

# SARALAND

# Beesley is veteran mainstay

*Spartan junior has held important role of left tackle ever since he was a freshman*

BY TOMMY HICKS  
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Those who see big 6-foot-4, 290-pound Colton Beesley at left tackle for the Saraland Spartans are not surprised he holds the position, considered by many to be the most important spot on the offensive line because the left tackle most protects the quarterback.

Certainly no one who has seen Beesley play is surprised he's at the left tackle position.

But consider this: He has held that starting spot since his freshman season. Yes, his freshman season. That makes the junior a three-year starter at the position, with another year to go after this one.

"Colton is going into his junior year and he's been our left tackle since the day he stepped out there in the ninth grade," Saraland head coach Jeff Kelly said. "He's been very effective, steady and strong. He's just got to get his overall understanding better.

"He's a very good run blocker who has really worked hard to improve his pass protection and do a lot of different things. But I think Colton has a chance, with a big year this year, to be a very well-known guy on the recruiting circuit going into his senior season next year. He just has to continue doing the things he's doing now — and I believe he will — and good things will happen for him."

Kelly admitted for a freshman to step in and start at left tackle is a rarity.

"It's hard. But he's got good feet and he's a big kid," Kelly said. "He's a mature kid. Even as a young kid he didn't have that younger mentality. He was a mature guy who wanted to work and get better and he had good feet and so that's a pretty good combination. He doesn't mind putting his face on somebody."

Kelly said he has seen Beesley grow in the position each season he's been on the field, including last season with the Spartans were 13-2 and played for the Class 6A state championship.

"He went up against some really good ones last year (on opposing defensive lines) as a young kid and he never once backed down," Kelly said. "I'm proud of where he's at right now."

Beesley himself gives a bit of a head shake when he is asked about starting at left tackle as a freshman.

"I knew it was special to come in like that. I didn't let it get to my head," he said. "I just tried to help my team out as much as I could. It took a long time for me to get in the swing of things and how coach Kelly wanted me to do things."

He has embraced the pressure that comes, not only with being the team's left tackle, but a member of the offensive line that is charged with protecting the quarterback and opening running room for the backs that will make the Spartans' offense go.

"I like it because everything starts with us," Beesley said. "You can't have good players if you don't have a good O line."

He said he and his O line teammates are tight. "We have to be like family," he said.

Memories of the loss to Pinson Valley in last season's Class 6A state title game are pushing this year's team to go one game better, Beesley said.

"I think it's going to help us and make our minds go back to how it was (last season) and it's going to help us realize that we've been here before and what we have to do," he said. "We're going to make sure it's right."

Always one of the bigger kids in his class growing up, naturally when he showed an interest in playing football his coaches placed him right up front — on the offensive line.

"I've always played on the offensive line or D line," he said. "I started playing in the fourth grade and I've been sticking with it ever since. At home, my brother always picked on me and I always had to do something about it. (Football) helped."

For those who may be curious, "No, he's not picking on me anymore," Beesley said with a grin.

Beesley said his goals for the upcoming season are team oriented.

"I want to go all the way. Last year we didn't win (the championship game) and this year I want to win. I want it to be right," he said.

He added he hopes he'll receive some attention from scouts after the upcoming season and heading into his senior year next year, but the goal remains the same.

"I'm trying to get recruited, but my team comes first. That's all that I'm worried about," he said.



Colton Beesley, Saraland High's veteran left tackle.

## THOMAS: Tight end has all the tools

FROM PAGE 46C

he said. "When you've got that threat of a really, really good, SEC-caliber, dynamic receiver at tight end, that's pretty good. You can do a lot of different things with a young man like that.

"He's had a good offseason. He's probably really worked more in the offseason with the linemen than he has at tight end. He's been learning those blocking fundamentals and techniques. At the next level that's really going to help."

Thomas not only fit the mold of what college scouts were looking for at his position, he exceeded those expectations. That led to the popularity and the many offers he received as a result.

"They are hard to find," Kelly said. "You look at DJ, and he's been a good player for us, but he's not a guy who's had 60 catches a year or anything like that. He was one of the most recruited guys throughout the southeast because that's what those college guys are wanting to find. That's what they

are looking for, a big strong guy who can be athletic and effective as a receiver but also effective in the run game.

"You look at the Power 5 programs throughout the country, and they have good receivers, but they also have those explosive players at tight end who can make plays. Three years from now, he's going to be an absolute beast."

But that's in his college future. At the moment, Thomas said his concentration is with his Saraland team and helping the Spartans in their quest to return to the Class 6A state championship game, this time coming away with the crown.

The offense will play a big role toward that goal and Thomas said this year's Saraland offense is one that has a lot of offer.

"From last year's team we had a lot of really good finishers and that carried over to the players," Thomas said. "Now we're just trying to make a statement and prove to everybody that we can do it again. I know that we can."

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