



AP Photo/Michael Perez

Anonymous No More Taylor Heinicke is First in His Class in Football, and Dean's List in Engineering

BY RICH RADFORD

For someone known for flinging footballs all over the place, Taylor Heinicke sure does enjoy operating under the radar. This past fall, he habitually roamed the campus along Hampton Boulevard wearing a hoodie and jeans, forsaking the sweats-with-jersey-number wardrobe of the typical Old Dominion University football player. When in class, he would sit on the end of the middle rows in lecture halls, often donning reading glasses to promote an even less conspicuous look.

Most of the time, it worked. Sometimes it worked shockingly well. "There was this one time when I was sitting on a bench with a friend and he looks over at these two girls near us and says, 'Do you know who this is? It's Taylor Heinicke.' I was so mad at him," Heinicke said, rolling his eyes skyward to emphasize his disapproval. "Then both girls both looked at me and said, 'No he's not. That's not Taylor Heinicke.' That kind of got him off the hook."

Heinicke (pronounced HINE-eh-kee) even figured he had his professors fooled.

Then, two days after setting two NCAA records in a second-round NCAA playoff victory over Coastal Carolina, he wandered into lecturer Hut Lindner's calculus class, believing he was still off the grid, at least in his instructor's eyes.

Lindner, however, coyly said, "Only 497 yards? You couldn't make it a nice, round 500?"

So much for anonymity.

Then again, anybody at Old Dominion who doesn't know who Taylor Heinicke is and what he looks like by now just isn't paying attention to the 19-year-old who has become the face of the university. Heinicke has had his boyish mug plastered across television screens and Internet sites from coast to coast in the last four months, breaking records set by legendary players on his way to winning the Walter Payton Award, symbolic of the best player in the Football Championship Subdivision (FCS).

The Payton Award is the FCS's equivalent of the Heisman Trophy and Heinicke won it in a landslide. Then again, he should have, after becoming the first FCS player to pass for over 5,000 yards in a season. It was just one of a slew of records he set during the 2012 campaign.

"Our football team was on national television three times this year and I have to believe that anybody tuning in and watching us had to come away curious about what ODU is all about," said football coach Bobby Wilder. "Maybe they Googled ODU to see what the school's all about. Maybe they saw us playing in front of a sold-out crowd and thought, 'Gee, the weather looks pretty nice there.'"

"Maybe they thought of applying to school here, all because they learned about us by watching ODU play a football game on national television. Say what you want, but the reality is that Taylor Heinicke is driving the bus that's opening eyes for ODU across the nation. I don't think that ODU has ever had an athlete like Taylor who has actually moved the needle the way he has."

And to think, he had to practically beg schools to look at him coming out of high school.

Despite eye-popping numbers during his senior year at Collins Hill High in suburban Atlanta, not one top tier Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) team was