

LEROY BEARS

NEVER FORGET

Heartbreak of playoff loss to Aliceville provides plenty of incentive for Leroy linebacker Dristan Weaver and the rest of the Bears

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
alouismack@aol.com

Dristan Weaver will never forget the game that ended Leroy's 2016 season — a 36-33 loss to Aliceville in the second round of the Class 2A playoffs.

It was a game of highs and lows, with the Bears trailing 20-6 midway through the third quarter before battling back in the fourth quarter and eventually falling 36-33.

"It was something that you had to be at to have that feeling," Weaver said. "We fought hard, and we lost by three points. That game was a battle — it was one of those games where you had to be there."

Weaver, a 6-foot-0, 220-pound senior linebacker, said it was a game that could have gone either way, and if not for a couple of key Aliceville plays made possible by a couple of defensive lapses, things could have been different.

"It was a hard game for us, and they just got us on a couple of busted plays, missed

assignments, something we could have stopped, but we made a few errors and it cost us," he said. "If you don't do your job, they're going to bust out a 60-yard run like they did, and if you don't get into the right coverage, they can throw a 60-yard pass, and that's what really cost us the game."

"We were scoring right there with them, but they just got those busted plays. You just have to do your job at all times, because if you don't, they can always bust out a play like that and that's how they got us."

But this is a new year, and the heartbreak of that loss has given Leroy a lot of incentive to go deeper into the playoffs, and hopefully, a championship game. As such, the Bears have been working hard over the spring and summer, and have the backing of the community.

"We've been doing pretty good," Weaver said of the summer workouts. "We got young boys who are stepping up and working hard, then you've got people like Jacob Brewer, who really does his job and they keep players like him coming back. We didn't really lose anybody on the defensive line, so we should be doing good. We lost four people on defense, but most of the main guys are back."

"The confidence is high—nobody's going to stop us but us. It's just like last

year, when we stopped ourselves. They (Aliceville) went to the state championship, and that's where we should have been. We could have played with anybody, and we're really a high-level team."

Last year, there were times the Bears got a little bit too amped up, chewing each other out when mistakes were made. That's not the case this season.

"(Sometimes) we would just get angry at some plays when we mess up," Weaver said. "Sometimes, we'll jump down on other players and it really doesn't help us. This year, we're picking each other up."

Weaver and the rest of the Bears are looking forward to the season opener against Satsuma on Sept. 1. Then, the following week, Leroy faces Class 2A, Region 1 foe Washington County.

"With us and Chatom (Washington County), it's always a rivalry," he said. "We've never really liked each other, so that's always a close game. Silas (Southern Choctaw) has some good backs, and they always have a good team—they beat us by one last year. We've got something to prove against them."

"We won't settle for anything less than a state championship, and if we get beaten, it'll have to be a team with better talent. I hate losing, and that fires us up. I'm going to keep from losing this year and see how far we can go."

"That game was a battle — it was one of those games where you had to be there."
— Dristan Weaver



Bears' big Dylan Stewart trying to be best he can be

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
alouismack@aol.com

Dylan Stewart has seen action on both sides of the ball for the Leroy High Bears, and chances are, he'll see action on both the offensive and defensive lines again this season.

That's why he's been concentrating hard this spring and summer to do his part to help his team make a deep run in the playoffs — and hopefully beyond.

"We've been working hard, trying to get better every day," he said. "Win today, and get better. (Going both ways) is tiring, but you gotta do what you gotta do for the best (interests) of the team."

Leroy went 8-4 last year, courtesy of a five-game winning streak in the second half of the season, and advanced to the second round of the Class 2A playoffs, where they lost a tough battle to eventual state runner-up Aliceville 36-33.

"It was feeling pretty good until we got beat (by Aliceville)," Stewart said.

"If we were to be beaten, we wouldn't have wanted to be beaten by anybody else because they went to the state championship, so it wasn't like a big upset."

Stewart (5-foot-11, 250 pounds), who has been starting since his freshman season, said that he is great at pass blocking, but wants to be a better all-around lineman.

"I'm just trying to get better like everybody else on the team," he said. "I've been working hard, trying to be the best player I can be. I feel that my pass blocking skills are best, while I think I can improve on sweeps a little bit, not to a point where it's that noticeable, but our passing game has been better than our running game."

As for the offense overall, while the offensive line has all five starters returning, Stewart said the wideouts will be the position that would be strongest team-wise.

"Probably our receiving corps, because we have a lot of receivers coming back," he said. "We're just looking for a quarterback to fill the spot. We're

very good with the pass routes."

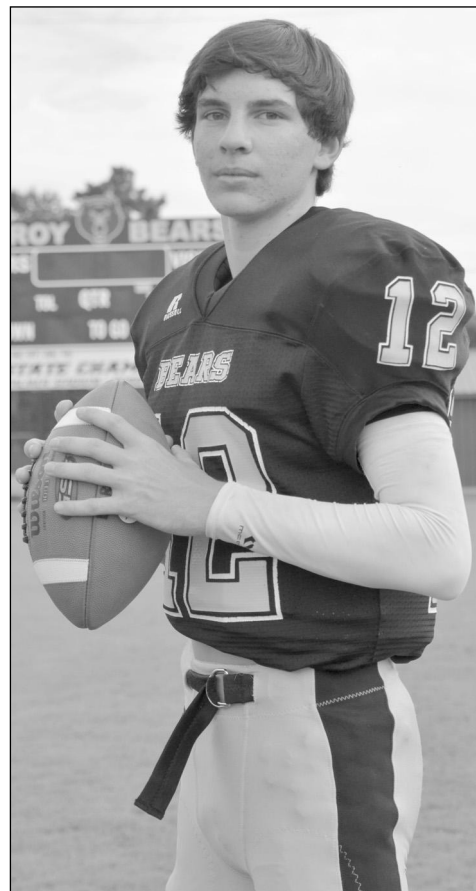
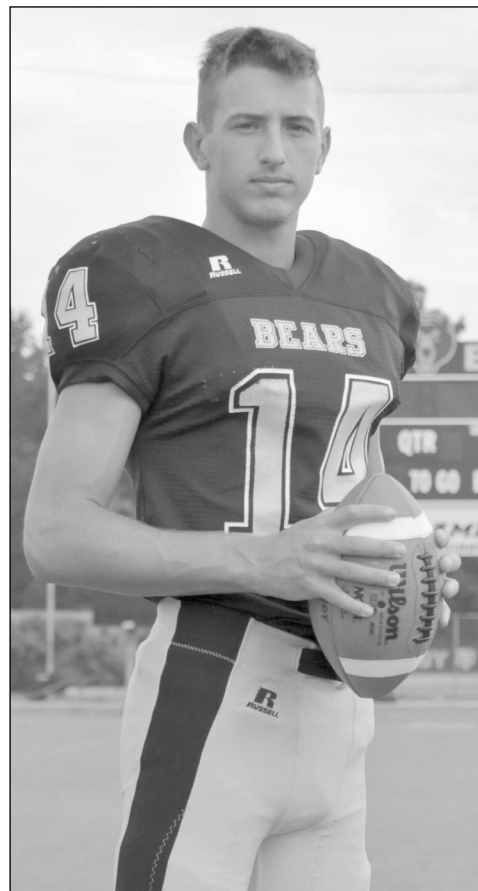
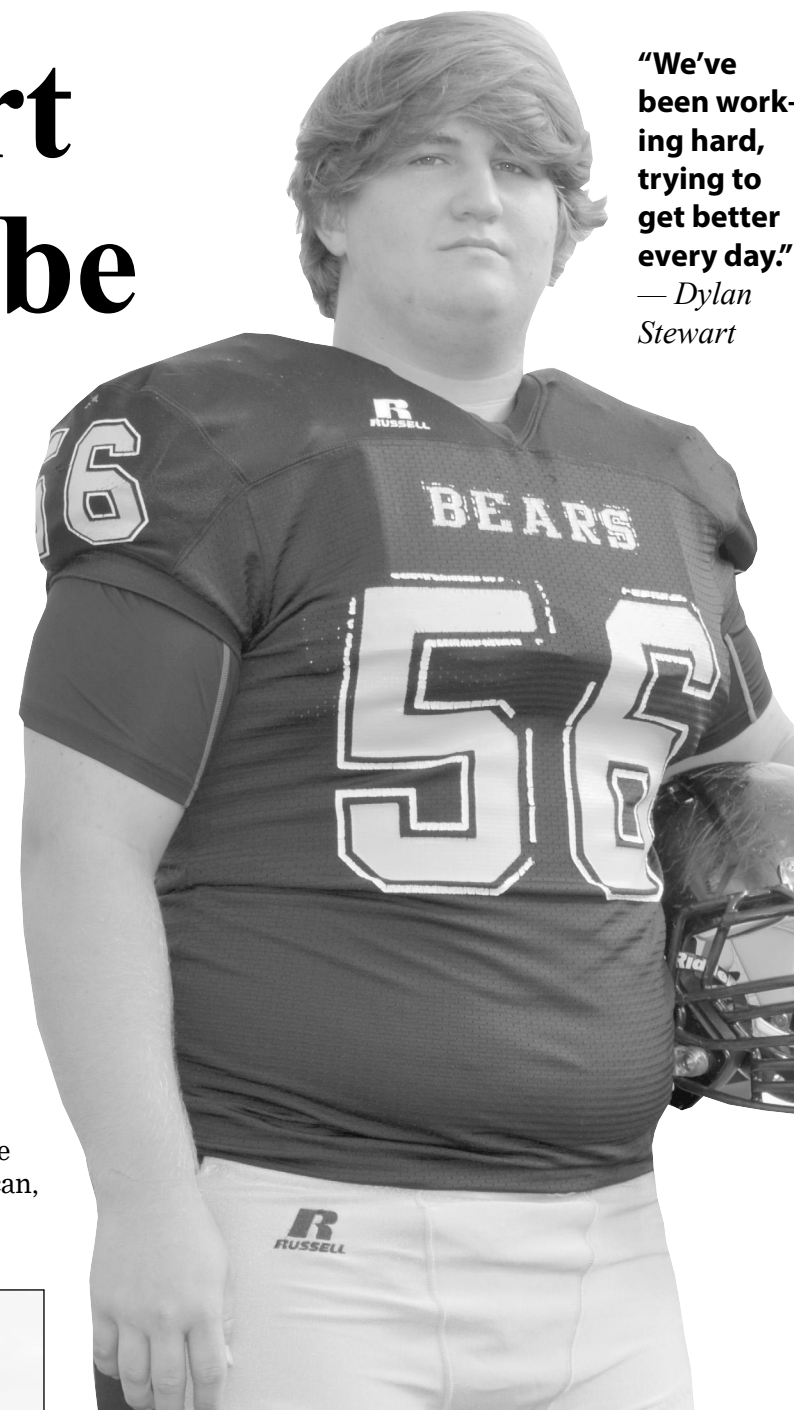
Since starting as a freshman, Stewart feels that he and others who have started since their freshman year have grown and matured and improved the team at the same time.

"It was kind of scary, coming up from middle school ball and going straight to varsity," he said. "We didn't even get to play JV, but as the years have gone by, it has gotten so much better. We've learned a lot and gotten better every year. I guess we were building the team up as we were growing up."

Team-wise and individually, Stewart hopes for a solid team bond for 2017. He feels that it is the key for the Bears to go all the way to state.

"(We) want to (be) just being like a brotherhood and being close to everybody and go as far as we can, and enjoy the season," he said.

"We've been working hard, trying to get better every day."
— Dylan Stewart




Bears search for a starting quarterback

These players are among the candidates to replace departed star Chase Warren at quarterback for the Leroy Bears this fall. From left are Daniel Waddill, Kade Mosley and Jeb Rice. Nathan Taylor is also in the mix.

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