

Shon Carson remains patient running back for South Carolina

Willie T. Smith discusses how the Gamecocks are getting ready for the second half of their season.

Richard Breen, Contributing Writer 7:13 p.m. EDT October 16, 2014



(Photo: MYKAL McELDOWNEY/Staff)

COLUMBIA – Action can be hard to come by for a fourth-string running back, but in a sport where the depth chart can get flipped in a hurry, Shon Carson is trying to maximize his attitude and his opportunities.

"Everybody's got to be patient and keep everybody up and keep going and working hard," Carson said after practice this week as he and his University of South Carolina teammates prepared for Saturday's game against Furman.

Carson, a fourth-year junior, has seen more action on kickoffs (nine returns) than in the backfield (eight carries) in six games this season. Even Pharoh Cooper, a Wildcat quarterback and wide receiver, has one more carry than Carson.

But in the third quarter at Kentucky two weeks ago, Carson took a handoff, found a cutback lane, and scampered practically untouched for a 25-yard touchdown.

"The big thing is when they get opportunities, they know, 'Hey, I've got to take advantage of this,'" USC running backs coach Everette Sands said. "That is a very good example."

Juniors Mike Davis and Brandon Wilds see the majority of time at tailback. Gamecocks fans have been calling for David Williams, a highly regarded redshirt freshman, to see more carries as well.

Carson, from the small town of Scranton outside Lake City, might appear to be an afterthought. There are ample examples of how that can change, however.

As a freshman in 2011, Carson suffered a season-ending knee injury, one of four Gamecocks running backs to get hurt, along with Eric Baker, Marcus Lattimore and Kenny Miles. Wilds emerged from fifth-string obscurity and started five games.

Last season, with Davis and Wilds ailing, Carson rushed for 102 yards against Florida.

It's not just a USC issue. A combination of injuries and a suspension recently elevated Georgia freshman Nick Chubb – who underwent thumb surgery in September – from fourth string to starter.

And again this year, Davis and Wilds are struggling with nagging injuries.

"That's life in the SEC and that's why it's good to have three or four deep," Sands said.

The challenge is keeping everyone sharp when they are healthy.

"We just come out here and get better and push each other every day and make each other work hard so we can be one of the best running back groups in the nation," Carson said.

Sands said the competition at running back is positive.

"Even though they might not be getting in there a lot, they have to know what's going on," he said.

"Mental reps," hearing the play calls and visualizing one's participation, are important for backups, Sands said.

The 5-foot-8, 201-pound Carson sees himself as a "scatback" type of runner.

"Hit the hole fast and a little bit of power, but not too much, although I can use power if I need to," he said.

Sands said Carson does a great job as an open-field runner.

"He's got a real good grasp of the offense," Sands said. "I don't have any hesitation to put him in. It's just getting him opportunities."

Perhaps those will come for the Gamecocks (3-3) against Furman (2-4), a team with the top pass defense in the Football Championship Subdivision but which hasn't beaten a Football Bowl Subdivision team since 1999.

"Right now the biggest thing we're looking at this week is we've got to get better," Sands said. "If the opportunities arise where we can get some other guys in, we'll definitely do that."

SATURDAY'S GAME

Furman at South Carolina

Kickoff: noon

TV: SEC Network

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