

LONGHORNS FOOTBALL

Griffin twins could make up half of UT's secondary

Michael Griffin is the established player; Marcus eyes a starting spot.

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For at least a few moments earlier this month, the normally gregarious Michael Griffin was keeping his mouth shut.

The Texas free safety wanted to share the limelight with his twin brother, Marcus, as they talked about their tight relationship and how that might impact next season's secondary for the national champion Longhorns.

If the brothers have their way, they'll be the first set of twins to start for Texas since Kerry and Keith Cash were catching footballs in 1990.

So far, the Griffins have been easy to tell apart. Although both sport the same dread-locked hairstyles, Michael is the thicker of the two fraternal twins. They're hoping, however, that their play will be mirrorlike this fall.

After all, the two have been competing against each other since they were 6 years old.

"What one didn't do, the other one did," said their mother, Mae Griffin.

For now, Michael Griffin has the significant edge. He was the hotshot recruit out of Bowie High School in 2003 who enjoyed a breakthrough season last fall. Although he loves to talk, the senior-to-be really doesn't need to do so anymore in order to get noticed — his play last season spoke loudly about his abilities.

His 124 tackles led the Longhorns, and he added a spectacular, game-turning interception during the Rose Bowl, picking off Southern California's Matt Leinart while managing to keep a toe inbounds at the end zone pylon.

Then there's Marcus Griffin, the quiet, more studious one of the pair. He's vying for the other starting

safety spot, left vacant with the graduation of Michael Huff, who shared a house with the Griffins last fall.

Most don't realize that on USC's final drive, it was Marcus Griffin on the field and not his more recognized brother; Michael had injured his neck earlier in the fourth quarter as he and Tarell Brown tackled Dwayne Jarrett on the Trojans' final touchdown.

As spring football workouts conclude Saturday, Marcus Griffin — along with Brandon Foster and Ryan Palmer — are in the mix to receive significant playing time at safety this fall. Foster and Palmer are cornerbacks but are being cross-trained at safety.

The Griffins have been inseparable since Michael was born two minutes earlier than Marcus in Austin on Jan. 4, 1985, back when the twins' parents were stationed at Bergstrom Air Force Base.

At Bowie, Marcus was the quarterback, running the option with Michael at tailback. On defense, Michael was a linebacker and Marcus was a safety.

When they got to UT, Michael got jersey No. 27; Marcus was No. 26.

While Michael was the higher-profile recruit, Marcus was trying to decide whether he should finally split from his brother and sign with Baylor, Kansas, Colorado or Texas-El Paso. After talking with Coach Mack Brown, Marcus agreed to come to Texas, though not initially on a scholarship.

"Coach Brown told us that with brothers, if they separate (in college), they eventually come together," Marcus said.

Michael said he and Marcus had never really talked about starting in the same secondary in college, but he acknowledged, "It's very cool to be playing on this level with my twin."

Marcus was put on scholarship last August. This fall will likely will be the final chance for the brothers to play together.

Marcus, having redshirted his freshman season, is officially a junior. Both are on track to graduate next spring.

Duane Akina, Texas' co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach, looks at the Griffins and sees similar players. Michael, he said, is enjoying his best practices ever as a Longhorn as the mental game improves even more for him. Marcus also is making strides to earn playing time.

Both fit in well with the other members of the Longhorns' secondary.

"Marcus is a character, too," Akina said. "He's not really as quiet and shy as people think. He can't be and fit in with this group."

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