

Tebow 3:16 or the Gospel According to Ray Lewis?

✖ During the Denver Broncos' overtime win over the Pittsburgh Steelers in the AFC Wild Card game, Tim Tebow threw for 316 yards and a 31.6 yards per pass average. Almost immediately, people went scrambling to post on Twitter and Facebook about how only Tebow could conjure the number that calls to mind Bible verse John 3:16. For those unaware, the verse says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." Ever since his college days, Tebow has been an outspoken proponent of his Christian faith. He has championed pro-life causes and told the story of how doctors recommended his mother abort him in the womb. Some have derided him for his enthusiastic Christianity and "Tebowing" during games, saying he should cool it. Even Jesus did in this Saturday Night Live skit a few weeks back.

Some of Tebow's defenders say people are having a double standard and that athletes constantly "thank my Lord and savior Jesus Christ" when they do something big in a game. As the SNL skit suggest, Jesus has been real busy helping people win football games for a couple of decades now.

And what if Tebow and the Broncos play the Ravens in the AFC Championship game? I'm not sure people are aware of it, but Baltimore is home to "God's Linebacker," Ray Lewis. Lewis is notorious, but rarely criticized, for invoking God as much as Tebow. When I was covering the Ravens for The Baltimore Examiner back in 2006 and 2007, Lewis would often make comments about God that kind of, sort of, made it sound like he knew God and the media didn't. Often, we would bristle at his comments as we walked away from press conferences.



That's Sports Illustrated's Nov. 13, 2006 cover that examined how big of a role faith has played in Lewis' life. Here's how that story began.

The sinner is breaking a sweat now. He's been telling his story for just over a

minute, just enough time to start feeling it all again, and the reliving always brings rage. Called him liar, monster, abuser of women? Yes, the world did that. Called him killer? Yes, the world did, and does it still: He saw the poster in Cleveland in September, back of the end zone, with the drawing of a knife and the words asking how Ray Lewis can still be free. But here? Tonight? No. Or as he sometimes lets slip, "Hell, naw!" He's got his people, a bobbing, loving, understanding sea of 2,000 black faces before him. He's got his pastor, Jamal-Harrison Bryant, standing behind him, saying, "Talk, Ray, talk." Tonight, indeed, Lewis has the Holy Spirit settling on him like never before. He grips the microphone in both hands, crouches ever so slightly, as if girding himself for the collision to come.

"God has done something in my life-and not just for me to see it," Lewis says softly. Then his eyes flash, and he starts shouting, pointing. "God has done something in my life for ev-ery hat-er, ev-ery enemy.... "

A noise—"whooooaaa!"—rises out of the rows at the Empowerment Temple in northwest Baltimore, like the roar of an ocean wave gathering itself to crest.

"... every person who said I wouldn't walk or ever play again!"

Later, Lewis told the congregation about his struggles after being accused of murder in 2000. He went so far as to say he was "crucified."

"The battle is: Am I O.K.?" Lewis is telling the crowd. "Even though I was persecuted, crucified.... Am I O.K.? Let me give you a quick read-back on me, Church. When I walk into another stadium, 52 other players walk in there with me, plus coaches—and all [the fans] do to them is boo." He pauses, then grins. "Now, when Ray Lewis walks out there..." he says, but the whole room cuts in laughing, ready for the roundhouse to come. "Church? I'm going to tell you something about God, now.... When Mr. Lewis walks out, child, I hear everything from 'Murderer,' I hear everything from 'N—,' I hear everything from 'You shouldn't be playing football!' And when I break it all down, I know they're talking about yesterday!"

Anyone's that ever seen Ray Lewis' entrance during home games at M&T Bank

Stadium knows that it is electric.

One of the things that always fascinated me Lewis was that he was introduced in a special way in Baltimore. In those moments where he does that dance and the crowd goes wild, he's as close to god-like as one professional athlete can be. Sports can do that. It can make you feel unstoppable.

With God at his side, Lewis does feel that way.

But, what happens if God's co-pilot and God's linebacker meet? Are they mere insignificant pawns in God's interest in NFL football games? The reality is, each man might have God-given gifts, but neither wins because God wears blue and orange or purple and black. Although, you might get some disagreement from the people here in Baltimore.