

SARALAND

No worries for emerging star

Brett Nezat, much more than the 'next guy,' is making a name for himself as QB leader

BY TOMMY HICKS
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Few want to be the "next guy" when the previous guy was considered someone special. But in football, especially high school football, there has to be a lot of players filling those "next guy" roles each season.

Last year was Brett Nezat's turn at Saraland.

He stepped in at quarterback a season after the departure of Jack West, who was highly recruited, signed to play at Stanford, and was perhaps the most recognizable student at the school during his time there.

The bar of expectation for the position was fairly high, but Nezat played his junior season for the Spartans as though unaware it even existed. He started a bit slowly, but gained confidence with each start, each opportunity on the field, and he finished with a solid season, helping lead the Spartans to a 13-2 record (tied for the most wins in schools history), a spot in the Class 6A state championship game and the first advancement past the second round of the playoffs since the 2014 season.

After this season, someone is going to have the unenviable task of having to follow Nezat as the Spartans' starting quarterback.

"I definitely felt my confidence coming each week, especially with my guys," Nezat, a 6-foot-4, 225-pounder with a strong right arm, said of last season. "When you have Rashawn (McAlpine) rushing for about 300 yards a game that definitely helps anybody out.

"I feel like I'm really into the system right now and (head) coach (Jeff) Kelly

trusts me a lot more. He'll give me about three plays and I can pick one of those when we get into the play. I love the responsibility. I like the pressure it puts on me. I feel like I play better with that responsibility on me."

That's what Kelly, himself a former starting quarterback at Southern Miss, saw from Nezat last season, and he said he believes better things are ahead for Nezat and the Spartans' offense overall as a result.

"Brett's an unassuming kind of guy," Kelly said. "He came in last year and just sort of flew under the radar. He sort of got his confidence going about midyear and he started to take his game to a new level. He had an outstanding playoff run. He had a great year.

"The thing that jumped out to me last year is he was a very clutch football player. When we needed big plays down the stretch he came up with them. He came up with the big drives in the playoffs when we needed them and nothing seemed to bother him.

"I can usually do a pretty good job of bothering a quarterback at practice but I have never been able to really get under his skin, I don't think. He's just got that great mentality for the position. He's had a great offseason and he's got a full grasp of what we're wanting to do and we're able to put

See **NEZAT**, 43C



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Good luck to the 2019 Spartans!
May you have a memorable season.

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