

Mixing football and track

Richardson finding 'extra edge' provided by two sports



by Joe Tindel Jr.

Battalion Staff
Meet the Renaldo Nehemiah of Texas A&M — sort of.

His name is Rod Richardson, and like Nehemiah, he holds a record in track. Like Nehemiah, he's decided to try his luck at football. But unlike the NFL's new wide receiver, Richardson is holding on to his track career at Texas A&M.

Richardson, the 5-10, 170-pounder from Shreveport, La., set an NCAA record for the 60-yard dash last spring. But long before that accomplishment, he had everything planned out nicely. He'd hold out on football until his third year.

Right on schedule, the fleet-footed junior joined the ranks of the Aggie gridders this past fall as a wide receiver and kickoff return specialist. Now he's in the final stages of nursing an ankle injured during the season in football practice.

That injury may cause him to miss the indoor track season this spring, but Richardson has no reservations about his decision.

"I feel like I'm very competitive, and track was consuming a lot of that competitive spirit in me — but I don't think it was getting all of it out of me," Richardson said in an interview Tuesday.

"I think had all things remained normal, football would have provided me with an extra edge as far as competition goes going into the track season.

"Football tends to give an athlete more explosiveness because you have to concentrate on moving fast all the time and not just at the race time."

Former head coach Tom Wil-

son wanted to recruit Richardson as a wide receiver out of high school, but the time wasn't right for Richardson. Through the grapevine, however, Aggie track coach Charlie Thomas caught wind of the young speedster's availability and brought him to College Station as a runner. But Richardson said he had plans to return to football eventually.

"Coach Wilson and I had discussed it (playing) right before the coaching change," Richardson said. "At that time it was fairly well set that he was going to allow me to come out."

But the picture changed somewhat at the hiring of Head Coach Jackie Sherrill.

"When Coach Sherrill came in, I didn't know where I stood as far as my opportunity to play, and I was in limbo at that point," Richardson said.

"When he (Sherrill) got here I had really just dropped the idea until he approached me, because maybe I was just afraid of being rejected if I approached him with the idea."

And after three years' absence from the gridiron, with his memory of high school experiences a bit foggy, Richardson

was born again with that first contact.

"I had never performed in front of that many people before, and I guess I felt like any other incoming freshman," he said. "I think that after the first lick you forget about all that. Things that I'd done before started to come back to me."

Now Richardson regrets the injury, one of those bothersome things that can frustrate anybody who relies heavily on how quick his feet move, but he doesn't regret re-experiencing football.

"I feel like at the time I got injured, I was about to become a good wide receiver — not great, but good," Richardson said.

Conflict between the two sports? For Richardson, track is tops in spring, football in fall. You get yelled at more in football, he said, but he's adjusted to that, and his mental determination has carried over to football.

As Texas A&M's Nehemiah puts it, track is number one right now, and, if his ankle heals soon, he hopes to be back in competition by the middle of March.

Rod Richardson is helped off the track by trainer Sam Bell in a meet last spring after injuring his leg. This spring the Aggie sprinter is sitting out the indoor

season while he nurses an ankle injury. Richardson hurt his ankle during football practice last semester, and he is learning the dangers of mixing football and track.

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