

HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS

Midseason football report: Santee running back Darnell Miller thrusts himself into spotlight



Senior running back Darnell Miller of Santee High leads the City Section in rushing with 1,159 yards and 13 touchdowns. (Eric Sondheimer / Los Angeles Times)



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Every morning, Darnell Miller walks his 10-year-old brother, Fredrick, to elementary school, then walks another 20 minutes to Santee High in downtown Los Angeles. Before football practice, when the bell rings in the afternoon, he sometimes jogs to pick up his brother, then walks him home or takes him to practice.

This is a peek into the life of the 17-year-old Miller, a soft-spoken senior who leads the City Section in rushing at midseason with [1,159 yards and 13 touchdowns for 4-1 Santee.](#)

As an example of his talent, the 6-foot, 170-pound Miller made such a positive impression in a 43-7 loss to University that the opposing coach, Bryan Robinson, said, “He’s the No. 1 running back in the City Section.”

Miller rushed for 209 yards in the defeat. He also plays basketball, runs track and has a 4.6 second 40-yard time.

He used to play youth football at age 6 and was so scared of being tackled that he kept running away from defenders when he had the ball.

He moved from Memphis to Los Angeles at the end of 2018. He didn’t play football his freshman year at Santee. He played point guard on varsity basketball. The football coaches noticed him.

“The coaches made me come out,” Miller said. “They kept asking me and I said I’d give it a try. Now I love it.”

He was a receiver last season until switching to running back at midseason after an injury to a teammate. He also plays defensive back.

“He’s a natural at running back,” coach John Petty said.



Santee High running back Darnell Miller, right, takes his 10-year-old brother, Fredrick, to elementary school each morning. (Eric Sondheimer / Los Angeles Times)

Raised by a single mother, Miller relishes his role watching over his fifth-grade brother who sometimes joins him on the football bus to road games. The two are so quiet and shy that it might take a third person to get them to speak up. Playing football has helped Miller become more vocal but his performances are speaking for him.

Miller has a warning. “I feel I can still get better,” he said.

Let’s review some midseason excellence with some player-of-the year candidates:

- Quarterback Luke Fahey, Mission Viejo. Having guided the Diablos to wins over Santa Margarita, Folsom and San Diego Lincoln, Fahey has shown accuracy and great judgment. He has completed 74% of his passes with 12 touchdowns and one interception.

- Taylor Lee, Oxnard Pacifica. The junior quarterback has gone on a touchdown throwing barrage with 19 in his last three games for unbeaten Pacifica. Tougher competition begins in the Marmonte League.
- Madden Williams, St. John Bosco. The senior receiver is living up to expectations in playing his best in big games. He has 13 receptions for 331 yards and four touchdowns entering Trinity League play.
- Jaden Walk-Green, Corona Centennial: A junior safety who started the season unknown, he has made an impact with his athleticism. He starts in center field for the baseball and is versatile on the football field, batting down balls, making tackles and serving as the Huskies' kicker.
- Mark Bowman, Mater Dei: He's a senior tight end showing everyone why he might be the best in the country. The Monarchs haven't throw many passes to him because they have so many top receivers, but he had two touchdown catches last week against Bishop Gorman and contributes on almost every play with his blocking.
- Isaiah Arriaza, Damien. The Spartans are 5-0 behind their senior quarterback. Arriaza has passed for 1,491 yards and 14 touchdowns.
- Rocco Tompkins, JSerra. The linebacker and running back is only 5-10, but what a first five games he's had. He leads the Southern Section in tackling. "He's a tackling machine," coach Victor Santa Cruz said.
- Madden Riordan, Sierra Canyon. On perhaps the best defense in the Southland, you don't mess with Riordan, a defensive back who has two interceptions and 16 solo tackles. He had 10 interceptions last season.
- Khary Wilder, Gardena Serra: The defensive lineman has contributed six sacks and 17 solo tackles while coming ready to cause havoc every game.
- Max Meier, Loyola: The defensive lineman has seven sacks and helped out on 40 tackles while showing Stanford has stolen a rising talent.
- Caden Jones, Crean Lutheran. The junior quarterback and star point guard has completed 76% of his passes for 1,432 yards and 10 touchdowns with zero interceptions for the 5-0 Saints.

Players exceeding expectations: Sophomore quarterback Chase Curren, Crespi; **senior quarterback Jack Thomas, Palisades**; sophomore quarterback Gino Wang, JSerra; junior receiver Paul Turner, Birmingham.

Surprise teams: 1. Los Alamitos (7-0), 2. Beaumont (4-1), 3. Norco (5-0), 4. Moorpark (5-0), 5. Crespi (5-0), 6. Torrance (5-0).

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Eric Sondheimer is the prep sports columnist for the Los Angeles Times. He has been honored seven times by the California Prep Sportswriters Assn. for best prep sports column.

