally see why Michael himself had problems with how he was portrayed in the book. This is not just a poor black teenager being taken in by rich white upper class christian family stereotypical rags to riches taking the black child out of the ghetto story that Hollywood loves. It's like reading the "Jungle Book" or "Tarzan", Michael was raised by pack of wolves for 15/16 years then brought into civilization or even an alien from outer space coming to live on Earth learning the ways of humans at least according to Michael Lewis depiction of Mr. Oher in this book. I have no idea if this is an exaggeration or actual truth either way I find it more than a little disturbing.

Matthew says

You've seen the movie, now read the book. Michael Lewis truly has a knack for taking an ordinary subject

that's been endlessly profiled, such as the rags to riches story of a big black football player from the south, and peeling away unseen layers to reveal surprising depths and nuance. The opening, which solemnly recounts Joe Theismann's gruesome injury at the hands of Lawrence Taylor, is a perfect introduction to "The Blind Side" as a football term, but also lays the groundwork for exploring the enigmatic Michael Oher, who is rescued from poverty in the worst part of Memphis and given the chance to succeed at football and life.

Mahlon says

The Blind Side features two story lines, one traces the evolution of offensive football since the early 1980's specifically the way it reacted to the way Hall of Fame revolutionized the Outside Linebacker position was played. Thanks to Taylor's prowess at rushing the Quarterback, the Left Tackle(who protects the QB's blind side) quickly became one of the most important, and highest-paid positions on the football field.

The second storyline focuses on Michael Oher, who has all the physical gifts that NFL scouts look for in the prototypical Left Tackle, the problem: can Michael make the grades necessary to play college football? We follow Michael on his journey from impoverished upbringing, to his enrollment at an elite christian school, where he is taken in by a white family, to his eventual enrollment at Ole Miss. Along the way, we are given a glimpse into the often predatory recruiting process that top prospects must negotiate.

Michael is projected to be a first round pick in April's NFL draft.

There have only been a handful of great books on Football published in the past 20 years, and this is one of them.

Donna says

I loved this book...well most of it anyway. Michael Oher's story was touching and I loved that specific part in this book. He changed his stars and put them in line. It was very inspirational. This started as a solid and clear 5 stars. Michael Lewis wrote this story so well.

But then he got all technical about football, coaches, players, and plays. Which, to be honest, really isn't my thing. I like football just a tad less than baseball, and I really don't like baseball. Football, to me, just seems to be a very long game of fat-man tag.

So that is the reason it gets 4 stars. I loved Michael Oher's story though. I read somewhere that he wasn't completely happy with the way he was portrayed in this book. But I think the author did a great job with the details that were included in this. So whether or not the author got creative with that...I don't know. But the story he told here was beautiful. Michael Oher has now actually come out with his own autobiography/memoir so the next time I have to read a sports book, I think I will choose that one, just to see his side of the story.

Patricia says

I loved this book! Love, love, loved it. Interest in football? Zero. Interest in the surge of importance of a

single football position I maybe could point out on the field, but probably not? Nope. Interest in the motives and actions of a white Christian Republican uber-rich Memphis family? Not even. Interest in this book which contains all of the above? Incredible. I couldn't put it down. That is the mark of a very good non-fiction writer. Do you like football? Read this book. Do you not like football? Read this book.

Aaron says

Hoop Dreams detailed the machine built around taking poor black athletes from the inner city and sticking them into primarily white school systems that only cared about those athletes to the extent that they would help their sports teams win. *The Blind Side* concerns itself with a similar story, except Michael Lewis tends to pause breathlessly and exclaim *isn't this great?* He admits that the father, Sean, "had been born with a talent for seeing the court, taking in every angle and every other player, and then attacking in the most efficient way possible. The talent translated beautifully from basketball into life." But Lewis never really weighs the possibility that maybe this chronic manipulator had some dubious intentions when, on essentially a whim, he ends up adopting a tremendous football talent, Michael, a year before Michael decides where he wants to play his college ball. When an NCAA investigator feels that this adoption (and the tens of thousands of dollars thrown towards Michael) might be some attempt to circumvent the rules and buy his favor, Lewis can't help but vilify her. "[The NCAA] didn't care how things were, only how they could be made to seem. A poor black football star inside the home of this rich white booster could be made to seem scandalous, and so here they were, bothering Michael. The lady said she was just trying to establish the facts of the case, but the facts didn't describe the case... They had violated the letter of every NCAA rule ever written. They'd given Michael more than food, clothing, and shelter. They'd given him a life." And, despite this ascribed nobility of Sean, his family, and the support system of tutors willing to get him passing grades by any means at hand, I never found myself buying into it fully. Yes, I find myself rooting for Michael Oher to make it in the NFL, but mainly because I feel that if he doesn't, the life that these people have given him will seep away, and he'll be back on the streets from which he was rescued.

I also was annoyed by which the degree Lewis writes from a perspective of "poor black" athletes and "rich white" heroes. He can't help himself from throwing these modifiers on any person where they might apply. But when talking of about a black investment banker, he isn't written as "a rich black banker", instead he is merely described as being from Washington, D.C. Michael is meant to stand in for so much of what is happening in this country in terms of race and economics, and, while large though he may be, he isn't big enough to tell this story unless Lewis cuts off these annoying details and nuances.

In the end, it rings with the empty ease of a cheer before a football game: "Whitey, go adopt a black kid that can run 4.3 40, on three!"

Husein says

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Meghan says

I am a big Michael Lewis fan, but *Blind Side* really missed the mark. This was a chance to explore race, socioeconomics, education, and college and professional sports. Instead, it becomes a story of how wonderful a white family is for taking in a poor, black kid who is then groomed to play football for the NFL. There are so many shades of gray in this true story, but Lewis never really "goes there" and it becomes clear why in the acknowledgments - he is childhood friends with the rich white man in question. The story itself raises some very interesting questions, but the author is never the one to ask them. Their absence really niggles at the back of your mind as you read. Skip it.

Kaitlin says

Had no idea what was going on. I don't speak football.

Jason Koivu says

FOO-BAH! FOO-BAH! 24-7, 365 Days a Year!

Seriously, doesn't it seem like football is happening year 'round these days? The NFL with the help of ESPN has done a hell of a job making themselves ubiquitous. Lucky for me, I love the game. Sucks for those who don't, though...

The Blind Side is a nice, concise slice of today's true American Pastime, and it's the sort of feel-good story that will appeal to a broad audience (and by broad I don't necessarily mean dames!) *twiddles cigar and jiggles eyebrows ala Groucho Marx*.

This is essentially the story of Michael Oher, current NFL offensive lineman, former skid row forgotten child of delinquent parents. This is also the story of privileged white Christians plucking a boy from the ghetto and raising him as their own, giving him an opportunity he would've otherwise never had.

Much of author Michael Lewis' book tells Oher's heart-warming tale. When not evoking tearjerking scenes, he occasionally questions the morality of the sport in question as well as the people that thrust this naturally athletic kid into it. Analysis of the game's (after all, *Evolution of the Game* is its subtitle) progression and how it's changed the very shape of the players who play it runs through out and provides a nice base from which to play off the Oher example.

Football enthusiasts, historians and strategists may glean some interesting insights from this well-written, flowing story with its palatably presented data tucked in as thought-nuggets through out. Very nice read. I can see why they made a movie out of it, which I ought to get around to watching someday.

Jose Tagle says

The Blind Side is a book about a homeless teenager who gets adopted by a married couple who sees him on the side of the road and gives him a ride and a place to stay. While he is with them he grows fond of them he starts to attend a fancy mainly white Americans go there he only has a couple pairs of clothes. He starts playing football but he does not have the best grades in the world, his major is protection. His adopted parents use that to an advantage and he become's really good at the sport . The family loves him and he loves them. He is in a place where everyone loves him

Warning: plot spoilers and discussion follow below.

The protagonists are the people who adopt him are pretty much his whole community.

The only antagonists are the streets he is trying to get away from. By the streets I mean the town where he used to live.

Main conflict

He lived with a mom who didn't even know who he was he pretty much didn't have an actual family he had to fend for himself. The main conflict is trying to get his grades up so he can attend a college. One of his parents wants him to go to the university of Tennessee , the other wants him to go to the university of ole miss. But that's not the major conflict in the story.

Adam says

Lewis writes two stories here. One is interesting. The other is mildly intriguing and probably not as big a story as it seems.

When telling the story of Michael Oher, a poor black kid from Memphis adopted by a loaded white family and the journey he takes from uncommunicative, unschooled, untrusting child to a succesful lineman starring at Ole Miss it's a good story.

When writing about the emergence of the left tackle position in the NFL it was hard not to skip passages.

Left tackle is an key position and the excerpts from players and coaches is interesting. Reading about the gruesome ways Lawrence Taylor destroyed people is great.

But it's tedious and in the end it's hard to argue it's important. There's no real comparison to other ways the game has evolved.

The Michael story left me uncomfortable. As great a story as his is (and it's still going - when his NFL draft approaches, Lewis-hype will ensure you know he's available), significant ethical questions are raised by the conduct of his adoptive family.

Lewis correctly raises the questions, though he had little choice after the NCAA launched an investigation

into the subject.

But he never attempts to answer them.

And his portrayal of the Tuohy family never wavers from supportive. Lewis never tackles their involvement, preferring to leave the questioning to others, and in doing so he is doing the story a disfavour.

Stephen says

After seeing the movie I was curious about the book and though I'm not a big football fan decided to give it a read.

The story is well written and Michael Oher's story is compelling. I'd been curious about the Racism vs. Ole Miss angle as it was not emphasized in the film and knowing what I did of Ole Miss's history I was curious. This was covered very well in the book.

I was a bit daunted by depth of the coverage of the evolution of football in the book but I can't say I wasn't warned... The title indicated as much. Mostly the explanations of football strategy were very good and I followed most of it though I'm in no way a fan of the game. There were a few sections (particularly when the footnotes got to be close to half a page) when the football details became too much for me but I'm sure that dyed in the wool fans loved it.

Even the sections on Lawrence Taylor and Steve Wallace, and John Ayers were eminently readable, even for a non-fan.

If you're a sports fan or if you've got one on your gift list, this may well be a great buy. If you'd rather not learn a lot about football but are still curious about the Michael Oher story, by all means, check out the movie.
