

WASHINGTON COUNTY

Elijah Johnston 'the guy' for Dawgs

BY TOMMY HICKS
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There are no secrets for Washington County quarterback Elijah Johnston. He knows what is expected of him and he understands the importance of his role on the Bulldogs' team this season. Truth is, nothing has changed much in that regard from a year ago, his first as a starter at quarterback.

What has changed is Johnston himself. He's a little bigger these days, standing about 6-foot-1 and weighing about 180. He's stronger too. Perhaps more importantly, Johnston is more seasoned at the position and he's certainly more confident.

All of those factors will weigh in his favor, and that of the Bulldogs, for the 2019 season.

"I feel like the summer of last year I just was working to get better at my craft and heading into this year I feel like I've learned so much more and I have more confidence under my belt," Johnston said. "Last year we had a lot of young guys and this year we're more experienced."

"I learned in order to be a successful team everybody has to come together. You can't have just one guy or two guys, the whole team has to be working together. That's what we're going to try to do this year in trying to be more successful this year than we were last year. We're learning new things and we're learning from our mistakes."

The mistakes were most notable early in the season as the Bulldogs lost their first five games, most of those defeats coming in lopsided scores. But the Bulldogs won four games in a row and if they had defeated Chickasaw in the regular season finale they would have qualified for the Class 5A playoffs. Chickasaw won the game.

Still, the WCHS players came away with lessons learned and experience gained. Perhaps no one more than Johnston himself.

"I feel like everybody has gotten stronger, grown a couple more inches and gained more weight and most of all we're more experienced at every position on the field," he said. "We've learned a lot from last year. We're more confident this year and we're looking to be a better team this year. I think we'll be a better team."

Head coach Devin Roberts admits much of the offensive success, especially early last season, depended on Johnston's performance. When he was on, so was the Bulldogs'

offense; when he wasn't, well, the news wasn't good.

"Elijah coming back after the season he had is big," Roberts said. "He was the guy last year that kind of determined our offense; when he was on we were on and when he struggled we struggled. He's going to be a big factor in what we do, probably on both sides of the ball (this season)."

"He'll play some on defense when we need him, probably not much early on, but as was start playing more and getting more into playing shape we'll probably roll him in a little more. He's really good in the secondary and I'm really excited about him being able to go both ways and I feel better about it (this year). He's a little bigger, a little stronger, a little faster and that makes you feel better about it."

In truth, Johnston admits he prefers playing defense to offense. Turns out he likes to be the player delivering the hit than receiving one. But without question, he's the Bulldogs' best answer at quarterback and the player who can make things happen both with his arm and his legs. Last season, he threw for more than 1,000 yards and also rushed for more than 1,000 yards.

This season he is expected to receive more assistance on offense from running back Chad Carter, a new addition to the team, and a strong receiving corps.

And he'll be directing an offense that will be more multiple this season, finding him working out of the shotgun

and under center, mixing it up and looking for the best plan of attack against each opponent.

"It's not too hard," he said of learning the wide-ranging offensive gameplan. "If you know how to run the offense and you know what you're doing, it's really not hard at all. It's really like making any other adjustment that you have to make in a game."

"If you're going to be a good quarterback you have to learn everybody else's position and recognize that as the quarterback you are the leader of the offense and of the team."

Johnston said he's ready to accept even more responsibility and, yes, pressure, this season.

"My confidence is way better. I learned from my mistakes and I learned from other people too," he said. "I believe I have a lot more confidence this year than I did last year."

He recognizes too his performance has a large bearing on the success of the offense as a whole.

"I do feel that. I've just got to realize that if I mess up everybody else is going to see that and they may start dragging," Johnston said. "I'm the leader of the offense and the team so I've got to be on in everything that I do and just show them that we're good and moving on and keep driving, especially in the fourth quarter. I know they're watching me."



WCHS quarterback
Elijah Johnston



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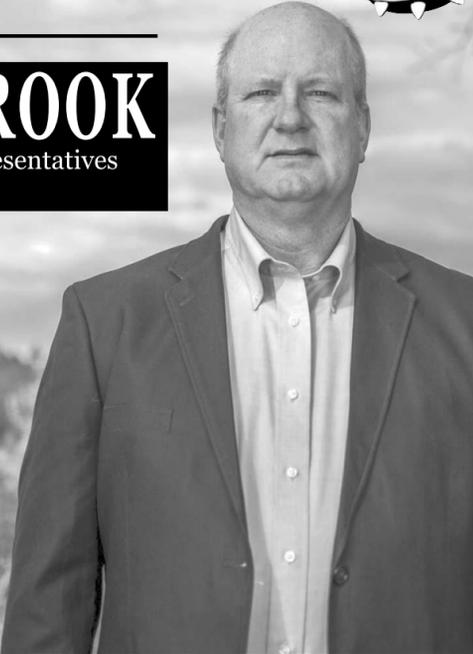
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Bulldogs
a successful season.**

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