

Carr embraces life as UNI defender

Written by Jim Ecker

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It was a joy to watch Alex Carr play tailback at Cedar Rapids Washington during the 2010 campaign.

A little guy but extremely tough, he'd carry the ball 30 times, 40 times or even 50 times a game, whatever the team needed, and he'd look just as strong, just as fresh, just as quick, just as fast in the fourth quarter as when the game began.

He scooted for 1,925 yards and accounted for 28 touchdowns for the Warriors in 2010 as a senior and made the all-state teams, and rightfully so.

Now it's two years later and No.22 is wearing purple these days at the University of Northern Iowa. And despite all that good work at tailback in high school, his days as a running back are over. He's a full-time cornerback, with no big regrets.

"I've grown out of the wanting-to-play running back phase," he said with a smile Saturday at UNI's media day. "I've got my mind transferred over to playing on the defensive side."

Carr said the Panthers have five or six talented running backs, including the established 1-2 tandem of Carlos Anderson and David Johnson. His tailback days are done, barring something totally unexpected.

"I wasn't really that upset," he maintained.

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Carr excelled as a defensive back at Cedar Rapids Washington and was recruited as a cornerback by Northern Iowa, so none of this is a great surprise. He enjoys playing on defense and special teams and hopes to see the field this season.

Carr was redshirted in 2011 as he made the adjustment to college, but now the 5-foot-10, 170-pound speedster is competing for playing time in preseason drills.

Most true freshman take a redshirt year in college to get adjusted, but that doesn't mean it was a whole lot of fun.

"It was tough, coming from high school, from playing every snap to not playing," he said. "It's not exactly what you'd call fun, but it's a learning experience. You've got to get your body right, get your mind right, learn the plays and stuff.

"It's good to finally have a legit chance to compete and play, get on special teams and stuff like that."

Carr said he's competing for the No.2 job at right cornerback behind Jalen Barnes, a transfer from Iowa Western Community College, but he works at left cornerback as well. "You have to know both sides and you have to be interchangeable," he said.

Carr placed third in the 100-meter dash at the Class 4A state track meet in high school and helped Washington win state track titles in 2009 and 2010. He also excelled on relays and ranked as one of the fastest guys in the state, but he's got a lot of company in the speed department at UNI.

"There are a lot of guys out here who are faster than I am," he reported.

Carr has been working with the punt return team, but he's being used as a corner blocker, not as the deep return man. Again, that's OK with him.

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"I'm just focused on one or two or three things, instead of worrying about having the ball in my hands," he said.

Carr just wants to play, and he figures the best way to make that happen is to work hard in practice and be as consistent as possible.

"You just have to battle every day at practice," he said. "You can't take any steps back. Keep stepping up the stairs, climbing the ladder, not having bad practices, learn your stuff, be smart and be consistent. That's really the most important part.

"A lot of guys can come out and make a lot of plays, but if they're not consistent they're not going to play, because you can't be trusted."

Northern Iowa opens the season at 10th-ranked Wisconsin on Sept. 1 and visits Iowa on Sept. 15.