

MARY G. MONTGOMERY VIKINGS

Confidence grows for Martin, other Vikings running backs

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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A good spring and summer workout has given Mary G. Montgomery running back Josh Martin confidence to have an even more productive 2017 season.

"It's been going pretty good with me and the rest of the running backs," he said of the workouts. "We've been working pretty hard, and we have a nice line in front of us."

Even though there is one returning starter on the offensive line — senior Michael Mills — Martin feels that the newcomers up front are learning the blocking schemes. It's especially important, with MGM's emphasis right now being a ball-control offense.

"The young guys are really stepping up this year and filling the positions for all the seniors who left last year," he said. "They're doing a good job. Right now, we're working on pounding the ball in there, but we're also trying a whole lot of offensive schemes that will fit our team."

As for the defense, Martin feels that it's beginning to find its way.

"We're really good with the coverage and with the run game, keeping them inside and covering the deep ball," he said. "We're really getting aggressive with the ball, more than what I've ever seen."

With new head coach Chris Wilson at the helm, Martin said the players are coming together more as a team.

"I feel like we've done a lot more positive feedback from the team, like coach has gotten all of us to come together as a team and seeing that

we have one common goal together," he said.

Last season was one of those what-if things, as the Vikings came within a win of making the playoffs for the first time since 2002. Martin said despite missing out on a playoff berth, his teammates knew that they would have to regroup.

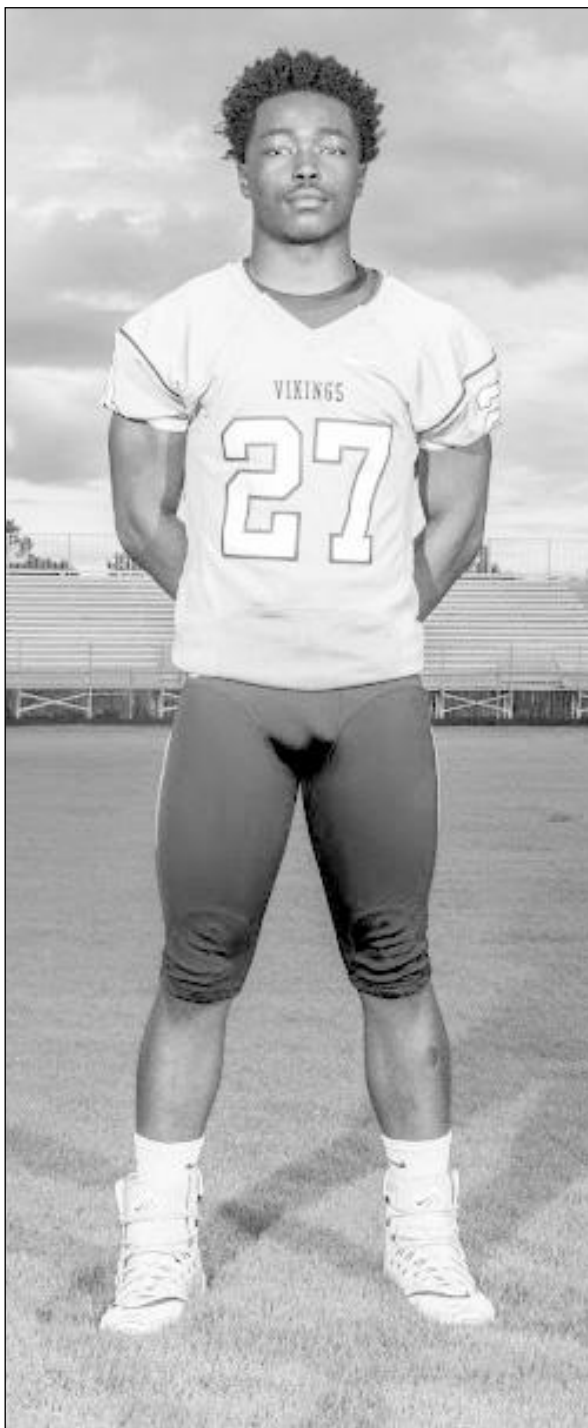
"Last year, we were so close, knowing that this would be our first time in 14 years (of making the playoffs)," he said. "Everybody knew that we were set for the playoffs, and got that close, and everybody got down and were really sad, but they knew they had to pick it up this year."

Added weight and working on hitting the holes has Martin feeling that he can be even more productive than in his sophomore season. Although only 5-foot-10, he's picked up a few pounds, going from 160 to 170.

"I've improved a lot on my vision running the ball, and my strength and getting my weight up for the varsity starting position," he said. "With the extra weight, it sort of gives me that reassurance that I can run inside in there with the big boys."

The extra weight will definitely help, especially with the Vikings being in the always tough Class 7A, Region 1. Naturally, Martin wants another crack at a playoff berth.

"Everybody knows that we have that chip on our shoulder to get back to that position," he said. "Really, we're just taking it one game at a time, and rebuild while we can. My personal goal is to help lead my team if I can. I'm trying to make it to college, but I know I'm going to have to take it one step at a time and help my team get to where it needs to be."



MGM running back Josh Martin

WILSON: He aims to bring stability

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"I learned that it's a lot like where I grew up," Wilson said. "I grew up an hour north of Semmes, where there are a lot of blue-collar people, a lot of hard-working people with a love of football. They love to support the community, and they'll do anything they can to help you, all you have to do is ask them."

"You understand where the kids come from, where the parents come from, and you know the aspect of the community. You understand the nature and the culture of the area. That's definitely a positive, and having the family structure and support around you, that's definitely a big positive."

"I learned that a lot of the folks in the community can provide a lot more with their time and their expertise than with their money. All the help that is warranted and needed and accepted, and as a program, (we should) accept that help and let the community be a part of the program, because that's what they want — they want to be a part of Friday nights when the lights come on. I feel like they want to be a part of the program."

Already, Wilson has seen what the community can do for a program when they are encouraged and asked to be involved.

"They've come out and within a matter of minutes with phone calls they did things at the school as far as ceilings and flooring and basically anything we needed as it relates to maintenance with something readily available," he said. "In a large school system, sometimes it's tough to get those things set in the process very quickly."

"We can make one phone call, and in 20 minutes we can have some parents that are willing to come out. Like I said, they're sharing their expertise and knowledge and giving their time, and that's as important as giving a monetary donation or buying a new helmet or pair of pads."

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