



CONVERSATION :

# TROY POLAMALU

## THE MANE MAN

*Troy Polamalu, strong safety of the Pittsburgh Steelers, is one of the most feared defensive players in the NFL. He has been in the Pro Bowl twice, and scouts say he is a ferocious hitter with excellent speed who has the ability to single-handedly destroy an opposing team's game plans.*

*Though some people don't know him by name they do know his trademark black mane that dangles far below his helmet. Polamalu earned his first championship when the Steelers won Super Bowl XL.*

*On the field Polamalu is a physical force to be reckoned with, but off the field he is quiet, introspective, spiritual and thoughtful.*

*Watching him play is like watching a predator run down prey. Talking to him is like spending time with a sincere seminary professor. The contradictions are baffling.*

*Managing Editor Kirk Noonan spoke with Polamalu about faith and football.*

### **Why did you move from Southern California to a tiny town in Oregon when you were a kid?**

I was getting in a lot of trouble in Southern California. By God's grace He saw it was better to isolate me from all that [the inner city] by moving me to a small town in Oregon.

### **When you arrived in Oregon what were some of the changes you experienced?**

Besides the physical environment going from the inner city to cows, pastures, mountains, pine and fir trees, it was a disciplined environment at my aunt and uncle's house where I lived.

### **How did you end up becoming a believer in Jesus Christ?**

By the grace of God. I really feel there has been a spark inside me from when I could remember that made me hungry for the knowledge of Christ.

AP photos

**Do you think you were born with that hunger or was there an outside influence that pushed you that way?**

I think everyone is born with it. But some people feed it more than others. As a child I grew up away from my mother and father and lived with my aunt and uncle, but I also stayed at friends' houses. So I can honestly say I never truly had a real set of parents my whole life. With that, the only Person I could really rely on was Jesus Christ and God's Word.

**Is reading your Bible a favorite hobby?**

I don't think it's a hobby; it's a necessity. But aside from that, reading any Christian theology is beneficial.

**You're in the NFL. You've had a lot of success. With that success comes a lot of temptation in the form of women, large sums of money and fame. How difficult is it to stay focused on Jesus?**

In Western society there are a lot of vices we face. But Mother Teresa said it beautifully when she said God called us to be faithful, not successful.

That is the model I aspire to live by. Because when you strive for worldly success you are striving for vanity in the worldly sense. Instead, your motivation needs to be Christ, as explained in Colossians 3:23 ["Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men," NIV].

Sometimes winning a Super Bowl or winning an award may not be what God wants for your life.



**What did playing and winning the Super Bowl tell you about God?**

Like any occupation, in the worldly sense, if you apply yourself to something and are rewarded it gives you confirmation that you are on the right track.

The Super Bowl was confirmation for me. I had never won a championship — not in high school, not in college or at any level — so winning the Super Bowl gave me a very special feeling.

**Do you really pray during games?**

I pray as much as I can. In every situation and with every breath I strive to live for God.

**What are some of the things you pray for when you are on the field?**

I pray that whatever God's will is for me that I would accept it in all humility, whether that is success or failure.

**What's your take on individual awards and accomplishments?**

The beautiful thing about football is that it is the most team-oriented sport. So any goal a player strives for in football should be focused on team-oriented goals. Striving for individual accolades or notoriety can be damaging to a team.

**You have a reputation for putting in extra hours at work. Why do that when you're naturally gifted?**

I believe God gives us different missions in life. Whether that mission be as a doctor, accountant, football player or

janitor, we have been given a beautiful gift with which we can glorify Him.

In order to glorify Him we have to polish the gift He gives us and make it better and better. When I work hard I try to keep in mind that I am working hard for Christ in order to polish the gift He has given me.

**How do you think other players view people of faith, like you?**

It doesn't really matter. I strive to seek only God's justice, judgment and approval.

**What do you say to a high school football player who is struggling to live a life of faith?**

People are always looking outwardly in order to find encouragement. Everyone thinks they need to be rich or an NFL football player. I tell young people to listen to God's will for their lives and don't get caught up in trying to be more for men; instead try to be more for God.

**What will you do when your football career ends?**

I have aspirations to be a high school teacher. It's a beautiful way to positively affect people's lives. But I don't know if that is God's will for my life. Right now it's playing for the Pittsburgh Steelers, so that's what I am doing.

I'm just trying to live day to day. But if God called me to do something tomorrow morning in Africa, then that's what I would need to do.

**So there would be no problem leaving the life of an NFL superstar?**

There would be a problem, of course. There's this battle of mind and spirituality. [He pauses.] Honestly, I don't know what I would do in that situation. I would love to say I would get up and do exactly what God asks me to do, but sometimes we all struggle with fleshly, worldly desires. **tpe**

E-mail your comments to [tpe@ag.org](mailto:tpe@ag.org).

**2-MINUTE DRILL**

**Favorite hobby:** I like to read a lot, and fly fishing is fun.

**Autographs:** I don't mind giving them, but I wish people would learn that they aren't important and they're just ink on paper. It's more authentic to shake someone's hand.

**Favorite verse:** There are a lot of great Bible verses that can pertain to any area of our lives. I can be struggling with something and a verse I read will carry me through a certain situation. A favorite verse depends on whatever situation you're facing in your life. You can't just rely on one verse to carry through your life because you'll have different circumstances at different times.

**As a kid what would you do to get in shape for sports?** I'd work out for two hours two or three times a day.

**Favorite television program:** I love the Food Network.