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From the Marines to the Gamecocks: Washington getting a shot with USC

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Published: Wednesday, October 22, 2014 at 9:06 p.m.

Michael Washington was a star safety on the Allendale-Fairfax football team in 2004 and had offers from North Carolina State, Clemson and South Carolina.

Washington signed with the Wolfpack, but was not mentally ready to be a member of a college football team. Four years in the military helped changed that.

Instead of enrolling at N.C. State out of high school, Washington enlisted in the Marines. While other members of his recruiting class were playing football, he was learning valuable life lessons while serving in the military.

"It helped me to be more of a team player," Washington said of his time as a Marine. "Coming out, I was kind of a me player; coming out of high school I was all about me. Going into the military, there's a lot of teamwork, so it helped me out a lot."

After his four years in the military, Washington spent a season at South Carolina State as a walk-on defensive end before transferring to South Carolina in 2012. He did not play for the Gamecocks in 2012 or last season, serving as a member of the scout team.

Now in his redshirt junior season, Washington is finally getting a chance to show what he can do. After coming out of high school as a 200-pound safety, Washington is a 240-pound defensive end for the Gamecocks.

South Carolina's defensive ends have struggled this year, and several of Carolina's defensive linemen are banged up.

South Carolina coach Steve Spurrier said last week that Washington was in line for playing time, and he ended up starting in USC's 41-10 win over Furman this past Saturday. Washington found out last Friday that he would get the start.

"It was kind of surprising," he said. "I wasn't nervous to play, it was more like nervous I don't want to mess up for the guys. On defense if one person gets out of their gap something big will happen."

Washington did miss a couple of assignments, but he also recovered a first-quarter fumble in the red zone with USC leading 14-7.

"On the play I had the quarterback, so when the running back went I just swiped for the ball and the next thing I know it was on the ground, so I jumped on it. It was amazing," Washington said.

He finished the game tied for eighth on USC's team with three tackles.

"He is a mature man, obviously, 27 years old," Spurrier said. "He has served duty and he's a mature young man, that's for sure. Hopefully his leadership can maybe help our guys grow up a little bit. He's a good guy to have on the team."

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