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Senior wideout Jon Talmage wants championship ring before end of his career

DANNY DAVIS

MONTANA KAIMIN

Jon Talmage wants a championship ring. Sure, UM’s senior wide receiver was a member of the 2001 national championship team, but Talmage said that doesn’t count because he was playing the role of redshirt freshman. He had a shot at a ring last year in Chattanooga, but UM came up short, 31-21, to James Madison. Talmage knows that his time in Missoula is limited and that his career is somewhat incomplete without that elusive finger bling. “It means a lot to go back there this year with this as my last shot,” he said. “It (my career) feels incomplete.” Jon Talmage only has one shot left, and he’s hoping the third time is the charm.

A few years ago it would have made more sense to say that Talmage would be playing for UM’s non-existent men’s soccer team than running routes in Washington-Grizzly Stadium on a Saturday afternoon. Talmage, a native of Anaheim Hills, Calif., had been playing soccer for as long as he could remember and wasn’t too shabby a player, either. He earned team MVP honors at Orange Lutheran High School for both his junior and senior seasons. All it took to get Talmage to Missoula was a teammate’s broken nose. Despite his lifelong love affair with soccer, Talmage decided to spread his wings as a sophomore and joined the school’s football program as a place kicker. “I was the kicker for some games my sophomore year but I really never did anything then,” Talmage said. After a season in which he occasionally got on the field, Talmage accompanied his team to a passing camp in Utah during the summer of his junior year. While in Utah, one of his wide receiver teammates broke his nose, and with no one to fill the roster spot, the team decided to let Talmage take a few snaps at receiver. “He was such a good athlete and it would be a waste if he was

just a kicker,” Orange Lutheran head football coach Jim Kunau said. “He came to our school as a really gifted soccer player and that helped him because he has such great footwork when running his routes.” Talmage went on to catch 118 balls and 29 touchdowns during his junior and senior year. Talmage also became the team’s full-time kicker and ended his

“*It means a lot to go back there this year with this being my last shot. It (my career) feels incomplete*”
— Jon Talmage

career with 375 career points, which, according to Kunau, is still a school record. After a senior season that saw him have 85 receptions for 1,398 yards and 15 touchdowns, Talmage was named the Lancers’ offensive MVP. Although he assembled quite a resume in football and soccer, Talmage admits that his most memorable times at Orange Lutheran may have been on the baseball diamond. Talmage earned three letters playing on a squad that was coached by Mark Langston, who pitched for five major league baseball franchises from 1984-99. Over the years, Talmage developed a friendship with Langston and still remains close to the former major leaguer. Talmage said that Langston helped him make his decision to go to college at UM, and still calls him for the occasional words of wisdom, like before Montana’s recent trip to Autzen Stadium to play the Oregon Ducks. With his high school career coming to a close, Talmage possessed the skills to play either soccer or football at a collegiate level and had a decision to make. Luckily for Griz fans, Talmage felt burned out by his lifelong

dedication to soccer and chose to play football. *** So how exactly did a boy from the OC end up in the Garden City? “I was really nervous about going to a college where I didn’t know anybody, and Montana had gotten a wide receiver (former Griz receiver Jeff Renevier) from my old high school and I was friends with him,” Talmage said. “I visited up here and I really liked it.” Like in high school, it didn’t take very long for Talmage to make a name of himself in college. After red-shirting during UM’s championship run in 2001,

Talmage busted onto the scene in 2002, hauling in 50 catches and five touchdowns. Talmage was ranked fifth in the conference in receptions and his 689 receiving yards placed him seventh in the conference in that statistical category. For his efforts, Talmage was named UM’s newcomer of the year. Over the next two seasons Talmage hauled in 79 balls for 1,326 yards and 14 scores, and this year leads UM receivers with 16 receptions and two touchdowns. “He’s been extremely productive in the first three weeks. He’s made all of the catches and he’s made the big plays,” UM head coach Bobby Hauck said. “One of the things he’s really improved on is his blocking, which kind of goes unnoticed with the wide receivers, but he’s done a good job blocking in the run game.” Going into today’s homecoming game against Weber State, the 6-4 Talmage is well within reach of UM’s three most prestigious receiving career records. With eight games left in the season, Talmage is 47 receptions short of Raul Pacheco’s career mark of 192 receptions, 500 receiving yards short of overtaking Matt Wells in that cate-

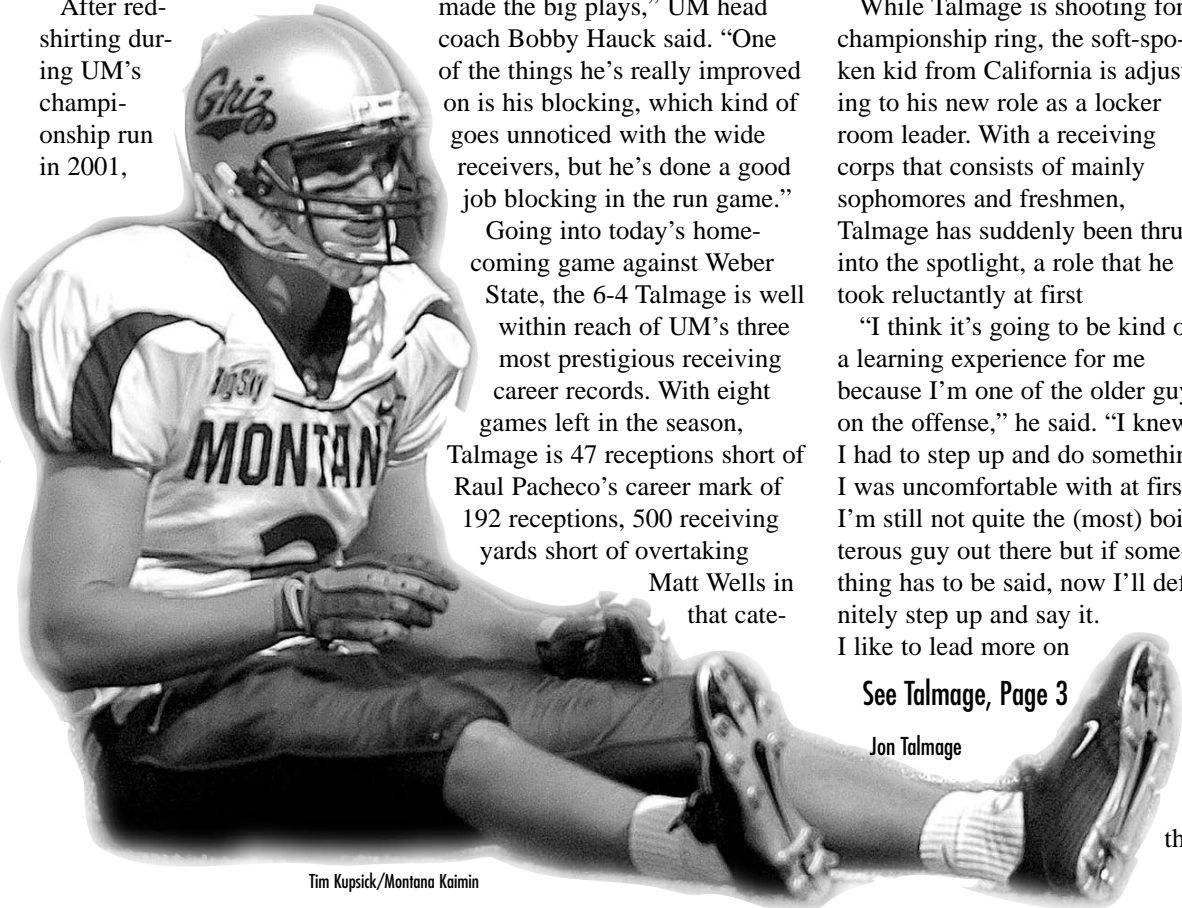
gory and six touchdowns short of becoming UM’s all-time leader in touchdown receptions. Although he could be rapidly rewriting UM’s record books soon, Talmage is trying to keep his legacy in the back of his mind. “I think everybody wants to leave their mark when they leave a huge program like this, (but) I don’t really pay too much attention to it,” said Talmage, who noted that those records were a reflection of all of the great offensive players that he has played with. “I think it says a lot about the team.” ***

While Talmage is shooting for a championship ring, the soft-spoken kid from California is adjusting to his new role as a locker room leader. With a receiving corps that consists of mainly sophomores and freshmen, Talmage has suddenly been thrust into the spotlight, a role that he took reluctantly at first. “I think it’s going to be kind of a learning experience for me because I’m one of the older guys on the offense,” he said. “I knew I had to step up and do something I was uncomfortable with at first. I’m still not quite the (most) boisterous guy out there but if something has to be said, now I’ll definitely step up and say it. I like to lead more on

See Talmage, Page 3

Jon Talmage

the



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TALMAGE

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Talmage's work ethic off of it has helped propel him to a leadership role going into his senior season. "Jon is our go-to receiver and he is the leader in that group," Hauck said. "He's one of those players who has worked extremely hard last couple years to put himself into a position to have a big senior season."

Even though Talmage has been asked to assume a more vocal role on the team, there is one thing that Hauck won't be asking Talmage to do anytime soon: kick.

"My first year here me and (UM senior strong safety) Ty Thomas, we both were kickers in high school, we would be out there punting every single day and it was a joke, we weren't very good," Talmage noted.

While on the field, Talmage has provided a comfort zone to new Griz quarterback Jason Washington.

"He's been a big help for me. I could put it up in triple coverage and Jon will still come down with the ball," Washington said. "He's been in the offense for years, he probably knows the offense better than the coaches."

Anyone who has followed Grizzly football over the past four years knows that Talmage has the capability of filling up a Sportscenter highlight reel by himself. Among his favorite moments in a Grizzly uniform, Talmage mentions his touchdown catch at Oregon, last year's match-up against Sacramento State that saw Talmage, with his dad watching from the sidelines, score three touchdowns, and a 2002 game against Albany. In that game he nabbed a 10-yard strike from Brandon Neill for his first career touchdown reception.

But for every highlight show, there are the bloopers. While Talmage doesn't have a specific blooper in mind, he had no doubt about what the most embarrassing moment in football is.

"I think the most embarrassing thing is just dropping a ball in a game," he said. "When it's your job to catch the ball, dropping it is embarrassing."

If you ever had the chance to meet Jon Talmage, it might be hard to believe that he is a wide receiver. While big name receivers like Terrell Owens and Randy Moss routinely give new meaning to the word selfishness, Talmage is often humble, polite, soft-spoken and fan-friendly.

"He's just super generous," girlfriend Lindsey Torgerson said. "If a fan wants something from him off the field, he'll do it because he cares about everyone."

Washington describes his fellow California native and friend as a funny and good guy.

"Everybody likes him and I've never heard anyone say anything bad about him," the junior quarterback from Oakland said.

Talmage isn't quite sure what he wants to do with his life after he graduates this year with a degree in psychology, but he mentions firefighting alongside his father as a possibility. Unfortunately for Griz fans, Talmage said he is realistically looking at starting a career when he leaves Missoula and isn't banking on combating his humble nature with the arrogant mannerisms of T.O. and Moss in the NFL anytime soon.

"If it happens it happens," he said.

Regardless of what he chooses to do with his life, Talmage will leave UM with the assurance that he has given the folks back home something to boast about.

"I'm very proud of Jon and how he has improved in his five years at Montana," Kunau said. While Talmage may be able to hold his own in football, soccer and baseball, there is one sport that he actually sucks at... tennis.

Unfortunately for Talmage, that just happens to be the same sport that Torgerson starred in at UM from 2001-2004.

"I have (played her) a couple times and I beat her," Talmage said with a laugh. "I'm just kidding. I wish I could beat her but she's really good."

The couple, who have been together for a few years, agrees that while Talmage is a better athlete, it is Torgerson that is in better shape.

"I definitely agree that I'm in better shape," she said. "I know that for a fact."

Although Talmage has played Torgerson a few times on the tennis courts, don't expect them to be playing any mixed doubles anytime soon.

"He might be a better athlete, but he's nothing with smaller balls and a racket," said Torgerson, adding that he would have to practice a lot.

Jon Talmage is on the clock and he knows it. With every pass caught, touchdown celebration, and every "first down Montana!" screamed over the stadium loudspeakers, time is ticking away in his pursuit to win that elusive national championship.

As for that championship ring that he received for being a member of the 2001 championship team? Talmage has put it where he believes it belongs: in its original box on top of his refrigerator. Jon Talmage has one more shot to get a ring that he can proudly wear.



Tim Kupsick/Montana Kaimin

Senior Jon Talmage is tackled during Montana's 7-0 victory over South Dakota State last Saturday. Talmage wants nothing more than another trip to Chattanooga and a second championship ring to end his illustrious career at UM.

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