

Notre Dame's Corey Robinson a man of the world



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When his Notre Dame teammates speak of Corey Robinson, they rarely mention football. They're more into his latest passport stamp.

"I ask him, 'Corey, where did you go this time? Bring me something back,'" fellow receiver Chris Brown said. "He is going to be president — somewhere. I'm talking Rhodes Scholar smart."

Joked quarterback Malik Zaire: "I never know if he's working out in the offseason or not. He's all over the world."

Following 2014 visits to Brazil and Japan, Robinson journeyed from South Bend to South Africa in May as part of a Notre Dame study-abroad trip for 16 Irish student-athletes, including seven football players.

"My mission is to tell people: You can have a holistic college experience," Robinson said during a 15-minute chat with the Tribune. "Just because you play Notre Dame football, you don't have to live Notre Dame football. I think studying abroad is an important part to any student's development as a person."

What struck Robinson during his trip to Japan were the cultural differences — people are too polite to say no and the emphasis is on the group, rather than the individual.

At Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for 18 years, Robinson learned that the political prisoners were *rewarded* with classes, a contrast to the mindset among many American teens.

"A lot of people think school is a chore," he said.

The Irish junior is not one of them. He has made the dean's list in each of his four semesters while taking classes in poetry and astronomy, and with an opera scholar named Pierpaolo Polzonetti. His name rolls off Robinson's tongue.

"Corey Robinson is the most interesting man on the team and probably at the university," Zaire said. "He is such a well-rounded guy, and that is something everyone should aspire to be."

Said associate head coach/receivers coach Mike Denbrock: "When Corey leaves the building, I don't know that he is obsessed with football. He's obsessed with being a good human being and contributing to society."

It's fitting that Robinson, despite growing up in football-mad Texas, never was drawn to the sport. He was a self-described "tennis nut" who once met Andy Roddick and used to string rackets for fun.

He showed up at San Antonio Christian High School for football tryouts without a position. His goal was to team with other brother David Jr.

By the time Corey realized that David Jr. wasn't going to play, he was stuck.

"I unwittingly made the team and I couldn't quit because basketball season was next," he recalled. "And in high school if you quit one sport you couldn't play the next two seasons. So I had to play football so I could play basketball and tennis.

"I was slow, couldn't jump and was relatively short. The only thing I could do was catch the ball, so everyone said: 'You have great hands. Keep at it.'"

Now he's nearly 6-foot-5 — still eight inches shy of his Basketball Hall of Fame father, David — and a dangerous enough weapon that Notre Dame coach Brian Kelly said teams would be "crazy" to try to cover him with a single defensive back.

"We're preparing him for a lot more zone ... and bracket coverage," Kelly said.

Offensive coordinator Mike Sanford called him a "vicinity catcher ... it doesn't have to be the perfect ball. Corey can open his hips and make plays that most human beings can't make."

Robinson caught 40 balls last season and scored two *legal* touchdowns at Florida State. (Don't ask Irish fans about the third.)

He is ready for what opposing defenses have in store.

"I approach football in the same way I approach classes," he said. "Going into the film room, I'm asking: 'Why am I running this route? What is my secondary read? What is the Z (receiver) doing? What is the X doing? Am I pulling for them so they are open? It's very intellectual.'"

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