



## **Bulldogs' Mykal Walker making plays and influencing game plans — and games**

*It was a Mykal Walker play, the type that the Fresno State Bulldogs defensive end has been making for a while now, starting a year ago when he was on the scout team running around in practices against the No. 1 offense.*

*Toledo is in a third-and-hopeless, 19 yards to go for a first down against a defense that gives up few big plays. Walker, lined up on the right, ran a simple twist around tackle Kevin Atkins at the snap and tried to make a run at quarterback Eli Peters. Walker instead ran into tackle Jasad Haynes, who had engaged two blockers, and eyeing the deep drop Peters had taken followed the quarterback's eyes, worked his way left and off the line.*

*When Peters fired, Walker was between Point A and Point B, running back Shakif Seymour, the intended receiver, and nowhere near where the Toledo quarterback might have expected to find him on that play.*

*Walker got his hands up, tipped the pass into the air. He secured the ball as it fell toward the ground and took off running, using his smarts and then his speed.*

*He turned it into a touchdown.*

*"That's called play-making ability," defensive coordinator Bert Watts said. "I don't know if you can boil it down to anything specific other than just guys that have good instincts and can just feel when they have an opportunity to make a play."*

*Walker called it a "dream come true" after the Bulldogs had dispatched the Rockets 49-27, and it was a long time in coming.*

*The defensive end, who was selected Mountain West defensive player of the week after racking up one sack, 2.5 tackles for loss and the interception return for a touchdown, almost gave up football when he was in high school after this father, Michael, a former Fresno State lineman, passed away from cancer.*

*"I started playing football because of my dad," Walker said. "I kind of decided, 'I don't know if I want to play football anymore.'*

*"My mom basically just told me, 'Listen, this is what your dad wanted you to do. This is what you do. This is you. Stick with it, and do it for him.'"*

*So Walker played and on the field, he did everything. He played some cornerback. He played some safety. He played some linebacker. On offense, he was a running back. He returned kickoffs.*

*But his first shot at FBS football at San Diego State was scuttled by a scholarship crunch when he was coming out of Vacaville High.*

*He ended up at Division II Azusa Pacific and as a sophomore was a first-team All-Great Northwest Athletic Conference selection after racking up 112 tackles with a team-high 11.5 tackles for loss.*

*But he wanted more, wanted that shot at the FBS level, and decided to transfer.*

*Once he landed at Fresno State, Walker was an intriguing and critical piece, though no one was quite sure how best to use it. The junior is 6-foot-3 and around 220 pounds. He can rush off an edge and also can drop and cover.*

*“He has a lot of physical attributes about him, and he was really motivated to be here because of his past,” coach Jeff Tedford said. “Last year was tough on him, having to sit out, and then we were trying to figure out a position for him at that time. ...*

*“We knew he was such a dynamic player, we had to find a spot where he could make the most impact. I think we found a position that suits him well.”*

*After Walker worked at Sam linebacker and defensive end in the spring, the Bulldogs applied his skill set at end and let him loose.*

*“What we really looked at was how can we put him in a position to free him up to play his game and play fast, and that’s what it really came down to,” Watts said.*

*“We have good depth at linebacker, as well, so we wanted to make sure we got our best 11 on the field, and it was able to work out.”*

*Walker still is working through the position, one of the few he hadn’t played, which merits a chuckle from defensive line coach Jamar Cain.*

*“It’s funny,” he said. “With all the plays he’s making, he’s still learning the position.”*

*The defensive staff, also, still is learning the many ways Walker can be deployed in a [multiple defense](#) that is leading the conference in scoring and total defense, allowing just 18.8 points and 314.8 yards per game.*

*Through four games, Walker is leading the Bulldogs with 5.0 tackles for loss and tied with Will linebacker George Helmuth for the team lead with 2.5 sacks.*

*“He’s a play-maker,” Cain said of Walker. “We just have to put him in position to make plays.”*

*The one against the Rockets, the pick-six? It really was a dream, or at least something Walker had thought about and talked about, albeit jokingly, with Helmuth.*

*“We talk briefly right before the game, joke around a little bit,” Walker said. “We always talk about envisioning something happening and we talked about how it would be cool if we got a pick or a fumble and just ran to the student section.*

*“When it happened, I thought, ‘This is real. This is happening.’ It was really cool.”*

