

## CITRONELLE

# Lofton likes linebacker

*New role on Wildcat defense suits the senior, who has gained size and speed*

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Jason Barnett may not be a chess player, but he's making a lot of moves with his roster as though he has the background to excel at the game. One aspect of fall drills — actually, the movement started in the spring — that has been a constant with the Citronelle football team has been the reshuffling of the lineup.

Certainly the loss of some key players to graduation has had an impact on the reshuffling, as is the case every season for every high school football team. But the Citronelle shuffling has involved the movement of several players from one position to another, sometimes from one unit to another — offense to defense or vice versa.

Barnett and his staff are looking for the right moves, the right combinations if you will, of players and positions to give the Wildcats the best opportunity to be successful this season. When they open play Friday, Aug. 23, at home against the Class 2A Washington County Bulldogs, even the most loyal Citronelle fans may see favorite players in a new spot.

One of those players will be senior Ricky Lofton, and his movement has been made since spring practice. During the spring he was lined up on the defensive line and was doing a good job there, but Barnett thought to move him to linebacker, and so Lofton was switched to see how he might handle the position.

Lofton played so well, the move became permanent, and this season he'll be a linebacker for the Wildcats.

Lofton said he's fine with the move.

"It took a little while to get adjusted to it, and to the differences, but I like it," Lofton said.

Barnett said he likes having Lofton there for what he brings to the position, especially combined with the others filling the remaining linebacking positions. Barnett said the moves have helped the Wildcats' defense become stronger.

"The second day of practice in the spring I had him on the D line and we really needed some backer help so I moved him to linebacker and the first day he just started doing his job and working really well there," Barnett said. "So it was OK, here we go. And he had a great spring game."

It wasn't the only change in Lofton that Barnett has recognized of late and that met with his approval. Lofton also

gained strength and size and added to the maturity he brings to the game as well.

"Ricky is a guy, this is his fourth year in the program and he's been with us all four years," Barnett explained. "He finally grew up. He hit his growth spurt and his maturity level increased as well and he's going to play linebacker for us."

"He's gotten stronger and he's gotten faster and he got in the weight room and really started hitting the weights hard and it showed."

Barnett said the change was so dramatic that even Lofton himself noticed the change.

"It was one of those things like, 'Eureka, look what happens when I really do work out,'" Barnett said of Lofton. "He's a great kid to be around and I'm proud of him for finally stepping up and being one of those guys."

"You could see it, absolutely. I remember when it happened. It was sometime in February, I can tell you that. We were in there working out and all of a sudden I started bragging on him about his technique, that he had finally started getting the technique right. And when that happened it was like, 'Hey, I can do something and I enjoy this; let's go.' The switch turned on for him."

Lofton remembers too and admits at times previously in his career he may not have given his full effort in the weight room.

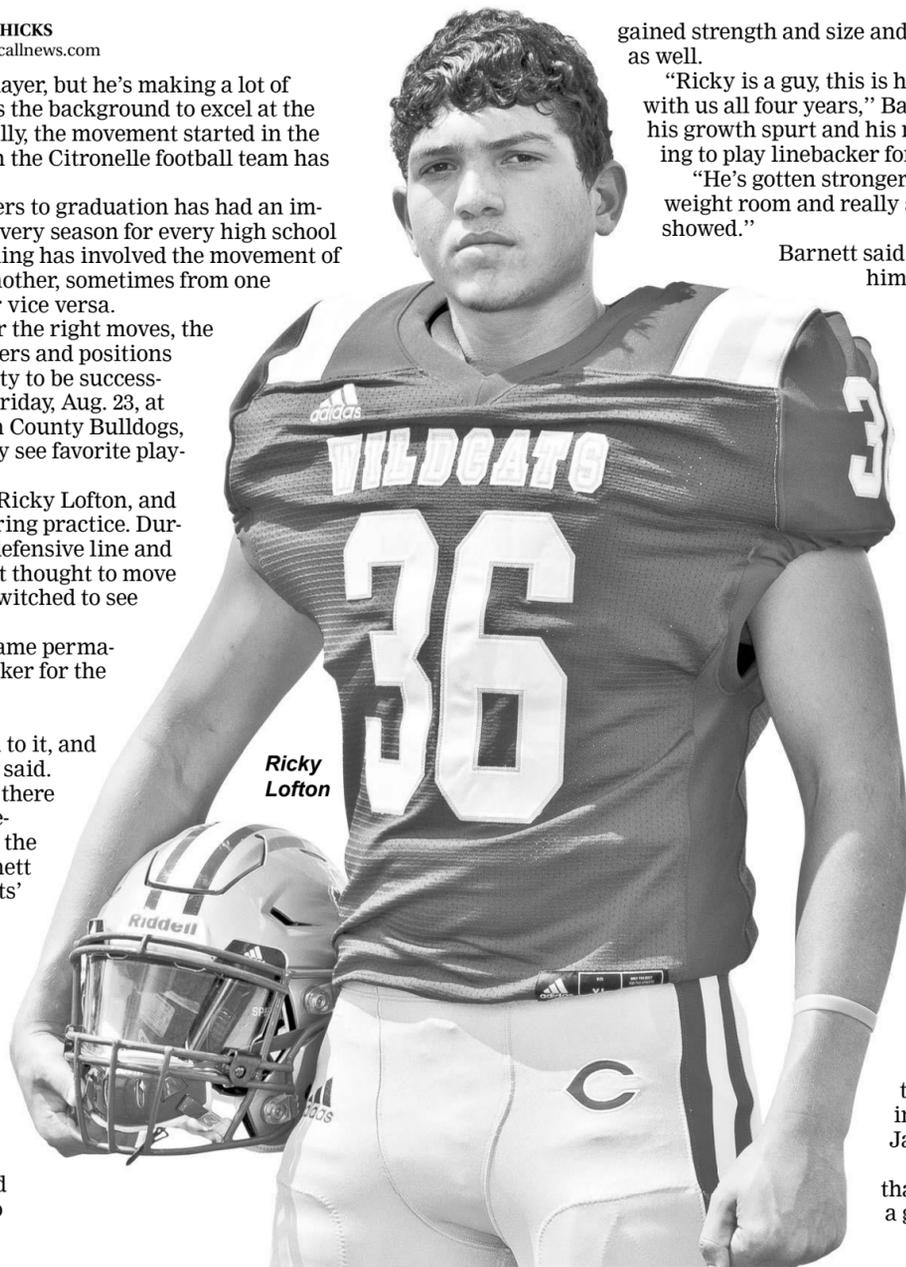
"I see the difference now and what it can mean," Lofton said. "I like working out now."

Armed with new confidence and a new position, Lofton said he is looking forward to the start of the season and seeing what he and his teammates are capable of doing this season.

"I'm just trying to contribute as much as I can to the team and hopefully we'll make a deep run into the playoffs," Lofton said.

Does he believe a deep run is possible for the Wildcats, who face a tough schedule that includes Class 5A, Region 1 opponents such as Jackson, Vigor, Satsuma and Faith Academy?

"Oh, yes. I think we're going to do better than we have in years past," he said. "We've got a good group of guys."



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