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No limit to Skai's potential with Gamecocks

By JOSH KENDALL

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Linebacker Skai Moore

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When Skai Moore was at University School in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., he didn't realize his high school experience was different from any other player.

Then he arrived at South Carolina.

"I found that out pretty quick, that some other guys weren't in a real complex scheme in high school," Moore said. "They were just really playing football."

At University, Moore was studying game film every day and absorbing different defensive schemes each week to match the opponent's offense.

"The high school setting I was in was like a college setting," said Moore, a 6-foot-2, 212-pound sophomore linebacker for the Gamecocks.

That's why Moore was able to lead South Carolina in tackles (56) and interceptions (four) as a true freshman last year, he said. It's why he was named to Athlon Sports' All-SEC preseason second team, and it's why the Gamecocks are expecting even more in 2014.

"It was a high-tempo type of atmosphere," said former University coach Roger Harriott, who is now an assistant at Florida Atlantic. "We stressed strength, accountability, focus and attention to detail. Our kids realized that the fun part is a byproduct of working hard and doing the right thing. It becomes a habitual expectation."

Harriott also stocked his staff with former college and NFL players, said assistant Henry Colombi, who was a graduate assistant at Ole Miss.

"We prepared like a major Division I college football program," Colombi said.

Moore started his high school career as a tight end and wide receiver but was moved to linebacker prior to his sophomore year.

"Skai didn't come to us a freak of nature," Colombi said. "He was a good athlete. We didn't know what Skai was going to turn into."

What he turned into was a four-star prospect who was recruited by Tennessee, Arkansas and Vanderbilt, as well as South Carolina. When he came to the Gamecocks and took over the starting weakside linebacker job by the end of the season, Harriott wasn't surprised at all.

"He had the all the talent and the physical attributes to be a productive college player early," Harriott said.

Moore also had the temperament, Colombi said.

"Oh my gosh, Skai is an incredible young man," he said. "Never had anything negative to say. He is very level-headed at all times. You never got a high or a low from Skai. You got the same kid every day at practice. Quiet, but he could wreak havoc when he needed to."

That attitude came through as soon as Moore arrived in Columbia, USC linebackers coach Kirk Botkin said.

"The thing about Skai Moore that made him good last year and is going to continue to – he is very coachable," Botkin said. "You tell him one time, he's going to remember it and he's going to do it. He does exactly what you try to tell him to do. Can't say enough good things about him."

Moore has grown sound enough in USC's defensive scheme that he now knows his mistakes before the coaches point them out, Botkin said.

"Now I know where my help is coming from, where my front is really going on stunts and stuff," Moore said. "Last year, I wasn't really comfortable with all of that, but this year I really have the defense down pat."

Moore has "several steps" he can make in his development this year, defensive coordinator Lorenzo Ward said. Moore can be the type of player who leaves for the NFL after his junior season, Ward believes.

"But he's not there yet by no means," Ward said. "I think Skai has got a lot of natural ability. If Skai gives

us 100 percent all the time, he'll be even better. (Effort) is not an issue, but we want everybody to give more. Skai can give us a lot more.

"He hasn't arrived is what I'm trying to tell you. I think he's a work in progress. When he understands going 100 mph all the time, he'll be an even better football player."

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