

# Everywhere Jordan: Central Valley's Whitehead shines on offense and defense in Pitt's loss

By Lauren Kirschman

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PITTSBURGH — It felt just like old times to Jordan Whitehead.

In high school, he did this often: Make plays on offense, then turn around and do the same on defense. As a senior at Central Valley, he rushed for 1,925 yards and 35 touchdowns. But, up until Pitt's 42-30 loss to Notre Dame on Saturday, he hadn't played offense in college.

Instead, he became an instant star at strong safety, starting as a freshman and leading Pitt with 73 tackles so far this season. Against the Fighting Irish, though, Whitehead got the chance to show what he can do with the ball in his hands.

He didn't disappoint.

Whitehead rushed for 27 yards and two touchdowns on four carries. He played every snap on defense, too, finishing with a team-high 11 tackles — nine solo — and 1.5 tackles for loss. Add in kickoff team and some punt return duties, and there wasn't a lot Whitehead didn't do.

"It's been in," Whitehead said of his offensive package, "but they never really ran it. Coach (Pat Narduzzi) just told me (during the week) they were going to run it. He was serious, and I knew he was. So when I got my chance, I was just trying to make something of it."

As for whether the added time on the field led to some extra fatigue?

“Not right now,” Whitehead said with a grin. “Maybe tomorrow.”

To anyone who watched Whitehead play in high school, Saturday’s performance wasn’t a surprise. It was the kind of outing that became almost routine for the former No. 1 recruiting prospect in Pennsylvania.

And it wasn’t much of a shock to his coaches or teammates, either. They’ve seen what Whitehead is capable of in practice. It was just a matter of finding the right time to try it during a game.

Quarterback Nate Peterman said they had the package in the works since before the Panthers’ loss to Iowa in September, but they wanted more time before breaking it out for the first time.

“(Whitehead) came in with eyes wide open, wanting to learn and saying, ‘Just tell me what to do, and I’m going to go in ready to play,’” Peterman said. “It’s huge for him and huge for our team, and I’m really happy for him and proud of him.”

Whitehead was called out of the defensive huddle on the sideline for the first time on Pitt’s opening drive. He stayed in for one play, rushing for 5 yards, and then returned in the second quarter for a 9-yard run.

Then, with 11:19 left in the third quarter, Whitehead cut through the Notre Dame defense for a 10-yard touchdown. Nine minutes later, he scored again, this time from 3 yards out.

Before the game, Whitehead — who said he’s now completely comfortable with the defense — spent time with Peterman and Pitt’s running backs to make sure he had the plays down.

Once he stepped on the field, Peterman did what he could to guide him and make sure he lined up correctly. Then, he just told Whitehead to go make a play. He shouldn’t have bothered. For Whitehead, it was a flashback to high school.

He knew what to do.

“Maybe I’m really dumb, and we should’ve started using him earlier,” Narduzzi said. “He had four carries and two touchdowns. Sometimes he doesn’t get touched. He’s an explosive player. He can be electric for us on offense and we just have to keep using him, so I imagine there will be more of that.

“It was time to try a new package and let Jordan play. It was something we thought about, and it was the right time to do it.”

