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Mariota makes good decisions on and off the field

By Mike Street
Special to The Asian Reporter

As the National Football League (NFL) draft draws near, many experts believe that Florida State quarterback Jameis Winston will be chosen first overall. His size and skills represent everything scouts look for in a number-one pick, but Winston has been dogged by issues off the field like allegations of sexual assault and shoplifting, and some teams may not consider drafting him.

The second quarterback likely to be chosen in the draft, Samoan Marcus Mariota, may not match Winston's physical abilities, but his strong character has bolstered his stock among NFL scouts. The overall package that the Heisman-winning Mariota presents — intelligent, mature, modest, and generous — come from his family and Hawaiian and Samoan heritage, after a lifetime of defying expectations and overcoming stereotypes.

As a football player in Hawai'i, Mariota had very few visits from college scouts, who see his island as difficult to visit and lacking in top-level football talent. His Samoan heritage might suggest a football career as a wide-bodied lineman, but Mariota is an elusive, intelligent quarter-



back who can sprint out of the pocket, slip and twist past tacklers, and zip the ball downfield — sometimes all on the same play.

This combination of Mariota's quiet leadership and athletic abilities produced explosive results at the University of Oregon. In his final year under center, Mariota set seven Duck passing records, including total career yards, eclipsing former record-holder Bill Musgrave by

more than 2,000 yards. His 58 passing touchdowns in 2014 similarly demolished the previous Pac-12 record of 41 set by USC's Matt Barkley in 2011. Although he fell short in the National Championship game against the Ohio State Buckeyes, Mariota nonetheless swept the Heisman Trophy balloting, setting a record for being named on the most ballots.

These are the records that everyone notices; often overlooked are his

MULTIFACETED MARIOTA. Oregon Ducks quarterback Marcus Mariota (#8) runs for a touchdown during the National Collegiate Athletic Association PAC-12 Football Championship game against the Arizona Wildcats last year in Santa Clara, California. As a football player in Hawai'i, Mariota had very few visits from college scouts, who see his island as difficult to visit and lacking in top-level football talent. His Samoan heritage might suggest a football career as a wide-bodied lineman, but Mariota is an elusive, intelligent quarterback who can sprint out of the pocket, slip and twist past tacklers, and zip the ball downfield — sometimes all on the same play. (AP Photo/Ric Tapia)

accomplishments off the field. Other star college players make headlines for everything from late-night partying to accepting illegal cash contributions, but Mariota has remained squeaky clean, despite spending the past two seasons under the media microscope.

Some of those in the media criticized Mariota for his easy senior year course-load: two credits of golf and yoga. But he could do that because he'd taken a heavier course-load the previous three years, allowing him to graduate early as a science major.

This was no accident, but a strategic move he and his academic adviser made after his freshman year, just one aspect of the grand plan Mariota set for himself. Mariota's low profile and community ser-

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