

Running back hit books before indoor circuit

By Ben Roberts

broberts@herald-leader.com

Like most college freshmen meeting with an academic adviser for the first time, Rayshawn Askew didn't really know what to say when he was asked to declare a major.

He had enjoyed biology in high school, and physics wasn't bad, either.

But the path Askew's adviser laid out for him that day would have made just about anyone take pause.

Not this college freshman.

Askew embraced the biology/pre-medicine curriculum that was recommended, and he graduated four years later with honors, even though it meant his days at Elizabeth City State University on the North Carolina coast might have been a bit repetitive.

"I spent so many hours at that library," Askew said.

Every day was pretty much the same for the Cincinnati native. He would wake up and eat breakfast, go to the library until it was time for class, then grind his way through football practice before a second trip to the library, where he would study until closing time.

In all, Askew estimates he spent about six or seven hours in the library on a normal day at Elizabeth City. That's a commendable feat for any college student, let alone the starting running back on the football team, who no doubt would have rather called it a day after practice and limped back to his dorm room.

But that's never really been Askew's style.

"My dad always told me that hard work would pay off for me, so I worked hard," he said. "I wanted to make sure I had a sol-



Rayshawn Askew graduated with honors at Elizabeth City State University.

id backup plan in case I was ever hurt and couldn't play."

He never took days off as a student, and he doesn't take plays off as a football player. That's why Askew won't have to rely on his backup plan any time soon.

In an indoor football career that has spanned six seasons and five different teams, Askew has earned the distinction as one of the most celebrated running backs in the history of the sport.

He got his professional start in the National Indoor Football

League with the Lincoln Capitols shortly after graduating. From there, he played with the Ohio Valley Greyhounds, Cincinnati Marshals, and Port Huron Pirates before joining the Lexington Horsemen this season.

He led the NIFL in rushing with Ohio Valley in 2004, broke the league scoring record with Cincinnati in 2005 and was named league MVP while leading Port Huron last year.

Askew's 180 career touchdowns are the most in indoor history. Askew has never had a losing record as a pro, and he's led two teams to undefeated seasons and league championships.

"He's the greatest back in the history of indoor football, and he wins wherever he goes. Hopefully he's bringing that with him," said Horsemen wide receiver John Cooper, who was Askew's teammate at Ohio Valley when the Greyhounds won

the NIFL title in 2003.

Horsemen Coach Mike Zuckerman was Lexington's defensive coordinator when Askew was running all over his opponents, including Lexington, as a Greyhound.

"We've known him ever since we started this thing, and we've always had a good relationship with him," Zuckerman said. "There's always been an open invitation where if he wanted to play for us, he could come and play."

Askew scored three touchdowns in his first game as a Horseman and earned the league's first offensive player of the week award in a 44-37 win over his former team, Ohio Valley. Through three games, he has 137 yards and a league-leading eight touchdowns.

Playing in Lexington also gives Askew's family a chance to see him on the field. His parents and siblings still live in Cincinnati, and his brother B.J., a running back for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, is even planning on coming up for a couple of games.

After his football career is over, he plans on either going to medical school or working on a master's degree in chemistry.

In the meantime, he'd like to put his knowledge to good use in the community as a physical trainer for young athletes, something he's done along his previous pro stops.

And once his days as a student are through, Askew said he might like to open up his own gym and settle down for good, maybe even in Lexington.

"I never intended to go to that many different places. That's just kind of how it worked out," he said. "But I've enjoyed it, and it's given me a chance to see different places and meet different people. I don't know. I'm always ready for new things."

Today

Ohio Valley at Lexington

When: 3 p.m.

Where: Rupp Arena

Records: Ohio Valley 1-2, Lexington 2-1

TV: WLRO-FM 101.5