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Head Of The Class

Carter Emerges For Bridgewater

MATTHEW STOSS, Daily News-Record

BRIDGEWATER - After playing in eight games for the Bridgewater College football team in 2008, Anthony Carter disappeared. He was still enrolled at BC but spent 2009 and 2010 academically ineligible following his transfer from Mount Union and a change in majors.

A lot of people - media, players, even coaches - doubted Carter would ever play again for the Eagles.

"There were people in these offices, for that matter, that said this kid just has way too far to come to get the GPA that he needs to be declared eligible," said Bridgewater coach Michael Clark, referring to the BC coaches' offices in Nininger Hall.

But, in his sixth year of college, Carter has resurfaced and finally is on track to have a football career. And, judging by his performance Saturday against Ferrum, it could be a good one.

Carter, now academically eligible and a health and exercise science major, had a breakout game in his first game since 2008, rushing for 100 yards on 19 carries against the Panthers, running past, over and through would-be arm-tacklers with his 23-year-old, grown-man, 5-foot-11, 205-pound frame.

"I expected that out of Anthony," said BC fullback Ryan Richmond, a fifth-year senior. "He's worked hard for two years, even though he didn't play football. You'd always see him in the weight room. You'd always see him on the field trying to do agilities just to keep up with the running backs and what we're doing."

Carter - a Hollywood, Fla., native who missed BC's first two games because of a school-imposed academic suspension - averaged 5.3 yards per carry and nearly broke his first run for a touchdown, but a Ferrum defensive back undercut him at the FC 42-yard line after 8 yards.

But it was OK. Carter was playing football after two years of being M.I.A.

"It was hard. It was tough," said Carter, who has an NCAA Division III championship ring from his freshman year at Mount Union, when the Raiders won the 2006 national title. "I tried to stay motivated. I played flag football - intramurals. I stayed in the weight room, kept trying to work out, trying to get to the ideal size. I tried to base myself off NFL players, like their size - Reggie Bush, Adrian Peterson. I wanted to be more lean, be able to move with more flexibility. I kept trying to work back and get to football, and here I am now."

To get there, Carter stayed active after rushing for 267 yards on 47 carries (5.7 ypc) and two touchdowns in 2008 (a former high school quarterback, he also threw a 41-yard touchdown pass on a trick play that season). Even though he wasn't with the team, Carter continued to lift weights, albeit anonymously.

"People would ask me, like, 'You're big. Why aren't you playing football?'" said Carter, smiling. "So I had to tell the story, and they'd say, 'You need to get back.'"

But Carter didn't just lift. He also changed his diet, willing himself to ignore his rather pronounced sweet tooth - Carter is an accomplished baker and specializes in cookies - and get down from the 235 pounds he played at in 2008. He also cut out fast food and soda.

"He was always around the weight room," Clark said of Carter, who benches 330 pounds. "He's one of those kids - and he'll be the first to tell you - his body has changed physically. He's gone from being a chunky 235 pounds ... he's like 208 pounds and, by college football standards, he's a big back for the Division III level."

But Carter's eligibility this season isn't just about grades. It also has to do with how he structured his classes.

Clark, a former chairman of the NCAA football rules committee, said a D-III player gets 10 full semesters (defined by

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taking 12 or more credit hours) to play four years. Carter, he said, was able to come back in 2011 by not taking a full load last spring, making this fall semester his 10th.

Carter picked a perfect time to emerge from obscurity.

Starting tailback Darrin McKenzie injured a shoulder against Ferrum and will miss Saturday's 1 p.m. game against the Apprentice School of Newport News. It's still unclear how severe the injury is and how long McKenzie will be out.

McKenzie's injury also continues a recent trend for Bridgewater, which, over the past few seasons, has had backup tailbacks emerge as stars. Last season, McKenzie stepped in for the injured Teley Tate. In 2009, Tate stepped in for David Argaud and went to be an Old Dominion Athletic Conference first-teamer.

Now - finally - it's Carter's turn.

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