

SARALAND SPARTANS

‘I was mad’

Hunter Mason inwardly stewed when coach asked him to move to offensive line — but he unselfishly made the move and now he likes it more than defense

BY TOMMY HICKS
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When he was called into the office of head coach Jeff Kelly during Saraland’s spring drills, Hunter Mason wasn’t sure what to expect. As it turned out, he really wasn’t ready for the topic of discussion.

The 6-foot-1, 240-pound senior, who was forced to the sideline for all but five plays of the 2016 season, was perhaps more eager than most of his teammates to get back on the field. He was looking forward to getting back to his defensive end position and contributing to the Spartans’ defense.

But there was a change of plans. Kelly and the Saraland coaching staff felt, for the betterment of the team, that Mason was more valuable on the offensive line as the team’s starting left tackle. Which is what led to Kelly asking Mason to stop by his office.

“Oh, I was mad,” Mason said of his feelings after the meeting. “Coach Kelly brought me in his office and told me. I acted like I didn’t care but deep down I cared. But I was going to do whatever it took for the team.”

His mood eventually changed. “It’s been hard (making the switch),” he said. “It’s a lot different, but I have good coaches. I’m enjoying it more than I did playing defensive line. It’s pretty easy, pretty smooth. ... Coach (Chris) Fancher didn’t really give me any choice. He made me like it. He’s a really good coach. I studied and got the hang of it and once I got the hang of it, I liked it.”

cept the switch, and for the right reasons.

“I’m so proud of Hunter,” Kelly said. “He’s been one of the most unselfish guys here. He started as a sophomore as a defensive end and blew his knee out in the first game (last year) against Baker. He had to sit out his whole junior year rehabbing and recovering.

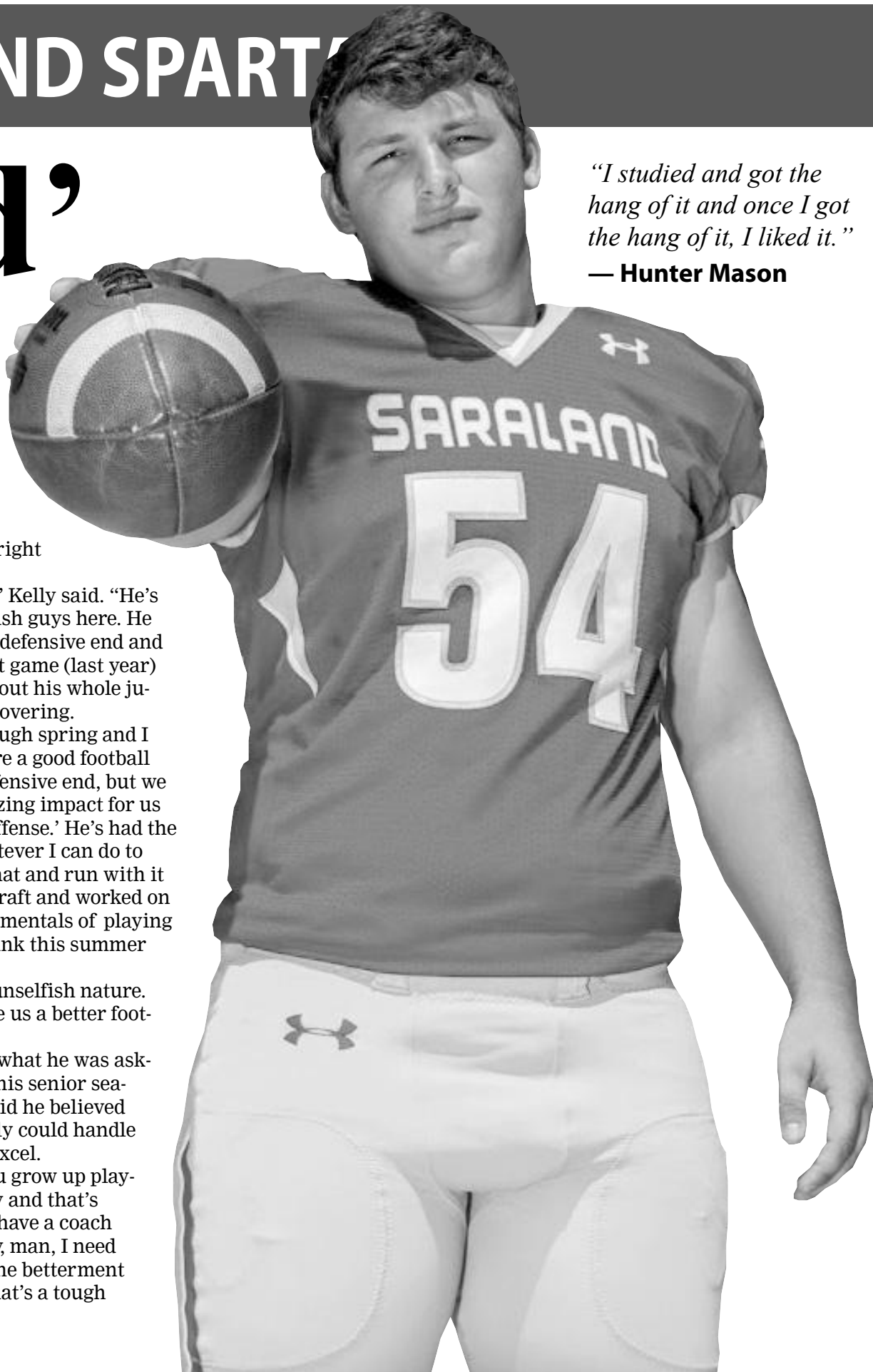
“I go to him midway through spring and I tell him, ‘Look, I know you’re a good football player and you’re a good defensive end, but we think you can make an amazing impact for us if you come over and play offense.’ He’s had the attitude since Day 1 of ‘whatever I can do to help the team.’ He’s taken that and run with it and he has worked on that craft and worked on the technique and the fundamentals of playing that position and I really think this summer was huge for him.

“I’m really proud of his unselfish nature. He has singlehandedly made us a better football team.”

Kelly said he recognized what he was asking of Mason, especially in his senior season, was a lot, but he also said he believed it was a move Mason not only could handle but one in which he would excel.

“That’s always tough. You grow up playing a position that you enjoy and that’s comfortable to you and you have a coach come up to you and say, ‘Hey, man, I need you to think about this for the betterment of the football team.’ And that’s a tough

See **MASON**, 43C



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— Hunter Mason

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