

# Latimer

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"It was just kind of a dream," Latimer says of his final season. "As I was going on, the confidence kept building, and pretty soon it just felt like I could do anything. It was three months later and I was like, man, I rushed for 3,000 yards."

In fact, his yardage total was 10th-best all-time for high school running backs nationally. Although he was eventually named an all-American by BlueChip Illustrated after his senior season, Latimer was feeling the pressure of being a star before, during and after his attempts to break the records.

Latimer began to feel the heat initially when people began questioning the credibility of his record during the season. Air Academy had an infamous rushing attack, and Latimer was a member of three consecutive squads that ran for at least 3,000 yards.

"A lot of people thought I was just getting a lot of carries, but my sophomore year we rushed for 3,000 yards as a team; it was just spread between three other tailbacks," Latimer says. "Then my junior year, I had about 1,500 yards and our other tailback had about 1,600 yards. We had always been rushing for 3,000 yards as a team, it just so happened that I was the only back that year."

And what a year it was, as Latimer twice ran for six touchdowns and piled up at least 300 yards in a game six times. But as the year progressed, the intensity of approaching a state record be-

gan to take its toll, and Latimer entered the last game of the season just three yards short of the magical 3,000.

"I didn't break the record until the fourth quarter, and I had 30-something carries," Latimer says. "I just remember, probably about the fourth quarter sometime, I knew I hadn't broken it yet but I didn't know how many yards I had. I was on the sidelines frustrated, with tears in my eyes, and was like, man, I'm never going to do this."

He did of course, and in the

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**Damon Griffin**  
UO wide receiver

process earned himself a scholarship to Oregon. With the Ducks facing the graduation of Dino Philyaw in 1995 and the potential loss of Ricky Whittle to the NFL the following season, Duck fans were more than happy to see a 3,000-yard rusher amongst the redshirts.

But with the addition of McCullough in 1996, Latimer faced the prospect of spending two years almost entirely on the bench.

"A lot of guys come in with a lot of hype, but he has to come up and show he's for real," Oregon receiver Damon Griffin says. "I think he just hasn't had the op-

portunity to show what he can do. I've foreseen the potential since he came here, it's just that he hasn't had the opportunity."

Now, with Droughns out and senior Kevin Parker sidelined with a sprained ankle, Latimer has a chance to show Oregon fans what they were getting three years ago.

"Derien is a strong runner, an inside runner more than a pure speed guy to the outside," Oregon head coach Mike Bellotti says. "He has good stop-start ability, he's capable of breaking tackles and he has a good burst of speed through the hole. Those are his strengths, plus he's become a more accomplished receiver, which I'm proud of."

But Latimer credits an even greater strength as the key to his success.

"So many stories in the Bible talk about people having a time plan for what God's going to do to our lives, and God has a time frame, and it's never the same," Latimer says. "God's just taught me to be patient, and whether that means be patient until next game or next year, I'm going to be patient."

It appears Latimer's patience has paid off and that he's reached the end of his long road to starting at Oregon.

"God's given me a chance now, and I've got to take advantage of it," Latimer says. "You wait for times like these."

He might even prove that Oregon isn't beginning the 1998 season A.D.; they've just been playing in 1998 B.L.

That's B.L. as in Before Latimer.

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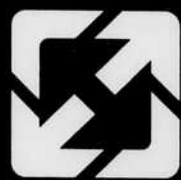
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