

Extraordinary

Story by George Mauzy | Photography by Rick Fatica

Ordinary guys are a dime a dozen, and Ohio University senior running back Calvin McRae does everything in his power to make you believe he fits in that category. “I’m an observer who likes to watch other people,” McRae says. “I never want to draw all of the attention to myself, because I know that if you aren’t humble, God will humble you.”

Given that the two-time first-team All-MAC selection entered his senior campaign as a candidate for the prestigious Maxwell and Walter Camp Player of the Year awards, one might expect a little ego. But Cheral Hope raised her four sons to be respectful and modest, and her youngest didn’t disappoint.

“Being up for those awards is exciting,” McRae says, “but I’m not going to focus on them and try to overperform.”

The 5-foot-11, 208-pound McRae is closing in on several Bobcat records. His 1,252 yards last season (second-highest in school history), left him 1,009 yards shy of breaking the school career rushing record of 3,972 yards set by Steveland Hookfin in 1998. As *Ohio Today* went to press, he needed 149 more yards with four games remaining. And he was three 100-yard rushing games short of Hookfin’s record 19.

“I met Hookfin last spring, and he told me to go ahead and break the records because he’s had them long enough,” McRae says. “It’s an honor to follow in his footsteps and those of all of the other great runners before me, like Kareem Wilson, Tim Curtis and Chad Brinker.”

After leading last year’s team to Ohio’s first bowl game since 1968, McRae spent the summer prepping for senior year. He’s one of just four players this year to earn Super Iron Bobcat status in the bench press, clean and jerk, back squat and power clean lifts.

“Kalvin is the complete package as a running back. He can run, catch and block,” says offensive coordinator Tim Albin. “He is the most durable player I’ve ever coached.”

While there was satisfaction in winning last year’s MAC East Division championship and making it to a bowl game, McRae says losing the final two games was disappointing.

“Last year was special because we stuck together through difficult times, but I can tell the guys want even more this year because everyone came in here with bigger

eyes,” says McRae, a recreational management major who eventually hopes to coach high school football and teach.

McRae’s road to the record book hasn’t been without obstacles. He wasn’t heavily recruited coming out of Avondale High School near Atlanta, and he sat out fall and winter of what would have been his freshman year as he worked to raise his ACT score. One morning, while waiting for a ride to his final attempt at the test, his life changed.

It was the morning of his Great-Aunt Rosa Lee’s funeral, and — grieving the loss of the “rock” of the family — he was in no mood to take a test.

“I was standing on the porch in the dark waiting for my ride when a gust of wind blew over me,” McRae recalls. “After the wind blew over me, I felt calm all over, and I wasn’t angry or worried anymore. I believe it was my Aunt Rosa Lee letting me know everything was going to be OK. After that moment, I knew I would get the ACT score I needed that day, and I did. I waited until I got my test score back before I told anyone about the gust of wind.”

Family is important to McRae. At 22, he is the youngest of Willie and Cheral Hope’s four sons, and he maintains close relationships with brothers George, William and Kenny, each of whom is separated from the next by just one year.

“My routine before every game is to call my mother and brothers for encouragement,” McRae says. “They have never said a negative word to me, even when I was close to giving up my dream of playing college football. They wouldn’t let me quit.”

McRae hopes that drive his family helped instill leads him to the pros.

“Playing in the NFL is something I have always wanted to do since I was a little kid, but I never dreamed it would be possible,” McRae says. “When I think about it, it sounds amazing. But I try not to get too excited and lose my focus, because I know in football, nothing is guaranteed.”

“My goal is to have fun this year, and I always say ‘Lord willing, I’ll break the records and the team will have a great season.’ It would be nice to be regarded as the best running back in school history, but I’m more concerned with leaving a legacy as a great teammate and a down-to-earth person.”

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Game face and all,
running back Calvin McRae is at home in Peden Stadium.