

SPORTS

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AP Photo/Timothy J. Gonzalez
Oregon running back Royce Freeman carries the ball against Oregon State in Corvallis in November. After the trials of last season, Freeman appears to have emerged with two things: a college degree and a bright outlook.

Armed with a degree, Ducks' Freeman looks to senior season

By ANNE M. PETERSON
 Associated Press

EUGENE — After the trials of last season, Oregon running back Royce Freeman appears to have emerged with two things: a college degree and a brighter outlook.

The senior, who opted to stay with the Ducks rather than enter the NFL draft this spring, heads into the season with 936 career rushing yards to go to reach Lamichael James' Oregon record of 5,082.

"I'm comfortable in my own skin. I'm a senior, I've been here before, I've seen it all, been to a national championship," he said. "I feel more than comfortable being around these guys and playing beside them — and that was a huge reason for me coming back."

Freeman completed a degree this summer in general social science with an emphasis on crime, law and society, something that was important in addition to "finishing on a better note than I did last year."

Freeman was the Ducks' leading rusher last year with 945 yards in 11 games. He was widely considered a Heisman candidate going into the season, but he was held back by injury.

Oregon was struggling overall, too. The Ducks finished 4-8 overall and at the bottom of the Pac-12 North standings at 2-7 — snapping a run of nine straight winning seasons in conference play. Three days after the season ended with a loss to Oregon State in the Civil War game, the Ducks fired coach Mark Helfrich.

Oregon went on to hire charismatic coach Willie Taggart, who spent the previous four years turning around the program at South Florida. The Bulls flipped from a 2-10 record in his first year to a 10-2 mark last season and a spot in the Birmingham Bowl.

"Coach Taggart and his staff bring energy every day," Freeman said. "And they demand the same from us."

Taggart has been impressed with Freeman.

"He's excited. He's ready to go. I've seen a big difference in him and his attitude and the way he's doing things and the way he's working. Really excited about it, and glad that he decided to come back," Taggart said.

In his first two seasons, Freeman has epitomized the speed in Oregon's hyper-drive offense.

The native Californian burst on the scene as a freshman, rushing for 1,365 yards — a Pac-12 true freshman record — and 18 touchdowns. He also caught a touchdown pass. As a result, he was named the league's freshman of the year on offense.

He followed that up with 1,836 yards — an Oregon single-season record — and 17 touchdowns as a sophomore.

Freeman currently has 44 rushing touchdowns for his career, trailing James' 53. But he insists he's not paying attention to the numbers, or closing in on James' lofty records.

"THE WHOLE TIME I WAS IN THERE I WANTED TO BE A BASEBALL SCOUT. AND I REMEMBER PROBABLY MY FRESHMAN YEAR, SOPHOMORE YEAR, I WAS LIKE I REALLY DON'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING BUT THAT. SO WHY AM I TRYING TO ALMOST TALK MYSELF OUT OF IT AND FIND A DIFFERENT PATH?"



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson
Amanda Hopkins talks with others before a baseball game between the Seattle Mariners and the Baltimore Orioles in Seattle. Hopkins, 24, is about to complete her second year as an area scout for the Mariners, a position that has made her a part of baseball history. She is the first full-time female baseball scout in more than a half-century, breaking through a barrier that required diligence on her end and willingness by the Mariners organization.

First female baseball scout in 50 years

Hopkins eyes Southwest region for Mariners

By TIM BOOTH
 Associated Press

SEATTLE — Nearly two years ago, Amanda Hopkins' phone rang. It was a call she dreamt of receiving, one that broke barriers and made her a part of baseball history.

Almost immediately, her competitiveness took over.

"She put a sign up on her bedroom door saying, 'Stay out, we're opponents,'" recalled her father, Ron Hopkins, a special assistant to the general manager for the Pittsburgh Pirates. "In other words, my bedroom is off limits to you, there is info in here. I got a kick out of it."

The 24-year-old Hopkins is now about to complete her second year as an area scout for the Seattle Mariners. Her responsibility is the Four Corners area of the Southwest, taking her to destinations like Greeley, Colorado, and Hobbs, New Mexico, two of the more challenging places to get to from her base in the Phoenix area.

She is also the first full-time female baseball scout in more than 50 years, breaking through a barrier that required diligence on her end and willingness by the Mariners.

Yet, Hopkins does not view herself through that prism or want to be viewed as a trailblazer. She's a scout. That's it.

"I think if anything people are more shocked sometimes when I will go meet with a player in the office or something like that. Maybe they just know, hey the Mariners' scout is coming in and they're like, 'Oh.' That kind of thing," Hopkins said. "It's usually more of like a shocked look. But then they're more curious, they're like, 'How'd you get into this?' And they kind of like want a brief rundown of how I got to where I am. All the players, all the coaches, are incredibly respectful to me."

While she is believed to be the first full-time baseball scout since Edith Houghton in the middle of the 20th century, Hopkins has been around baseball since she was a child.

She traveled with her father to games, regularly making trips to the Alaskan Summer League or the Cape Cod League in summers. She would run the radar gun and pass along the speeds to her dad when she was as young as 8. It was obvious early on she possessed the same critical eye as her dad.

"She learned at an early age the difference between a curveball and a slider. As she got older it just sort of grew on her," Ron said.

"I'd go out with my dad and they'd be like 'Oh what do you want to do when you grow up?' And I'd tell them, 'I want to be a base-

ball scout,'" Amanda said. "It's like this little girl telling them that and it's like, 'Oh that's cute. She wants to be like her dad.' But really, I think it was kind of like she'll grow out of it. That's kind of what everyone thought."

Instead, her passion for the job only grew. She majored in psychology while playing softball at Central Washington University, yet that failed to satisfy the desire to be around baseball.

"The whole time I was in there I wanted to be a baseball scout," Hopkins said. "And I remember probably my freshman year, sophomore year, I was like I really don't want to do anything but that. So why am I trying to almost talk myself out of it and find a different path?"

Hopkins served as an intern in Seattle's baseball operations department in the summer of 2014, but worked mostly with amateur scouting. A year later, she was sponsored by the Mariners to attend scout school and about a month after returning she got the offer.

"I was a little nervous myself because I knew she was going to be breaking a little bit of a barrier and she was pretty young," said Tom McNamara, who hired Hopkins and is currently a special assistant to the general manager with the Mariners. "I went into Jerry (Dipoto's) office and I had a lump in my throat and I said, 'This is what I want to do.' And he was all for it. He didn't even hesitate."

Raiders' Lynch avoids questions about anthem

Running back chose to sit

Associated Press

NAPA, Calif. — Oakland Raiders running back Marshawn Lynch spoke to reporters Thursday for the first time in training camp and avoided questions regarding his decision to sit during the national anthem before last week's preseason game against the Arizona Cardinals.

Not long after the Raiders broke camp following their final practice, Lynch spoke briefly about his charity work in Oakland including an upcoming backpack giveaway for needy children, a business forum for youths he recently held and his thoughts on playing in the Coliseum this week.

When the topic turned to the choice he made to sit during the national anthem, something Seattle Seahawks defensive end Michael Bennett also did before a preseason game in Los Angeles, Lynch responded with cryptic answers.

One reporter addressed the situation as the elephant in the room when questioning Lynch.

"I think the elephant just left the room because a little mouse ran in here," Lynch said. "Didn't they say elephants are scared of mice or something? That (expletive) left the room, cousin."



AP Photo/Rick Scuteri
Oakland Raiders running back Marshawn Lynch (24) sits during the national anthem prior to the team's NFL preseason football game against the Arizona Cardinals in Glendale, Ariz.

Pressed further, Lynch remained evasive.

Asked if Raiders coach Jack Del Rio gives his players space to be themselves, Lynch instead referred to a play.

"Yeah because on doctor-24, it's a designed way that you're supposed to run it but I have all freedom to go any way that I choose to run it," Lynch said. "I would say, yes."

Lynch was later asked if it mattered to him whether or not fans wearing his jersey during Saturday's preseason game against the Los Angeles Rams will sit or stand during the anthem.

"When we run 74 or something like that, where I have to scan and read on both sides, that is pretty difficult," Lynch said. "For the most part, I'm a veteran so I can make it work."

NFL PRESEASON

- Minnesota Viking at Seattle Seahawks
- Today, 7 p.m. TV: NFLN

Del Rio said earlier this week that he had spoken to Lynch about the situation and that Lynch told him it was something he had been doing for 11 years.

There has been mixed reaction around the NFL regarding Lynch and Bennett's decision to sit during the anthem. Former Green Bay Packers tight end Jermichael Finley called the move "selfish" and a "marketing tool," while Commissioner Roger Goodell has asked fans to be more understanding of the players' decision.

Lynch did turn serious for a few moments while talking about his work in the local community. The 31-year-old has said repeatedly that his decision to come out of retirement after a year away was based primarily on the opportunity to play in his hometown of Oakland.

"It's truly a blessing and just to have the opportunity to go and do that is a good ... feeling," Lynch said. "I plan on continuing to do what I do in the community. It'll probably be that now that I'm here, more people that are in the community might actually come out and support what it is that we've got going on."

SEASON OPENER

- Southern Utah Thunderbirds at Oregon Ducks
- Sept. 2, 5:15 p.m. TV: PACN