

Nkang powering through bigger competition

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Game one, second quarter. There's a certain *mano a mano* poetry about it, the way a ball carrier lowers his shoulders and takes aim at a tackler, digging in, getting low, wanting only to ram himself forward, not caring that the line-backer in his way wants nothing so much as to flatten him in a resounding blow. In that brief moment, one body slamming against another, it's a collision of wills, one of which must be broken.

BAM . . . the noise of the crowd in response.

Rumblin', stumblin', bumbling' down the field, as ESPN's Chris Berman would say. Ball clenched tightly by two hands, motoring on legs not yet bruised and bloodied by tackle after tackle, the veins in his forearms rising above the skin, Elon's freshman fullback Chad Nkang bursts into the end zone after a 32-yard run.

But the glory of touchdown runs isn't what keeps him coming

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—Chad Nkang, running back

back to the game.

“For me it's the physical aspect of it. You have sports like basketball and stuff, where if you push somebody you get a personal foul,” Nkang said. “There's nothing wrong with that, but football, just the physical aspect of it, how much your team trains shows out there, being able to take hits, things like that keep me coming back, and love for the game.”

Nkang's toughness was drilled into him from an early age. Growing up as the youngest of three children in Hyattsville, Md., Nkang played youth football with his older brother, playing up a weight class because his mother didn't want the two brothers separated.

The team lost only twice all year, once in the championship

game. Now, Nkang is in a similar situation, once again playing against athletes older than him.

“If I could do it then, then I can do it now,” he said. “That's a thing I tell myself every now and then.”

Later, Nkang encountered another individual who wouldn't settle for anything less than smash-mouth football from his running backs, his high school football coach. A coach who, after every practice, made the linemen run a mile. In Nkang's senior year coach Roy had him running with them.

“Coach Roy, before he came to coach for high school, he was in the Marines,” he said. “He doesn't believe in juking and all that fancy stuff. Our drills were to make a cut and run up the field. The most important thing [to him] was how

many yards can you get after you get hit. He always told us to keep our feet moving.”

After holding his own against bigger, stronger kids in youth football and the experience of being coached by a mile-after-practice Marine, you'd think a guy would be pretty tough. Enter the running backs coach.

“Our running backs coach had this little thing called ‘Camp Running backs,’” Nkang said. “He used to have this thing where we would run up and down a hill with someone on our back. So, I went through a lot trying to prepare for the next level. At the time I didn't understand why he was doing it, but now, since he's not here, I just have to use what he taught me.”

If you think those people didn't influence Nkang, check out one of the Phoenix practices. Late in a practice, he's already been going for an hour and a half. Coming out of the backfield to make a block, he spots a teammate on defense, and hits him square in the numbers. In an instant the teammate has been knocked off his feet and thrown to the ground. Ohs and ahs resound from the offensive and defensive second teams watching the play. At least he doesn't have to run a mile after practice.

Not bad for a player recruited to play linebacker.

“They recruited me as a linebacker, and a couple of days before the season started coach [Al] Seagraves called me and told me they were looking at me as a fullback now,” Nkang said. “It wasn't the biggest transition, but back in high school we used to run a different kind of offense where I was down in a two point stance.”

Coaches aren't the only influence in Nkang's life. Nkang's family has also shaped his values. His mother is from Trinidad.

“I have just a little bit of family there,” he said. “The ones that I do know, we're pretty close. I've been [to Trinidad] once but that was when I was younger. I know a couple of them. Maybe a couple of years ago my mom's sister and her children came from Trinidad and lived with us for probably eight months to get on their feet until



Tim Rosner / Photo Editor

Elon's true freshmen running back, Chad Nkang, is the second leading rusher on 299 yards with 60 carries.

she got a job and they moved out on their own. So I'm really close to them. In the long run the people that you can depend on is family. You might have close friends, but the old saying is true. Blood is thicker than water.”

Beside football, one of Nkang's favorite things to do isn't what you'd expect from a football player.

“I would say either drawing or talking to family back home. At first, before I was coming to school for football, I was going to go to arts school,” he said. “Most people think that a big football player wouldn't sit down and draw something.”

Now the season is winding down and the tackles are taking their toll.

“For me it's the legs because the upper body I can defend,” Nkang said. “Pretty much I can dodge. A lot of times when you're getting hit my one or two people they go for the legs so you can't gain yards.”

Don't expect any on field artistry from this fullback though. He's still running right at defenders. . . *mano a mano* . . . it's poetic.

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