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## **Fumble and Recovery in the End Zone**

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# Fumble and Recovery in the End Zone

WHEN JEREMI POWELL FIRST TRIED OUT FOOTBALL, HE THOUGHT IT WAS THE WORST. AT 10 YEARS OLD, HE'D BEEN SIGNED UP BY HIS MOM TO CHANNEL HIS ENERGY AND KEEP HIM OUT OF TROUBLE. WHAT LEFT AN IMPRESSION, INSTEAD, WERE THE EMBARRASSING TACKLES HE ENDURED.

He kept at it, however, and soon enough he was the one doing the tackling. The sport quickly became like a home and, before long, his talent shone through. By high school he had gained the status of a four-star athlete and all-American football player.

Jeremi was recruited to the University of Florida as an outside linebacker, where his name quickly became well known. He won the Chris Patrick Courage Award in 2018, was a key contributor on special teams, and was awarded player of the week multiple times. Despite a successful career, however, he still felt like something was missing.

One day, he was called into his professor's office and had a chance encounter with a stranger. "There was something about this dude that was very contagious," he describes. "He had a glow about him." When he asked his professor about it, she told him that the stranger's glow stemmed from a love of God. Jeremi affirms, "I was trying to be like that guy."

As he realized this, he also recognized that football was beginning to treat him differently. Despite his hard work, he struggled with his identity and endured verbal and emotional abuse from his coaches. "I can never forget," he recalls, "I went to practice one day, and I was kneeling down, and I just started crying ... It was a pain that comes when you realize that something that you love has broken your heart."

Reaching his breaking point, he contemplated taking his life. However, through a series of God-ordained events, his friends intervened and helped him get back on his feet.

After graduating from college, Jeremi struggled to find purpose and in the midst of this, felt compelled to return to church. He eventually attended

a service at the Bethlehem Seventh-day Adventist Church of Clearwater, where he had grown up. "I walk into this church and there's just a whole bunch of people my age," Jeremi reflects with a laugh. "And they're cool people."

The next Sabbath, Jeremi found himself back at church. Before he knew it, he was attending regularly. He met his wife, Monique, in the church, and found even more happiness in his new community. They launched programs which were successful and fulfilling, and Jeremi soon found himself wishing for a career in which he could carry out God's work all day.

After attending an evangelistic series by Pastor Carlton P. Byrd, Jeremi was inspired by the idea of dedicating his life to sharing God's message. Now enrolled at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Jeremi is working toward a career in chaplaincy.

Today you can still find Jeremi on the football field during intramurals season, but you might also find him enjoying downtime with friends. He carries a tangible sense of excitement for the future. "There was nothing [but football] that I could see myself giving 100 percent," Jeremi conveys. "Now I'm here, trying to give this 100 percent. Just doing God's work and keeping things as genuine as possible." ■

**Isabella Koh** is communication coordinator for the Andrews University Office of University Communication. A longer version of this story was first published in the award-winning student publication, "Envision" magazine.

