

Winnsboro's Mike Anderson gets ready to run for the University of Missouri Tigers

By **WORTHY EVANS**
Staff Writer

It took a while for Winnsboro native Mike Anderson to show his talent on the gridiron.

Now that he's verbally committed to the University of Missouri as a running back, the 24-year-old Anderson hopes the country will see what he has to offer.

The son of Emily Copeland of Winnsboro, Anderson began the long road to starting at a major college in Fairfield County.

He once tried out for the Griffins as a freshman at Fairfield Central High School. When the coaches said they wanted him as a lineman, he joined the Griffins' marching band instead.

"I wanted from the start to be a running back," he said. "When they said they wanted me as a lineman, I lost interest."

After graduation Anderson enlisted in the Marines and was stationed at Camp Pendleton, Calif. But the football bug bit Anderson again. He eventually tried out for one of the base's organized football teams.

"I wasn't too interested in playing football at first, but my buddies convinced me to try out," he said. "This was full-contact, full-pads football, open to anyone who tried out."

Anderson's base play caught the attention of a retired colonel who coached for Mount San Jacinto Junior College in Southern California.

After talking to the assistant coach and to head coach Bob Stangel, Anderson accepted the

college's offer.

Neither MSJC nor Anderson has regretted that decision.

The last two years were very good for the school and for Anderson, who finally achieved his dream of becoming a star running back.

In his first year of playing organized football for any school in 1996, Anderson set the school's single season rushing record with 1,511 yards in a 10-game season.



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Mike Anderson
Future Missouri Tiger



That year he also led California in rushing, scoring and multi-purpose yards on the junior college level.

Meanwhile, MSJC made the conference playoffs for the first time in 15 years and defeated West Los Angeles in the Los Angeles County Bowl.

In 1997, Anderson racked up 1,477 yards and 386 receiving yards, averaging 195.9 yards per game.

That year, MSJC went undefeated in the conference and 6-4 overall.

Anderson's phenomenal

performance on the junior college level attracted several large universities.

"I chose Missouri for several reasons," Anderson said. "It's a program on the rise. Missouri played some tough games last season and has one of the toughest schedules next year."

Along with colleges like Bowling Green, Missouri plays Nebraska, Ohio, Ohio State, Colorado, Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Clemson.

"I'm looking forward to the Clemson game," he said. "Being from Fairfield County, I've heard all about Clemson and the Gamecocks. Now I'll get a chance to play against them."

Anderson, who will wear No. 22, said he hopes to start.

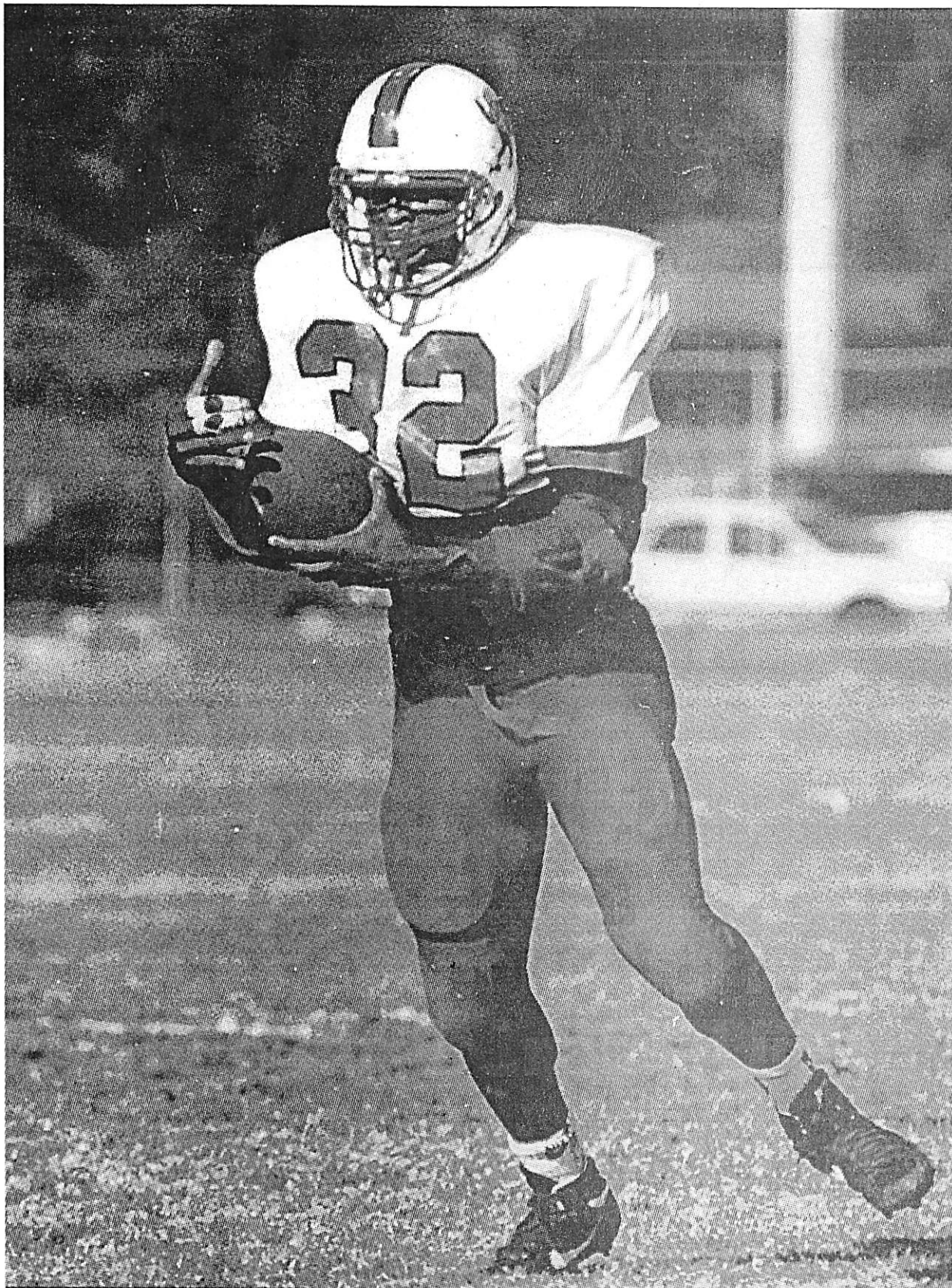
"I have a really good chance," he said. "I've already played on the college level, so I have more experience than the typical high school senior."

Anderson said he hopes to play on the professional level someday. As a physical education major, he would also like to return to the high school level - as a coach.

"If I can't play football anymore, I'd love the opportunity to coach at that level," he said. "I'd like to pass on the desire to play and to teach kids that anything's possible, that you just have to want it badly enough."

The sheer thrill of playing football is enough to keep him going, he said.

"It's hard to pin it down. It's like a rush," he said. "You never know what to expect."



PHOTO/SPECIAL

Winnsboro native Mike Anderson started at running back for Mt. San Jacinto College in southern California for the past two years. After setting rushing and scoring records there, he verbally committed to play for the University of Missouri this fall.

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The loss to Newberry makes