



Adam Jones Emerald

Onterio Smith (2) is one of several players with an early shot at the Heisman Trophy, but he'll have to maintain his impressive numbers of the first two games to keep up with the likes of Marshall quarterback Byron Leftwich and other hopefuls.

Never too early for hype; Smith in Heisman race

Onterio Smith is one of several early-season favorites for the Heisman Trophy, given annually to the nation's top player

Peter Hockaday
Sports Editor

Onterio Smith needs a nickname. You could call Eugene "O-Town." You could go simple and say "O-Baby." You could go with the phrase uttered by many opposing defenders and say "O-No."

Just don't call him "Onterio Heisman."

As much as Smith's Heisman campaign is different from Joey Harrington's last year — in the sense that Smith isn't being promoted for the award at all while Harrington had a 100-foot Heisman advertisement in the middle of New York last season — Smith may deserve to be mentioned for the award.

Smith already has been mentioned. He was among the Heisman favorites listed by Sports Illustrated, and he's currently sixth on ESPN.com's list of Heisman hopefuls. Smith is also one of a handful of players on the Emerald's Heisman Watch list. Without further ado, here are some players to track this season for college football's top award.

1. Byron Leftwich, QB, Marshall. He's at the top of many pundits' lists, but there's reason for this small-college signal-caller to garner that attention. In his opening game last week, Leftwich passed for 469 yards and ran for 58 more. He threw four touchdowns and ran for one more.

He's for real. The only thing that could hamper

Leftwich is his schedule. If he wants to win the Heisman, Marshall might need to win all its games, including a showdown with Virginia Tech on Thursday night. Win that game, and Leftwich might have his trophy sewn up; the toughest game for the Herd after that is a Nov. 12 matchup with Miami. That's Miami (Ohio), of course.

2. Ken Dorsey, QB, Miami. One of two returning Heisman finalists, Dorsey had a showdown last week with the other returnee, Rex Grossman. Dorsey's 202 yards and four touchdowns were enough to move Miami ahead of Florida and Dorsey far ahead of Grossman in the Heisman polls.

Dorsey probably got passed over in favor of Eric Crouch last season because of his youth. But now Dorsey is a junior and will get a serious look from voters. If Miami has a chance to repeat as national champions, then Dorsey will have a chance for a repeat trip to New York, and this year it might be him up on stage at the end of the Heisman ceremony.

3. Onterio Smith, TB, Oregon. Smith has proven to be a workhorse in the season's first two games, carrying the ball 28 times against Mississippi State and 35 times in a full game's action against Fresno State. He had exactly 124 rushing yards in both those games, but had 144 all-purpose yards against MSU and 143 against FSU.

Smith still hasn't broken out the big runs that helped him to a 1,000-yard season last year as a backup to Maurice Morris, but the junior must be licking his chops at the upcoming games against Idaho and Portland State. Smith's status as a runner may

help him stand out among the same old quarterbacks on the Heisman list.

4. Jason Gesser, QB, Washington State. Gesser's "Gess Who 4 Heisman?" banner in Dusty, Wash., was a joke, but his on-field campaign is far from funny. The senior signal-caller has thrown for 462 yards and four touchdowns in two games this season, completing 64.4 percent of his passes.

The quarterback is another player in the mold of Leftwich, in that he'll need the Cougars to be successful — Pac-10 title successful — to have a shot, in order to play up his leadership qualities. Washington State's Pac-10 schedule is littered with hidden mines, so that may be harder than it sounds.

5. Chris Simms, QB, Texas. In the tradition of decent quarterbacks getting mentioned simply because they come from football powerhouses that win bunches of games (see: Eric Crouch), Simms deserves at least a trip to New York if the Longhorns do well in the Big XII this year.

But does he deserve the Heisman? Probably not. He threw for 187 yards in the Texas season-opener last week. He averaged 217 yards per game last season, and he'll need to improve on that number to put his hands on the trophy.

Honorable Mentions. Some other players deserve early-season watching: Charles Rogers, WR, Michigan State; Lee Suggs, TB, Virginia Tech; Seneca Wallace, QB, Iowa State; Eli Manning, QB, Ole Miss; Willis McGahee, TB, Miami.

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