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LONGHORNS FOOTBALL

Young ready to contribute for Texas

Running back believes he's ready after injury, academic problems.

By **Cedric Golden**
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF
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Selvin Young felt like he was just along for the ride during the 2004 season. Literally.

After breaking his ankle on a kickoff return in the season's second game against Arkansas, Young underwent surgery on Sept. 13 and spent most of the 2004 season on a motorized scooter while his teammates were busy posting a 11-1 mark that ended with an emotional win over Michigan in the Rose Bowl.

Meanwhile, Cedric Benson, who fended off Young's spirited challenge for the starting running back job just two seasons earlier, turned in a stellar senior season and became the first Texas running back to run for 1,000 yards in four straight seasons.

Young remembered lying on the training table in the bowels of Fayetteville's Razorback Stadium while the team trainer examined him after a fateful 24-yard first-quarter kickoff return that subsequently resulted in a Texas touchdown drive. Texas won the game 22-20 but lost its backup tailback and top returner for the season.

Young, who missed two games with a groin injury his sophomore year, was devastated at the prospect of missing another 10 games in 2004 but resolved to return to his freshman form, when he ran for 408 yards on 4.8 yards per carry as Benson's understudy.

Last year's injury was even more painful considering he opened the season with 102 yards rushing and two touchdowns against North Texas one



Larry Kolvoord/AMERICAN-STATESMAN
([enlarge photo](#))

Selvin Young's ability and experience make the junior the top candidate for the starting job at running back for the Longhorns.



week earlier.

"I could see the big picture while I was on that table," said Young, 21. "I believe the Lord was with me and I had faith. We all have tests in life and I felt when my time came to shine that it would happen."

To add to Young's frustration, he was academically ineligible following the season and was unable to practice in spring football. Young spent the spring regaining his eligibility by taking classes at Austin Community College.

"You could see it in his eyes last season that it was killing him not to play," said senior offensive tackle Jonathan Scott. "So when we reported to campus last week, he was one of the most excited guys here. He's been waiting a long time to play some football."

Benson is gone now, and Young, who has muscled up to 220 pounds after playing at 210 last season, is back with two years of eligibility left after the NCAA granted him a medical redshirt for last season.

The former Houston Jersey Village High star said he rededicated himself over the summer. Longer weight room sessions and being a regular participant in the team's player-only 7-on-7 drills were part of his summer regimen. Young and roommate Vince Young also threw the football around the house at all hours.

"I told him to be ready to catch the ball this season," Vince Young said. "He still has great hands and hasn't lost any of that speed."

New running backs coach Ken Rucker believes Young is more than capable of stepping in for Benson, who finished as the sixth-leading rusher in NCAA Division 1-A history with 5,540 yards.

"He's has been in the fire before and this is a comfortable arena for him," Rucker said. "So he will handle this challenge and his teammates will help because that's the maturity of this football team."

But nothing is guaranteed. The oft-injured Young, who has played in only 26 of a possible 38 career games, is in a battle with sophomore speedster Ramonce Taylor for the starting job.

Coach Mack Brown has decided to not have a depth chart during the preseason so there is no definitive word on whom he plans to start. Young won't be discussing the matter any more, either.

Young has said he will not be granting any more interviews for the rest of the preseason. Instead, he said he wanted to devote the next three weeks to re-establishing himself on the football field after missing last season.

"He told me, 'Coach, I haven't done anything,' " Brown said. "Selvin has had a tough time with his injuries and he told me he wanted to prove that he belonged in this lineup before speaking to the media."

Young is treating the upcoming season as a fresh start, and he switched to his old Little League number (22) to signify that he is starting anew. He also plans to return punts even if he starts, just like Kansas State tailback Darren Sproles did the past two seasons.

But Texas' lack of depth in the backfield and his history of injuries may limit those opportunities.

In all, Young hasn't been involved in a competitive football play in 335 days, so the 22 days until the season opener can't get



Larry Kolvoord/AMERICAN-STATESMAN
(enlarge photo)

After sitting out most of last season with a broken ankle, running back Selvin Young says he's ready to contribute for the Longhorns.

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here soon enough.

"My legs are moving so fast right now that I'm just trying to catch up with them," he said. "I believe everything is starting to fall into place."

cgolden@statesman.com; 912-5944

Selvin Young at a glance

Class: Junior

Size: 5 feet, 11 inches, 220 pounds

High School: Houston Jersey Village

Career rushing (att-yds-TDs): 132-661-10

Career touchdowns: 13 (10 rushing, 3 returns)

Did you know? Young rushed for 2,204 yards and 24 touchdowns as a high school sophomore.

UT running back candidates

Selvin Young

The most experienced running back on the team, Young's 132 carries and his knowledge of the offense make him the leading candidate to start.

Ramonce Taylor

One of the most explosive players on the team, the 195-pound sophomore will have to answer questions regarding his ability to take the pounding of an every-down back.

Chris Ogbonnaya

The 6-1, 220-pound freshman has been on campus all summer and got a chance to work out with teammates before the preseason started. Several linemen say the former Strake Jesuit High star has a similar running style to Cedric Benson.

Jamaal Charles

The 6-1, 190-pound speedster freshman has a huge upside with his running instinct combined with an ability to run between the tackles. After being sidelined this week while waiting for high school transcript to receive the blessing of the NCAA clearinghouse, he suited up Thursday night for practice.

Henry Melton

May end up being a fullback or a defensive end at Texas, but Coach Mack Brown is looking at the 6-3, 270-pound freshman, who was a USA Today All-American at Grapevine High, as an option at tailback.

Jerrell Wilkerson

San Antonio's all-time leading city rusher with 7,249 yards and 110 touchdowns, the 5-8, 175-pound Wilkerson may be the second coming of Hodges Mitchell.

—Cedric Golden

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