



PREP FOOTBALL

GO WITH THE FLOWE

Upland sophomore linebacker already attracting attention

By Michelle Gardner

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In the spring University of Oklahoma linebackers coach Tim Kish stopped by to see Upland football coach Tim Salter. The two have been friends for some time and Salter had been telling him about his latest young prospect — linebacker Justin Flowe.

The Sooners coach only needed to watch a few minutes of film and he was convinced Salter did indeed have a promising young athlete on his hands.

"He told me, 'You were right. That kid is special,' " Salter recalled.

The next day Flowe, a 6-foot-2, 215-pounder, was offered a scholarship by Oklahoma. It is one of nine he has now and his sophomore season has not yet started. His first offer came after an impressive showing during a 7-on-7 passing league the summer before he started high school.

Flowe's list now includes Penn State, Oklahoma, USC, UCLA, Oregon, Utah, Washington State, San Diego State, San Jose State. That list of options is sure to grow with each game.

The buzz has been reminiscent of the attention running back Nathan Tilford drew in his first couple of years at Upland. Tilford, now a freshman at Arizona, got an offer from USC as an eighth grader. But Salter is convinced that Flowe could draw even more attention before he has departed.

Salter also compares his player to a "young" Su'a Craves, who played at Vista Murrieta and went on to USC but now plays with the Washington Redskins.

"If the kid doesn't get hurt he will play on Sundays," said Salter, the longest-tenured coach in the Inland Valley. "You hate to say that about kid this early, but he has all the attributes and skills that translate to playing at the next level, then the next."

Salter isn't the only one dishing out the compliments. Recruiting service 247 Sports has Flowe listed as the top-ranked linebacker in the country for the class of 2020, as well as the top prospect in California and No. 8 prospect overall for players of any position.

Flowe, 15, takes such lofty accolades in stride.

"It's all nice to hear," he said after a practice earlier this week. "I just want to stay humble and keep working hard to get better. I just love to play football."

There was a clear indication of things to come last year when Flowe excelled on the playoff stage, He started the season on the freshman team but was promoted halfway through the season when the school's lower level coaches told Salter the freshman was more than prepared.

The Highlanders were going through some growing pains and settled for a tie for second in the Baseline League behind Rancho Cucamonga. In the CIF Southern Section Division 1 playoff game against national power St. John Bosco, Salter started seven sophomores and the then freshman Flowe.

The youngest player was the best on the field for the Highlanders. Despite losing 47-20, Flowe had made a statement with his play — 19 tackles.

What exactly sets Flowe aside from other high school players? Well, everything.

"He's very quick and he has great explosiveness but he also has great instincts and knowledge of the game. Put those together and you have a kid that can really deliver a hit," Salter said.

"There is a very small window you have to make a play or not make it. If you hesitate every so slightly, that window is going to close. He almost always gets through that window because he can see the play developing almost before it happens. And he is never out of a play."

While Flowe's primary position is linebacker, Salter says he won't hesitate to use him at running back, much like he did with Josh Woods, a 2015 graduate of Upland who is now playing linebacker at UCLA and to whom Salter compares favorably.

"They both are very fast and very fluid," Salter said of Flowe and Woods.

"Nathan was more powerful. He would just run over you Flowe just wants to be on the field but he prefers delivering the hits.

"I played offense and defense when I was younger but I like defense," he said. "I like to be the guy out there making plays."

Flowe has known from a very young age football was something he wanted to pursue as more than just a hobby. He grew up playing with the Pomona Steelers in the youth league organized by Snoop Dog. His father played football,, so did an uncle.

He also has a younger brother Jonathan, 14, a freshman at the school who plays safety and linebacker.

"Ever since I was 8 or 9 all I wanted to do was play football," he said. "I can't imagine would it would be like not to play."