

Big Kat can't avoid spotlight

Andy Katzenmoyer can't escape the notoriety this season has brought him

By Rusty Miller
The Associated Press

COLUMBUS — Pursuit is part and parcel of Andy Katzenmoyer, top-ranked Ohio State's premier linebacker.

Opposing coaches gush over the 6-foot-4, 255-pounder's speed and lateral movement as he sorts through blockers like rag dolls before arriving at the ball carrier with a thunderous hit.

He roams the field, creating havoc and knocking offenses out of synch. Running plays are designed to avoid him. Receivers pray they don't run through his coverage area.

But just as he pursues on the field, Katzenmoyer feels he is pursued off it.

"I can't do anything without it being known," the Butkus Award-winning junior said in a rare interview. "If I go out to eat, I hear about it for two weeks. It's difficult, so I just keep to myself and keep to the people I know I can trust."

Katzenmoyer feels he's been burned by the public's demand to know all it can about him. He seldom speaks with the media, and skipped a national conference call this week to discuss Saturday's game against No. 7 Penn State. His reason? He says some of his troubles have been blown out of proportion.

In August, Katzenmoyer revealed that he had to pass three classes — AIDS awareness, golf and music — in order to be eligible for the 1998 season.

Sports Illustrated declared Ohio State No. 1 — only if Katzenmoyer made the grade. The magazine pro-

filed him inside, right after a two-page photo out of an old war movie, featuring a crazed Katzenmoyer with limp bodies and broken goalposts in his wake.

Katzenmoyer's mother, Dianne, was asked if she was saddened by the low priority her son assigned to education.

"Absolutely not," she said. "We sent him to college to learn how to earn a living."

Katzenmoyer was quoted as saying, "After next year, hopefully I'll be making millions and millions of dollars."

He eventually passed the classes to remain eligible, but not before dozens of national publications had mocked or vilified him for his class load.

The Buckeyes are 3-0. Katzenmoyer was at his best against No. 21 Missouri, recording a career-high 12 tackles.

"I'm playing like I always have," he said after the game. It was one of only four times he has met with reporters this season.

Coach John Cooper has little tolerance for Katzenmoyer's plea that he has no private life.

"He better get used to that," Cooper said. "That goes with it. The better player you are, the more notoriety you're going to have and the more recognition you're going to get."

Katzenmoyer's popularity remains high in his hometown, however.

With no major-league football, basketball or baseball teams, Columbus has to reach to the college level to find its heroes. Katzenmoyer is the people's choice.

Because Ohio State's No. 45 jersey was worn by the only two-time Heisman Trophy winner, Archie Griffin, it has long been a common

sight around the city.

But these days, it is worn by hundreds of kids who never heard of Griffin, Woody Hayes or "three yards and a cloud of dust."

While still being recruited by Ohio State, Katzenmoyer mentioned that he wanted to wear 45, the same number he had worn at Westerville South High School. Cooper checked with Griffin, now an associate athletic director at Ohio State.

"Hopefully, he'll make 'em forget who wore it before," Griffin said.

So Katzenmoyer, literally and figuratively, replaced a Buckeyes great. But controversy came along with the jersey.

On his official recruiting trip — not much of a trip, since he grew up just a few miles from campus — a policeman walking down the street looked in the window of a bar and saw a young, square-jawed kid sitting at a table. On the table was a beer bottle. Katzenmoyer was charged and later convicted of underage possession of alcohol.

On the field, things went smoothly. Katzenmoyer became the first Ohio State linebacker to start his first game as a freshman. And the Buckeyes have produced linebackers such as Chris Spielman, Pepper Johnson, Tom Cousineau and Randy Gradishar.

Katzenmoyer was a second-team All-American on a team that would finish No. 2 in the country and earn Ohio State's first Rose Bowl victory in 23 years.

Although his sacks dropped from 12 to 2 and tackles for a loss from 23 to 13, Katzenmoyer was acclaimed the best linebacker in the country last season as a sophomore. He moved up to first-team All-America.

Sports briefs

Griffin catch earns play of the week

Damon Griffin's juggling catch, followed by a determined run resulting in a 35-yard touchdown vs. Stanford in Saturday's 62-28 victory, has earned offensive plays-of-the-week honors for the fourth week of the college football season in a program co-sponsored by Compaq Computer Corporation and the College Sports Information Directors of America (CoSIDA).

A select panel of judges picked the play from numerous entries that were submitted nationally at the Division I, II and III levels. Compaq recognizes schools for top offensive and defensive plays in college football. This is the only program of its kind that assembles judges and ranks the best plays in college football at all levels of competition.

Oregon earned "Compaq Offensive Play of the Week" recognition for the second quarter Akili Smith-to-Griffin reception which gave the Ducks a 35-7 cushion with 6:09 remaining in the first half. After running a quick slant pattern, Griffin momentarily juggled a pass at the 25 yard line, then ripped it away from Stanford defensive back Brian Taylor and gained control at the 20. Griffin broke free from the grasp of two other Cardinal players en route to the touchdown. It highlighted a five-catch, 118-yard day for Griffin, who helped lead Oregon to its first 4-0 start since 1988.

The "Compaq Defensive Play of the Week" belongs to California's Deltha O'Neal, a tailback-turned-cornerback. O'Neal picked off Washington

State quarterback Steve Birnbaum and returned it 76 yards for a score, increasing the Bears' lead to 17-7 with 8:40 left in the game. Cal eventually triumphed, 24-14.

Colleges and universities submitting the winning entries each receive \$1,000 worth of computer equipment from Compaq Computer Corporation.

Compaq's "Plays of the Week" program will include weekly highlights of football and men's and women's basketball.

Women picked third by Pac-10 coaches

The Pac-10 women's basketball coaches have chosen Oregon to finish third in the conference for the 1998-99 season, garnering 77 points, including two first-place votes.

UCLA, with five returning starters from last year's NCAA Tournament team, have been tabbed as the team to beat, earning 94 points, including five first-place votes.

The Duck squad is coming off a 17-10 overall record (13-5 Pac-10) a year ago, advancing to the NCAA Tournament for the fifth-consecutive year.

Head coach Jody Runge enters the 1998-99 season with four starters and seven letterwinners returning from a year ago, including center Jenny Mowe who sat out last season due to injury but averaged 8.3 points and 7.0 rebounds her freshman year. Runge, who enters her sixth season at the helm of the Ducks, has led Oregon to the NCAA Tournament in each of her five seasons, posting a career coaching record of 95-47.

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