

WASHINGTON COUNTY

WCHS: Dawgs maturing

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ning the ball. I'm not really sure (when they'll be used). I think we have a chance to be really good at what we do and I can't define the identity of this team. That's something they're going to do. If we come out against Citronelle (in the season-opener Aug. 23) and we can line up and run the ball in the I formation, then we've got an identity. If we need to throw it some I think we can do that.

"To me the strength of this team is not in any one aspect, it's their ability to do multiple things. We did that last year. I think we scored more points on trick plays than we did just the traditional stuff. I'm a football guy and I like power and counter and lead, but if that's not the kids' strength, but they are capable of running multiple sets and keeping the defense off balance, then I think that's what you've got to do and I think we can do that this year. I expect us to use a lot of different looks and do them well."

Defensively there is some improvement that must be made but Roberts said he likes what he has seen from his team thus far.

"I felt like last year we stayed base for the first three or four weeks of the season, using a 4-3 look and base coverage and just tried to get better at fundamentals, and as the season went along we started evolving and changing our looks defensively. I thought it really messed with people.

"I do expect us to change defensively a little bit this year. We're going to be more of an odd-front team and

use some 3-3 stacks and out of that we'll be able to roll into a 40 look or whatever we want to get to. I feel like defensively we're going to be in the same boat. We're going to line up with a lot of different looks and a lot of the stuff we're doing is going to be the same, we're just going to be starting out in a different position. It's not adding that much more for the kids to learn, it's just adding more things for the (opposing) offense to worry about."

A lot of the same players who will play key roles on offense will be counted on to strengthen the defense as well. Most of the offensive linemen will man positions on the defensive front. Johnston and Carter will play in the secondary, though the hope is to hold Johnston out from a heavy defensive rotation the first few games of the season. Busby will play outside linebacker and other players will fill in at key spots.

Again, the Bulldogs' schedule is a bit top-heavy. They open at Class 5A Citronelle on Aug. 23, then face Class 1A Millry, a team expected to challenge for its region crown, Thursday, Aug. 29 at home. A trip to Southern Choctaw on Sept. 6 marks the first region game, with defending region champion Cottage Hill visiting Chatom on Sept. 13. A trip to Leroy on Sept. 20 for that rivalry game is followed on Sept. 27 with a home game against Fruitdale. The Bulldogs go to J.U. Blacksher on Oct. 4, play Choctaw County at home on Oct. 11, then hit the road for games at R.C. Hatch (Oct. 18) and Chickasaw (Oct. 25).

Count on me

Younge relishes role as a leader for WCHS

BY TOMMY HICKS
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Whatever position Austin Younge fills for Washington County this season, it will come with an addendum — team leader.

Head coach Devin Roberts is quick to point out Younge's importance to the team along the offensive and defensive lines, but it is Younge's leadership skills that Roberts said carries more weight, especially this season, than his actual physical abilities.

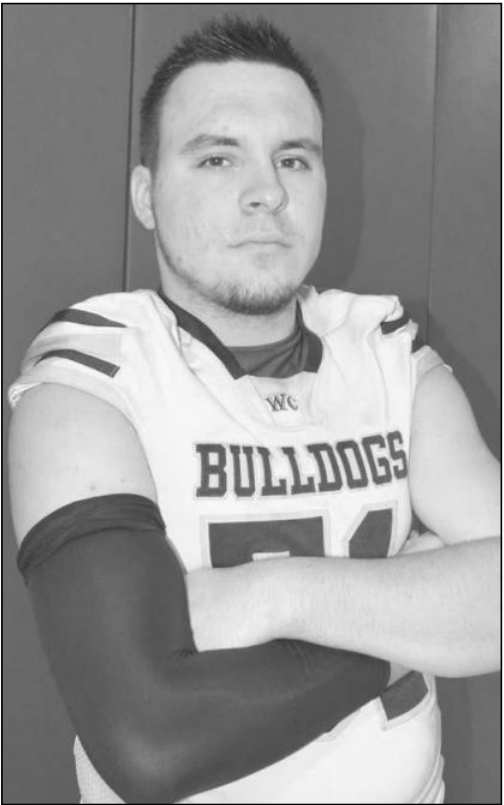
Instead of shying away from the responsibility and expectations that come with being tabbed a team leader, Younge chooses to run head-first into the role.

"I like being a leader and just being out there as someone the other guys can count on," the senior said. "I like being the center (on the offensive line), the one that gets things started and being out there and telling the guys what's right and what's wrong and what we need to do to improve. And if we mess up I try to tell them to keep their head up and go on to the next play because if you keep your head down you're likely to mess up the next play too. I just try to tell everyone to stay focused and keep pushing."

That is the primary trait Roberts and the WCHS coaching staff has tried to instill in this year's Bulldogs team, a team that lost its first five games last season, then won four straight only to lose the season finale. Remaining calm and focused and pushing forward is what Roberts wants to see from his team, and what Younge continues to preach to his younger teammates.

"Leadership is important to me because I'm a senior and I'm the oldest guy out there, so I believe it's on me to be on top of everything and be a role model," he said. "When I was a junior I looked up to the seniors to show me things and teach me things. I look up to coach Roberts and the other coaches. They taught me how to be a leader in my three years here."

For sure, Younge will be a busy man on Friday nights. Playing on both lines will keep him plenty busy, but he has other duties too. He'll also serve as the team's punter



Austin Younge of Washington County

and kicker for extra points and kickoffs. With that kind of to-do list, he won't be spending much idle time on the sidelines. And that's just fine with him.

"I like that. That's what we train for. That's why we're out here every day just grinding, getting in shape," Younge said.

Asked to pick a favorite position, Younge didn't hesitate. "I would probably say defense, because I get to hit people," he said.

Football, regardless of the position, has always been important to Younge, he said.

"When I was growing up, in middle school, I was probably 5-4 or 5-5, maybe 80 pounds," he recalled. "I moved from Tuscaloosa down to here, this is my home. I moved up there and didn't play at all. When I got back here I went from being on the sidelines to being a leader."

His leadership role intact, Younge said he expects this year's WCHS team to have a winning season and he and his teammates are hoping for a playoff berth.

"You could tell at the end of the season (last year) and start of the summer (there was positive carryover)," Younge said. "I think (recently) we had our most dedicated day. I don't know why, but when we showed up it seemed like we were all on the same page. The quarterback was throwing good balls and the receivers were catching them and the defense was flowing to the ball and we ran hard during all the conditioning."

The guys up front, especially on the offensive line, recognize their importance to the team's success, Younge said. He is joined by three other returning starters there.

"It helps a lot (having experienced guys) because last year we were really young up front," he said. "This is just my second year of playing on the line and last year's experience helped me a lot.

"I'm looking forward to this year. I want us to go to state, obviously, but I guess that's everybody's goal. I just want to let things fall into place. We just have to go out there and play as hard as we can play and at the end of the game we'll check the score. That's all that we can do."

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