**BEATING THE ODDS**

**THE MICHAEL OHER STORY**

As a child, Michael Oher never had a bed of his own. He had an absent father and a mother who was addicted to crack cocaine. He and his 12 siblings constantly searched for places to live, sleeping on friends' couches, on porches, and on the streets. Not a typical life for a teenager. Michael, however, is not a typical individual. And that's the key. Despite being homeless for most of his life, Oher never gave up.

Fortunately for Michael, he met some extraordinary people who shared the same resolve and helped him change his life forever. They opened up their home to Michael and paved the way for him to receive an excellent high school education. At the age of 16, after being homeless and alone for much of his life, Oher was spotted at a bus stop by Sean and Leigh Anne Tuohy, a wealthy couple whose children attended school with Oher. Sean Tuohy recalls that upon seeing Oher, his wife grabbed the wheel, made a U-turn, and "cried the second she met him." Oher had been admitted to the private school as a special-needs student. Otherwise, he would never have been given the opportunity to attend a school like Briarcrest. But thanks to generous donors who paid for his education, and an administration that saw something special in Oher, he was given the chance. Then the Tuchys brought Oher home. They gave him shelter, his first bed, a tutor to help him succeed academically, and all the essentials he could possibly need. It was there that Michael eventually learned how to give and receive love.

Academics did not come easy for Michael. After all, he spent his first 9 years in school in 11 different schools. Once at Briarcrest, he constantly had to work toward improving his grades in order to be eligible for football. Thanks to the nurture and support from his caretakers and teachers, Michael was able to increase his academic performance. He went from barely passing to making the honor roll during his senior year. Michael never dreamed that an education like this was possible for him.

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**Being Homeless**

In today's economy, being homeless is more common than people realize. Following are some of the reasons why people are turning to living on the streets and/or in shelters:

- Foreclosure – Inability to pay for the home one is living in. In many cases the banks will foreclose on a home and evict the residents.
- Poverty – Being unable to earn enough money to pay for the cost of living.
- Decline in employment
- Rising cost of homes and the cost of living
- Health issues
While attending Briarcrest, his size became an asset when he pursued football. With continued guidance from his coaches and teachers, he continued to improve both on and off the field. Oher earned such honors as being selected the “Best Player in Tennessee” by a local newspaper and was chosen as “Mr. Football.” Although Oher had improved his grade point average, it was still too low for him to meet NCAA eligibility requirements. So Oher enrolled in online grade forgiveness classes at Brigham Young University following high-school graduation. His GPA quickly improved, and he was admitted to the University of Mississippi. It was the effort of all of those who cared about him, along with his own hard work, that allowed him to develop the academic skills he needed to attend college.

Once at Ole Miss, Oher helped the Rebels improve their record and become a football team to be reckoned with. Oher played left tackle for Ole Miss and was selected as an All-American player. As left tackle, he had the important responsibility of protecting the quarterback’s weak side, also known as “the blind side.”

**Overcoming the Odds**

Michael Oher is not the only NFL star athlete to overcome adversity. Donald Driver, who now plays for the Green Bay Packers, grew up without a permanent residence for many years. Like Oher, Driver persevered and went on to become a star football athlete. Recognizing that inadequate education often comes with homelessness, Driver has now created the Donald Driver Foundation to provide aid to homeless families and scholarships for students.

Michael Oher graduated from Ole Miss with a degree in criminal justice and entered the NFL in 2009 as a first-round draft pick. He was drafted by the Baltimore Ravens and started at right and left tackle during his first NFL season. However, it isn’t Oher’s football prowess that really makes him stand out, but rather his story. Oher is more than a successful athlete. He has proven that with perseverance and determination, anything is possible. Michael Oher had to continually work to achieve his goals and never took his gifts for granted. Regardless of his early hardship, Oher takes pride in being “very determined in everything” he does. He also credits his new family with making his path much easier.

Oher’s story inspired a book, *The Blind Side: Evolution of a Game*, by Michael Lewis. The book was later made into a very successful movie. Oher obviously no longer worries about having a place to lay his head. He is indeed a testimony that even the most difficult circumstances can be overcome with perseverance and the loving support of others who care.
READING COMPREHENSION

After reading "Beating the Odds: The Michael Oher Story," choose the options that best answer questions 1–14.

1. Read this sentence.
   **Fortunately for Michael, he met some extraordinary people who shared the same resolve and helped him prevail over his circumstances.**

   What is the meaning of the word *resolve* as it is used in the sentence?
   A. greed
   B. indecision
   C. puzzlement
   D. determination

2. Read this sentence.
   **While attending Briarcrest, his size became an asset when he pursued football.**

   What is the meaning of the word *asset* as it is used in the sentence?
   F. loss
   G. pride
   H. benefit
   I. obstacle

3. From this article, the reader can tell that
   A. Oher is a talented track and field star.
   B. Oher always shined in both academics and sports.
   C. Oher is ungrateful for his second chance in life and all that others did for him.
   D. had it not been for those who helped him, Oher's talent may have never been noticed.

4. What exception did Briarcrest make for Oher?
   F. The school provided a tutor to help Oher with his studies.
   G. The school admitted Oher even though his grades were not up to par.
   H. The school created a special diploma track for Oher to allow him to graduate.
   I. The athletic department waived the required GPA for football so Oher could play.

5. The author of this article would most likely make the statement that
   A. everyone should take in foster care children.
   B. Oher is a model of determination and perseverance.
   C. Oher should have played for the University of Tennessee.
   D. The offensive line is more important in football than the defensive line.

6. What method of organization does the author use to introduce Oher to the reader?
   F. providing data
   G. presenting chronological information about Oher's life
   H. comparing the effects of private school and public school education
   I. explaining the differences in the admission requirements for various colleges
7. What was the author's main purpose for writing this article?
   A. to teach the reader the fundamentals of football
   B. to introduce the reader to Oher's life and the obstacles he overcame
   C. to illustrate the many differences between Michael Oher and Donald Driver
   D. to entertain the reader by presenting a fictional story with a positive outcome

8. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?
   F. Oher had a difficult childhood.
   G. Oher had a large family of 12 siblings.
   H. Oher's mother was addicted to cocaine.
   I. The Tuohys wanted to increase the size of their family.

9. Leigh Anne Tuohy originally attempted to help Oher because
   A. she saw someone who needed help.
   B. she wanted to do something good for the community.
   C. she thought Oher could serve as a strong role model for her son.
   D. she believed Oher would be a wonderful asset to the Briarcrest football team.

10. Why did Oher take classes at Brigham Young University?
    F. The university offered more electives than Briarcrest.
    G. Oher needed to improve his grades so he could graduate from high school.
    H. The Tuohys both graduated from Brigham Young and encouraged Oher to do the same.
    I. Oher wanted to obtain his associate's degree before enrolling at the University of Mississippi.

11. What is true of BOTH Oher and Driver?
    A. They played football for the same team.
    B. They attended the University of Mississippi.
    C. They overcame difficult childhoods to become strong individuals.
    D. Their stories have inspired best-selling autobiographies and successful movies.

12. Which of the following statements provides the BEST support for the argument that private individuals can help fight homelessness?
    F. Despite being homeless, Oher never gave up.
    G. The Tuohys helped Oher overcome being homeless.
    H. County-run homeless shelters help provide food and shelter for the homeless.
    I. The government provides medical care and mental health services to the homeless.

13. People who read this article will
    A. learn more about the beginning of the NFL.
    B. learn more about factors that lead to homelessness.
    C. gain understanding about various NCAA recruiting rules.
    D. be able to compare and contrast college football and the NFL.

14. What conclusion may the reader draw based on information in BOTH the article and the second text box?
    F. Oher didn't put much effort into his studies.
    G. A family like the Tuohys helped Donald Driver.
    H. Homelessness is too big a problem to try to fix.
    I. An education can be the first step in climbing out of homelessness.