

SARALAND SPARTANS

SPARTANS: Kelly says team is motivated to excel

Saraland's senior QB Jack West

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them and that's encouraging."

Kelly has developed Saraland into a consistent winner. He has produced a 52-21 overall record in his six previous seasons directing the Spartans, a record that includes a 7-6 playoff mark and a 33-12 record against region opponents.

"We've got to stay healthy and get some breaks," he said. "There's probably a lot of people in our region that people are going to pick to finish real well but I guarantee you our group is chomping at the bit to get out there and see what happens."

Defensively, the Spartans expect to be strong up front and in the secondary and they are improving in the middle. "When you look at our linebacking corps, I think we have a level of athleticism that we haven't had since 2014," Kelly said. "I really feel that, and they're young guys. There's not a senior in that bunch."

"They understand what we're doing and they're smart guys and they can play football. We're looking at inside backers who are sophomores, but they are dang good sophomores."

... There's some guys on the edge I believe who are going to be able to rush the passer and be disruptive in both the run game and the pass game. I'm excited about that bunch. In the secondary we've got two safeties who have played a bunch of ball. Randle (Hinton) is as good as anybody in the county. We've got some corners that are untested but I feel really good about them. They're doing well in practice, we just have to carry it over to Friday night."

As for the offense, the player who is likely to attract the most attention is senior quarterback Jack West, the Stanford commit. The 6-foot-4, 215-pounder is considered one of the top quarterback prospects in the country and he will be the leader of the Spartans' offensive attack.

"It starts with Jack," Kelly said of the Saraland offense. "He's in total control. He could probably script a practice and plan a practice because he understands how we want to attack and he understands all those things - protection, run game, who's blocking who. When you talk about wanting a guy who truly understands what the other 10 guys are doing, he under-

stands it all and he's got a confidence about him. The game has really slowed down for him. I think he's on the verge of having a huge year. We're doing some different things with him and I think that's been helpful."

But West is not alone.

"I feel like we've got the players who are playing well right now. Receivers Jay Williams, Daniel Taylor and Andrew Booth, Vykh Hughes; there's four or five guys that are playing some good football. In the backfield, I think Maddox Copeland may be the silent but most important guy we have. He's at fullback and he's like a sledgehammer back there. He's just a junior but he's a 230-pound bulldog who just likes to hit somebody. We're going to play two or three backs and they all bring something different to the table."

A difficult schedule awaits the Spartans, one that will test them from the first game to the final game of the year.

"I don't know who makes the schedule around here, but there needs to be something done about that," Kelly joked. "Everybody's talking about Heard County. All opening games are big, ours just happens to be on national TV. We've got to be ready to go."

"The LeFlore game, and I said it at media day, I think that's the most important game of the year. It's after that big one that everybody's been talking about and right before Daphne which everybody is talking about too. ... If we can survive the first half of the season and get some big wins I feel good about us."



Saraland's inside linebackers.



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