

SARALAND SPARTANS

Staying centered

Jake Hall got the job suddenly, then kept it — and has excelled as one of area's best long snappers

"I just want to be a better leader and help my team and my teammates and make great snaps on every play."

— Jake Hall



BY TOMMY HICKS
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Coaches are quick to tell players who don't make the starting lineup they could be just one play (a.k.a. injury) away from being a starter.

Saraland's Jake Hall heard those words. Then he found himself as a case in point.

Last season, the 6-foot-0, 225-pounder began the season as a back-up on the offensive line at center. There was an injury to the starter, the player ahead of him on the depth chart, and just like that Hall was a member of the starting unit, a position he held throughout the season.

"As a junior he played and we had a guy get hurt that he was competing with and Jake ended up playing every snap for us as a junior,"

Saraland head coach Jeff Kelly said. "He's a smart player. He's not the biggest of dudes; he plays at 225, 230. But he's extraordinarily smart and he understands leverage, and he understands his calls and he's able to make those calls for the guys up front.

"He's really good at getting on the second level and moving. We're proud of him, he's become one of our best players. And on top of that he's one of the best long snappers around. He was baptized by the fire last year, but Jake is a steady player and he does a good job. His snaps are outstanding. He and Jack (West, quarterback) have a good relationship too and that's a big thing for the quarterback and center to have a good feel for each other. I expect big things from him. He's a big part of our offensive line."

Last year, Hall went from backup to starter in an instant. Now with a year's experience under his belt he goes from starter to senior leader. Both tasks are

extremely important to the Spartans' offensive plans.

"It's a lot of pressure because there are only two of us (returning starters) back from last year and I'm the only senior back of those two players," Hall said. "You've got to tell everybody where to be and they're always depending on you. You have to help them, but it's a lot of pressure."

"The seniors last year did a good job of pumping me up and helping me and I just worked as hard as I could. I could feel myself getting better as the season went along. I am (happy to be a leader this year). I really want to be the leader this year on the O-line. I think it's going to be a good year. I just want to be a better leader and help my team and my teammates and make great snaps on every play."

He's making the adjustment to the leadership role. Hall, who began as a long snapper, and still holds that position as well, is making a name for himself on the Saraland team as a player who doesn't say a whole lot, preferring to have his play and his actions speak for him. When he does speak, the message is received, even when delivered in his usual, soft-spoken manner.

When speaking of this year's Spartans' O-line unit, he speaks highly of what he expects the season to hold.

"I think this is definitely a smaller group than we've had in the past, but I think we're faster and we can get to more plays quicker than in the past," Hall said. "I think everybody understands their role and is working hard to do their role."

Another senior, West, serves as "a great motivator," Hall said and he and others have helped push Hall toward stepping up his play.

"I've gotten so much bigger," he said. "I used to be 200 pounds, now I'm around 225 and I'm so much stronger. ... My first game against Baker there was a 315-pound guy in front of me and I was the most nervous I've ever been. But I had some great coaching and I just tried my best."

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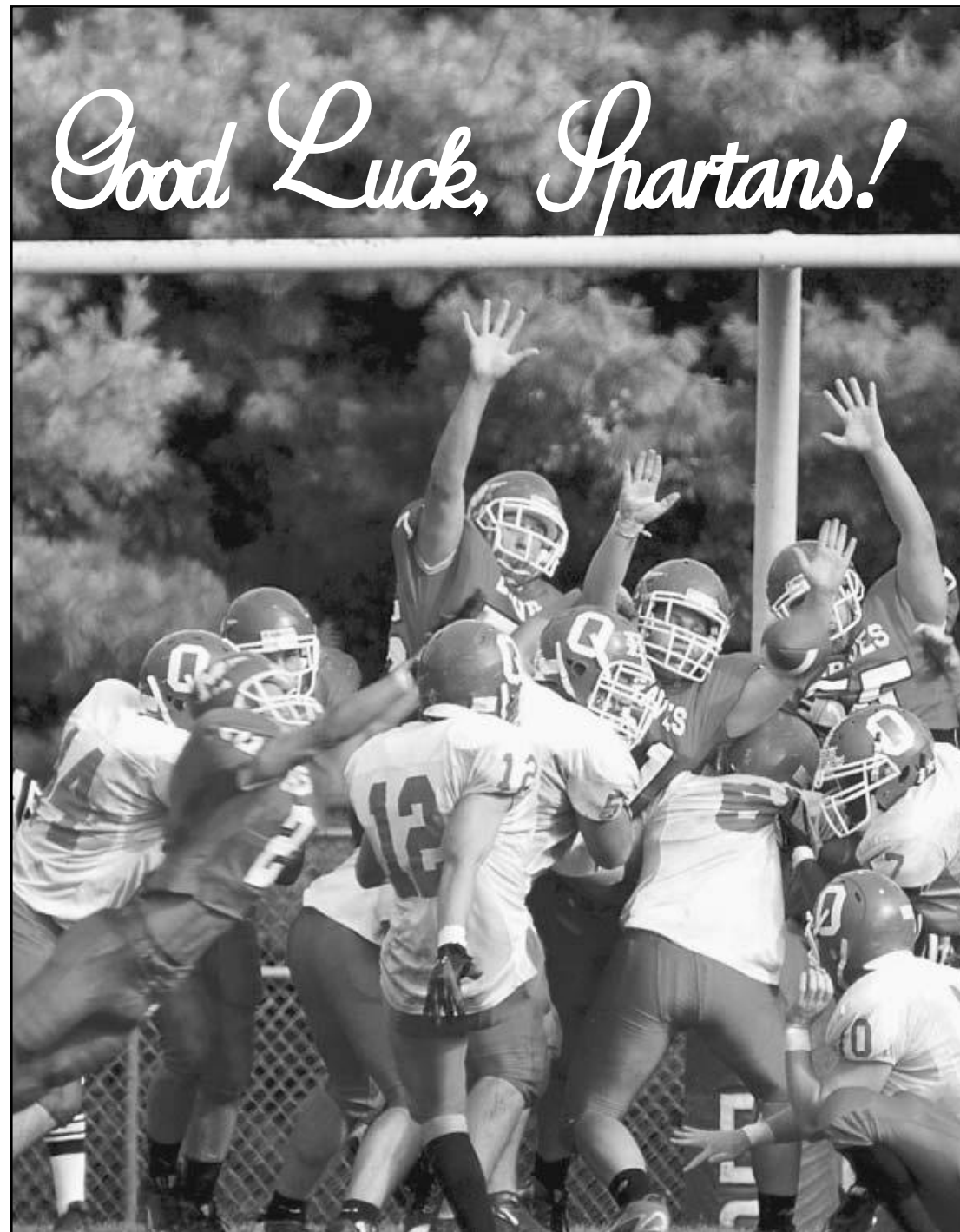
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