Mike Burnop: He Gets The Ball In A Crowd

Marshall Taylor claims the exceptional is just the accepted thing for Mike Burnop. The Virginia Tech receivers coach rates Burnop one of the best in the business at catching the football. Taylor says Burnop has great concentration and does his best in a crowd. Burnop doesn't hear footsteps, and body contact, to him, is something to enjoy and not punishment.

"Let me just give you an example," Taylor said. "It was in the Ohio University game. The defensive end and linebacker both hit Mike. One of them actually tackled him. But Mike just shook it off, got up and caught the football for an 18-yard gain.

"Most receivers would have stayed down. But not Mike. It was just a routine play for him. He's that type of football player."

Burnop (6-1, 214) has been a regular for three seasons at Tech. He came to Blacksburg from Roanoke Catholic where he was Mr. Everything—football, all-star and captain, basketball captain and the school's B'nai B'rith nominee for athletics and achievement.

"I know I have been around a long time," Mike said. "But I feel I am just learning how to really play tight end. There's a lot more to it than just running out and waiting for them to throw you the football."

Taylor agrees. He says Mike has gained a great sense of getting to the open spot. He has learned how to go under and around the linebacker coverage.

"We weren't getting the ball to him enough in our early games," Taylor said. "But in the last three or four he has been getting the ball and he's been catching it. I don't know of any receiver anywhere I'd rather be throwing the ball to in a critical situation. Mike just doesn't miss the tough catch."

No Chicken Rules as Coach

Burnop is a dean's list student at Tech and majoring in physical education. He would like to coach if he doesn't get a shot at professional football.

He has his own ideas about how to handle his players.

"I wouldn't have a lot of chicken restrictions and regulations," he said. "I would have discipline and respect but my players could have long hair and do their own thing.

"What I would demand is 110 per cent on the practice field and in the games. I would expect each player to take pride in himself and in his team. It would be a team effort and I don't think you can get the real support of your players with a lot of crappy rules."

Burnop said he has worked hard to improve his blocking this season and Taylor thinks the work has paid off.

"Mike is blocking better in every game," Taylor said. "He's a tough kid who takes pride in everything he does."

Burnop holds the Tech season receiving record with 46 catches as a junior. He also holds the career mark at 81 and has four more games to add to his total.

The records don't mean much to Burnop. "What the heck," he said. "Records are made to be broken. Mine probably won't be here but a year or two. Ricky Scales has already caught 20 passes this year and he's only a sophomore."

Get Even With Those Dudes

Taylor feels Burnop certainly deserves a good shot at the pro ranks.

"I don't know of any tight ends around who are any better," Taylor said. "There probably are some a lot bigger and might have more recognition. But Mike could fool 'em all.

"He can read coverage and get to the football. He doesn't mind contact and his great concentration and hands make him a whale of a receiver."

Burnop hopes he has a chance to prove himself with the pros. But he admits he hasn't been flooded with feelers. Anyway, the pros are in the future and the big thing on his mind now is his final four games as a collegian.

"I hope we can win 'em all," he said. "But right now I'm just thinking about Southern Mississippi. We owe those dudes something. They came up here last year and beat us (17-8). It won't happen again."