

WASHINGTON COUNTY BULLDOGS

WCHS plans hard-nosed football

BY TOMMY HICKS
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It's a different day for the Washington County football team.

The Bulldogs have enjoyed great success in recent seasons, earning a playoff spot the past 12 consecutive years and 16 of the past 17 years, and playing for state titles twice in that span. Also in that span the Bulldogs won at least nine games 11 times.

That's consistency and that type of consistency builds confidence.

This season, though, WCHS is coming off a disappointing 6-4 season that ended not with a loss but with a ruling, the Alabama High School Athletic Association ruling the Bulldogs used an ineligible player in its first-round playoff win, leading to a forfeit of that victory. Then head coach Al Earnest resigned in May after two seasons as head coach to accept a position with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes in Mobile, leading to a search for a new leader for the football program.

Devin Roberts, a former assistant at Saraland and Auburn high schools, was tabbed to fill the vacancy in the spring and he, as was the case with Earnest, will be a head coach for the first time at the varsity level. His task will be to meet the expectations and tradition head on and attempt to lead the Bulldogs back to the playoffs once again, chasing the 2A state crown.

The job appealed to Roberts in part because it meant a return to his roots — he and his wife, Rachel, grew up in the Chatom-Jackson area. "It is a special feeling to get to come home," Roberts said.

The honeymoon phase is coming to an end and now it's time to play football. Roberts inherits

a young team, one that features a smaller roster than in previous seasons, as well as being one that doesn't have the star power of the recent past.

"We're going to be, I would say, a very blue-collar, physical football team," Roberts said. "A lot of our senior leadership is going to be up front. We've got a lot of youth at the skill positions. Our backfield, other than (quarterback) Cade Glass — and Cade was hurt most of last year — has had very little experience at the varsity level. They've had some really good players come in in front of them. They have some experience at other positions but they have had very little experience in the backfield. And that's where they're going to be now."

That fact has dictated the offensive ap-

proach the Bulldogs will take this season, Roberts said.

"We're going to run the ball downhill and establish the running game with our strength, which is our offensive line," he said. "And we've got some wrinkles and adjustments. When teams stack the box and load the box we've got enough playmakers on the edge we'll be able to take advantage of that when they give us those opportunities."

"I just kind of see it, and it kind of goes back to that old Carl Madison mindset, when I played for him (at Jackson Academy) — we ran the split-back veer, and it was triple-option, triple-option, triple-option. You do everything right and you get four yards; if you do everything right and they

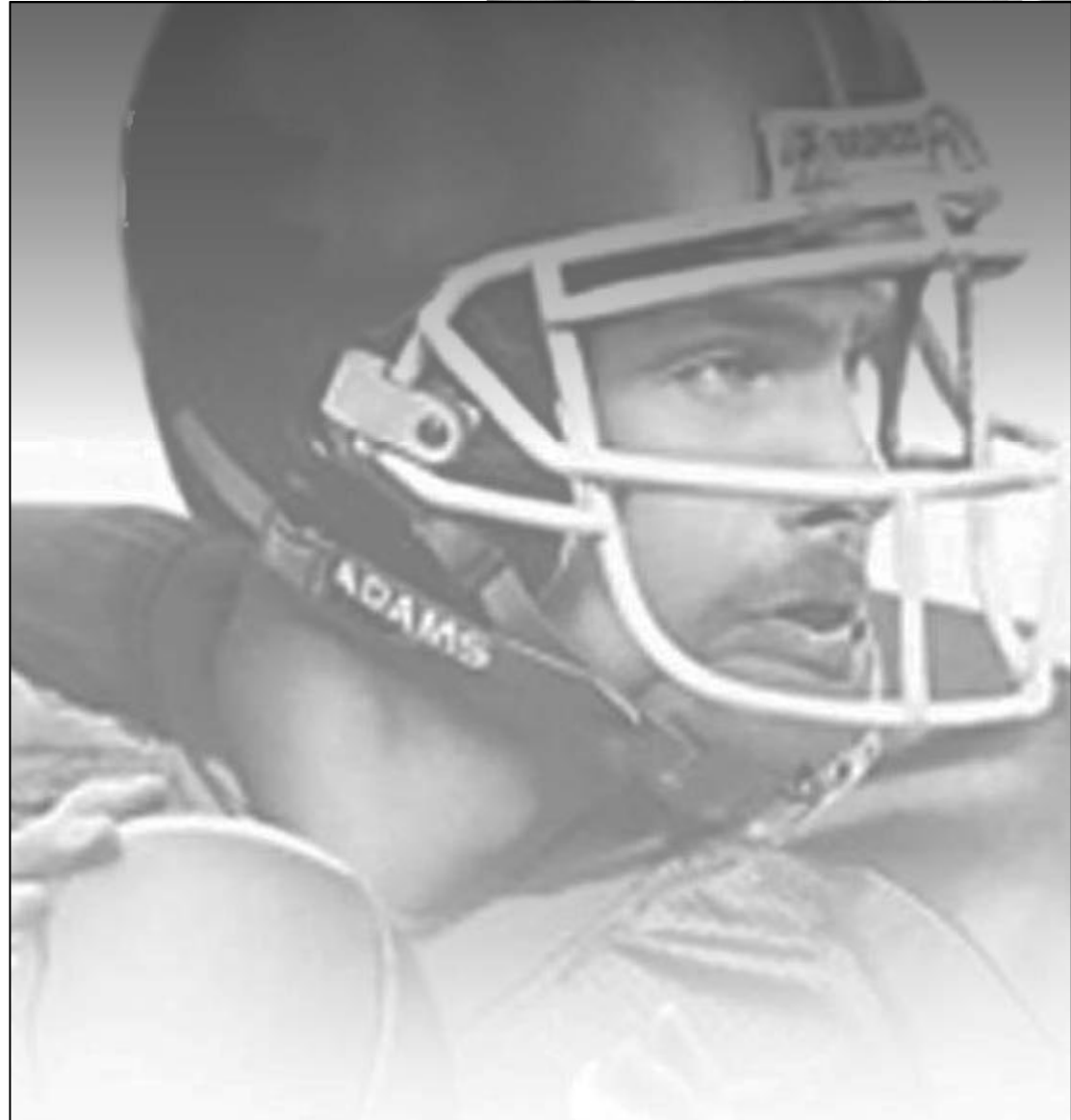
know what you're doing, you get four yards. Well, you do that enough and then all of a sudden he's going to call a wrinkle, and when he does it's a touchdown.

"That's kind of the mindset that I want the kids to be in, in that we're going to do everything perfect. We're going to step with the correct foot and at the right angle, we're going to put our head in the right spot, and we're going to get, even if they know what play we're running and they're there, we're going to get four yards out of it. And when they (opponent) sell out to stopping it, we're going to hit them on a big play."

Roberts said the depth chart will require WCHS to play smart and play within its

See **BULLDOGS**, 51C

Running backs for WCHS, from left, Eric Hicks, Benjamin Jones, Andrew Jones, Dalton Woodyard, Caleb Ladhier and Austin Younge.



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