

On his own, Berry succeeds in football, track

Ninth leading rusher in Oregon history

By Cam Sivesind
Emerald Sports Reporter

No one can say they helped Latin Berry get where he is today. The senior fullback for Oregon has done it all on his own.

The 5-foot-10, 207 pound Berry has not had a storybook athlete's life, with the father who showed him how to catch a football and the mother who fed him his vegetables to grow big and strong.

"I've basically been on my own since I've gotten here and a couple of years before in high school too, so as much as family I haven't had any kind of support like that," Berry said. "I have had to depend on myself in terms of money and making myself be successful. I never had the father and the mother to say look out for this and look out for that."

Athletics has always been Berry's avenue toward success,

and has allowed him to find a new family in his Duck teammates.

"The team is basically my family. People always say things like that, 'this is my family this is all I got,'" Berry said. "In my case that is basically true. I don't have a lot of friends or nothing like that. The people I associate with are basically people on the team."

Berry, who is currently ninth on Oregon's all-time rushing list, has been a fiery competitor from the beginning.

"I've had problems in terms of doing things for fun because as a kid I always felt that I had to excel," Berry said. "I had to be one of the best. It never was just fun for me."

"I was setting the base for my future. That was going to be my income."

Being on his own for so long without that family support behind him has made Berry an even tougher competitor above

and beyond the natural instincts he was born with.

The 1,548 yards Berry has gained in his four-year stint with Oregon not only put him ahead of Mel Renfro's 1961-63 career rushing mark, but has him knocking on the door of Tony Cherry's eighth place total of 1,575 yards in 1984-85. That could easily be done with the Independence Bowl remaining.

"That makes me feel good because you want to do something to be remembered and to have your name in the book," Berry said. "People are going to look at that for a while, and you hope for a while it will be there, and they'll see Latin and they can say who is he and what did he do, what kind of person was he."

For the season, the California native racked up 520 yards on 92 carries for a 5.7 yards per carry mark and a seventh place ranking among Pacific 10 Conference running backs. Berry was second in yards gained among Pac-10 fullbacks.

Berry's totals would have undoubtedly been higher had he not missed two games because of injuries. A knee injury sidelined Berry early in the season making for some rough times.

"It was tough to overcome injuries this year because I was a senior and it was supposedly a serious injury. It was to the knee and all running backs dread that," Berry said. "But I just stayed positive and realized that I wasn't the first person this ever happened to. I was lucky enough to be able to come back and I just thought 'well I'm going to play again.'"

A shoulder injury at last Saturday's practice has Berry listed as questionable for seeing action in the Ducks' appearance in the Independence Bowl. Berry is confident he will be there and playing.

"I popped it out Saturday. I'm not having a lot of problems with it right now, so that's good. The game's not for two weeks, so I'll be ready by then," Berry said.

And just how does it feel to be going to a bowl game?

"It feels great actually. I've never been to one obviously and quite a few players in the past haven't been to one," Berry said. "I think we're going out in style. We're seniors and



Photo by Mark Vlen

Latin Berry has become one of the best Oregon athletes in history, competing in both football and track

we got a bowl bid and a seven win-season. A lot of good things have happened this year."

Individually, Berry has improved steadily over his career. Berry gained 291 yards his freshman year, 313 as a sophomore, 424 last year and 520 so far this year. That has made for a more enjoyable season for Berry this year.

"I think a lot of maturity and having fun has helped out a lot. In the past, it was hard to have fun because you're always fighting for a position and you have to fight to stay healthy during the season and practicing and stuff like that," Berry said. "This year, my senior year, everything just came together. It was a lot more fun."

A new offensive scheme for Oregon this year where the fullback was more involved also al-

lowed Berry to gain a few more yards and strut his stuff.

"Getting the ball helped a lot. Basically our offense was two tailbacks or two running backs in the backfield instead of a tailback and a fullback. So that was fun," Berry said. "I got the ball a little more than I had in the past and got a few more chances to show that I can run the ball too. In terms of showing my stuff, I feel I wasn't getting the opportunity."

Berry added it was nice to get a chance to do something besides block. He likes to remind people that he was once a tailback too.

"First of all, I came in as a tailback, many people forget that. I had to get down into a three-point stance and start taking on 230- or 240-pound guys coming in and clobbering me, and what can I say, a lot of the time I lost the battle," Berry

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Friday, December 8, 1989