

Breitenstein Proud To Be A Terrier

Written by Mike Kelly

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Eric Breitenstein was born to be a football player.

A red-shirt junior at Wofford College, Breitenstein was named the Southern Conference Pre-season Offensive Player of the Year. The All-America, who is also on the Walter Payton Award watch list, amassed a school record 1,639 rushing yards and he scored 22 touchdowns in 2010. His efforts led the Terriers to a share of the Socon championship with Appalachian State and a berth in the NCAA quarterfinals, where Wofford was eliminated by SoCon rival, Georgia-Southern.

"It was a great year," he said. "But I didn't like the way the season ended. We turned the ball over too many times against Georgia Southern. You can't leave the ball on the field in a big game like that."

But the stakes have gotten a little higher this season. And that isn't anything new for Breitenstein, whose had a bulls-eye on his back dating back to his prep days at Watauga High. "God has blessed me with some amazing opportunities in my life," said Breitenstein, a pre-season All-America. "And I've been so fortunate that many things have fallen into place for me. It's a honor to be recognized, but it's only a preseason honor. Now, the team and I have to prove how good we are; we have to produce."

And Breitenstein has had a productive career. A two-time All-State selection at WHS, he led the Pioneers to 23 wins and two Final Four appearances in the NCHSAA Class 4A state playoffs (in 2006 and 2007). And he followed that up by being named to the to the SoCon All-Freshman team (as a true freshman) in 2008. A freakish knee injury (he tore his Posterior Cruciate Ligament) in the second game of the season against Charleston Southern put him on the shelf his sophomore year, but he came back with a vengeance last fall.

"Thank God the injury wasn't real serious," he said. "It was tough. Our team really struggled that season (the Terriers were 3-8), and it was hard to watch. That just motivated me that much more for what happened last year."

And man was he motivated. Breitenstein averaged more than 126 yards a game, he led the SoCon and was fifth in the nation in rushing, he was fourth in the nation in scoring with 22 touchdowns, and he also tied the school record with eight 100-plus rushing games in 2010.

"Dane Romero really helped me when I got here my freshman year," Breitenstein said. "He was an All-America, but he was so encouraging and helpful. I guess he never really looked at me as a threat to take his job. He really taught me how to prepare myself to play successfully at this level. And he was also preparing me to take over for him when he left."

And Breitenstein was an excellent student. He's picked up right where Romero left off in 2008. But Breitenstein, modest as always, deflects the praise and gives it all to his offensive line.

"Those are the guys that made last year possible," he said., "I wouldn't have gained all those yards without them busting their tails up front. They really did a great job. Their hard work made my job a lot easier.

"And our offense really focused on the fullback position last season. It gave me a lot of chances to touch the ball. I'm grateful, and being named preseason player of the year on offensive is great. Not just for me, but for our program in general. Remember, we have the defensive player of the year (Ameet Pall) on our team as well. It raises the bar for our team, that's for sure."

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And Wofford College was the perfect fit for Breitenstein. Head coach Mike Ayers, who took over the program in 1988, wanted Breitenstein so badly that he put a scholarship offer on the table during the spring semester of his junior year at WHS. It turned out to be wise move.

"Coach Ayers is a good christian man," Breitenstein said. "And I really love playing here. A lot of our coaches have been with this program nearly 20 years or more. That's practically unheard of at the collegiate level today. It's a great atmosphere, and coach Ayers knows the game. He's a great teacher and a great motivator. I couldn't have made a better choice."

Breitenstein will be featured during the halftime segment of Friday's game between WHS and Avery that will be broadcast live on Oldies 100.7 FM beginning at 6:30 p.m. The Terriers open the season Saturday at Presbyterian. The Terriers entertain ASU October 1; they entertain Georgia Southern on November 12.