



Photo by Sophie Fernandes

# Windle 101

*Junior Michael Windle has persevered through frequent moving and familial complications all while pursuing his passions.*

BY KATY MAYFIELD  
News Writer

**A**t 6'1", junior Michael Windle easily stands out from the bustling crowds of Clarke Central High School students in the hallways.

His shy demeanor, however, helps him blend in, and behind it is a complicated but steadfast love for his family and a passion for tennis.

"He's quiet, but there's something to be said about reserved people. It's usually the loud ones who get attention," social studies department chair Ashley Goodrich said. "You can just tell by looking at him that he's such a caring person. So he reaches out to people as much as people reach out to him."

Michael was born in Atlanta, where, after his parents split, he grew estranged from his father and was raised bouncing from house to house and from school to school in the Atlanta area.

"My mom had to move out the house, then we had nowhere to go, so we ended up staying in a shelter for a while," Michael said. "Then we ended up moving out, we lived with family members: my grandma, my auntie, my other auntie, my grandad."

Moving schools every few months or years proved difficult for

Michael, who was already hesitant to build friendships.

"We changed schools a lot, which was hard because I had to start over," Michael said. "Relationships I had built at other schools, they were just gone 'cause I had to move to a new school."

Despite their troubles, the family grew closer.

"I'm pretty sure it strengthened my family. I knew we had each other, so we really didn't have anything else to worry about," Michael said. "I really didn't let all that other stuff bother me."

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-- ASHLEY GOODRICH,  
social studies department chair

But in 2012, the cancer that Michael's mom, Ramona Armstrong, had been dealing with her whole life flared up again.

"The last time she had cancer it was like this gigantic lump (on her arm)," Michael said. "So she couldn't use (that) arm at all."

Following her diagnosis, Ramona continued to live with her kids and carried on with life as usual.

"She still did everything, like she drove. She was still the same mom that I was used to, but she couldn't do everything that she wanted to do," Michael said.

After a year of living on her own, though, her condition worsened.

"It ended up being too much. So she was in and out of the hospital at Emory. When she went in, some church member would come stay with us, me and my sister, while we were at home," Michael said. "She would still send the money from the hospital to home so she could pay the bills. So she was still taking care of us even though she was in the hospital."

As a result of the hospitalization, a job was not an option for Ramona, making it all the more difficult for her to support her children from the hospital. In the middle of the 2012-13 school year, before the second semester of his freshman year, Michael, his sister and his mom uprooted again and moved in with Michael's grandfather in Athens.

"The move to Athens was kind of difficult because I lived in Atlanta and

"Instead of shutting down, he wanted to persevere, and so I think he has a lot to teach people about how to deal with death, how to deal with changes in situations and how to still be a kind and considerate person in the meantime."

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social studies department chair

that's where I was born, where I was raised and I had a lot of friends up there. That's where all my family lives at," Michael said. "I wouldn't say I (have) completely settled in (here). I don't know where anything is, even though I've been here for a while."

But after the family began to acclimate to Athens, and Michael to life at CCHS after his freshman year, their world was turned on its head.

"After like a year, July 5, 2013, right before my tenth grade year, my mom had passed away," Michael said.

Goodrich taught Michael in his sophomore year, and says his emotional resilience following his mother's passing is what she admired about Michael.

"He's just such a great example of how one deals and copes with tough times. Instead of shutting down, he wanted to persevere, and so I think he has a lot to teach people about how to deal with

**Opposite:** A PASSION FOR NUMBERS: Michael solves math equations on a whiteboard. Though teachers like social studies department chair Goodrich speak highly of Michael, he says the subject he really enjoys is math. "I like math... I'm just good at it. There's a reason for things," Michael said. **Below:** A CLOSE BOND: Michael smiles with Ashley Goodrich. Michael and Goodrich became close last year, when Michael had her AP World History class and Goodrich helped him settle in at CCHS. "I would take time after class to just talk to him about his interests, about his life before he came to Athens," Goodrich said. "He could have chosen not to spend time with me outside of class and just been very short with answering my questions, but he really engaged in them... He really was interested in getting to know me as well."

Photo by Sophie Fernandes





Photo by Chad Rhym

**Above: BEST HAND FORWARD:** Michael competes at one of his early season matches. Though throughout his life Michael has been interested in other sports, including basketball and football, deciding on tennis because he said it delivers the most fun for the least risk. "At first I had no interest in tennis, I liked football, but I didn't want to play football because I kind of don't want to be broken. I don't want broken bones, that's just not attractive to me," Michael said.

"I plan on finding a college that can still allow me to play tennis. I would like to be a pro tennis player because you get paid to do something that you love to do and is fun."

-- Michael Windle,  
junior

death, how to deal with changes in situations and how to still be a kind and considerate person in the meantime," Goodrich said.

The self-described shy student at first struggled with adjusting socially to his new home and school.

"On the first day of math class, everyone had a group, you know, and I was a new student, and all the groups were full. So I'm just sitting there listening to the teacher but it's kind of awkward because there are a lot of people around me who I don't know," Michael said. "And one day (senior Aramis Ferrer) just came and sat at my group and we just started

talking and so we've been friends since my ninth grade year."

Ferrer said he first viewed Michael as a shy introvert, a label that has changed after years of friendship.

"As soon as I made the chance to get to know him everything fell into the right places to help him come to terms with being new in the school and he also helped

me a lot with mathematics as well. He's like the textbook strong silent type," Ferrer said. "I'd say that Michael has evolved into more of an extrovert and he takes the time to interact with his surroundings more."

With the help of Ferrer and Goodrich, Michael settled in. This spring, he decided to branch out, and joined the varsity boys tennis team.

"It's just really fun. I like the adrenaline, like the drive to win when I'm playing. I just love the game," Michael said.

Michael remembers his passion for tennis beginning back in Atlanta.

"Me and my cousin, we were playing tennis on the Wii and we were like, 'Let's go try it for real,'" Michael said. "So we just went outside, got some tennis rackets and we went to the tennis court and started playing."

Michael cites tennis not only as one of his passions, but also one of his dreams.

"I plan on finding a college that can still allow me to play tennis. I would like to be a pro tennis player because you get paid to do something that you love to do and is fun," Michael said.

Social studies department teacher and tennis coach Stephen Hinson says he, too, can see a future in tennis for Michael.

"He's gonna have to get a lot more experience, but he improves so quickly, it could be a situation where maybe he could play in a small college or something and just

"He improves so quickly, it could be a situation where maybe he could play in a small college or something and just continue getting better."

--STEPHEN HINSON,  
head tennis coach

continue getting better," Hinson said.

No matter where his passion may later lead him, Michael has his sights on one very definite goal: graduating.

"Right now I don't know what school I want to go to but there's a lot of colleges sending me stuff in the mail so I just need to sit down and read all of them," Michael said. "I don't know what job I'm gonna have, 'cause I don't know where I'm gonna go yet. The most important thing, the priority in my life, is graduate school."

Ferrer is confident in his friend no matter where he chooses to go.

"Success, for him, is inevitable," Ferrer said. 

**Below:** JUST HANGING: Social studies department teacher and tennis coach Stephen Hinson and Michael catch up in the bleachers. Michael joined the tennis team this year and enjoyed a successful first season, with the boys tennis team making it all the way to the first round of state. "He approached me about tennis, and he's one of the best additions I've had in years," Hinson said.



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