

CITRONELLE

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Delaney beats the odds

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He's not an imposing figure to be sure, but the strength of Jackson Delaney isn't found in his physical stature. Instead, it's his mental stature, his determination and certainly in his doggedness to get the job done.

At 5-foot-8 and 200 pounds, Delaney doesn't feature the typical size one would expect of a center on a Class 5A football team, but then again, Delaney isn't the typical center. So when he steps onto the field for the Citronelle Wildcats again this season and takes his place at his starting position for the third consecutive year, he does so against a lot of odds. And that's just fine with him.

The way Delaney sees it, judging a book by its cover might give him a bit of an advantage. He's been overlooked in the past.

The only thing Delaney sees is that he has a job to do and he wants to perform that task as best he can, on every play, in every game, for the Wildcats. That will be his goal again this year, his senior season at Citronelle.

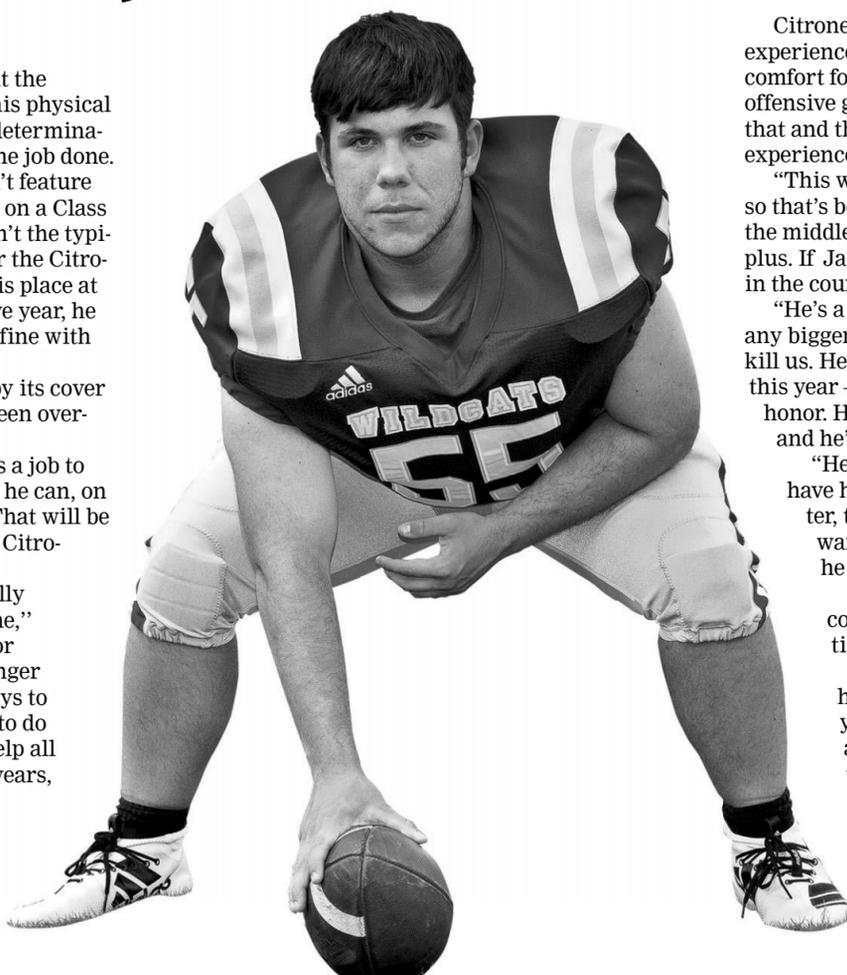
"When you think of being center, you really have to think of being the leader of the O line," Delaney said. "You have to be a role model for the guards and the tackles and even the younger guys. I try to set a good example for those guys to be able to look up to. I believe I've been able to do that with the work that I've put in and the help all the coaches have given me over these three years, I believe I have."

That responsibility creates a pocket of pressure. After all, every offensive play starts with the center. Delaney said the pressure is just part of the job and it is something that has become commonplace with the position.

"I've been playing center since I was 9 or 10 years old, so it's just something that I've gotten used to at this point," he said.

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Even when he was a youngster playing football in community leagues and such, Delaney has been an of-



Citronelle center Jackson Delaney

fensive lineman. It is a designation that has stuck over the years and one for which he has developed a great appreciation.

"The first two games I was at right guard and they were looking for a center so they tried me there (back when he was 9 years old)," Delaney said. "And that's where I've been playing ever since."

Citronelle head coach Jason Barnett said Delaney's experience at such a key position provides a bit of comfort for coaches when they are putting together and offensive gameplan. Delaney has been there and done that and that is a big plus for a team that will have less experienced players at other positions on the offense.

"This will be his third year starting at center for us, so that's been huge," Barnett said. "Having that guy in the middle who has been there through the wars is a big plus. If Jackson was 6-3 or 6-4 instead of 5-8, everybody in the country would want him in their system."

"He's a great football player, he's just 5-8. If he was any bigger we couldn't practice probably because he'd kill us. He's that quiet guy. He's going to be our No. 55 this year — he got the Alan West award, which is a big honor. He's a smart kid, second or third in his class, and he's just the kid you want."

"He's a high school football player. I'm so glad to have him on our team. A returning starter at center, that's huge. He held his own last year in the wars and I think he's gotten better this year than he was last year."

Holding a key role for his school, his team, continues to drive Delaney every day in practice and especially on Friday nights.

"It's a huge honor to play for this team," he said. "Since I came up here my freshman year, we've gone from having a weight room and locker room in that baseball facility over there and practicing on the baseball field, to where we now have a brand new weight room, a brand new practice field, brand new locker room. It's truly something that I've been proud to be a part of, that we've been able to come so far that last few years."

The thing that would top it all off is for the Wildcats to have a breakout season, Delaney said.

"That would mean the world to this team and probably to this whole community," he said. "We've always had really good community support and just a great season would mean a ton for this whole city. I just want to try to do as much I can to help this team win. I'm not worried about me getting good stats or anything like that. The only thing I'm worried about is trying to get wins for the Wildcats."

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season.**

#wildcatnation