

# Sports

Emmanuel Rivas Valenzuela, editor

## Juggling stadium lights, textbooks and teachers

Behind Cade McConnell's success on and off the field

BY ITZEL A. GIRON  
The Prospector



Being thrust into the starting quarterback position in late September was not quite on redshirt sophomore Cade McConnell's radar. After senior quarterback Gavin Hardison fell to injury during the team's fifth game against the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, McConnell was put in to step up and lead the Miners to the promised land.

Throwing a monkey wrench into his plans, an already busy student-athlete now has to balance academics, personal life and becoming a new leader for the Miners.

Even with support from Hardison and the rest of the team, balancing more than just school can be tricky in all aspects, but it is the student-athlete's responsibility either to sink or swim.

"It's been tough but I've just tried to be as supportive as possible to the other quarterbacks and Cade (McConnell) and try to help as much as I can," Hardison said in an interview with KTSM.

Dealing with classes, workouts, practices and maintaining a personal life may not seem like much to stress about, especially for someone who is not a student-athlete and has

the common misconception that student-athletes have it easy.

"Sometimes people think athletes have the easy way out," McConnell said. "I'd argue and say it's the opposite. There is a lot of hours we put into our sport and we also try and take care of our classes to the best of our ability."

It is the positive attitude of McConnell that makes him not only a great leader on the team, but someone who can push through the adversity.

After being the third quarterback to be put in during the Louisiana Tech game Sept. 29, McConnell ended up taking the starting position after both junior Kevin Hurley and freshman Jake McNamara were taken out of the game due to unforeseen injuries.

In his first game as starting quarterback, McConnell was able to take the Miners to a win against Florida International University with a score of 27-14. However, new positions come with bigger responsibilities and more stress, so finding ways to destress is vital.

"I try to be as efficient as possible so, I try and get my work done as well as I can but also in the shortest amount of time because you don't have very many extra hours balancing football and school," McConnell said. "I try and leave as little work as possible on the weekends, the weekends are your time to destress. For me it's watching football on Saturdays or Sundays or whenever we're not playing."

Getting caught up in the limelight is something that can happen, but it's important to stay grounded and remember to enjoy the four to five years most student-athletes have. For McConnell, it is important to enjoy the moment and

remember it will not last forever.

"I think the number one thing that I've learned is to appreciate it all. I think specifically being an athlete and a student," McConnell said. "We were all that kid in high school one time that just wanted to have an opportunity to play at this level."

McConnell knows these moments do not come easy and sometimes they do not come at all, which is why he reminds himself to not let this moment in the spotlight be taken for granted.

"Sometimes when the stress stacks up and you have a lot of things going on and you're thinking 'why does this got to happen to me?' You have to remember to be grateful and be appreciative you have this opportunity cause not a lot of people that get this chance," McConnell said.

Having a few years left under his belt to play Division I football and with a new head football coach on the horizon at UTEP, there are no signs of slowing down or letting stress get in the way of success both on and off the field for McConnell.

"It's an honor (to be a student athlete), my whole life I wanted to be a Division I student athlete, my parents are both teachers, so the student aspect has always been a big part in my life," McConnell said. "I know I'm always striving to get A's in my class, to ensure I'm always ready to be on that field."

Although the fate of the upcoming season is up in the air with the firing of Dana Dimel, McConnell expects to return and lead the Miners while continuing his studies to one day graduate with a degree in communication studies.

Itzel Anahi Giron is the Editor-in Chief and may be reached at [prospector@utep.edu](mailto:prospector@utep.edu); @by.itzel.giron on Instagram, and @itzel\_anahi\_16 on X.



LEFT: Sophomore quarterback Cade McConnell puts up tough battle versus No. 22 Liberty Nov. 25.

RIGHT: McConnell took over the start spot and finished averaging 205.3 yards per game.

Photos by Gianluca Cuevas/The Prospector