

JACKSON ACADEMY

Roberts enjoys being leader

BY TOMMY HICKS
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One would think at this point Micah Roberts may just be getting tired. And you would be incorrect. In a lot of ways, he's just getting started.

Roberts has been the guy on the Jackson Academy football team for a while now, but that was especially true last season. He was selected as the Player of the Year by the Washington County News for its All-Area team a year ago based on Roberts' contributions as a running back and defensive standout for the Eagles.

Once more, he'll be a go-to guy for the Eagles as they chase the Alabama Independent School Association Class A, Region 1 crown and hope to make a run at the state title. With Roberts contributing on both sides of the ball, the Eagles' chances toward those goals are not diminished, that's for sure.

Consider that he scored 30 touchdowns on offense a year ago and probably prevented about 30 more from being scored on defense where he collected 91 tackles, including 23 tackles for a loss, three sacks, five forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries, grabbed five interceptions and even scored a pair of defensive touchdowns.

His presence on the field for Jackson Academy has become commonplace over the years, having played since he was a seventh grader.

"This is my sixth year on the varsity team," Roberts said recently. "I don't know, it's been fun. We've had a lot of different coaches over the years but it's fun to play with each of the players that I've played with through the years and all the coaches I've played under through the years."

As such, it could be argued Roberts himself has been the most consistent factor associated with the Jackson Academy football program. His experience and time with the program, not to mention his talent and his natural ability to lead others, makes him an obvious choice as the player who can best lead the Eagles the season.

"I like it (leadership role) because I know what it's like to have a good leader and I know what we need to do," Roberts said. "I want them to look up to me and hopefully they'll follow me if I do the right things. It's the same thing when I was younger and looked up to the older players. All the

other seniors on the team are the same way, which is why I think we'll have a real good team this year."

Don't get Jackson Academy head coach Jacob Webb started talked about Roberts; he has plenty to say.

"Micah is 100 percent in everything that he does, both on and off the field," Webb said. "I think he has a 4.0 GPA and he's involved with a ton of organizations. He's a great kid, a great leader, a great teammate, a great friend to all of these boys. He's a coach on the field.

"After four years of having him here, we're trying to lean on him to help us handle some of this stuff and be a good leader. He's been a leader since he was a ninth- or tenth-grader. He's not a big talker but he says something when he needs to and he's never told a kid to do something he wouldn't do himself. I've never seen somebody give all of their energy every single snap like he does. It's amazing his work ethic and his love for the game. Hopefully he gets a chance (to play) at the next level. I know if he makes the decision to be a coach he'll be a great one."

There's more. "Outside of his athletic ability, he's going to be a good man, he's going to do the right things, and he's going to be successful in life no matter what he wants to do. He's our captain," Webb added.

The final sentence is the key, as far as Webb is concerned; Roberts is the team captain, and that speaks volumes.

"We have five seniors on the team," Roberts said. "It would be nice to have more guys with experience on the team, but we're OK with what we have and I think we'll do well with the five seniors that we have. Even when we move on next year they'll still be good."

"I'm just ready to start playing. I know we have a great group of guys on the team and we have a really good chance, especially with the new defensive coordinator who came in, he's really good,

and we're going to have a good chance to play for a state championship this year, I believe."

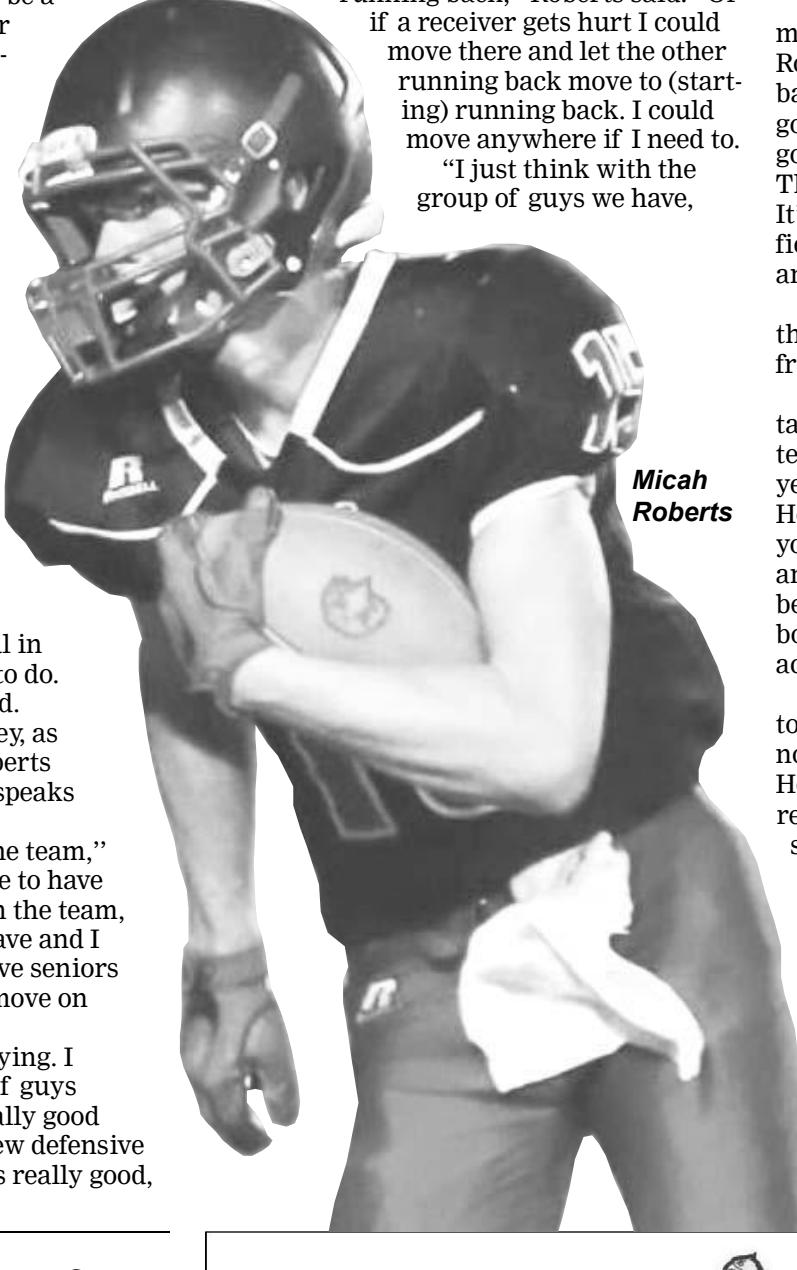
If he's not at running back you may see him playing wide receiver or linebacker or maybe even quarterback if the need should arise. But you'll definitely find Roberts on the field, pretty much throughout the game. He likes being on the field and it doesn't matter what position

"I like it because let's say we have a safety go down (with an injury) and we have more running backs than we do safeties, they could move me to safety and I could

play there and still play some at running back," Roberts said. "Or if a receiver gets hurt I could

move there and let the other running back move to (starting) running back. I could move anywhere if I need to.

"I just think with the group of guys we have,



Micah Roberts

we have a great senior class (in terms of character). Last year coming into the year we only had three seniors and we didn't have a lot of players who had played in big games, so when we had those type of games we didn't really have a lot of guys who had played in games like that. That hurt us a lot. But this year, on both sides of the ball, I think we have something like eight starters coming back. Everybody wants it this year. Everybody is coming in day in and day out and putting in the work."

Being on the football field came naturally for Roberts, whose father Dwain was the Jackson Academy head coach from 2008-13.

"My daddy played (football) and pretty much everybody in my family played it," Roberts said. "We just grew up playing football. And my daddy was the coach. I liked going to the games; it was fun. And when I got older, the football atmosphere was great. There's nothing like a football Friday night. It's just all pretty fun. You get out on the field and play alongside your teammates and all the people are cheering us on."

There will be a lot of cheers for Roberts this season, as always. And that includes from his head coach.

"It's huge (having someone with Roberts' talent and leadership ability on the roster)," Webb said. "You don't have that every year. A kid has to be made a little different. He has to have a lot of God-given ability and you've got to be faithful to those abilities and do something with it, and he does. He's been a coach on the field. He holds everybody accountable but he holds himself accountable too."

"Sometimes you'll get seniors that want to tell other kids what to do while they're not doing it. That's not the case with Micah. He gives 100 percent every time. The kids respect him. They know he's not going to say something unless he's going to back it up. He has made play after play after play after play. No matter where we line him up, when the whistle is blown he's on top of it somewhere (on defense). And on offense if I wanted to hand him the ball 60 times a game he wouldn't want to come out one play. Or if I asked him to block every single play you'd never hear him complain. He's selfless. We're very fortunate he's playing for us and to have been around him."

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nates on both sides of the ball. He's 6-3, 295. He's a great athlete."

PJ Fleming, a former tight end, will also help on the line, as will Walker Whitehead "who has a very, very high ceiling," according to Webb. "He started two or three games last year as an eighth-grader." Overall, the OL is "going to be physical and they want to dominate. They know they're not going to get their name in the paper, but every time a running back gets his name in the paper that's good. We've got some guys in the trenches we feel confident with. I think they'll jell pretty good," Webb said..

Depth is the key for the Eagles. They'll have nine players going both ways so if someone is injured and forced out of action the team loses someone in three spots, counting special teams. As such, most every player on the roster learns at least two positions, often more.

Depth is Webb's greatest concern. "Our starting 11 on both sides of the ball we're very confident with," Webb said. It's beyond that group where concerns begin to creep in.

On defense, Johnson, Whitehead and five or six other players figure into the Eagles' plans up front, where Jackson Academy will employ an odd-man front. Johnson was a first-team all-state selection on the defensive line and looks to continue his success there. "He's one of the best athletes I've ever seen for his size anywhere, so we feel good about him," added Webb.

At linebacker, Roberts and McCaa along with PJ Fleming are likely to have spots there. Webb is looking to develop a group in the secondary which doesn't boast a lot of experienced players. Still, Webb said he likes the starting unit there but again it's about seeing improvement from those in back-up roles that is key.

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