



LUCKY 13

With a little luck and a lot of determination, sophomore Maurice Clarett of Ohio State has become the best running back in college football today

To understand what Maurice Clarett is all about, check out his tattoos. He has a tat on his left forearm that reads LUCKY. At first, the word LUCKY *seems* to tell Big Mo's whole story. Not many college freshmen walk into such a perfect situation, landing a starting spot on a team that wins the national championship. A four-leaf clover glued to a rabbit's foot doesn't have *that* kind of good fortune.

But, Clarett's real story can be found on his right bicep — the tattoo that says AGAINST ALL ODDS. He's only 19, but Clarett has already endured serious setbacks in order to enjoy serious success. The dude even rocks number 13 on his jersey, digits you're more likely to see on an elevator button than on a running back's uniform.

Everybody says bad things about 13, the bad-luck

Big Shot

by Justin Tejada

number," says Clarett. "I got 13, and it hasn't done me wrong yet."

Clarett wants to buck another trend this season. He hopes to become the first sophomore to win the Heisman Trophy in the award's 68-year history.

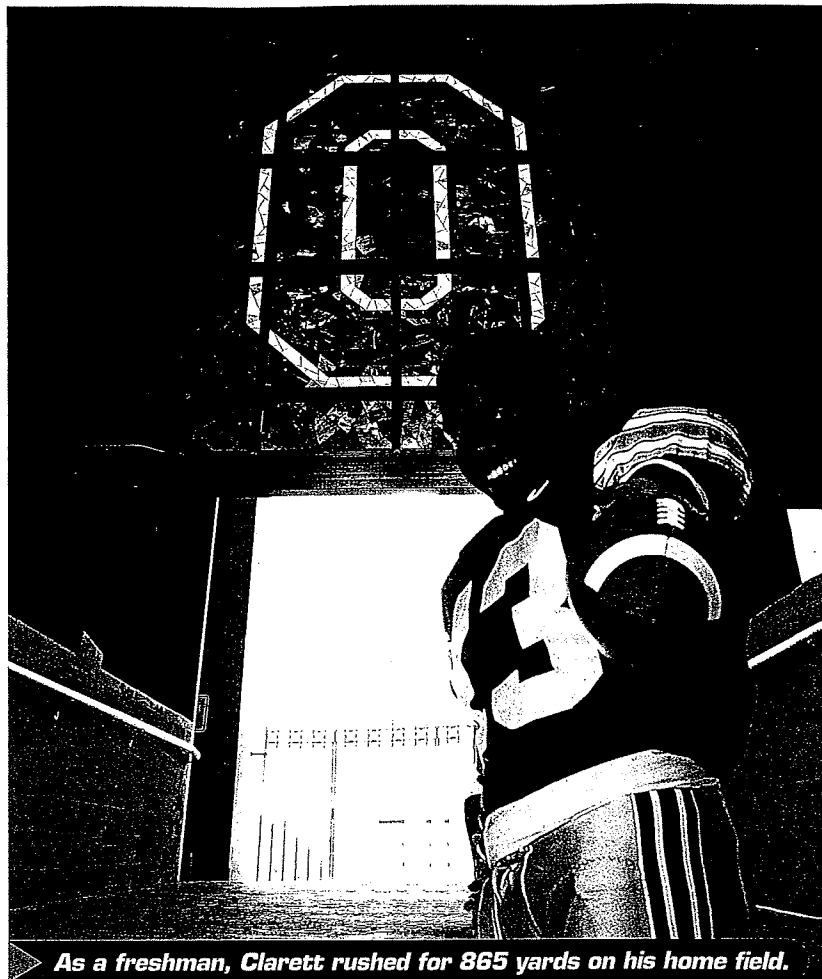
Freshman Phenom

No one was more shocked by Clarett's success last season than Clarett himself. He graduated a semester early from Warren G. Harding [Ohio] High School and enrolled at Ohio State, making him eligible for 2002 spring practices. As a senior at Harding, Clarett racked up 2,194 yards and 38 touchdowns and was named *USA Today's* high school offensive player of the year. But his first college work-

outs did little to buff his ego. "[Ohio State] had such a good defense, they bottled me up in practice," says Clarett. "My longest carry in spring was, like, six yards."

Once the season counted, Clarett quickly found that opposing defenses weren't as stingy. Many true freshmen redshirt, or sit out, a season to practice and learn. Clarett slipped into a Buckeyes' jersey and started the first game. He was the first true freshman Buckeye tailback to start in an opening game since 1943. He popped off for 175 yards and three touchdowns in the 45-21 season-opening win over Texas Tech. Two games later, he dropped a season-high 230 yards and two TDs on Washington State in a 25-7 win.

In some ways, Clarett plays more like an NFL veteran than a college underclassman. He is lightning fast and is strong enough to plow through defenders who try to drag him down with arm tackles. He also has sharp field awareness, which allows him to find the crack in the defense and turn broken plays into long gains.



As a freshman, Clarett rushed for 865 yards on his home field.

"He has great size and vision, and is very patient for a young guy," said Lloyd Carr, coach of archrival Michigan. "He has made a lot of big plays cutting back against the grain."

Carr should know. Clarett rushed for 119 yards in a 14-9 win over the Wolverines on November 23. The

performance made Clarett an instant hero to Buckeye fans, who prize a win over hated Michigan almost as much as the national championship.

But Clarett didn't disappoint in the title game, either. He scored two TDs, including the deciding score, in a 31-24 OT win over

"Everybody says bad things about 13 . . . it hasn't done me wrong yet," says Clarett.

Miami in the Fiesta Bowl national championship game. He finished the season with 1,237 rushing yards — the record for an Ohio State freshman.

Fame and Misfortune

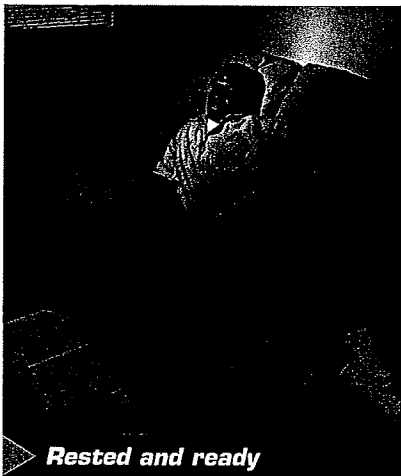
Clarett's fast and furious success wasn't without obstacles.

In the midst of his title run, he appeared on the cover of *ESPN The Magazine* above the headline "One and Done?" The NFL prohibits a player from joining the pros until three years after his high school class graduates. The article suggested that Clarett might challenge that rule. Critics started to wonder if the kid was greedy, spoiled, or immature. Clarett says the story was taken out of context: "The question was asked, 'If I had a chance after my freshman year to go to the NFL for a six-year, \$115 million deal, would I do it?' I was, like, 'I'd have left after junior high. What kind of [person] wouldn't?'"

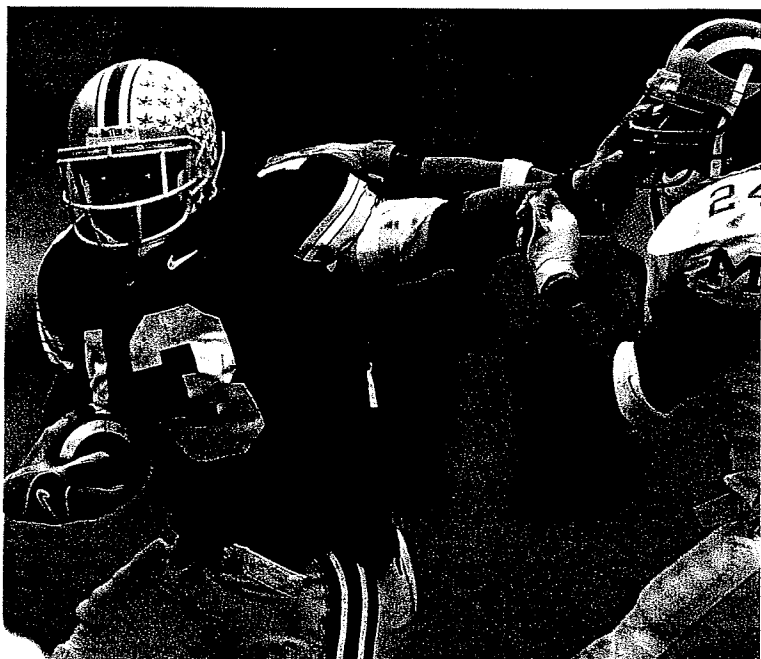
The road got rougher



► Buckeye fan favorite



► Rested and ready



► Clarett strikes the Heisman pose against rival Michigan.

CLARETT'S FAVORITE STUFF

| | |
|--|--|
| Sport to Play (other than football) | Basketball |
| Video Game | NCAA Football 2003 |
| TV Show | 106 & Park |
| Movie | Gladiator |
| Food | Slim Jims |
| Musical Artist | 50 Cent |
| Team to Watch | Baltimore Ravens |
| Cartoon Character | Bugs Bunny |
| Athletes | Jim Brown and LeBron James |
| Cereal | Corn Pops |
| Magazine | The Source |
| Car | Lamborghini Diablo |
| Animal | Pit bull. Clarett has one named Lucky. |

SLIM JIM AND CORN POPS BY FREDDY PERAZO; 50 CENT BY SCOTT GRIESE/GETTY IMAGES; BUGS BUNNY BY PHOTOESTIMAR BROS.; JIM BROWN BY WALTER IOOSS, JR./SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; LAMBORGHINI DIABLO BY CARLOS OSORIO/PIT BULL BY TON GANNAMAR

when an injury to his shoulder forced Clarett to miss three games and limited him in two others.

Then, two weeks before the Fiesta Bowl, one of Clarett's childhood friends was shot and killed. "That was a really emotional time for me," says Clarett. "You've got a lot of things going through your mind. I figure everything happens for a reason."

Growing Up the Hard Way

Clarett grew up in a tough neighborhood in Youngstown, Ohio, where getting out alive wasn't guaranteed. He has already been to the funerals of 10 friends.

"Being from Youngstown, it's kind of like the bad-luck city of Ohio. Everything is against you," he says.

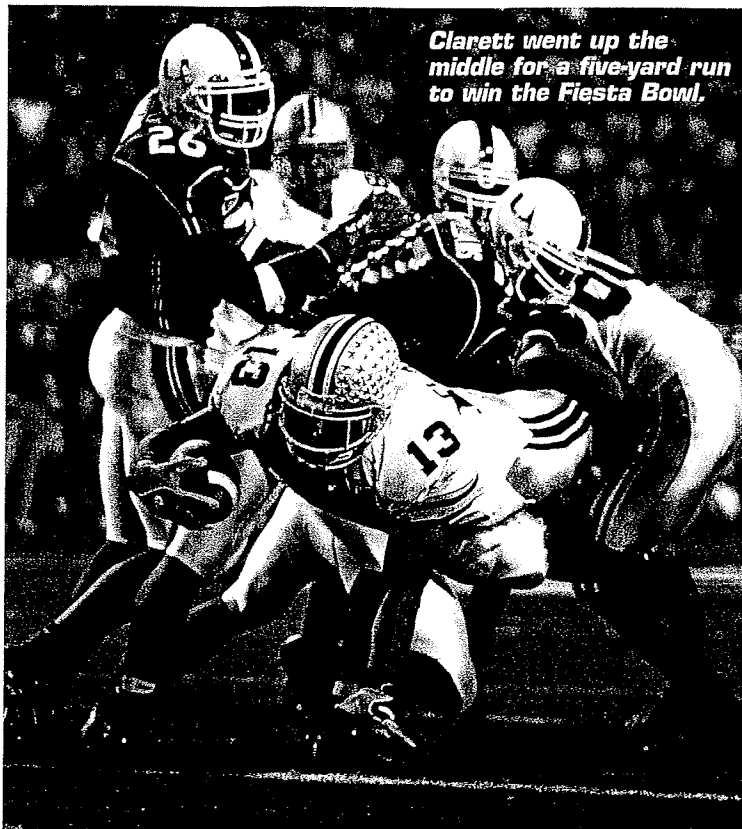
Clarett's family certainly didn't have fat pockets, but Clarett always had phat talent. While drug deals and drive-by's went down in his 'hood, Clarett found his escape in sports.

"He was sort of a legend in youth leagues, whether it was in basketball or football or anything," says Thom McDaniels, Clarett's high school football coach.

When McDaniels arrived at Harding High, Clarett was a junior and the team's star. He thought he could call his own shots. McDaniels put an end to that quickly.

"He always told me, 'I'm not scared to bench you.' I was like 'Whatever, man,'" Clarett says.

It wasn't an idle threat. When Clarett missed a team meal and



Clarett went up the middle for a five-yard run to win the Fiesta Bowl.

TEB S. WAREH/VAP

POSTER
INSIDE!

has done drills to increase his explosiveness and improve his receiving skills. And his left shoulder, which hampered him last season, is good to go. Clarett is back to bench-pressing

didn't ride on the bus to a game, McDaniels sat him for two games.

"After that, I started listening to him," says Clarett. "He gave me a whole lot of advice, and I ran with it. He's my 'cat' now."

No One-Season Wonder

Clarett still considers his old high school coach one of his trusted advisors. The day after winning the title, he called his former coach and said "Man, I gotta get faster." Mo was so focused, he didn't even bother to say hi.

When it comes to preparing for his second season, Clarett has been busting his butt to avoid a sophomore slump. He

350 pounds, the same weight he put up before the injury.

"It's hard to stay focused when everybody is patting you on the back all day. But I think the patting on the back has died down. So we're cool now," says Clarett, who is relaxed, quick to flash a smile at a passing teammate. "We're just doing everything in our power to try to win . . . once you start to win, the individual goals will come."

As he finishes this interview, Clarett rises from his seat at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. The building currently houses six Heisman trophies. After Clarett's done, they may need to make room for one or two more.

Clarett's Stats

| Season | G | Att | Yds | Avg | TDs |
|--------|----|-----|-------|-----|-----|
| 2002 | 11 | 222 | 1,237 | 5.6 | 18 |

G: Games; Att: Attempts; Yds: Yards; Avg: Average; TDs: Touchdowns

LUCKY 13

1. CLARETT'S SENIOR YEAR HE RUSHED FOR HOW MANY YARDS?
2. HOW MANY YARDS DID HE GAIN IN HIS FIRST GAME?
3. HOW MANY YARDS DID HE RUSH FOR IN HIS FIRST YEAR AT OHIO STATE?
4. WHAT IS CLARETT'S FAVORITE CEREAL?
5. WHAT CITY DID CLARETT GROW UP IN?
6. HOW MUCH CAN CLARETT BENCH PRESS?
7. CLARETT'S PICTURE WAS ON THE COVER OF WHAT MAGAZINE?
8. WHAT IS CLARETT'S FAVORITE TEAM TO WATCH?
9. CLARETT IS THE FIRST TRUE FRESHMAN TAILBACK TO START FOR OHIO STATE?
10. WHAT IS CLARETT'S JERSEY NUMBER?