

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Woodyard for the defense

Bulldog senior is a force at linebacker, and (bad news for foes) he's getting even better

BY TOMMY HICKS
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When any discussion is engaged concerning Washington County's defense, whether it's by fans at the local diner or offensive coaches of an opposing team, the topic of conversation will always get around to linebacker Dalton Woodyard.

The senior linebacker is the heartbeat of the Bulldogs' defensive efforts; the unit goes as Woodyard goes. While there are other players who obviously play key roles on the unit, it is Woodyard who sets the tone for the defense and Woodyard who makes sure the other members of the defense know their assignments.

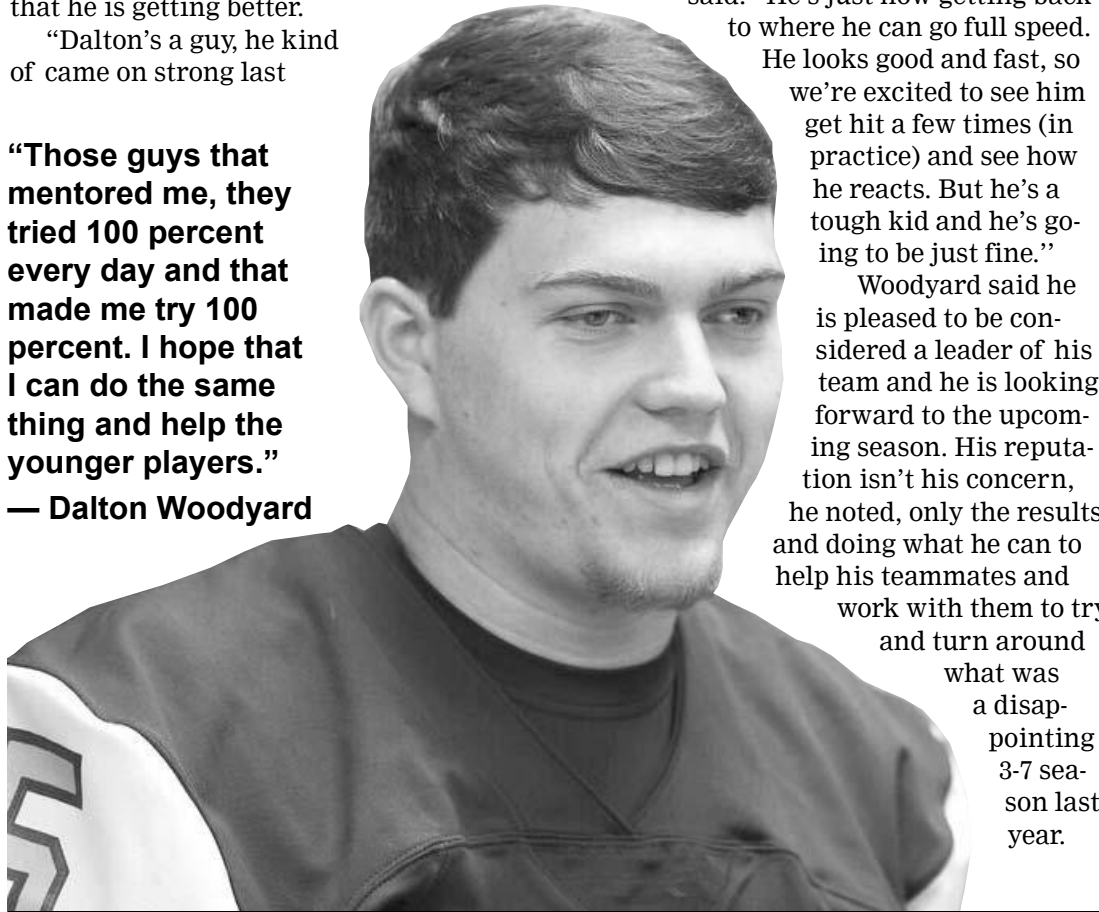
He is loved by WCHS fans and disliked by opponents based on his ability to stop plays before they lead to big gains against the Bulldogs.

The scary thing for opponents is that he is getting better.

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— Dalton Woodyard



year," Washington County head coach Devin Roberts said. "He had played some his sophomore year at linebacker and last year he started coming on strong in reading the offenses at linebacker and having a nose for the ball.

"He was a guy who was probably trailing the leading tackler on the team by at least 30 tackles halfway through the season and he ended the season just a few tackles behind. He came on strong and started figuring it out late."

These days, as a senior and leader of the team, he is figuring out even more as he and his teammates prepare for their season opener Aug. 24 at home against Class 5A Citronelle, a team with a strong offensive unit that is expected to test Woodyard and the Bulldogs.

"He is looking to bounce back from a Week 9 (of last season) ACL tear," Roberts said. "He's just now getting back to where he can go full speed.

He looks good and fast, so we're excited to see him get hit a few times (in practice) and see how he reacts. But he's a tough kid and he's going to be just fine."

Woodyard said he is pleased to be considered a leader of his team and he is looking forward to the upcoming season. His reputation isn't his concern, he noted, only the results and doing what he can to help his teammates and work with them to try and turn around what was a disappointing 3-7 season last year.



Linebacker Dalton Woodyard

"I had a lot of help the previous season and I learned a lot from some really good people and some really good coaches," Woodyard said. "This past season I had a really good person, Patrick Sanderson, playing beside me and I learned a lot from him. The coaches, too. The older you get the more you learn."

He said the most valuable lesson he has picked up in his time with the team is the level of intensity that is required to be a success.

"Everything is going so fast. Your mind is going everywhere all the time, there's just so much going on, so you have to play with intensity and focus," he said.

While others look to Woodyard to lead the way, he said the success of the WCHS defense will be based on a matter of trust.

"I trust my teammates to do their job and if I do my job, which is to cover the middle, we're going to be OK," he said. "If I cover the middle I know they've got the outside and I don't have to worry about that. I trust my team."

His continued improvement is grounded in playing the game since he was a youngster and not being afraid to take failures and disappointments and use them to become a better player.

"I've played since I was a little kid, probably five or six years old, and I've just moved up every year," Woodyard said. "I started high school football when I was in the 10th grade. I didn't start that year — well, half my 10th grade year I started.

"I remember my first practice. It was rough. I looked like I was so little

compared to the other giants that were out there. But I've come a long way since then. I'm definitely proud. I've gained a lot physically, but mentally mostly. Football is a tough sport and you learn a lot."

As a leader, he knows just as he looked up to older players when he was a younger member of the WCHS team, there are younger players looking to him for guidance this season.

"That's why I try 100 percent every day," he said. "Those guys that mentored me, they tried 100 percent every day and that made me try 100 percent. I hope that I can do the same thing and help the younger players. Maybe they are watching me and seeing me trying as hard as I can and they will try their best too."

Woodyard said he believes this year's team will be a successful one.

"Last year's team was more family," he said. "We were all together no matter what happened. We did have a couple of bad games, but we came through it as a family and as a team. It helped me realize how important that is for a team. If you treat your team like family then it will take you a long way.

"The weight room is the key to success in every phase of football. If you're not in the weight room you're not going to do good. That's just the bottom line. We have a good strength and conditioning coach and he's working us hard."

As it relates to Woodyard, there may be more bad news for opponents. Roberts has plans to add to Woodyard's responsibilities.

"He'll also play some offense," Roberts said. "We try to have kids stay one-sided, even though we're in a lot better shape than we were last year physically since we've gotten started on conditioning year-round and our numbers are up (on roster). ... He'll always be a defensive guy, but he'll also play some on offense."



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