

USC sophomore linebacker Moore only beginning to tap into his talent

Willie T. Smith III, The Greenville News 1:12 p.m. EDT August 24, 2014



(Photo: MYKAL McELDOWNEY/Staff, MYKAL McELDOWNEY/Staff)

COLUMBIA – What kind of potential does South Carolina sophomore linebacker Skai Moore possess?

Just ask Gamecocks coach Steve Spurrier.

Not typically one to concern himself with conference and All-American honors, Spurrier voiced his frustration with so few of his players making any of the preseason All-Southeastern Conference squads.

One of the players Spurrier believed was most deserving – Moore.

“Skai led us in tackles last season and had some big interceptions for us at the end of the season,” Spurrier said. “He deserved recognition.”

The fact that Moore is a student at USC is a story in itself. The Gamecocks were forced to scramble to recruit a couple of linebackers late in the 2013 recruiting season when highly regarded Matt Rolin withdrew a commitment to USC and signed with Florida.

South Carolina did not get the nod from Moore, whom it had immediately targeted, until signing day.

“A lot happened last year,” Moore said. “Coming into it, I felt like I was ready and prepared for it. The coaches told me, since day one, they would give me the opportunity and if I capitalized and did what I’m supposed to do I’d be out there playing on Saturdays.

“That’s what happened.”

Despite starting only four games, Moore led South Carolina in tackles with 56 and grabbed four interceptions, including one in the regular-season finale against Clemson and two against Wisconsin in the Capital One Bowl.

That was good enough to earn a spot on the SEC All-Freshman Team, but defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward believes Moore is capable of much more.

“Skai is one of the players that can potentially leave here in three years,” Ward said. “I talk to him about that. He’s one of the few guys I know on defense that can have a great season this year, another great season next year and go out (for the NFL draft) as a junior.”

Ward believes, for that to happen, Moore must get larger. He played at 193 pounds as a freshman.

“Skai doesn’t like to eat,” Ward said. “He’s an athlete. He runs a 4.4 (40-yard dash), but he can do that and put on the weight he needs.”

Listed at 213 pounds in the team’s media guide, Moore says he now weighs 220 pounds and hasn’t lost any of his speed or quickness.

He is listed as the Gamecocks’ starter at weakside linebacker but is being pushed by fellow sophomore Jonathan Walton, also a late addition to the 2013 recruiting class.

“Skai has played well, but so has Jonathan,” USC linebackers coach Kirk Botkin. “Whoever plays the best will start.”

Moore has continued to hold the upper hand in the competition, but Ward is still looking for more.

“I think Skai has a lot of natural ability,” said Ward. “If Skai gives 100 percent all the time he’ll be even better.

“Skai hasn’t arrived. He has several steps he can take.”

Read or Share this story: <http://grmol.co/1tyJyVy>