

Player: Different roles taught Burnett how to study game

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denced by the state championship he earned as a part of the 4x200-meter relay team at his Colorado high school, Burnett knows how to run.

"His quickness is his greatest ability," Arizona head coach Dick Tomey said. "That allows him to get to the ball and make the play. That is so important because our defense basically relies on the linebacker to make the tackle."

His speed has also allowed Burnett to stay in during specialty situations that would normally require linebackers to come out of the game. For Burnett, it gives him a chance to get more tackles and make more plays. It also means more time in the film room.

"I spend every spare moment watching film," Burnett said. "Knowing every little tendency my opponents have makes me so much more effective."

While he has always considered preparation important, Burnett said he actually became a student of the game because he had to play so many roles. It was after a 31-17 loss to Washington, before the Week 5 meeting with Washington State, when Burnett was asked to carry an extra load. He responded with 13 tackles and a sack. It was then he decided what he needed to do.

"I was a good player, but I knew I could become better if I really put my mind to it," Burnett said. "I start my preparation the second after the last game ends. I really focus

my energies on the game."

Burnett has brought not only a physical and mental attitude to the field, but also a steady presence. He has stayed relatively healthy this season in a sea of injuries. In fact, after redshirting the 1994 season with a shoulder injury, Burnett has been one of the steadiest things about the Arizona defense.

"The fact that he has played without injury all year has been tremendous," Tomey said. "He has been doing what he is supposed to do."

As one of the few Wildcat recruits outside of Arizona and California, Burnett is a Denver native who played at Mullen High, a known football powerhouse. He played with Cal's Brandon Willis and Miami quar-

terback Ryan Clement.

Burnett said he was initially forced to attend the private school by his mother rather than attend his neighborhood school. He also said that changed his life. He not only had to concentrate on his studies, but he also met his high school football coach, a man who helped give him a positive male role model — Burnett's father died when he was 12 years old.

"That was the best thing that could have happened to me," Burnett said. "It taught me work ethic, it taught me how to be coachable. It also taught me how to think for myself and to think ahead."

And thinking ahead is what has made the game so easy for "Chess".

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DeYoung: Exciting games may have to be good enough this season

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This is the time when players like Josh Wilcox challenge their teammates "to look themselves in the mirror and say 'What can I do to help the team win?'" For seniors like Wilcox, these next three games mean everything. The bowl games were nice, but it all matters how you go out.

Head coach Mike Bellotti, who guaranteed three wins to finish out the season, knows that in a year like this, the way the season ends is crucial.

"It matters much more how you finish than how you start," he said. "If you finish well I think you can take pride in what you've done, and we're really working hard toward that."

Fans would love to see the Ducks finish with a three-game winning streak. After all, they have been spoiled the last two seasons with exciting games and runs at the conference championship. People came out to the games to see players like Jeremy Asher, Chad Cota, Alex Molden, Rich Ruhl, Danny O'Neil, Ricky Whittle and Cristin McLemore.

These players may all be gone, but there are new ones who want to kick Arizona's ass this weekend. They want to play an exciting game, and they want to go 3-0 in the next three games.

The offense is set to break records this season. They may not be winning, but if scoring makes a good game then the Ducks have had some great ones. Two overtime games, two games scoring more than 40 points and every game scoring at least two touchdowns — what else can you ask for?

Wins. Plain and simple. The team is asking for them, too. And inevitably that will be the only thing that will make everybody happy.

The seniors, who are playing their last football games as Ducks, want to win. The fans, who for the most part have stuck by Oregon's side, want to see the Ducks win. The only ones who don't want to see Oregon win are the Wildcats.

With so little on the line this weekend, the Ducks could roll over and die. Or they could go out and play another exciting game just like they have played all season long.

My money is on the latter.

Andrea DeYoung is the assistant sports editor for the Oregon Daily Emerald. Her views do not necessarily reflect those of the paper.