

College Football

Sooner teammates are rare pair of Heisman Trophy finalists

By RALPH D. RUSSO
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Together, Baker Mayfield and Dede Westbrook were practically unstoppable for Oklahoma. Mayfield is one of the most productive quarterbacks in college football and something of a magician in the pocket, escaping trouble to make something out of nothing. Westbrook is a big play waiting to happen, a receiver who can turn just about any play into long touchdown.

A case could be made that neither would have been a Heisman Trophy finalist without the other, and Westbrook, for one, is happy to have a friend around during a hectic week on the awards circuit.

“I would be so much more nervous than I am if he wasn’t here. It’s just good to always look over and see him smiling and me just smiling back at him,” Westbrook said.

The two Sooners, along with Michigan’s Jabrill Peppers and Louisville’s Lamar Jackson, met with reporters at a hotel in midtown Manhattan on Friday, not long after arriving in New York City. They were all in Atlanta on Thursday night at the College Football Hall of Fame for an awards show that was on ESPN.

82nd Heisman Trophy Presentation

- Today, 5 p.m.
- Finalists: QB Lamar Jackson, soph., Louisville; LB Jabrill Peppers, jr., Michigan; QB Deshaun Watson, jr., Clemson; QB Baker Mayfield, jr., Oklahoma; WR Dede Westbrook, sr., Oklahoma.



Heisman finalists from Oklahoma Baker Mayfield, left, and Dede Westbrook, pose with the award in New York on Friday.

AP Photo/Richard Drew

Jackson took home the Maxwell Player of the Year and Westbrook won the Biletnikoff Award as the nation’s top receiver.

The other finalist, Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson, won the Davey O’Brien, beating out Jackson for the award that goes to the most outstanding quarterback. Watson was not scheduled to get to New York until Saturday. He had to stop in Baltimore to pick up the Johnny Unitas Golden Arm award, which goes to the best upperclassman quarterback.

The biggest prize gets handed out Saturday, and Jackson is the favorite.

Westbrook and Mayfield are the first teammates to be finalists since 2005, when Southern California’s Reggie Bush and Matt Leinart finished one and three in the voting, respectively. The last time teammates finished in the top five of the Heisman voting was 2008, when another Big 12 pass-catch combo did it. Texas Tech quarterback Graham Harrell and wide receiver Michael Crabtree finished a distant fourth and fifth, respectively, behind Oklahoma’s Sam Bradford, Texas’ Colt McCoy and Florida’s Tim Tebow.

Mayfield leads the nation in passer efficiency rating and is on pace to break the FBS record at 197.75. He has thrown for 3,669 yards and 38 touchdowns for the Big 12 champions. Mayfield also leads the nation in yards per completion at 11.1, a number helped mightily by Westbrook. The senior is averaging 19.8 yards per catch. His 16 touchdowns have covered an average of 48.8 yards.

“You put in so much work during the offseason,” Mayfield said. “The extra work that Dede and I put in together, with routes, just working on perfecting our craft. It’s kind of like it’s a reward for all the work we put in.”

Westbrook is just happy to be here. He said he does not expect to win and is looking forward to hearing Mayfield’s speech instead of making one himself as he did in Atlanta. Having Mayfield around is not always so calming for Westbrook. Especially when the quarterback was telling him about the millions of TV viewers that were going

to be watching him Thursday night.

“He wasn’t trying to make me nervous. He did make me nervous. And that’s why I told him I’m not nervous now because I know tomorrow I’m not going to be walking up there accepting the Heisman Trophy, that he will,” Westbrook said. “Trust me. I’m going to be in his ear.”

Less than a minute later, Mayfield was in Westbrook’s ear. As the quarterback walked behind his teammate, he gave Westbrook a wet willy the receiver never saw coming.

Mayfield finished fourth in last season’s Heisman voting, but did not receive an invitation to New York. Those are determined by the margin between vote-getters. Never shy to voice his opinions, Mayfield said even though he did not think he was going to win, he was disappointed about not getting to be at the ceremony.

No complaints from Mayfield this year, though. He is enjoying the opportunity and Westbrook is glad to be along for the ride — even if it is just to poke fun at his friend.

“He’s very cool and he can also dance,” Westbrook said. “What I think is when he showers, in the mirror, like I think he practices his dance moves. I don’t have the time to do that.”

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