

Monte Coleman

the **best** is yet
to come

By Derek Guilford

It's a Cinderella story. One you wouldn't ordinarily believe. Monte Coleman's life has played out like a script Hollywood wouldn't even accept.

This man who didn't play high school football joined one of football's greatest dynasties in NFL history. A man who walked on to his college football team became its only player ever to be drafted into the NFL. A man who wasn't supposed to even play professionally became the longest-tenured Washington Redskin in history. A man whose career spanned more than three decades as he collected a trio of Super Bowl rings. A man who grew up in the church loving God but whose faith faded until a critical moment when he needed Him the most.

The product of a large, strong family unit, young Monte learned early that faith is essential. But something was missing in his own life.

"I grew up in the church and was baptized, but wasn't living the life I should be living according to the Bible," he says. "I was baptized a sinner, and came out a wet sinner."

One Tuesday night as a sophomore at the University of Central Arkansas, Coleman rededicated his life to God at a Fellowship of Christian Athletes service. But it was flash-in-the-pan faith.

After being selected in the 11th round of the NFL draft by the Redskins, Coleman wasn't expected to produce.

Chosen that late, "you're usually only there for training camp," Coleman explains. "You're not expected to make it; you're just a body."

Coleman would prove the skeptics wrong. He became a consistent contributor, earning a starting spot soon into his career. But with everything in his life apparently on track, he had no interest in faith.

"I was out there in the streets. I forgot about Christ. I put Him on the backburner," Coleman says. "I thought, *Hey, I'm a pro now. I'm on the Washington Redskins.*"

With nothing to anchor his marriage, Cole-

Four Super Bowls, winning three • 56.5 sacks and 17 interceptions • All-Madden Team 1993 • 70 Greatest Redskins in franchise history

Monte Coleman 51



man chose a path of unfaithfulness. "My attraction Satan used as a trap was being with other women," Coleman explains. "It came to the point that I got divorced. It broke my heart."

After experiencing such emotional highs from success on the football field, the setback in his personal life was especially hard. This is the same man who would play in four Super Bowls in a 10-year span, winning three. The same man who would rack up a total of 56.5 sacks and 17 interceptions in his 16-year career as an NFL linebacker. The same man who was named to the All-Madden Team in 1993 and made the list of the 70 Greatest Redskins in franchise history. All this while falling short in his faith and watching his marriage crumble.

But when the storybook side of Coleman's life was brought up short by his real-life crises, he began to shape up. "I came back to my senses," he says, "and I thank God I had that upbringing, that I knew who Jesus Christ was. I knew exactly what I had to come back to. It was back to Jesus Christ."

Coleman rededicated his life to

Christ and was baptized in water and filled with the Holy Spirit on the same day.

Upon retirement, Coleman went into business. As vice president of marketing for a computer supply company in Virginia, he made a substantial salary. But something still wasn't right. Coleman and his second wife felt a call from God on their lives. God told them, says Coleman, to move to Pine Bluff, Ark.

With his marketing background, Coleman's desire was to become assistant athletic director for a university. God had a different plan. In 2001, Coleman was offered the position of linebacker coach for the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff. Never feeling the aspiration to coach, Coleman hesitated. Then he thought of the 90-plus college-aged young men he could impact for Christ on a daily basis.

"It was like a light went on!" Coleman says.

God was obviously at work. Over the next five years, Coleman would be promoted from linebacker coach to defensive coordinator along with the title of team chaplain. He got to be an even bigger part of his players' lives. Coleman saw his young men grow not just in football, but also in Jesus.

"As chaplain, I really got a chance to start speaking into their lives," Coleman explains. Players would come to his office and openly talk about their life challenges and pain.

"We'd cry together," Coleman says. "We'd talk about life, religion, football — we'd talk about everything. I really saw God moving."

In November 2007, Coleman was named head football coach of the university located just blocks from his childhood home. Today, he continues to minister to his players on a daily basis.

"God gave me a second chance at life," says Jermaine Clemmons, senior defensive back. "Coach Coleman taught me how to get in the Word, how to be an all-around better person and player. He's been there for me from day one. Even if I don't progress and go to the next level and play, I've learned how to be a man."

Coleman is also an ordained minister and active in his local church, Pine Bluff First Assembly of God led by Pastor Gary Bell. He holds chapel services for the team every Saturday night.

"He's spiritually strong," says Alonzo Hampton, defensive backs coach. "I've seen him emulate Christ in his life, and it has motivated me in my own life."

Coleman is patient in his walk of faith and confident that what God has planned for his life is best.

"I just wait on Him," he says. He also puts God first when it comes to the gridiron. "Win or lose, all praise goes to God. He gave us the ability to do this."

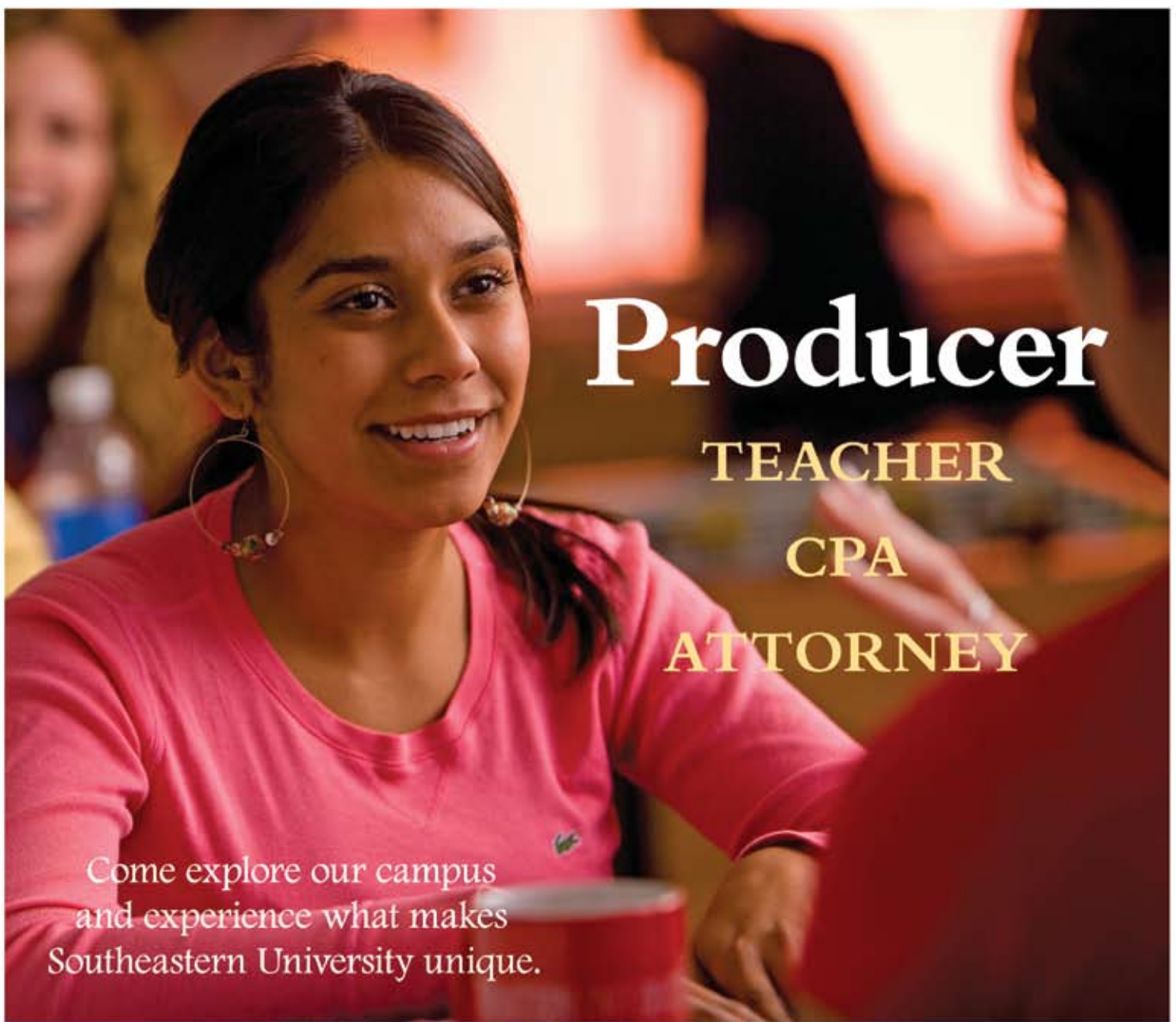
The man who wore No. 51 during his playing days is now 51 years old and is following the path God opened for his life in 1999. Coleman is comfortable with that plan. He knows he is following God's will for his life, trusting in Him to provide. The man of many titles — head coach, defensive coordinator, chaplain, pastor, father, husband — has a lot to be thankful for and believes the future is bright.

"I'm still growing," he says. "I'm still learning in my walk of faith with Christ. The journey's not over yet." **tpe**

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

Monte Coleman now invests his life in the young men playing for the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff.



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