

# SARALAND SPARTANS



Saraland's outside linebackers.



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Saraland's defensive line.

## Hall loves 'crazy and hectic' job of middle linebacker

BY TOMMY HICKS  
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As a sophomore linebacker, Larson Hall was establishing himself as a productive and key member of the Saraland defense. He not only was making the adjustment to being a starter, but he was becoming a leader for the Spartans as well.

Then came the Spanish Fort game and a season-ending injury halfway through the Spartans' season.

Hall doesn't dwell on the injury; he's too busy looking ahead to this season, anticipating the success the Spartans could have in Class 6A, Region 1, one of the toughest regions in the classification.

"I started last year as a sophomore so I got a little experience," Hall said. "I think this year is going to be different for me. I'm more comfortable. I feel like I'm a lot better than I was last year. I'm more experienced and I've watched a lot of games and I have been fine-tuning a lot of things in the offseason."

"It took me a while to learn everything. My first game I didn't know what to do but as the season went along I got better and better. You have to have (confidence). If you are out there for a game and your mind isn't where you need it to be it's not fun and it won't be good for you. If your mind is there and you've got that aggressiveness to play and you're ready to play, then that's when you're going to play well."

He has been playing well for the Spartans through offseason workouts and fall drills. As Saraland's season-opener against Heard County, Ga., on Aug. 26 on national TV approaches, those on Saraland's defense are learning how much they can count on the 5-foot-10, 205-pound junior.

The coaching staff too.

"Larson Hall is the guy who started as a sophomore for us last year and he got better as the season went along," head coach Jeff Kelly said. "He had a season-ending injury in the Spanish Fort game. He's one of our leaders in the weight room. He's an old-school, throwback, hard-nosed type player. He's been moving around to different spots defensively and he's really showing a lot of versatility there."

"When he got hurt he was just short of settling in. He played four or five



Junior linebacker Larson Hall

games as a sophomore and was just starting to get it. I think that was tough for his development last year. He did a great job rehabbing throughout the offseason and he had a good spring and summer. He's picked up where he left off."

One thing is certain: Hall truly enjoys being a middle linebacker.

"It's a huge deal to be an inside linebacker here because you're like the quarterback of the defense," he said. "Everybody is looking to you, the whole defense, and they know you can handle that responsibility. I love it. I think it's the best position on the football field."

"It's just crazy and hectic at the same time. But when you come up and you make a play and you stop the run or whatever, it's a good feeling. ... I started out in middle school ball playing full-back and then I moved to inside linebacker and I just fell in love with it."

Hall is also falling in love with the Spartans' prospects on the defensive side of the ball. He said he believes the unit is going to hold up its end of the bargain this season.

"I think it's going to be the best it's been in a long time," Hall said. "We've got a lot of guys, a lot of returning guys, and they know what they're doing. We're going to be a gritty bunch this year. ... We're good but we're young. I'm just a junior and the guy beside me is a sophomore. Another guy is a sophomore, but we're pretty good."

Heard County is expected to test that defense sternly in the season-opener.

"We're ready to get out there and on TV and show everybody how hard we've been working," Hall said.

## MASON: He unselfishly switched to O-line and has learned to like it more

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thing," Kelly said.

"He's a football player; if I put him at nose guard he'd be a great football player; if I put him at left tackle, he'll be a great football player; at full-back, he'd be a great football player. Those kind of guys, who put the team first, they have a special place in my heart. He's a throwback, and we needed that."

"We've got some good football players up front but we needed to add somebody to put his hand in the dirt and play that way. He brings that to us. He brings an edge to our front offensively and that has made some of those other guys better."

The difference, especially at first, was stark for Mason. He discovered that at his first practice at his new position. "Man, I didn't know anything," he said. "I was hitting people with my facemask and the coaches were screaming at me and I didn't know the plays. It was tough. I felt like an underdog. Then I started getting the hang of it and it got easier and easier, but at the beginning it was tough. I

never had to ask anybody anything on defense but on offense I was asking for help.

"Offensive line, you have to think - you have all those plays and all the calls (on the line). Defensive line, you just go to the ball."

He said he did see it as a sign of respect when

he was asked to man the all-important left tackle position, where his most important task is to protect the quarterback, in this case, Stanford commit Jack West, the trigger to the Spartans' offense.

"It was a big responsibility and I thought that I could do it and I knew that

they needed me to do it," Mason said.

In truth, Mason said he's just happy to be back on the field after missing last season with a torn

ACL in his left knee, suffered on the fifth play of the Spartans' first game of the year.

"Hitting somebody is still probably more fun,

but I think as the season goes and I get some live plays and such, I think I'll like it (offensive line) just as much (as defensive end)," he said.



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