

JACKSON ACADEMY

JA linebacker Roberts: Team hungry for wins

BY ARTHUR L. MACK
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Jackson Academy linebacker Micah Roberts said he believes his team's 35-34 loss to Lakeside Christian in the first round of the Alabama Independent Schools Association Class AA playoffs was a bitter pill to swallow.

As such, he and the rest of his Eagles teammates say there is some unfinished business — even though the team has been reclassified to Class A.

"We're all young and we're really hungry," said the junior linebacker who was an all-state selection last season and who will also play running back and receiver on offense.

Roberts, who had nearly 100 tackles on defense and almost 700 yards rushing on offense, will, along with most members on the Eagles' squad, be playing both ways this season. At the same time, he and the rest of the Jackson Academy crew have been working over the spring and summer to get ready for the season.

"Everybody's been working hard every day," Roberts said. "We're just ready to get back out on the field and tell people that we're going to be pretty good and not lose out in the first round this year. We want to go all the way (to a state championship)."

Which brings us to playing both ways. Roberts will be one busy young man, playing two positions on offense. As far as playing running back and receiver, while it is daunting at first glance, he says it's just a matter of the quarterback finding the intended target.

"It's kind of a challenge, but we run different sets," said Roberts. "We just try to get the ball to certain people so you just let them be wherever you need them to be and get the ball to them."

That was made possible by head coach Jacob Webb using a balanced offense.

"He's been trying to balance it out, passing and running, about the same," Roberts said.



Micah Roberts

Defense is another matter. Roberts said his experience as an offensive player gives him an idea, when he is on the defensive side of the ball, of which player on the opposing team will get the football.

"You can watch them and their eyes and the body language to see if they're going to get the ball or not," he said.

Besides a team goal of winning a state title, Roberts has some personal goals as well. Still, he said he knows while there is a lot of confidence that Jackson Academy will go deep in the playoffs, it won't be easy.

"I hope to have around 100 tackles on defense and around six picks this year," he said. "On offense, I hope to have at least 1,500 yards rushing. It's going to be very competitive. We're going to have to come out and play our best game and hope to win every week. We've got to play our best game every week with the schedule we have."

Steed has set sights on Eagles' state title

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Jackson Academy's Kie Steed hopes there won't be any repeat of the heart-break that ended the Eagles' 2017 and 2016 seasons. Last year, JA lost to Lakeside Christian 35-34 in the first round of the Alabama Independent School Association Class AA playoffs. The Eagles also lost in the first round of the 2016 playoffs to Lakeside Christian.

Steed, who has been playing for the Eagles the past couple of seasons, is hoping for a different outcome now that Jackson Academy has moved down to Class A. Regardless, he should be a big contributor as he is scheduled to play quarterback and safety.

"We want to win a state championship," Steed said. "I think we have a pretty good shot this year, because I don't think anybody in Class A is going to be too overpowering. I think we can hang with anybody, but there's some good quality teams."

Steed said some miscues in the first-round playoff loss to Lakeside Christian last year played a role in the Eagles not prolonging their season, and the emphasis this summer has been on preventing turnovers.

"We could have beat them (Lakeside Christian), but we had a few mistakes early on in the game and in the second half we didn't play too well," he said. "We had some fumbles and we have to hold on to the ball better; little simple stuff."

While playing quarterback on offense, Steed will have a good target in fellow senior Devin Pitre. While Pitre was not a primary target last year, he is expected to play a prominent role in the offense.

Playing quarterback is tough enough, but with most of JA's players going both ways, it's unlikely Steed will get much rest, especially with him also playing safety.

"You get a little tired, but you have to



Kie Steed

push through it and do a lot of conditioning to be in good enough shape," he said. "With playing both ways, I reckon that you can help your team out more if you play both ways with the ball."

So what happens when you go both ways and you're on the other side of the ball? Steed has this advice for two-way players, especially if they are playing safety and trying to figure out what the opposing quarterback is going to do: "It's kind of tough, but you've just got to read his eyes."

Meanwhile, Steed has some lofty personal goals and said the disappointment of the one-point loss to Lakeside Christian has fueled his teammates' hunger for redemption.

"I want to rush for at least 1,000 yards this season, and (throw for) 1,000 yards passing," he said. "The guys have been coming out to practice every day busting their butts. Sometimes, we stay until 10 o'clock (after starting practice at 7 in the morning). We come out and work hard every day."

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