

MACK STRONG'S DAILY WORKOUT

BY GAIL WOOD

To appreciate Mack Strong's unlikely journey from undrafted rookie to All-Pro fullback, from benchwarmer to Super Bowl starter, you have to go back to the beginning, to his arrival at his first Seattle Seahawks practice.

In July 1993 a 21-year-old Strong, fresh out of the University of Georgia, reports to training camp carrying his belongings in a garbage bag and luggage borrowed from his mother. At the airport earlier that morning when that plastic bag rolled down the carousel at the baggage claim, he overheard someone's comment.

"Wow, somebody put a garbage bag on there," Strong recalls. "Just as I was about to reach it, I took my hand back and I walked away for a while. Talk about humble beginnings."

As one of nine running backs that summer fighting for five spots, Strong wasn't expected to make the team. To his own surprise, he survived the cut, making the team as a 210-pound hybrid, a mix of runner and blocker.

"I did whatever it took to make the team," Strong says. "I did whatever they asked. If they wanted me to block, I blocked."

Eventually, Strong morphed into a 253-pound sledgehammer, blocking and opening holes for others to get the touchdowns and the headlines.

So began a most unlikely journey, one that passed through the Super Bowl, through two Pro Bowls and through season after season of being the lead blocker for a 1,000-yard gainer. Behind Strong's crushing blocks, running back Shaun Alexander broke the NFL's single-season touchdown record in 2005 with 27.

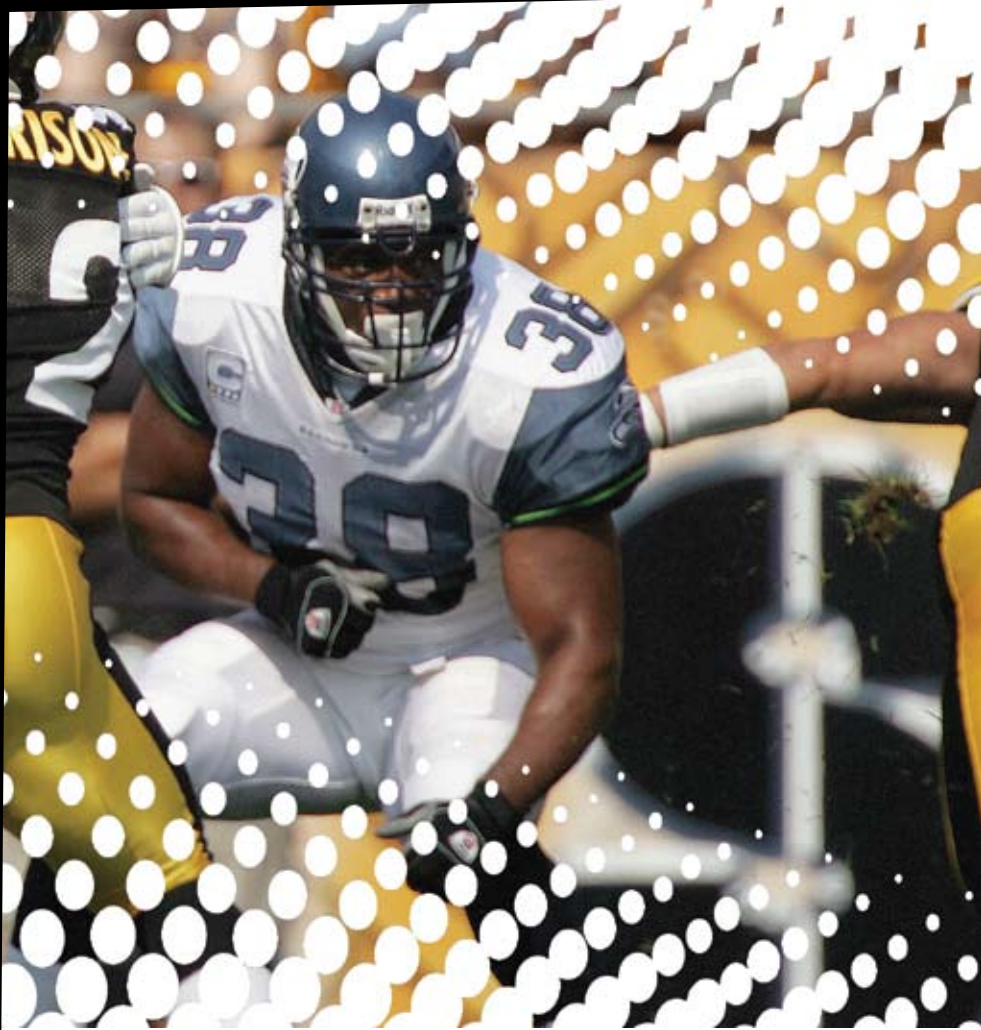
The Seahawks would use four draft choices and two free agents in a search to replace Strong. But, as his name suggests, Strong persevered.

Strong's remarkable 15-year career came to an unexpected end this season when he injured his neck in a loss at the Pittsburgh Steelers. A herniated disk did what all the challengers couldn't.

Strong finished with 205 games played, second most in franchise history. Not bad for someone who

POW

Mack Strong has faced and overcome his share of challenges while playing for the Seahawks.



wasn't expected to make the team.

At the press conference where he announced he was retiring, Strong wore a T-shirt with "No pain, no gain" written on it.

"Life is not easy no matter what you do," he says, "whether you're playing fullback for the Seattle Seahawks or working a 9-to-5 job stocking groceries. I made a decision a long time ago. I was willing to pay that price."

He never expected to be with the team this long.

Yet for all the accomplishments in the NFL, there's one special moment as a Seahawk that stands out. It's May 7, 1997, the day he accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Strong had been attending Seattle Christian Church with his girlfriend.

"I got interested in studying the Bible," Strong says. "I saw a

lot of things I didn't know. I got really inspired. I wanted to start living my life for God and not for myself. I studied the Bible for a while and made a decision to become a Christian."

Before then, Strong had been living with his girlfriend, Zoe. She moved out when she became a Christian. Two months later Strong became a Christian and they married.

He doesn't regret his decision to follow Jesus Christ.

"It changed my life

tremendously," Strong says. "The No. 1 thing is it helped me have the right perspective about my life, about my purpose. It was no longer trying to keep up with the Joneses, trying to make as much money as I could and live a life that is just about me trying to get as much credit and fame as I could. It was more about living for God."

Strong discovered that his NFL career couldn't satisfy an inner need.

"I came to an understanding that the way I was living was distancing me from living with God," Strong says. "I really wanted to be close. I really wanted to be at peace. Before, I often felt guilty with how I was living. God was calling me to be so much more. I appreciate Him being so patient with me, showing me so much grace and love and mercy."

Strong discovered a purpose to help other people find a relationship with God.

"That's what I'm all about now," Strong says.

Now, Strong studies the Bible

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"LOOK AT THE FIELDS...
THEY ARE RIPE FOR HARVEST."

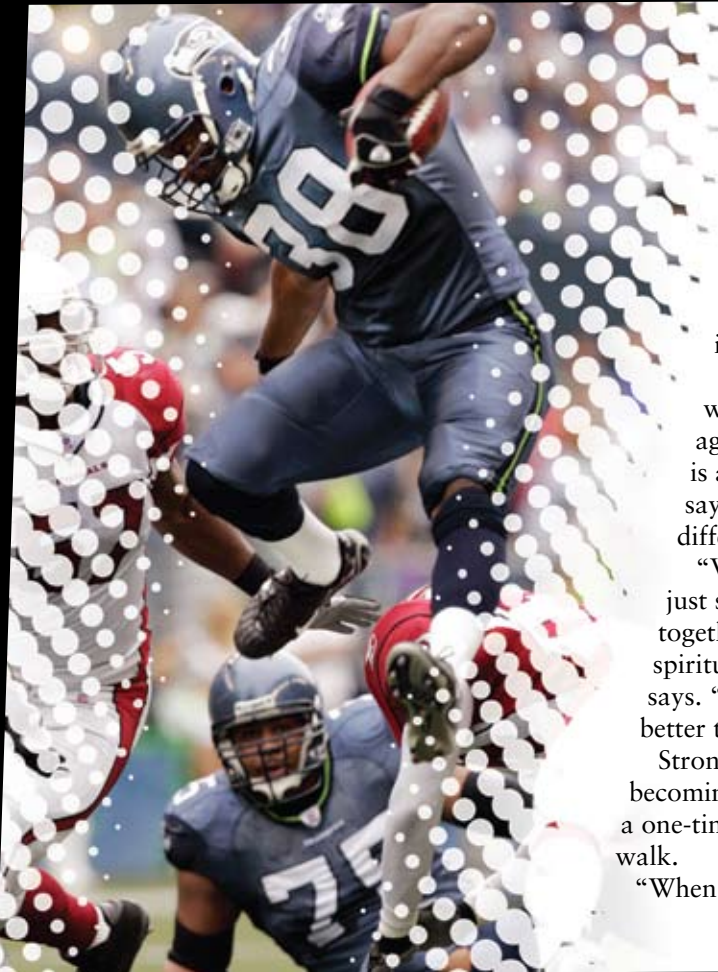
John 4:35



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with Leonard Weaver, the backup fullback who replaced Strong in the starting lineup. Like Strong, Weaver was an undrafted free agent, plays fullback and is a Christian. But Strong says there's a significant difference. "We spend a lot of time just studying the Bible together and talking about spiritual things," Strong says. "But he sings a lot better than me." Strong has learned becoming a Christian isn't just a one-time decision. It's a daily walk. "When you make a

commitment, it's like a marriage," Strong says. "When I got married, I committed my life, my faithfulness to my wife until the day we die. That's the same way with God. It's about living with Him day to day." Having been a Christian for about 10 years, Strong has discovered something about himself. "I know I blow it every day," he says. "I fall short of His expectations. That's why there's grace. That's why God continues to reach out for me and pursues me like the Prodigal Son and wants me to overcome the challenges in my life. He is rooting for me to overcome sin and is giving me all the help I need."

Unlike the young man who showed up at the Seahawks practice 15 years ago, Strong is now successful and famous. Yet he's maintained a reliance on God, understanding he still needs forgiveness. "I haven't reached this point on my own ability, my own merit," Strong says. "It's all come about because of God's grace. Anyone who is honest about their life will admit they need help. We're all sinners. We can't do it by ourselves." **tpe**

GAIL WOOD is a sports writer in Washington state and freelance writer for *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

ABCs OF SALVATION

To know God and be ready for heaven, follow these steps:

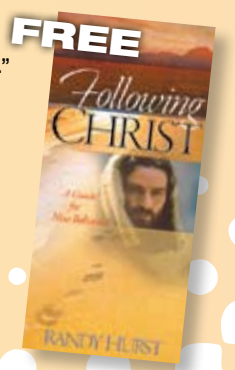
- A. Admit you are a sinner.**
"There is no one righteous, not even one ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Romans 3:10,23 (See Romans 5:8; 6:23.)
Ask God's forgiveness and repent of your sins.
"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Romans 10:13 (See Acts 3:19.)
- B. Believe in Jesus** (put your trust in Him) as your only hope of salvation.
"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (See John 14:6.)
Become a child of God by receiving Christ.
"To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." John 1:12 (See Revelation 3:20.)
- C. Confess that Jesus is your Lord.**
"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9 (See verse 10.)

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