

SARALAND

Brothers in the trenches

Dreaden is mentor to young Spartan blockers

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Those glancing at Saraland's football roster for the upcoming season will make note of several names they have heard before, players whose reputations as outstanding athletes and players have preceded them.

Most of those players are skill position guys — cornerbacks, running backs, wide receivers, linebackers — and one other attribute — returning starters.

Further examination of the Spartans' roster will reveal a fact that cannot be ignored: there aren't a lot of returning starters or big names on the offensive line this season. Truth be told, there's just one of those this season for Saraland. His name is Chase Dreaden.

It should be noted Saraland head coach Jeff Kelly has been very pleased with the work of the offensive line during spring drills, summer workouts and into fall practice. In fact, he has gone so far as to state the offensive line, even on a unit that has several players being recruited by colleges, may end up being the strength of that group.

That means the 5-foot-11, 285-pound Dreaden, a senior, will be expected to carry the burden of leadership and mentor for the younger players who will join him in the trenches this fall.

And that's just fine with him.

"It's great to be out here with my brothers. It's fun," Dreaden said. "I like playing the game with them because they make it fun. We're young and we don't have many returning starters, but we're athletic all the way across the line and that's going to help us out a lot.

"I'm the only returning starter, so that's pretty big. No, I don't really feel any pressure in that because being a leader is what I'm supposed to do. I like being that guy."

Kelly likes that Dreaden, who has also played nose guard on defense in the past but will concentrate mostly on the offensive side of the ball this season, is that guy too.

"Chase is a guy that's probably played as much ball as anybody," Kelly said. "He's played a lot — the last two years he's been at guard — and he's been a contributor. That's the group that's going to have three or four guys in there that weren't there last year. So Chase has sort of been that settling influence on the line, although I think we're going to be really good out there; we have some really talented guys.

"But he's the guy who has sort of been the leader of that group. Chase is not a really vocal guy and he's really good at what he does. He'll be the leader for us out there. He's playing guard and he's not playing a lot of defense right now, so primarily his time will be spent on the offensive side."

In that respect, Dreaden is one of the key players on the Spartans' team this season. Whether he is a household name to football fans in the area or not, it's for certain he's a big man on campus with the Spartans' football program.

"We're going to have some newer guys there and Chase is going to be huge for them," Kelly said. "The amount of communication that those guys have got to have — making calls — there's just such an intricate set of rules that they have to sort through on every play.

"It's good to have somebody who's seen every look you're going to see, who has played in a bunch of big games and sort of be that vocal guy who makes sure that we're pointed in the right direction. He's going to be a good one."

While he is the most experienced of the guys up front on offense, Dreaden considers himself one of the guys on what he described as a tight-knit collection of players on the O-line. And despite the youth and inexperience, their confidence is growing.

"We can be as good as we want to be," Dreaden said. "I don't think people see how fast and how athletic we are. But we know we have got to get after it and make things happen."

It will be Dreaden's job to see that is the case.

"It's great to be out here with my brothers. It's fun."

— Chase Dreaden, senior leader of the Saraland offensive line

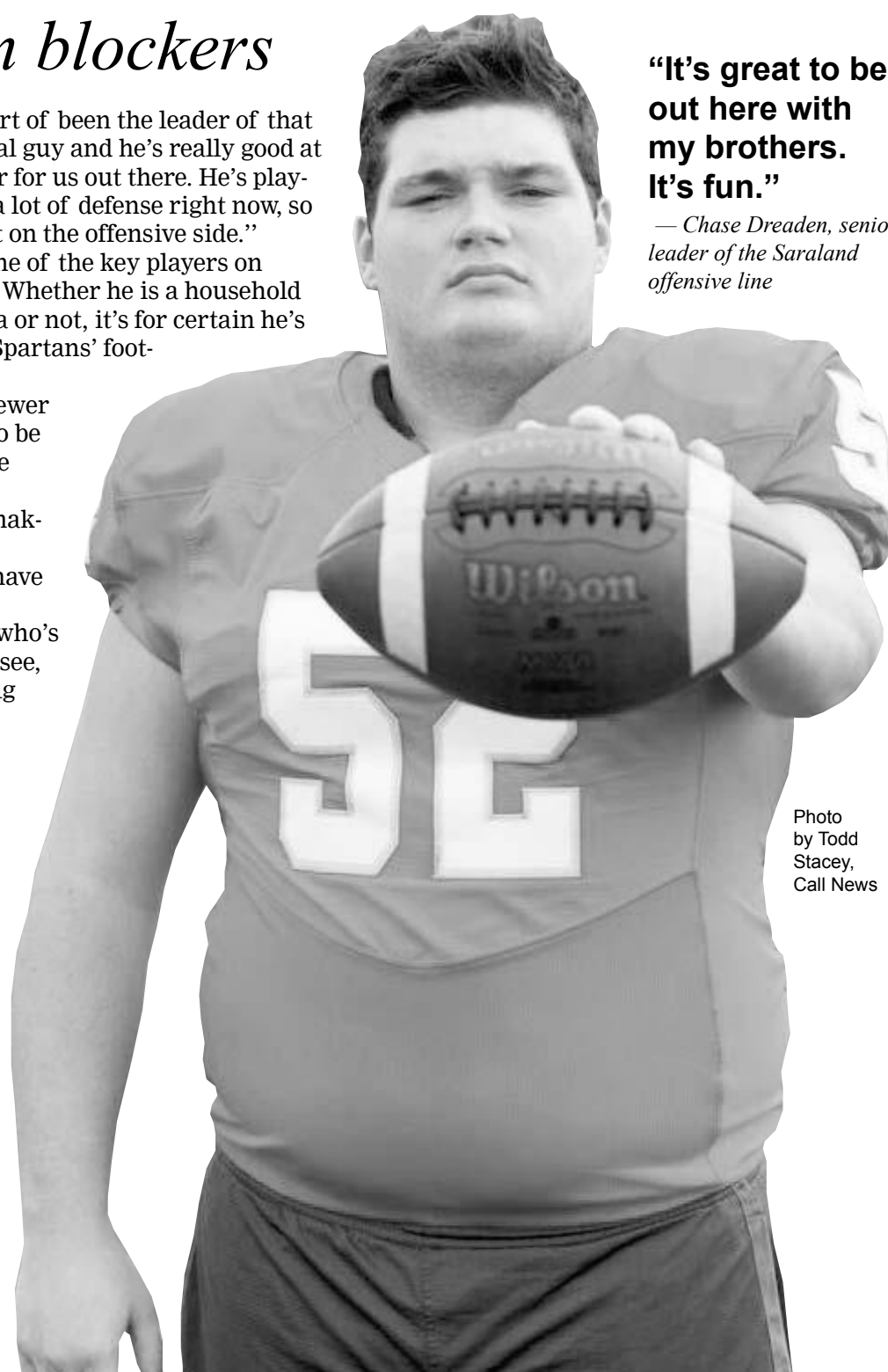


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