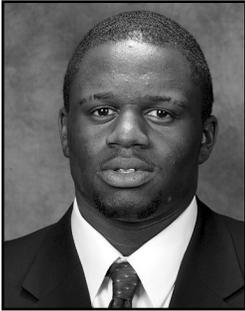


Cryer Overcomes Hardship to Make Impact



Barry Cryer, DT

by Brandon Gries, Nebraska Media Relations

It's been a journey from the junior college ranks unlike most others.

Anything before August of 2005 was the same for defensive tackle Barry Cryer. Playing in front of crowds of 2,000 and long bus rides are the norm for junior college athletes trying to make it to the Division I level. But what followed after Cryer's arrival in Lincoln was anything but the norm. It was a ride that few have taken, and one that Cryer amazingly took in stride.

Hurricane Katrina, noted among the worst and most costly natural disasters in U.S. history, whipped across the Gulf Coast in September of 2005, right as the Huskers kicked off the football season. While his family and friends fought for their lives and tried to save their homes in Marrero, La., Cryer tried to maintain focus on the football field. He held his head high. His infamous, humorous personality continued. His play improved.

In a time of turmoil 1,100 miles from home, Cryer developed family-like relationships with assistant coach Jon Blake, who recruited him to Nebraska, and teammate Ola Dagunduro. It may have been just what Cryer needed.

"He's like another dad to me," Cryer said of Blake. "He feels like a dad. It's been wonderful. Ten years from now, I want to be someone like Coach Blake, just helping out people like he's helped me."

The city of Lincoln threw in a helping hand as well. The week of Sept. 26, Cryer's father, Barry Cryer Sr., was forced to evacuate the New Orleans area. His mother, Rene Hunter, did the same. Eventually, both made temporary homes at Lincoln hotels and received emergency supplies from area businesses. On their visit, they got to witness the Iowa State game, a 27-20 overtime thriller – and a Husker win.

Cryer was only able to reach his mother following the disaster, as she evacuated to Dallas before coming to Lincoln. Everything else was left to uncertainty as Cryer was trying to adapt to his third college in four years.

Now, 12 months later, time has finally helped to heal the wounds as Cryer prepares for his second season with the Huskers, this time without the off-field drama.

"It was horrible, man," Cryer said of his first trip back home. "It was heart-breaking. But everything is getting back in order. They are fixing the house back up and trying to get it all back the way it was. It felt really good to see them when they came up here after I couldn't talk to them for a while."

Everything also looks in order for Cryer's senior season. The defensive tackle has worked his way to the top of the depth chart after a vigorous offseason of workouts. He is set to push for a starting spot, alongside his best friend, Dagunduro, another junior college transfer who came from Inglewood's Compton (Calif.) Community College.

"I did everything this summer," Cryer said. "I worked really hard. I did push-ups every night and did whatever it took. I think we, Ola and I, are ready to take that leadership role this season."

The leadership role Cryer speaks of filling is that of last year's dynamic duo, Titus Adams and Le Kevin Smith, who both were chosen in the NFL Draft. Cryer played in all 12 games last season as Adams' backup, with his most notable performances coming at the end of the year to set up an exciting senior season.

He shared a sack with Adam Carriker in the 30-3 route over Colorado in the regular-season finale and then got one of his own on Michigan's Chad Henne in the exciting 32-28 Alamo Bowl win. The sacks were just a pair of his six tackles on the year, with four of those being tackles for loss. Dagunduro was in a similar situation as he saw limited action behind Smith.

Off the field, Cryer's unassuming and laid back personality showed through quickly, as he became the easy answer to the survey question, "Who is your funniest teammate?"

"I just want to make everyone feel at ease," Cryer said. "Away from home, you need someone to make you feel at ease, and that's me. I help them out. Only certain parts are funny though. There's a time to work and a time to play."

You need people like that to endure a long season, and with the things Cryer has gone through, he knows exactly how to do that.

His sidekick is Dagunduro. Together, they form one of the more interesting and fun duos the Nebraska football team has possibly ever had. It was a connection from the beginning after they met in the summer of 2005, and it continues today.

"We're so much alike," Dagunduro said. "We like to hustle, we're funny and we make jokes about the same things. He'll see something that might be funny and I don't even have to say anything. All I have to do is give him a look and he'll be like 'I already know what you're talking about.'"

Dagunduro and Cryer had unknown similarities before they met as each was a



highly touted junior college defensive lineman and ranked among the top 10 in the nation at their respective positions by the College Football News.

"It was just like from the first day, we clicked on everything," Cryer said. "We do everything together. We play the same position, so we have no choice but to be best friends and try to do good things together."

Cryer was rated a three-star prospect by Rivals.com out of Dodge City (Kan.) Community College. He originally committed to play for UAB out of high school before starting his college career with Northeast Mississippi Community College. He later transferred to Dodge City, where he accounted for 9.5 sacks and 56 tackles in 2004. In November of the same year, Cryer attended the Nebraska-Colorado game in Lincoln. After viewing Nebraska's "Sea of Red" and its rabid and loyal fans, Cryer decided that this would be his next home.

Two years later, Cryer has accomplished that goal, with an entire senior season – and lot of fun times – still left to be determined.