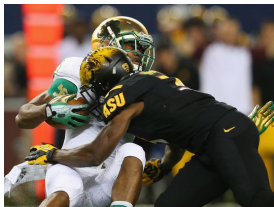


PHS grad Randall selected to Senior Bowl

Brian Achatz 8:32 p.m. CST December 2, 2014



(Photo: Getty Images)

Though he was a standout safety and a member of Pensacola High's 2009 3A state championship football team, Damarious Randall said he considered himself primarily a baseball player who had interest in following his older brother's footsteps at the time of his graduation after the Tigers' championship season.

In the past half decade, Randall has overcome injury and successfully transitioned to become one of the nation's top defensive football players at Arizona State, and on Monday, he accepted his selection to the 2015 Reese's Senior Bowl to be played Jan. 24 in Mobile's Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

"Coming out of high school, I signed to Butler Community College (El Dorado, Kan.) ... I was focused up on baseball," said Randall, adding that his 28-year-old brother, Patrick Norris, played baseball at Butler before him.

"I think (Norris) had a big impact on a lot of my decisions, and ultimately, my decision to go to Arizona State.

"We are more than just brothers, we are like best friends. He's always around. He understands a lot about football and baseball. There's really nothing more I can ask for from him."

Randall's first of several crucial decisions came during his freshman year at Butler, when a shoulder injury significantly inhibited his baseball ability.

Randall returned to Pensacola to take part-time classes at PSC while attending rehabilitation for his shoulder at the Andrews Institute for Orthopedics and Sports Medicine.

"I was rehabbing my shoulder at Andrews Institute for a year," the 22-year-old said. "But my shoulder never got back to its level — baseball wasn't really fun for me anymore.

"I sent out my high school football highlights to as many junior colleges as I could think of. A couple days later, Mesa Community College offered me a football scholarship, and I went to Mesa in fall 2012."

Before he finished at Mesa, Randall left his mark as he was named an NJCAA First Team All-American and the Arizona Community College Athletic Conference defensive player of the year.

He verbally committed to ASU in January 2013, an opportunity which led to fulfilled dreams, according to Randall.

Randall recalled the 2013 season when ASU rolled to a 58-21 win against rival University of Arizona, in which he scored on a 64-yard touchdown after an interception return to bolster the Sun Devils' lead in the third quarter.

"That game is what a lot of people call my coming-out party for my last year at Arizona State," he said, laughing.

The sense of foreshadowing was accurate, and this year Randall exploded as one of the nation's top safeties, while helping lead ASU to No. 17 in the AP rankings, with a 9-3 record which included wins over Southern California, Stanford and Notre Dame.

"I had a very, very special pick-six against Notre Dame," said Randall, referring to his key play in the 55-31 win for ASU. "I grew up watching Notre Dame.

"Just being on the field and playing against them. It was unreal ... almost like a dream."

But despite his dynamic collegiate journey, Randall had no trouble recalling his days at Pensacola High, in which he solidified his technique as a defensive back and strengthened his love for winning.

"(Head) coach (Mike) Bennett is a great overall coach," said Randall, referring to his former Pensacola High head football coach. "He just wants to do what is best for the players.

"He is very passionate. ... He just wants to win. There's not enough good things that I can say about coach Bennett. And coach (Gary) Cowart. He was my DB coach. He taught me the basics of being a great DB."

Randall attends PHS football games when he can, with his most recent attendance taking place in 2012 when Pensacola played Pace High in the playoffs.

"It's just all-out fun at those games for me now. I like to joke around with coach Bennett whenever I see him."

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