

Hoosier Happenings

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One last shot

Matt Mayberry hopes his senior season can bring about redemption for a Hoosier defense that struggled a year ago

By Matt Weaver

Following a 3-9 season that saw the defense really struggle, Matt Mayberry understands the lack of preseason accolades for the Hoosiers. But IU's senior middle linebacker believes the defense is going to have a successful 2009 campaign, and he is ready to prove the doubters wrong.

The rough season Indiana endured in 2008 was difficult for Mayberry, but it was especially hard for Mayberry to see his teammates drop around him with serious injuries.

"It wasn't a good season at all with the injuries and stuff," Mayberry says. "I'd probably say that was the most stressful part about last year."

Turning things around in 2009 will come down to one issue, especially for a defense that is loaded with experience but hasn't earned the respect of Big Ten opponents.

"As a defensive unit we just all have to come together and stay healthy," Mayberry says. "I think that is the biggest thing. Last year we ran into a lot of injuries. I think in this camp we are really working on running to the ball and doing everything full speed. Things are going really good right now."

Outsiders, however, haven't had that same feeling about the Hoosiers. More than a few publications have low expectations for IU this season, but Mayberry isn't worried about what others think. He knows in his heart the Hoosiers can be something special. He is confident that by the end of the year people will be talking about the IU defense.

"Iowa and Ohio State, they are always going to get talked about," Mayberry says. "After a 3-9 season last year I don't expect us to get highly talked about, but I think after the season we'll be pretty highly talked about."

The former Hinsdale (Ill.) South High School standout said that one of his roles this year will be to get after the quarterback when the Hoosiers go to their blitz package.

"I'm doing a lot of the middle (linebacker) work and all those responsibilities, but I think I'll be used more in the blitz package and stuff like that," Mayberry says. "I was pretty successful last year at getting to the quarterback, so I think that is something that the coaches rely on me to do."

Mayberry believes that rushing the quarterback is something that he excels in because of the speed he brings to the linebacker position.

"I think just using my speed (4.49 40-yard time)," Mayberry says. "For a linebacker, I don't like to brag or anything, but I don't think too many linebackers have the speed that I use, and I have to use that to my advantage. It works well in blitz packages."

That speed is also beneficial when it comes to some of his other responsibilities on the field.

"It's a great asset," Mayberry says. "In coverage you're asked to cover No. 2 receivers and running backs a lot, especially in the Big Ten Conference. You're asked to do a lot of things, and big speed is a big part of it."

If the defense is going to enjoy a successful 2009, it is imperative that the young IU defensive tackles play well, and Mayberry is pleased by what he has seen from the group up front over the past couple of weeks.



Photo by A.J. Mast

"Larry Black, Jr., Deonte Mack, Mick Mentzer, they are all playing great football," says Mayberry about IU's defensive tackles. "They're young guys, and they are really learning the plays. They're big body guys, and it is probably the best depth we've had at that position since I've been here. I'm really excited for those guys to play this year."

Mayberry believes the return of safeties Nick Polk and Austin Thomas from torn anterior cruciate ligaments will provide a boost, as well. Mayberry says it is great to look behind him and see his two teammates healthy and out on the field.

"It's wonderful," Mayberry says. "Last year those two guys got hurt, and they're a real big

aspect to our defense. It's wonderful to see Nos. 20 (Thomas) and 8 (Polk) back there. They are great run stoppers and great in coverage, as well."

The talented linebacker knows that if Indiana's defense plays well, he will get the notoriety that he is looking for individually.

"I think I still got to go out and prove myself this year and have a big season," says Mayberry about what he needs to do to show he is one of the best linebackers in the conference. "There are a lot of great linebackers in the Big Ten, and all I can do is go out and help my team. My responsibility as a middle linebacker is to help the defense be successful this year."

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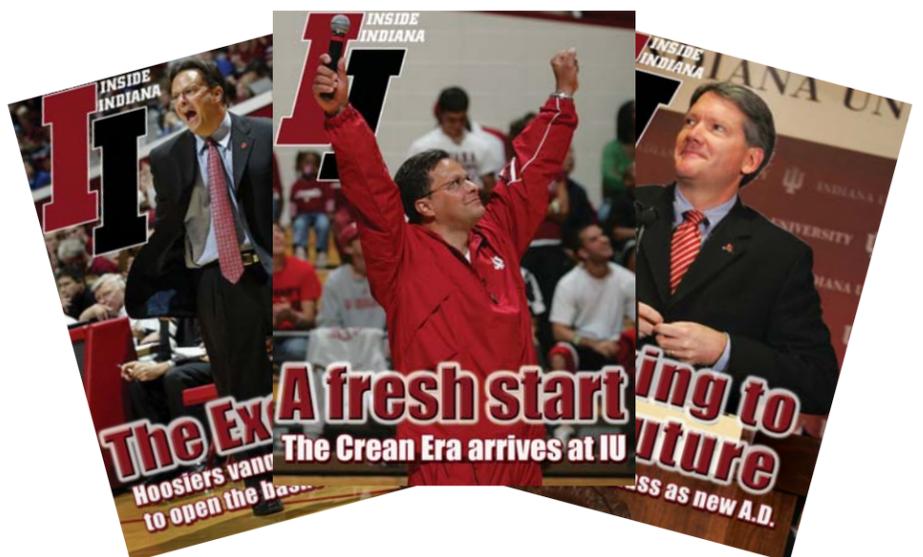
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