

JACKSON

Crenshaw has build, mindset of defensive star

BY LEEQUINTON BLACKMON
Sports Correspondent

If you were to ask a coach on any level what they want out of a defensive player they’d probably give you enough attributes to describe Jackson’s Stephen Crenshaw.

At 6-foot-1, 200 pounds, Crenshaw has the perfect athletic build for a high school defensive end/middle linebacker. And he has the mindset to match it.

He’s fast, he’s explosive, he plays with intensity and it’d be hard to find many players who can outwork him.

Crenshaw credits a lot of his development as a player to one of his former defensive coaches, Corvelle Jones, who is now at Chickasaw.

“I learned a lot from coach Jones,” he said. “He taught me a lot about how to play defense. It wasn’t just the physical aspect of playing defense, but he taught me a lot about the mental approach you have to have to play defense at a high level. Things like playing with intensity and how to be violent with your hands when you’re trying to get to the quarterback. That really helped me a lot over the summer, because I was able to use that against our offensive line and that



Stephen Crenshaw

helped them get better as well.”

This season, Crenshaw has a host of new defensive coaches to learn from and he also has a different position to learn as well.

“I had to make a big change this spring,” he said. “I played defensive line and (new defensive coordinator Ryan Little) switched

me to middle linebacker because he said that’s where he needed me to play. So, I learned all the plays and responsibilities and it took some getting used to.”

According to Crenshaw, one of the biggest changes he had to make in his new role was getting used to carrying a bigger load of responsibility.

“As a middle linebacker,” Crenshaw said. “You have a lot responsibilities and you have to control a lot of things on defense. You have to make sure that everybody is in the right spot and that all the plays are run right. You have to basically be a coach on the field, which is easy for me because coach Little shares the same beliefs that I do.”

In his opinion, Crenshaw believes the intensity he learned from his former defensive coaches makes his relationship with Little a match made in heaven, which is why the transition to middle linebacker has been so easy for him.

“He’s a good man,” he said of Little. “A lot of the things I believe in, he believes in them as well. He’s very intense and he believes in things like being accountable for doing your job and giving 100 percent effort on every play. That’s what his defense is

based on. It’s all about discipline and base. As long as you play your position and do what you’re supposed to do as an individual player, then the whole defense benefits from that.”

In many ways, Jackson’s defensive players say one of their biggest issues was their lack of togetherness last year. According to Crenshaw, when Little took over that was something both Little and the defense wanted to work on and Crenshaw says he can already feel the change.

“I feel like we have a brotherhood,” Crenshaw said. “That’s one of the things that coach (Danny) Powell and coach Little have been talking about. We’re not just a team, but we’re a brotherhood. We had some great coaches last year that taught us a lot and coach Little is just taking what they taught us and building on it by getting us to play together as one complete unit and not just a bunch of individual players. You can see it at practice. Everybody is coming together and doing their jobs and being where they’re supposed to be.”

With a new set of defensive coaches and a feeling of brotherhood on that side of the ball, Crenshaw is expecting big things from his defense this year.

Powell’s new coaches know how to lead

BY LEEQUINTON BLACKMON
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There may be some new faces on the Jackson Aggies’ sideline this year, but don’t expect a whole lot of change with the on-field product.

The Aggies still plan to do what won them a state championship in 2011 and what got them to the state semifinals three of the past four years, and that’s play what Aggies head coach Danny Powell calls “Jackson football.”

“I don’t think there’s going to be a lot of big changes,” Powell said. “It’s going to be a similar approach to what we’ve always done. We’ll be spread on offense and we want to run the football to be somewhat balanced on offense. Defense is still going to be about being disciplined and attacking the ball like we’ve done in the past. We have some really good coaches that have joined our staff and I’m really excited about what they’ve brought to the team, and our players really seem to be gelling pretty well under them.”

The coaches Powell noted are former Spanish Fort offensive line coach and Satsuma head coach Justin Thomas and former Murphy defensive coordinator and Fruitdale head coach Ryan Little.

According to Powell, having two new staff members with head coaching experience is not only going to help the players, but it will help him as a coach.

“It’s definitely a benefit,” he said. “Having guys like that frees you up a lot as a head coach, because it takes a lot of the pressure off you. They were head coaches before they got here, so they know what it takes to win, and they know what to look for. There are a lot of little things that are easy to overlook when you’re trying to put together a gameplan, so having guys like that helps you look at the big picture as a whole and makes sure you haven’t forgotten anything before Friday night comes.”

With Thomas coming over to coach the offensive line, the Aggies are hoping to have an easier time moving the football than they did last year. According to players such as junior right tackle Darron Jones, Thomas has brought a newfound level of intensity to the Aggies’ big men up front.

Powell said he is hoping the improvement on the offensive line will allow them to be an effective dual-threat type of offense, which is the type of offensive approach that has worked well for the Aggies in the past.

“We’re going to move it however we can move it,” Powell said. “We don’t really care how we move the ball, as long as it’s moving. I don’t care if we have to throw it more or run it more, we’re going to take whatever the defense gives us. If they try to take away one, we want to really hurt them with the other one. I do think that it’s a benefit having an offense that allows you to be creative like that and not have to be one dimensional, and coach Thomas has been doing a great job of getting those guys on the offensive line ready to play for us.”

On the defensive side of the ball, there won’t be many changes to the overall scheme, but Powell does expect Little to have the defense playing a lot faster than is has in the past.

Jackson will field one of the smaller defensive lines in the area, which is something Little, as defensive coordinator, will look to cover up with the unit’s overall speed and quickness.

“We’re going to be a little smaller up front than usual,” Powell said, “so we’re going to try to play a little faster on that side of the ball. We have very athletic guys over there and coach Little and the defensive coaches have been here all summer working hard with those guys and I really like what I’m seeing from them.

“I think we were very fortunate to get those two guys in coach Little and coach Thomas. In my opinion, I think they’re two of the best in area at what they do, and we’re looking forward to seeing that pay off this season.”

Jones, 6-foot-6, 270 pounds, ‘provides security’ for Aggies

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It’s hard to believe that at 6-foot-6, 270 pounds Jackson’s junior right tackle Darron Jones still has room to grow.

When one looks at Jones, his expected growth spurt has nothing to do with his physical size, as he’s already the perfect size for his position. His expected growth spurt is centered around his ability to grow into one of the state’s elite offensive lineman.

To become a better offensive lineman, Jones is approaching the season with a mindset similar to that of a highly paid bodyguard for an A-List celebrity.

“My job is to provide security for the team,” he said. “Everybody knows how valuable the quarterback is. In a lot of people’s mind, the quarterback is the most important position on the team. He’s the one that has the ball in his hands and he can’t do what he’s supposed to do if he doesn’t have the security that he needs.

“I’m supposed to offer that protection that we need as a team, and it starts with us as an offensive line being able to protect the quarterback and open up holes for the running back.”

One of the ways Jones plans on offering better security to quarterback Lane Rotch this season is by working to build stronger chemistry with his fellow offensive linemen.

“Collectively, we’ve got to work better together as a unit,” Jones said. “I feel like we didn’t do that at times last year and that showed on the scoreboard. It wasn’t just the protection; our technique wasn’t where it needed to be last year. We’ve been working hard and trying to get better as a collective unit and I think we’re going to see some really positive improvements this year on offense.”

A large part of Jones’ optimism for the upcoming season has to do with the hiring of former Satsuma head coach Justin Thomas coming to Jackson as the new offensive line coach.

“He’s intense and that’s what we need,” Jones said. “I think that’s the first thing that we noticed about him when we met him. We saw that he had a lot of passion and he was always upbeat, encouraging and enthusiastic. He’s always hyping us up and making us feel like we’re the best players on the field.”

Jones is aware the position he plays isn’t a very glamorous position. In fact, his offseason interview with the Washington County News was the first time he’s ever been interviewed, because he doesn’t play a popular position. However, Jones said he believes finally getting to be a part of an interview for the newspaper is proof of what Thomas has been telling him and his fellow offensive linemen since he’s gotten there.

“Coach Thomas has given us a lot of confidence as players,” he said. “He’s always telling us how important we are and how much we can affect the team based on how we play. He wants us to believe that the offensive line position is just as important as any other position on the field. That’s the type of confidence he’s giving to us and that’s important, because without confidence, you’ll never be successful.”


Considering Jackson plays in Class 5A, Region 1 that is loaded with stellar defensive lines, that confidence is going to be important for the Aggies’ offensive line and Jones said he knows it’ll pay off.

“If we listen to our coaches and do what I know we’re capable of doing,” Jones said, “I like our chances against any defensive line.”




Jackson tackle Darron Jones

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