



## Featured Alumnus: Michael Urie

### “Auditioning is like an NFL Tournament ...Without the Fun”

You may have seen his award winning performance at Nationals in 1998, or you may have seen him in a commercial or movie, or you may have seen him on ABC’s the new hit “Ugly Betty.” Wherever you end up seeing him you’re sure to be impressed. Michael Urie has a laundry list of talents starting with the NFL and where it ends...the sky’s the limit.

Michael started his career right where many alumni did...the hallways of an NFL high school. Michael grew up in Plano, Texas and was coached by Ms. Karen Wilbanks. He says the best thing about speech in high school was that his coach “never stressed about winning.” It became about doing good work and we were praised for what we accomplished!” He and his teammates were taught the motto “do it to do it again!” It’s not about who you beat, but rather getting to perform it again in front of a captive audience. Ms. Wilbanks is certainly praising him now.

Michael received his BFA from Juilliard in May of 2003 and shortly after started performing on stage. He has starred in many noteworthy shows such as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Othello*, *The King Stag*, *Romeo and Juliet* and many more. After his time on stage he looked towards television and movies. He starred in a number of pilots and a wonderful independent film “WTC View” which is a “modest but often surprising depiction of lower Manhattan after 9/11, the most devastating days in the nation’s history.”

Currently, Michael has a reoccurring role on the ABC’s hit show “Ugly Betty.” When asked about the show, Michael was eager to talk about how great the cast is and how he really has the ability to grow with his character as an actor. He was originally supposed to be a guest on the show but the producers realized that the show needed more of Michael and soon found a permanent role for him. Not surprisingly, according to Reuters, “*Ugly Betty* ranks as the most watched new series on US television this season. Although it ranks second in its time slot behind *Survivor* on CBS, the show is one of the highest rated among viewers aged 18 to 49, the group most prized by advertisers”

I asked Michael what he learned from the NFL that brought him to where he is today. He said that before one can land a job he or she has to earn the respect of those casting the job. The most unglamorous part about being an actor is actually getting the job; “auditioning is like an NFL tournament without the fun! Everyone has note pads and you either win or lose.” He went on to say how lucky he was to have an NFL background because it gave him an edge against his competition. “If you can get in front of complete strangers who control your fate for those few minutes without being nervous, you will continue to do well, and you will continue to do better every time you perform. I learned that from the NFL!”

You can watch Michael on “Ugly Betty” Thursday nights at 8/7c on ABC

## Interview With Featured Alumnus: Michael Urie

In 1998, at the NFL National Tournament in St. Louis MO, a young man from Plano, Texas won Dramatic Interpretation with his rendition of “Confessions of a Nightingale.” That same man used his high school speech experiences to land a role on the ABC hit series “Ugly Betty.” Recently I had an opportunity to speak with Michael about his past, present and future. We chatted about his successes as a high school NFL speech champion, an actor on stage/screen, and finally as a producer.

Heidi: Michael could you tell me a little more about your NFL experiences in high school?

Michael: It all started with drama and being in plays. Then I saw they were doing the same things with the NFL so it really was a seamless transition from drama to speech. I started attending speech tournaments and quit the marching band. I knew my career wasn't in music so it really was a great decision on my part. My junior year DI was a perfect fit and then ended up winning DI at the National tournament in 1998. I was truly surprised to win! But my best memories aren't from the “big show” but just going to rounds. It was just so much fun! My coach (Karen Wilbanks) was always so supportive and taught us that it's the opportunity to perform your piece again that's so great! So from her I learned “do it to do it again.” It shouldn't just be about winning a tournament but performing in front of the people that are there to watch you each round. It was pressure to win but do it because you love it.

Heidi: What was your favorite part about the NFL experience?

Michael: I think it was just the great memories. I always had fun. Performing is so exciting and nerve-racking and NFL taught me how to handle it when I was going through my interviews. I am also grateful because it taught me that I know I know how to talk. The NFL taught me to be able to speak in front of people. So there is no excuse for me not standing up for something I believe in.

Heidi: So what's next for you?

Michael: Well besides “Ugly Betty,” I am in post-production of “Two Down” which is a high school speech and debate documentary. It's exciting because it's about something that was so important to me and still is.

Heidi: Any final thoughts you would like to share with the NFL community?

Michael: I have to of course thank Karen Wilbanks for everything. She made the competitions fun and we really just focused on improving and having a good time. She was such a great influence on my life. The NFL taught me so much when I was applying for jobs and auditioning for jobs. But it isn't just because I'm an actor. The skills you learn can be applied to any job. So, I really look back on my experiences in high school as a stepping stone to my experiences now.

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