

Lynch / Aug.

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**CAL'S MARSHAWN LYNCH
HAVING A FUN RUN
Celebrated running back won't buy
into the hype**

- Bruce Adams, Chronicle Staff Writer
Sunday, August 28, 2005



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The buzz began last year when it became apparent that this one was special. It very well could reach a roar by the time Cal begins play in this, the Year of Marshawn Lynch.

Lynch is blissfully above it all. He's truly unconcerned with hype and hoopla. He sees himself as just another player -- a contributor, a dependable teammate. He's also doing his best to live like a normal college student, a pretty good one at that.

"That's all it is," Lynch said. "Having fun."

Lynch is not about to just become the Golden Bears' starting tailback. He's about to become the centerpiece of Cal football, a runner with uncommon talent and the potential to become one of the best players ever, anywhere.

Yes, he is that good.

"Everybody has talent, but not everyone has the gift," running back coach Ron Gould said. "Marshawn has the gift."

Lynch has a rare combination of strength, balance and speed. He appears capable of breaking away for a touchdown whether he's running up the middle, taking the ball around the edge or lining up in the slot, where he becomes a threat in the passing game.

Last year as a true freshman backing up 2,000-yard rusher J.J. Arrington, Lynch averaged 8.8 yards a carry. He scored eight touchdowns in just 71 carries. He caught passes for two more scores. He even threw a touchdown pass in the Big Game win.

This year he's bigger, stronger and faster. His offseason training added some 20 pounds of lean muscle to his already well-sculpted frame, and his stride is more powerful.

His trademark is the ability to stay on his feet. He challenges tacklers, running right at them, and often through them. In the open field, he has true breakaway speed. He can also, when need be, use deft moves to evade tacklers.

"I just react," he said.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/08/28/SPG7IEE00...> 8/28/2005

His challenge this year is to become an every-down back. His physical endurance will be tested. And so will his mental toughness, as he deals with the expectations.

"I don't see myself having any pressure at all," Lynch said. "There are still 10 other guys out there. And we have other great running backs that can do just as well as I do."

Lynch has a rare perspective. He doesn't follow college football and has no idea of his place on the national scene. He never thinks of awards -- including early Heisman hints -- pays no attention to the magazine cover stories and never contemplates his eventual place in the history of Cal football.

"I'm not into that stuff," he said. "I'm still playing to have fun."

The field-level view of Lynch often includes glimpsing a broad smile inside his helmet.

"He doesn't go through the peaks and valleys that some people would," coach Jeff Tedford said. "He just has an easy-going attitude."

He isn't comfortable talking about his talents. He doesn't enjoy press interviews, but is accommodating. He usually gives all the credit for his accomplishments to his teammates.

"He makes the O-line look good," center Marvin Philip said. "He's the offensive line's best friend. ... He's a very, very humble person."

"That's just him," said his grandfather, Leron Lynch. "That's the way he grew up. ... I don't understand him myself. I hope someday he gets out of it, talks and lets it hang out."

Lynch is, however, aware of his gifts. Privately, in conversation with his grandfather, he'll even show a rare bit of bravado.

"He'll say, 'Papa, they can't tackle me,' " Leron Lynch said.

Chuck Muncie, the Bears' great running back from the 1970s, said Lynch combines physical talent with the requisite intangibles.

"It's his heart, his desire is to live up to his own expectations," Muncie said. "I think he's ready."

His grandfather has seen that determination before, in his son Lorenzo Lynch, Marshawn's uncle.

Lorenzo Lynch was a walk-on defensive back at Sacramento State. He was an undrafted free agent who went on to have an 11-year career with three teams in the NFL, retiring from the Raiders in 1997.

"He reminds me of Lorenzo so much," Leron Lynch said of Marshawn, adding that both were driven by the challenge to "master everything in front of them."

Such family ties are important to Lynch. His best friends on the team are his cousins, receiver Robert Jordan and defensive back Virdell Larkins. He's close to his mother, Delisa.

She frequently attends practices and Lynch waves to her before every game.

Marshawn Lynch came to the college game as a blue-chip commodity.

He was heavily recruited out of Oakland Tech, where he scored 33 touchdowns his senior year, including six in Tech's 55-47 win over Skyline in the Silver Bowl at the Coliseum in Oakland.

"We really loved him out of high school," said Oregon coach Mike Bellotti, one of many who wooed Lynch. "He was the most complete back we saw that year."

Bellotti lost the recruiting battle to Tedford, and now faces the task of preparing his Ducks to face Lynch.

"Last year, there were several things you had to defend against Cal, and I'm sure there will be this year," he said. "But you will really need to focus on Marshawn."

And that isn't an easy task.

"He doesn't go down, he doesn't give up," Bellotti said. "He doesn't believe anybody can tackle him. ... You've got to gang-tackle him and you've got to hang on."

It's that mentality in Lynch, and the attendant risk of injury, that Tedford is trying to temper -- just a bit.

"At certain times, he's got to put his pads down and get us one or two yards," Tedford said. "Not everything can pop outside for a touchdown. That's a fine line though, when you have a back that's special."

Muncie shares the concerns over Lynch's all-out style.

"I'm crossing my fingers," he said. "I'd never try to change it."

Lynch will be backed up by three tailbacks -- sophomore Justin Forsett, junior Marcus O'Keith and senior Terrell Williams -- all of whom would probably be starting elsewhere.

"Everybody has got to be ready," said Gould, the running backs coach. "You never know when your time might come. ... It's inevitable that backs wear down."

The 5-foot-11, 220-pound Lynch, however, says he's prepared for the every-down grind.

"I've just got to make sure I'm in the best shape possible," he said. "Everything else will take care of itself."

Muncie said Lynch came by his grit through overcoming some obstacles growing up -- matters Lynch said he'd rather "leave be."

He is well-liked by his teammates.

"Every game is like his first college game," Philip said. "When you have someone who

loves football like that it makes everything more fun, more exciting. He's just a good guy all around and he comes from a good family."

"Everybody enjoys being around him," Tedford added. "He's got a great sense of humor and can always make people laugh."

Lynch says he spends most of his free time listening to music with Jordan and Larkins. The three have been close since their days back in Oakland.

He also enjoys reading and fishing. He never watches football on television.

He smiles shyly and shakes his head when asked if he has a girlfriend.

On campus he'd just as soon not be recognized.

"I just try and stay out of the way," he said.

He's most pleased with his academic progress, coming from a high school background where, in his words, "there wasn't a lot of stress."

"But being at the No. 1 public institution in the world and to get a 3.0, I was real happy with myself," he said.

Gould said Lynch attends tutoring sessions and stays on top of his classes -- usually completing papers well before they're due.

"He's a very, very bright kid," Gould said. "And he's a good kid. He works hard."

When Lynch was a youngster just starting to play Pop Warner football, his grandfather was working the night shift on the docks in Oakland and was able to attend afternoon practices.

"He was big for his age so they put him on the line," the elder Lynch said. "All he was doing was blocking and rushing the quarterback on defense."

One day he approached the coach after practice and said, "I know my grandson knows how to block."

The coach picked up on the hint. The next game he let Marshawn field a kickoff.

And, naturally, he ran it back for a touchdown.

CHART (1):

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Cal's best rushing seasons	Name	Year	Att	Yds	TD	J.J. Arr
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CHART (2):

Heisman watch

Tedford agonizes as sons play ball

Oakland Tribune, The (CA)

Date: October 7, 2005

BERKELEY — **Jeff Tedford's** two sons have football games this afternoon and evening. But, once again, the father won't be able to watch them play as Cal leaves earlier today for Saturday's game at UCLA.

Tedford has this ongoing dilemma, the bane of being a coach and a father. He finds himself torn professionally and paternally.

He wants so badly to see his sons play. But because Monte Vista High of Danville plays mostly on Fridays — tonight, the Mustangs host Livermore — he is tied up with his Cal football team that day.

"Of course, it hurts," he said this week. "I've gone over this with my kids. I'm very fortunate that my kids understand what I do, but that doesn't change the fact that I'd love to see them."

Taylor **Tedford**, 18, is a senior wide receiver on the Monte Vista varsity. Quinn **Tedford**, 16, is a sophomore wide receiver and defensive back on the Mustangs' junior varsity.

Donna Tedford, the mother, is the family presence at the majority of their games, while the father agonizes elsewhere.

"**Jeff** will have my cell phone ringing all the time," **Donna** said. "It's hardest on **Jeff** not being at his sons' games. There's an emotional side of **Jeff**. The boys know their dad's with them in mind, body and spirit. He'll write them letters early in the morning, wishing them well."

Jeff Tedford's mind, body and spirit are also on Cal football. That's evident by his having resurrected the sport on the Berkeley campus. Cal has been ranked in the Top 10 the past two seasons with a 15-2 overall record, further proof of his commitment to the program.

However, that doesn't lessen the suffering created by his having to miss his sons' games, except on those rare occasions.

"Last week, I got a chance after our Friday walk-through to go watch Quinn's JV game at Monte Vista," he said. "The game was at 4 p.m. I got there about 5. Then I just got to see Taylor come on the field to warm up before I had to go back to the hotel for our team meetings at 8."

When asked how many of Monte Vista's games he sees, **Tedford** turned away. His eyes teared up, and he couldn't respond for a half-minute. In that moment, one visually saw his struggle with duty and fatherhood.

"There's no question there are sacrifices that have to be made with the job here," he said after regaining his composure. "Family is a huge part of the sacrifice, that you're not there to go over issues that they have as high school kids every night. So we talk on the phone a lot."

In the off-season, **Tedford** gets to watch Taylor and Quinn play basketball, just as he watched them in Little League. But football is king in the **Tedford** household, and the father has his priorities in the autumn.

"After their high school sports, that may be the end of my sons' sporting careers," he said. "We'll still play golf together. But they are comfortable enough with themselves and with our relationship."

Nevertheless, parents don't want to miss their children's activities, to watch them grow athletically and in other ways.

"Great kids, great family," Monte Vista football coach/athletic director Craig Bergman said of the Tedfords. "**Jeff** and **Donna** attend all our meetings in the off-season, and they show up for our passing league."

"Taylor's face lights up whenever he sees his dad. Taylor's kind of a 'tweener in football, and not the fastest kid, but a possession guy who runs fantastic routes. Quinn is a slight kid who needs to grow more and see the field a little better. But he's still young and learning."

Taylor and Quinn are reserves, but because Bergman doesn't believe in names on jerseys, "**TEDFORD**" isn't advertised at games.

Bergman noted that Monte Vista's Thursday, Nov. 10, game at San Ramon starts at 7 p.m. Even though that's two days before the Cal-USC game, all the Tedfords should be present.

Whether you're a coaching family or not, and even though most parents have time-consuming jobs, not to be there for your kids is like cutting a piece out of your own heart.

"If that's what is to be, just go with it," said an understanding **Donna Tedford**, who realizes her husband's sacrifice and softens as best she can those missed moments with his sons. "It takes a strong family."

Plus strong support from within the Cal football family.

"Our (coaching) staff is the best there is," **Donna** said. "Coaches' families come to other coaches' family games. The head trainer's wife showed up to see our sons play."

That goes with the sacrifice of coaching.

"If you've got to go to your kid's birthday party, you go," **Jeff Tedford** said. "We try our hardest to go to things, but if we're on the road recruiting ... we still have a job to do."

Tedford didn't have a father while growing up, no dad to watch him play games, the result of divorced parents.

He doesn't want that same environment for his sons, so he is heavily involved with their games, though it's mainly in spirit.

"They know **Jeff** is with them all the time," **Donna Tedford** said.

Her cell phone will be ringing like crazy later today.

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