



Official Sports Report: October 06, 2009  
DE Johnathan Rainey: Potential Unlimited

He could be 'one of the best'

by Glen Rosales, Managing Editor

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. -- Off the field, New Mexico defensive lineman Johnathan Rainey comes across as quiet, even soft-spoken. He's unfailingly polite and exceedingly patient. A model citizen.

On the field however, well, he munches quarterbacks for lunch quicker than Alfred E. Packer in a snowstorm.

Just a sophomore, Rainey has 6½ sacks on the season. If he keeps up his current pace, he'll be pushing toward the top of the Lobos' single-season sack record, which linebacker Robin Cole set in 1975 with 17. Cole, of course, was one of the all-time New Mexico greats who went on to star for the Pittsburgh Steelers and wears two Super Bowl rings.

Rainey is already just 1½ sacks from getting on the UNM top 10 single-season list. And this after coming into the season with only one career sack.

"He has a chance to be one of the best," Lobos coach Mike Locksley said. "I don't mean just in the Mountain West Conference. I mean in the country."

That's pretty high praise for a player who didn't even earn his first start until the season's fourth game.

"I can't do anything about that," Rainey said. "I just try to control what I can control. I go out there and do the best I can when they put me out there."

One standout performance after another led to his earning a start, and now he's pretty much a fixture on the line.

"He's got a motor that doesn't quit," Locksley pointed out. "And he's got tremendous quickness. His fast-twitch muscles are something else."

Rainey grinned at these compliments, then took an "Aw, shucks," attitude and shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know," he said. "The trainers here do a really good job with us. "

Indeed. And the proof is in the stopwatch and the results.

He has been timed at 4.82 seconds in the 40-yard dash, the fastest linemen on the team. For a man who stands 6-foot, 2-inches and weighs 242 pounds, that's flat-out getting down the line.

Add in a 34-inch vertical leap and there's a star in the making.

Rainey's athleticism was evident early on. While attending Houston's Northbrook High School, he was a third-team all-district hoops player as both a sophomore and a junior and he also was third in his district in the high jump. He actually didn't start playing football seriously until his junior year because he thought his athletic future might be on the basketball court.

Those thoughts pretty quickly evaporated once he hit the gridiron and made an immediate impact for the Raiders. As a senior, he totaled eight sacks and seven other tackles for losses.

Used to both team and individual success, this season been difficult on Rainey, as well as the rest of the Lobos.

"Any time you're losing, it's hard," he said. "But every game, we come out and do our best and try harder. We try to learn something that we can use for the next week."

As the season has progressed, Locksley has taken to using the youngsters more and more frequently in preparation for the future. He appreciates the attitude that the younger players bring to the field.

"Their energy is non-stop," he said. "They have so much enthusiasm to be playing. For the seniors, with each game and each loss, they are getting closer to the end of their career."

Rainey, however, is one of the reasons that Locksley has so much enthusiasm of his own for the future of the New Mexico program. Rainey's potential is unlimited and, with a few breaks and some blue-chip recruits, the same just might be said for New Mexico, despite the 0-5 record to date.