

Donovan Alexander impressing Roughrider coaches

By Ian Hamilton, Leader-Post June 8, 2009



To say Donovan Alexander has caught the attention of Saskatchewan Roughriders defensive backs coach Nelson Martin is an understatement.

Photograph by: Bryan Schlosser, Leader-Post

REGINA -- To say Donovan Alexander has caught the attention of Saskatchewan Roughriders defensive backs coach Nelson Martin is an understatement.

“Donovan Alexander has been the most impressive DB in camp so far. Not rookies — DBs, period,” Martin said after Monday’s training-camp workouts at Mosaic Stadium.

“He’s doing everything I ask him to. He’s making very few if any mistakes, he’s a professional, his work ethic is outstanding, and I’ve got him with the vets from last year and he’s fitting right in. He’s been very impressive and he’s getting better with every practice.”

But that doesn’t mean anything at this point. Alexander, a 24-year-old product of Winnipeg, still has to hold on to that spot — despite injuries to potential competitors Leron Mitchell (leg) and Konrad Wasiela (hamstring).

“The coach came up to me right away and said, ‘You’re only as good as your last practice,’ ” Alexander said. “That was very important. I’m with the No. 1 group for today and my goal every day is to be with the No. 1

group tomorrow. (Martin) just said pretty bluntly that, ‘You have to work pretty hard or we can find somebody else.’ They can make arrangements. They can put an American out there and I could be gone.”

The Roughriders’ plan to use a non-import on the corner flies in the face of conventional CFL wisdom. Only the Montreal Alouettes — with Davis Sanchez — employ a non-import on the corner while other teams usually put a Canadian at safety.

Alexander, a 5-foot-11, 185-pound graduate of the University of North Dakota, said it was “very humbling” that the Roughriders want a Canadian on the corner. With that, however, comes pressure — but Martin wants his young charge to ignore it.

“Being a professional football player, you feel pressure, whether you’re a backup playing special teams or you’re starting on the corner, at half or at safety,” Martin said. “Everybody’s feeling it. He’s feeling it because of the novelty of having a Canadian on the corner. It wouldn’t be any easier for him if he was playing safety.

“(Being a Canadian corner) is unique, but he’s fast and he can cover. His birth certificate doesn’t say, ‘I’m a Canadian, so therefore I’m a safety.’ He’s a football player — a very good football player.”

Martin said Alexander does everything well, which the coach believes is a result of the coaching Alexander received at North Dakota, with the NFL’s Seattle Seahawks (with whom he attended training camp in 2008) and with the Als (with whom he played four games last season).

The Roughriders acquired Alexander in February, sending their second-round picks in 2009 and ’10 to the Als.

“As a football player, it’s always nice to be wanted — and I definitely feel like I was wanted here,” Alexander said. “It’s very humbling, but at the same time it’s a lot of pressure. I don’t want to disappoint. I want to do the best that I can and hopefully I live up to the expectations that they have for me.”

To help himself do that, Alexander is hitting up his mates in the secondary. He’s constantly asking questions of veterans Eddie Davis, Lance Frazier and Omarr Morgan in the hopes of finding out their secrets — which in turn will help him prove he belongs.

“It’s a little tough, but if I work hard, they’ll understand that I’m trying,” Alexander said. “If I sprint to the football whenever I get a chance, they’ll know I’m working hard. I’m just trying to get better every day.”

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