

Griffin next great Wash tailback?

Written by Jim Ecker

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Will Griffin thundered down the track at Kingston Stadium Friday night in the Mississippi Valley Conference meet with a rare combination of speed, power and grace.

He has immense thighs, a powerful torso and a muscular upper body, capable of running the 100-meter dash in 10.8 seconds for Cedar Rapids Washington High School.

He stands 5-foot-8 and 195 pounds, and pity the poor defensive back who tries to tackle him this fall when he becomes the No.1 tailback at Tailback High.

"I expect 2,000 yards out of him," said Alex Carr, Griffin's teammate, friend and mentor.

That's no idle boast by Carr. Andre Dawson rushed for 2,212 yards as Washington's No.1 tailback in 2009 and Carr scooted for 1,911 yards last fall for the Warriors.

"I expect that out of every running back at Washington," Carr remarked. "We've always had a tradition of having good running backs. I don't think anything is going to fall off.

"He's a little different than Andre and I are, but he's just as good."

Dawson looked like he was gliding on a football field, while Carr had great feet and quickness. Griffin, by contrast, can run through a would-be tackler, take numbers and dash to the end zone.

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Washington Coach Tony Lombardi loves his tailbacks. He's given them the ball 30 or 40 times a game, and Griffin appears capable of carrying the load this year.

Griffin was Carr's understudy last fall in Washington's backfield. He carried the ball 55 times for 452 yards during the regular season for a healthy average of 8.2 yards per carry.

Carr, by contrast, averaged 7 yards per crack as one of the fastest tailbacks in the state. Griffin is slightly faster than Carr, despite being 20 pounds heavier.

Pity those poor defensive backs.

Griffin has run the 100-meter dash this season in 10.83 seconds, slightly faster than Carr (10.86). And he's run the 200 in 22.19 seconds, also slightly faster than Carr (22.30).

They are two of the top sprinters in the state, capable of winning either race on a given day and forming 50 percent of Washington's premier 4x100 and 4x200 relays.

In both cases, they are football players first and track athletes second. Carr will join the University of Northern Iowa football team this summer as a defensive back and put his track career on hold, while Griffin makes it clear which sport he prefers.

"Football all the way," he said. "There's nothing like the Friday night lights."

Carr craved those Friday night lights, and he's instilled that same passion in Griffin, who speaks fondly of his buddy.

"Ever since I got here, he's been a big influence on me," Griffin remarked. "He's helped me out with track, football and everything. He tells me stuff I need to do. He tells me to work harder if I

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By the way, Griffin is not satisfied at 195 pounds. He wants more size and even more strength.

"I'm trying to get to 210 for next year," he said. "Just so I can be a sturdier back."

Lombardi thinks 200 pounds will be plenty, but imagine a 5-foot-8, 200-pound tailback who runs the 100 in 10.8 seconds.

Griffin ran well at the Drake Relays last month, tying Carr for second place in the 200 and helping the Warriors place third in the 4x100 relay. That Monday morning, University of Iowa assistant coach Reese Morgan came to Washington High School at 6:30 a.m. to watch Griffin work out in the weight room.

Griffin said he's received questionnaires from college football programs, but no offers yet. That could change.

Carr will be keeping a close eye on Griffin this fall.

"He's got a lot of lower body strength and he does a good job of using it," Carr said. "As big as he is, nobody should be able to tackle him. I expect big things out of him."

Griffin will try to help Washington win its third state track title in a row May 19-21, then will focus on football.

"I'm excited about it," he said. "I'm working really hard for next season. I think we'll have a good team."

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Pity those poor DBs.