

WESTERN RECRUITS: MAKING AN IMPACT

A new crop of talented recruits every fall is a necessity for teams hoping to be top competitors in the CIS. That has been key to the success of the Western Mustangs over the last several years, and that trend has continued in a big way in 2011.

On offense, Tyler Varga (Kitchener, Ont.) has had an exceptional first year for the purple and white. It's not easy to have immediate success in the CIS as a rookie, but Varga certainly made it look that way, as he scored three touchdowns in his debut and then followed that up with a 149-yard, four-touchdown performance in Western's 48-21 win over

McMaster in week 2.

"Tyler has made a big impact," said Mustangs head coach Greg Marshall. "He picked up our offense very, very quickly, and he has run the ball well, caught the ball well, and blocked well. I knew coming in that he was an outstanding talent, but he has been even better than I expected."

In seven games overall, Varga, who ran for three scores on his 18th birthday in a win over Wilfrid Laurier, finished the regular season with a CIS-leading 15 touchdowns. His 799 total yards on the ground, meanwhile, ranked second in the OUA and fifth in the CIS.

Western's top recruit on

the other side of the ball was defensive tackle Daryl Waud (Hamilton, Ont.). He, too, got off to a fast start as a Mustang, recording five tackles in his debut and coming up with an interception against McMaster in Week 2, which he returned 33 yards for a touchdown. An ankle injury suffered against Ottawa in Week 3 sidelined Waud for a month, but he has returned strong.

"He has come back and played very, very well in the last couple of games," Marshall said. "He's going to be a player who is dominant. We really believe he'll be one of the top defensive linemen here for a long time."

But among first-year Mustangs, production hasn't just been limited to the Varga and Waud show. Other rookies have also made an impact, including defensive backs Calvin Johnson (Brampton, Ont.) and Horace Fennikin (Brampton, Ont.), and defensive end Ricky Osei-Kusi (Brampton, Ont.). That trio combined for 23 total tackles and an interception during the regular season. And the Mustangs got a glimpse of the future against Queen's in Week 8, as rookie receivers Matt Brazier (London, Ont.) and Rahul Madan (Toronto, Ont.) stepped in to replace some resting starters and combined for seven catches and 91 yards.



When new recruits commit to the University of Western Ontario, Marshall says he hopes the primary reason is academics -- that the player wants to attend a school with a strong academic reputation, and that Western offers that player his program of choice.

But at the same time, Marshall doesn't shy away from selling the Mustangs football program to potential recruits.

"We believe that we're one of the top football programs in the country," he said. "We have a commitment to our program,

we have a tradition, and we can provide student-athletes with a great athletic experience."

That combination -- attending a well-respected academic institution and playing for a top CIS football team -- is what brought Daryl Waud to Western. And so far, he says, that decision has paid off.

"I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, that's for sure," he said. "The slogan [at Western] is 'the best student experience,' and it's been nothing but that. I'm having a blast."

Waud, like many first-year

students, has encountered some hurdles in his transition from high school to university, and the biggest challenge has been time management. But the youngster has received support from Western's athletics department, which offers academic seminars for student-athletes and also administers mandatory study hall sessions on Monday nights.

"They help for learning tips on how to study and how to write essays," said Waud, who hopes to pursue teacher's college down the road. "That extra help has been beneficial for me, and I'm sure I'm

speaking for a lot of the rookies on that one."

Better time management has resulted in better focus on the football field for Waud and his fellow first-year teammates. And this year's crop of recruits has certainly looked focused in helping the Mustangs to a 7-1 regular season record. Next up for these rookies is their first taste of CIS playoff football, and Varga, Waud and company are hoping their first season extends into late November and includes a trip to the Vanier Cup.

