

Jesus Plays Football

In this third part of a fanciful series on Jesus playing sports, we find Jesus obtaining a spot on a well-known, local football team, his true identity unknown to all of his teammates, the coaching staff, the opposing teams, and the fans. With time, patience, and a carefully controlled exhibition revealing his athletic potential only by tiny degrees, Jesus has attracted enough attention from the coaches that he is given a position at left tackle. In scrimmages he consistently muscles his opponents aside, eluding blockers, and brings down ball carriers for minus yardage. Frequently, with a seemingly unerring knack to know how the offensive plays will develop, he tackles the quarterback for significant losses, dodging opposing players and penetrating the pocket with uncanny ease. He is careful not to grandstand and modestly deflects everyone's praise and adulation. Before many plays, he suggests to individual teammates how he thinks the play will unfold, whether it will be a pass or a rush, and who the ball carrier will be. He always couches his suggestions in language that expresses his thoughts as, at best, only hunches or educated guesses. His hunches and guesses always turn out to be correct, and the others realize they have a rare treasure. They regard him as uniquely gifted but still only a human like themselves. His ability to shunt aside their efforts to idolize him makes his role and performance on the team more acceptable, almost normal even, although the results are anything but normal.

The coaches confer and decide that, with his inexplicable premonitions and almost superhuman quickness, Jesus should become a runner and pass receiver. As soon as this is effected, Jesus validates their hopes, consistently making long gains. In fact, it appears that he purposely slows down on some occasions and allows himself to be tackled. Just as often, he races to the end zone untouched, a step quicker than anyone else. If he goes out for a pass, he always catches it. He seems to know where the quarterback will throw, running more quickly for the bomb, changing the route for a pass thrown in an unplanned direction, hesitating or even curling back for what would normally be an underthrown pass.

All passes don't come to him, but he snares every one that does, with unbelievable athletic skill and prowess.

Eagerly anticipating the first game of the season against their most powerful rival, Jesus' teammates and coaches revel in what they expect to be a most historic outcome. Jesus retains his status in the offensive plan, but will not play defense. His role on offense will suffice.

Game day arrives and everyone has heard of (but not personally witnessed, because of closed practice) the new playing sensation. Most feel that his contribution has been exaggerated for the purpose of intimidation. Play begins with Jesus' team on defense. Fired up by what they know Jesus will do on offense, his fellow players limit the other team to three downs and out. Jesus and the rest of the offense take the field. He lines up at halfback. The ball is snapped and he takes the handoff. Outmaneuvering five defenders, he runs to the left side and makes a beeline for the end zone, leaving everyone far behind. This electrifies the team and the fans. Jesus & Co., 7-0. Back on the bench, Jesus watches the other team, loaded with talent, march methodically down the field and tie the score.

Resuming offense at his own 20-yard line, Jesus breaks outside and races for a bomb. Making an over-the-shoulder catch in stride, he covers the remaining yards with ease, the closest defender ten yards away. The score is 14-7. Not discouraged, the other team again patiently moves downfield but stalls on the defense's 20. A field goal makes the score 14-10. In the next series, Jesus defers to other runners and receivers, but after two plays gaining only five yards, he is chosen for a running play. Taking the pitch, he notices the entire defense collapsing in his direction, so he reverses field. Three defenders attempt to snag him behind the line of scrimmage but he dodges all three. Charging for the opposite sideline, Jesus seems to shift to a higher gear and outruns everyone, scoring easily. 21-10. During the next series, the opposing team fails to score. Confident of the game's outcome and not wanting to run

up the score, Jesus' coaches keep him out of the next several series. The first quarter ends with no additional scoring.

In the second quarter, the fans clamor so loudly for Jesus' return that the head coach relents and puts him back in. His name is listed in the program as Joshua Christopher, and so chants of "Josh! Josh!" fill the stadium. The other team still has possession and pounds its way down the field for another touchdown. 21-17. Retaking the field, Jesus grabs a short dump pass and shoots through a hole in the defense. 28-17. Distracted but not giving up, the other team resumes its attack but is intercepted on its own 38. Out comes Jesus, lining up for a pass play. His defender tries to level him, but Jesus sidesteps him and goes toward the throw. Four defenders immediately converge. The quarterback throws an extremely high-arching pass. Incredibly, Jesus leaps higher than his would-be tacklers, coming down on top of them. They fall like bowling pins while Jesus miraculously remains on his feet. One defender manages to get in front of him, but Jesus, hesitating only a split second, fakes him out and finds the end zone for a fifth time. 35-17. Completely mystified but still possessing fighting spirit, the other team assumes the offense and is again chewing up yardage but coughs up the ball while only 23 yards from scoring. Out trots Jesus & Co. for another display. A trick play is called, the quarterback pitching to Jesus. He runs around or over several opponents but stays well behind the line. He launches an incredibly long pass of 80 yards to a teammate streaking down the field. The ball arrives with pinpoint accuracy, the receiver not having to adjust at all for the reception. He crosses the goal line untouched to make the score 42-17. Jesus' coach keeps him out of play for the remainder of the first half, during which the teams trade field goals. At half time, with the score 45-20, the stands and both locker rooms are buzzing with excitement and astonishment. Local media covering the game have widely broadcast the events, and soon all modes of communication are overwhelmed with callers.

Jesus' teammates are sure he should be dead tired from his efforts, but he seems to act as if he had barely lifted a muscle, breathing evenly, and not even breaking a sweat. They are concluding that he can't be human, but he allays their suspicions, pointing out a dozen occasions when one of them helped open a defensive hole or nailed a potential tackler.

During the second half the head coach staunchly resists putting Jesus back in, except for once each quarter, knowing that every time Jesus touches the ball a touchdown is guaranteed. This is the actual result, Jesus scoring on a long run in the third and on a long pass in the fourth. The other team, gradually demoralized, fails to score again and the game ends 59-20. To utter disbelief, Jesus scored seven touchdowns, racking up 425 yards. His performance was so dominating and so much beyond comprehension that everyone not physically present at the game rejected the statistics, suspecting a grandiose, complicated hoax. Even watching the video failed to convince many, who accused the media of an elaborate technological trick. Only those who played and sat (actually they stood more than they sat) in the stands glimpsed the truth and magnitude of Jesus' stunning display.