

CITRONELLE WILDCATS

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Coach says of blocker **Denaud James**: ‘The kid doesn’t quit’

BY TOMMY HICKS
tommyhicks@thecallnews.com

The contributions Denaud James offers the Citronelle offensive line are not measured by his height and weight, but instead by his desire. Those who glance at James — he stands 5-foot-10 and weighs 220 pounds — then take note of his position as an offensive lineman and make a quick evaluation as to his expected level of success at that task will be failing to take into account another measurement.

To use a Southern phrase, those making such judgments will not be figuring in his “want to.” It is a mistake many Citronelle opposing defensive lineman have made in recent seasons.

To know all you need to know about James, take a listen to what Wildcats head coach Rusty Funk has to say about James.

“At the end of his sophomore year he got the (team’s) most improved player award,” Funk said. “He’s a kid that shows up. He’s extremely coachable, he is extremely likeable and he is there every day, not only during the season, he’s there every day during the offseason trying to get better.

“He doesn’t try to get out of workouts or anything else, which has made him one of our leaders on the offensive line. He did a great job for us last year and he’s one of our returning starters on the offensive line. He’s thick; he’s not huge, but he’s thick, and he’ll go out and play some on the defensive side of the ball also. He does a good job. The kid doesn’t quit.”

While admitting he has gone through growing pains from the first day he stepped onto the Citronelle practice field to today, James said he hopes it is his enthusiasm for the game and his technique that shine through on the field. He said he takes his role as a leader of the players up front seriously and he’s OK with opponents sizing him up in a first-glance sort of way; it gives him a little edge.

“I believe knowing that I have to play 100 percent every play, never do less than that against anybody and always do my best,

that’s the way I have to go at it on every play,” James said. “I believe you have to put God first, and that’s what I do. I pray every time.”

He returns as one of the most experienced players on the Wildcats’ offensive line and James will be called upon to offer leadership to a group of younger teammates at the position who do not have the luxury of his experience.

“Denaud is another one of our seniors that goes out there and he leads by example,” Funk said. “Denaud does not open his mouth. He’s one of those kids that just comes to work, he doesn’t have anything to say, he’s just going to do his job and do it to the best of his ability. He’s the kind of guy who leads every drill, the kind of kid that you’re looking for.”

And James is looking for good things from his team this season as the Wildcats hope to make a return to the Class 5A state playoffs.

“We’re getting a whole lot stronger than we were last year,” he said of the offensive line and the offensive unit as a whole. “We are getting our plays down and we know our alignments and other things. I believe that we’re getting better and better every year.

“I’ve been with varsity since freshman season. I’ve seen a lot of changes. I believe from my ninth-grade year that we’ve had a big mindset change. Our mindset is that we can do even better than we did the past years. I believe we can go all the way.”

That confidence and the success of last year’s team does not add any extra pressure though, James said, only a greater desire to meet those expectations.

“There’s no pressure, not at all,” he said. “... Everything is about family. We stay close to each other and always help out each other and things like that. We’re a tight group. We encourage each other to do better than we did the last play.

“I believe that I’m better. Getting a new weight room, that has driven us. Getting new players has helped too. We’re showing



Denaud James, leader on the Citronelle offensive line

the younger guys about how we do things.”

And how the Wildcats did things last season, making the playoffs for the first time since the 2008 season, created a great experience for the members of that team, James said. It is a feeling they want to expe-

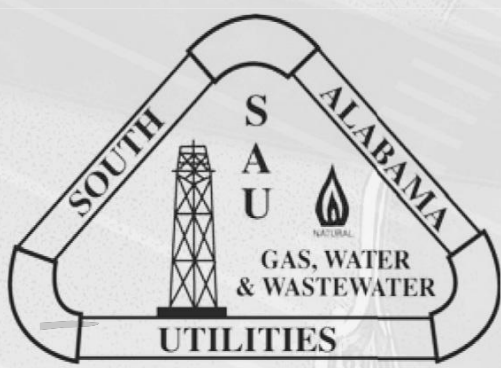
rience again.

“It was amazing,” he said. “That was an amazing season. It felt really good to be in the playoffs for the first time. It was challenging, but we got through it.”

And that’s about the size of it.



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