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Cooper's play has been golden for the Gamecocks

Sorry, Pharoah Cooper. Good nicknames don't stay a secret for long.

Cooper's teammates have begun to refer to the sophomore by an alias this season. The Gamecocks wide receiver broke into a sheepish smile when confronted with the evidence.

"Yeah, they call me 'Gold,'" Cooper confessed.

"They think I'm the chosen one, I guess. I don't know."

Or maybe it's because everything Cooper

has touched lately has turned into gold. Entering the Gamecocks' matchup against Missouri (7:30 p.m. EST, Gamecock IMG Sports Network), the 5'11," 201-pound Cooper leads all USC receivers with 21 receptions. He set new career highs in catches (10) and receiving yards (114) in South Carolina's 48-34 win over Vanderbilt.

He's also given the Gamecocks a dangerous weapon at Wildcat quarterback. With his game-sealing, 70-yard dash against Vanderbilt, Cooper became one of a handful of Gamecocks with multiple 70-yard runs in his career, joining the likes of George Rogers, Steve Wadiak, and Carl Brazell. His 246 snaps far outpace any other offensive skill player.

"I asked him [Monday], 'We're not using you too much, are we?' And he said, 'Coach, I'll be ready.' When he gets his hands on it, he is a very good player. We need to find ways to make sure he's running with it," head coach Steve Spurrier said of Pharoah.

(Or "FAY-row," when run through Spurrier's east Tennessee twang.)

That versatility almost never happened. Despite playing quarterback on a state championship-winning team at Havelock High School in Havelock, N.C., Cooper came to South Carolina with designs on becoming a defensive back. Think Stephon Gilmore more than Bruce Ellington.

That changed a week into preseason camp, when Spurrier noticed Cooper making plays whenever he touched the ball.

"I was catching punts at the time. He saw me catching punts, and he put me on offense," Cooper recalls. To formalize the switch, he changed his Twitter handle from @Pick6Cooper to @KingTutt_chdown.

Cooper came on slowly as a freshman, not catching a pass until the fifth game of the season against Kentucky. He didn't see the field against Georgia or Vanderbilt. Still, Cooper earned a spot on the SEC All-Freshman team for his work running, receiving, and returning kicks. His fourth-down, Wildcat touchdown pass to Brandon Wilds provided one of the seminal moments in South Carolina's 31-17 win over Clemson.

The expectations continued to rise in Spring drills, when Cooper was named the Gamecocks' Joe Morrison Offensive Player of the Spring. Still, it's easy to forget that Cooper only caught three passes in 2013. He hadn't been a dedicated wide receiver since his junior year of high school. He says he's adapted quickly to the nuances of the position.

"Route running and just knowing where to be. Mainly knowing coverages. In our offense, you've got to know the coverages at all times - Cover 2, Cover 3," he said.

Cooper is quick to distinguish that he's a Wildcat quarterback, not USC's backup quarterback. But with the success he's had in



that formation, he wouldn't mind seeing more snaps.

"We have a great offensive line. We do a great job pulling. Everybody knows the ball is going to be run to the left or the right. That's we practice against the 'D.' We go out and execute and do our job, and they make it easy," Cooper said.

Wherever he lines up, Cooper is most excited about taking snaps in November. That's when his older brother Dequan, a member of the United States Marine Corps, is scheduled to be transferred from Yuma, Ariz., to the Marine Corps Air Station in Beaufort, S.C. Dequan Cooper hasn't seen his brother play at USC.

By that point, Pharoah could become a contender for the Paul Hornung Award, which honors the nation's most versatile college football player. Cooper was named to the award's preseason watch List.

It figures. Hornung's nickname was "Golden Boy."

****Andy Demetra's latest "Inside the Chart" for *Spurs & Feathers*. Follow Andy on Twitter @GamecockRadio****