

COTTAGE HILL

Barbour wants full year of excitement with CH

Last season, he only got to enjoy Warriors' playoff run



Will Barbour, Cottage Hill offensive tackle

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

Last year was one of the toughest in Will Barbour's young life. He was primed to start at offensive tackle for Cottage Hill Christian Academy in the Warriors' quest to finally have a winning season after seven years of losing.

And as it turned out, it indeed was a great year for Cottage Hill, which posted a 10-2 record before losing in the second round of the Class 2A playoffs.

But Barbour was late to the party, missing the entire regular season with a foot injury suffered in preseason practice and only seeing action in the team's two playoff games.

"It was hard because of the success we were having and we hadn't had that kind of success before, so you wanted to be a part of that," said the 6-foot-3, 230-pound Barbour, who

will start at left tackle in his senior season.

"I just tried to cheer my guys on and keep supporting them the best I could. But I wanted more than anything to be out there playing."

How did he keep his head into things from the sidelines?

"I did all my exercises for my leg to try and stay healthy to get back as quick as I could," he said. "I came to every practice in my (walking) boot and I kept up with the plays so when I was able to go in and play I'd be ready."

He finally got his shot in Cottage Hills' 26-0 first-round playoff win over Goshen.

"When the time came I wasn't nervous at all. When I got out there I was excited," said Barbour.

He credits Cottage Hill head coach Chris Brazell, the Warriors training staff and his family for keeping him encouraged and engaged with the team.

"They told me to 'Just keep doing what you're doing, try to stay active and do what you can,'" he said. "They helped me stay positive. My parents were supportive, telling me not to get down and to keep my head up ... keep moving forward and eventually your time will come."

And the plan this year? "I want to grade out over 90 percent (performance rate) on the O line and I don't want to give up a sack in pass blocking," said Barbour. "I'm trying to just be a leader this year because I think the O line is going to be one of our strong points."

"We've got everybody coming back and I want our running back, J.D. (Pettaway) to have a big year rushing."

And does he have any concerns the Warriors can build on last year's breakthrough season?

"No big concerns," said Barbour. "I think we're more ready than we were last year."

Thomas: 'We've definitely got to finish'

BY DARRON PATTERSON
Sports Correspondent

A lot is at stake for Cottage Hill Christian Academy linebacker Rasean Thomas in 2019.

He has taken it upon himself to be the leading man in the Warriors' sequel to build on last season's incredible 10-2 run.

He knows scouts from several colleges will be watching, too, just to see if the 6-foot-2, 200-pound Thomas has what it takes to be part of their team at the next level.

So, with all that on his plate, what's Thomas' approach to the season?

"Don't try to play outside of your position," he said. "Do what you're told and be where the coaches put you, because they put you in the right positions so it's up to you to do what you're coached to do."

"That was really big last year because we had some really good guys who could pretty much do anything, but we didn't need them to do everything. We just needed them to do what they needed to do, and that's what I've been echoing to the young guys this year."

"It didn't hurt us last year, but a lot of guys just felt like they needed to do more than what they really needed to do."

And his goals this time around?

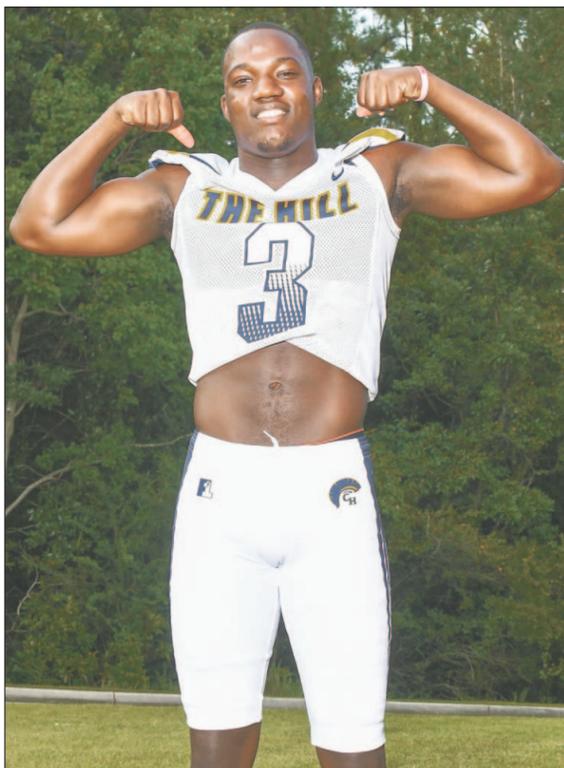
"I want to play on Thanksgiving and hit 200 tackles," he said in reference to making it to at least the third round of the playoffs which takes place Thanksgiving week and improving on the 170 tackles he put up last season.

Thomas has offers on the table from Jacksonville State and West Florida and has visited Princeton and Cornell of the Ivy League, but he's not focused on college just yet.

"We've definitely got to finish," he said of what he hopes to help his team accomplish this season. "That's what got us out of that playoff game (against Ariton) ... we just didn't close the game," he said of the 36-27 second-round loss.

"A lot of times last season we thought we could start slow, and because we were so talented we ended up coming back and beating a lot of people. But we were actually in a game with Ariton where we couldn't do that. So we have to start fast."

"I have to make sure I'm on my game because guys feed



Rasean Thomas, Cottage Hill linebacker

off me. If I'm having a good game, they're having a good game. If I'm having a bad game, they're having a bad game. I can't be off going into games. I have to be the motor of the team — kick the game off."

Before last season, Thomas and the other seniors suffered through two losing seasons, going a combined 7-13. So it was refreshing to him to have a year like 2018.

What changed?
"The coaches," he said.

Present Warriors head coach Chris Brazell, who's been involved with the school in some capacity for 19 years, enters his second season as head coach.

"We never really had bad coaches, but now we have coaches who've already been here that like to win," said Thomas. "We were all over the place going through coach after coach, and (now) we've got coach (Chris) Brazell, who's been here since the school started."

So, with things looking up, does Thomas have anything he fears this season?

"Not really. I just don't like to fail."



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