



SHAUN
ALEXANDER

UNSTOPPED

BY CHAD BONHAM

On the surface, Shaun Alexander's autobiographical book release might seem like the typical cool and calculated marketing move any other star athlete in his shoes would have made. After all, the guy *is* the National Football League's reigning MVP and he *did* lead the Seattle Seahawks to the franchise's first Super Bowl appearance.

Forget the fact that last season he also tied the NFL record for rushing touchdowns. His 27 scores matched Kansas City tailback Priest Holmes' 2003 performance.

So it all makes sense except for one small detail: Alexander originally planned to write his story two years ago. While one might think his decision to wait was a stroke of good luck, the native Kentuckian says it has more to do with a deeply rooted personal philosophy.

"I just try to wait for God's timing," Alexander says. "I keep things real simple. God's good though. His timing is flawless."

The release of *Touchdown Alexander* — written with Cecil Murphey — couldn't have come at a better time. Despite his team's disappointing 21-10 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers, Alexander's popularity is higher

than ever. Within the book's pages, football fans can expect a wealth of great behind-the-scenes stories from his high school, college and professional playing careers.

There are just as many details of the people and events that shaped Alexander's life long before he made the number 37 famous.

One of those people is his mother, Carol, whom Alexander describes in great detail throughout the early chapters. When his parents divorced while he was in the sixth grade, she was the one who took on the burdensome responsibility of raising five young boys.

"I just think about her character and how strong she was and always wanting to help people," Alexander reminisces. "We had an anointed woman of God teach us how to be great men. Even today, cousins and friends go back to our house to hang out with my mom because she always brings that light. She always brings that authentic unwavering love that can only come from God."

In his book, Alexander also gets into some of the challenges he faced as a teenager including all of the predictable issues that young people deal with today. He

openly shares how he personally managed to avoid the pitfalls of alcohol and drug use, premarital sex and rebellion.

Alexander, who played his collegiate ball at the University of Alabama, describes himself as a "blunt person." He believes his upfront and honest approach speaks to the current youth culture.

"I just think that in today's society, the young people need some really true, authentic, direct love," Alexander says. "If a person's missing something and they can get the answer, they would want it straight. If it's red, give it to me that it's red. Because then they can make a true choice. But nowadays, it seems like everybody tells them, 'It could be brown or green or yellow or red.' You give them the total truth just wrapped in love."

As an NFL superstar, Alexander's platform has grown significantly. But that increased positive attention has been joined by a certain measure of scrutiny as well. For example, during the 2004 season, Alexander finished 1 yard shy of the NFL rushing title and could have easily reached the mark had he received one last attempt late in the final game against Atlanta.

Afterwards, a reporter

AP photos

IN STEP

badgered him with questions and ultimately misled Alexander to believe that head coach Mike Holmgren purposely denied him the opportunity. That led to the now infamous "I guess he stabbed me in the back" comment that, according to Alexander, was severely blown out of proportion.

"For me, that's just a slang term," Alexander says. "It's not a malicious statement. But I learned that if it could be malicious to someone, then it's wrong. I think that's a valuable lesson to learn. Sometimes you don't think it's wrong because you didn't do anything that looks wrong in your tradition or your core beliefs. But, if it could be wrong to somebody else, then it is wrong. That's a great lesson to learn."

Not only has Alexander learned how to choose his words more wisely with the media, he has been taught some hard lessons about how money can severely distort people's perception about professional athletes — especially those who espouse Christian values.

Alexander took his time before signing an eight-year contract extension in March 2006. And while some criticized his laborious handling of the contract negotiations, Alexander says it was all about waiting on God. As a firm believer that "Christians can't be greedy," Alexander has big plans to use that money to help others.

"People need to understand that God plans even for the financial things," he says. "We're small-changing God. He'll take care of everything. He'll give you the house of your dreams if it's His will for you to have the house of your dreams. Get focused on going after God and then watch God go to work."

In life's even bigger picture, Alexander isn't really that concerned about the money or even winning and losing. He's most passionate about being the husband to wife Valerie and father of daughters Heaven and Trinity.

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IN STEP

Beyond that, he is a father figure to countless teens and young adults through the Shaun Alexander Foundation, which “empowers young men through education, athletics, character programs and leadership training.” Future plans include the expansion of these goals through a burgeoning mentoring program aptly named Club 37.

It’s his way of combating what he calls “the Great Curse” or “the Fatherless Plague.”

“I don’t have to change the world, but it’s a powerful thing when I speak into somebody else’s life,” Alexander says. “I think that’s one of my callings. We have the future running through this program. We have future presidents. We have future men of integrity, future vice presidents and presidents of companies and future football stars. They are the next mentors of the world. That’s the heartbeat [of Club 37]. We’re raising young men up to do this now.”

Alexander may be known as a great football player, but he’s much more interested in letting people know who he is as a man — more specifically, who he is as a Christian man. Through his words and his example, Alexander hopes he can shake up some people’s perceptions of what a Christian man really is.

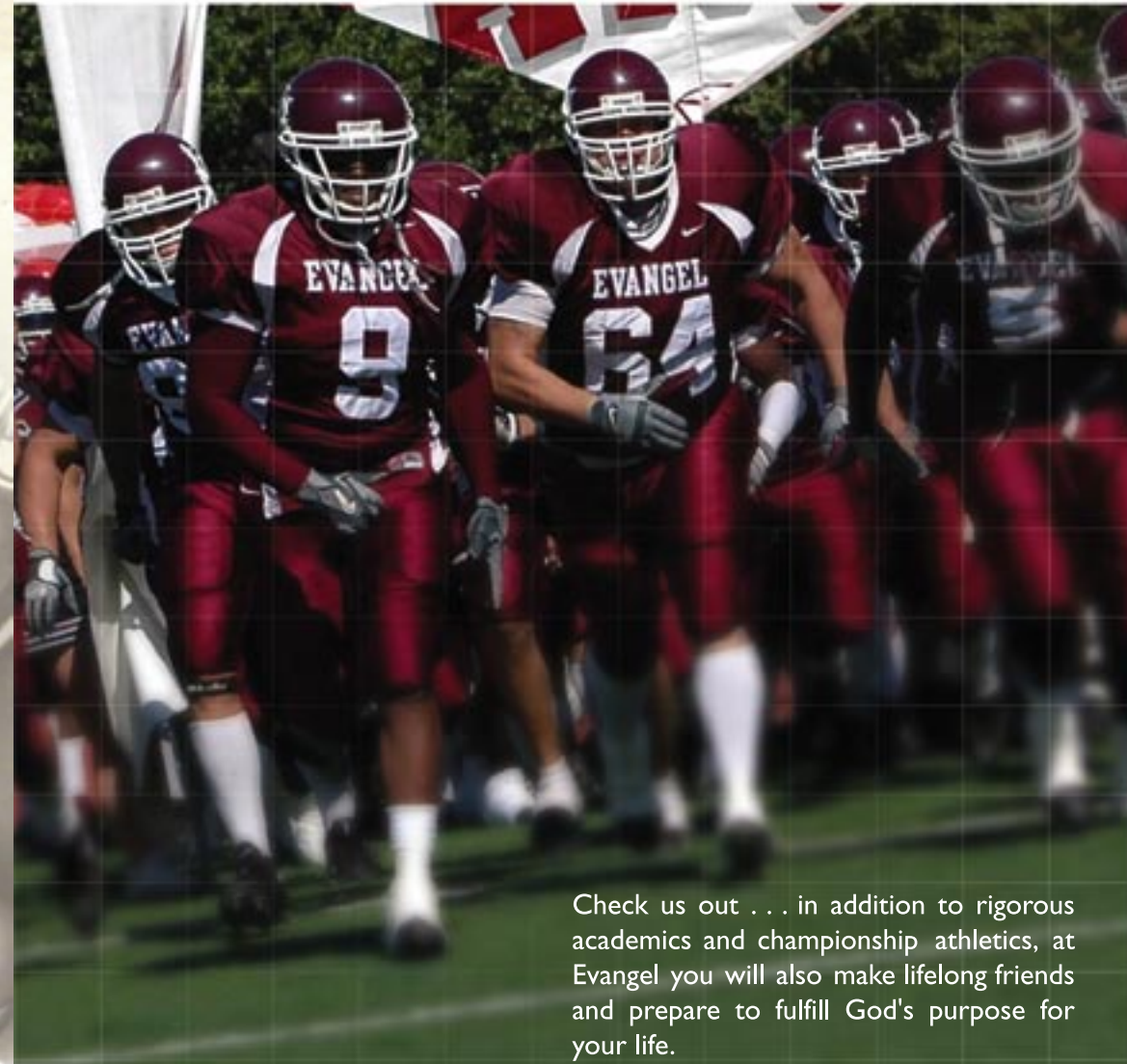
“Somewhere in the world’s mind, a Christian has to be weak,” Alexander says. “They can’t go out and win the game, and they have to be poor. They’ve got to barely make it. And I just don’t believe it. I believe that God’s children are the kings. They stand up. They’re dominant. They’re the ones who have the money to help the poor. They’re the ones who will be victorious.” **tpe**

CHAD BONHAM is a television program producer and freelance writer in Tulsa, Okla. E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



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