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Updated: 8:19 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 4, 2010 | Posted: 8:14 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 4, 2010

UGA's Aaron Murray shines in debut

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By Andy Johnston

For the AJC

ATHENS -- Aaron Murray knows it. He can't run every time his receivers are covered.

That was the main issue that coach Mark Richt had with Murray's debut as Georgia's quarterback Saturday.

Murray refused to be sacked in the 55-7 victory over Louisiana-Lafayette, tucking the ball four times for 42 yards, including a 16-yard run for a touchdown on the final play of the first half.

"That was probably not very wise," Richt said. "If he had got knocked out at the 1, we wouldn't have had any points in that situation. With eight seconds and a timeout, you've got time to run a play. He's got to understand that if there are times that a play isn't there, you must throw the ball out of bounds safely and allow us to get the three points."

Otherwise, Richt said his redshirt freshman quarterback played "very, very well."

Murray completed his first career pass, a 3-yarder to the versatile Branden Smith, and finished 17-for-26 for 160 yards and touchdown passes to Kris Durham, Shaun Chapas and Fred Munzenmaier.

"I had a little nervousness at first, but after a couple of plays in, it got a little better," Murray said. "I felt comfortable, and I had a lot of fun out there. That was my main goal."

Playing without starting receivers A.J. Green, who was held out of the game pending an NCAA investigation, and Tavarres King, who was suspended, Murray led the Bulldogs to touchdowns on their second and third possessions and a field goal on their fourth.

He missed both of his attempts on Georgia's fifth possession, but recovered by connecting with Durham on a 41-yard pass to set up an 11-yard scoring pass to Chapas for a 24-0 lead.

"I think he did amazing," Durham said. "He did everything we could ask him to."

Durham even took the blame for Murray's first career interception.

He was running a route in the middle of the field when Murray hit him in the hands with a pass. Durham bobbled the ball, and it was picked off by Louisiana-Lafayette safety Lance Kelley.

The Ragin' Cajuns scored their only touchdown on the next play.

"I was the one who caused the interception," Durham said. "You can't fault him for that. He stayed composed. He called the formations. He got everything right, and when we didn't have a good play called, he called timeout, just like a veteran would. I was very, very impressed."

Murray got away with a poor pass when he attempted to throw one through the end zone right before halftime, but he didn't get enough on the pass, and the ball fluttered into Kelley's hands. Kelley dropped it, and three plays later, Murray scored.

Murray understands he needs to be more selective about running, but he feels comfortable scrambling and creating on the move. Late in the second quarter, he scrambled and hit tight end Orson Charles, leaving the two former high school teammates thinking they were still at Plant High in Tampa.

Still, Richt will take a few more incompletions if it means Murray won't get hit.

"I don't want to turn him into a robot," Richt said. "I don't want to keep him from making plays. I don't want him to think that's the mode of operation every time the ball is snapped. He's doing his thing. He's doing what comes naturally to him.

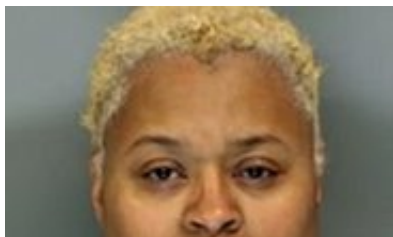
"I think as the season goes on, there will be bigger, faster guys chasing him, and if you look at our depth chart at quarterback, we don't have many of them. I don't want him taking a whack for a 2-yard gain."

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