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# Panther Sports News

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--The 'breaks' have had a significant impact upon the football success of Bob Norris (Pittsfield), Eastern Illinois University's offensive guard.

The 6-5 senior All-American is the lone holdover from EIU's 1978 NCAA II championship club but it has been a circuitous route that's brought him back to the Panthers' front line.

Recapping his path, Norris was a highly recruited tackle out of football rich Pittsfield HS in 1978. Selecting EIU he proved his worth as a freshman when he broke into the starting lineup and more than matched up with Cal-Davis' All-American Casey Merrill (now with Green Bay Packers) in the first round of the NCAA playoffs.

That success was shortlived as Norris dropped out of school after his freshman season. "I needed a break . . . to get away from football for awhile. I was only 17 when I came in and hadn't been around . . . just simply wasn't mature enough to handle both football and classes," he admitted.

Raised on a farm, he returned home picking up odd jobs. He and his mother lived with his grandparents who actually raised him as "Mom worked some long hours to support us."

That winter his grandmother died which caused Norris to reflect on his future. "She was my biggest fan because Mom was tied up so much with work. She (grandmother) was the one who kept all the clippings and encouraged me most with football. When she passed away, it was an incentive to get back to something I loved."

An assist was provided by his former high school coach, Denny Helman, by now an assistant at Iowa Central CC in Fort Dodge. "He approached me about playing right after I dropped out of Eastern, so I went to Iowa Central in the fall of 1980."

His performance there attracted attention from the Iowa major football powers. But another 'break', this time a shoulder requiring surgery, lowered his value in their eyes.

BOB NORRIS  
ADD 1

Consequently that forced another major decision because in order to transfer to another NCAA school he had to earn a degree from Iowa Central.

Instead he chose to return to EIU last fall where he was immediately eligible. But it was a mad dash to Charleston as he had to arrive in time to secure married housing before a deposit expired.

Norris said he and his wife, Donna, were married July 25 and "spent our honeymoon packing and getting here" with the Pittsfield-to-Charleston trek hardly fitting the Silhouette short story romantic scenario.

Once here Norris was unsure of the reception he would receive. "There were some guys left around from the championship teams and I was a little leery . . . I didn't know if they would think I was a quitter.

"But Coach Mudra had kept in touch all along and knew my situation. Once I got here it was kinda like I never left the block.

"But I was out of shape and never got in great shape. We didn't throw the ball at Iowa Central so my technique was pretty rusty. I'm doing 100% better thanks mostly to Coach (Chuck) Dickerson.

"He made me recognize I'm a good player", something the pros have come to recognize also.

"You rarely know what they're (pro scouts) thinking but there's sure been a lot of traffic through here this fall," Dickerson said.

Norris is definitely interested in NFL football. "I played tackle before last year but think I've made the transition to guard successfully . . . and could play in the pros.

"But it definitely takes some luck coming from a small school . . . you have to be above and beyond the others from the major schools with bigger reps.

"I can run a five second 40 on the track. When the Cardinals trained here this summer one of their rookie guards was timed in 5.1 in grass so I think I'm quick enough.

"I grew up on a farm but football has been my ticket getting out . . . to everything I've gotten. Right now all I can ask for is the opportunity for the next step."