

CITRONELLE

Fullback Tyler Jennings: Old-school tough guy

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It wouldn't be a surprise if stepping into Tyler Jennings' bedroom one noticed posters on the wall ... of Jim Taylor or John Riggins, maybe even Larry Csonka.

While many folks need to cut on the computer and head to Google, here's a hint — look up fullbacks.

OK, that may require the use of a dictionary too, as fullbacks are as popular these days in the game of football as helmets without facemasks.

All of this is said to make a point about Jennings' approach to football and how the Citronelle Wildcats' coaching staff intends to continue to use his talents; he's old school, baby, a player who does all the dirty work and not only doesn't mind it, he prefers it that way.

He's the guy who makes a way for the other guys in the backfield. Instead of taking the ball and looking to score, Jennings takes on the first opposing player, sometimes another, maybe three, he encounters and blocks their path to his teammate who has the football and is looking to score. He's a blocker, not a scorer.

His job is the one no one else wants to take on.

And that, in a large sense, makes him invaluable, especially with some of the approaches the Wildcats will take on offense this season.

He's not an H-back, the terminology of that day for a hybrid player who may block or carry the ball or catch a pass or drop down as a tight end where all those options are also available. Nope, Tyler Jennings is a fullback. He might get the ball occasionally, as in once in a blue moon, but the main reason he's set up in the backfield is to block, and block with authority.

Just as importantly, a fullback is someone who likes the job. Tyler Jennings likes the job.

"Tyler Jennings is our H-back and he's going to play a little bit of middle backer for us at times," Citronelle head coach Jason Barnett said, using the newfangled terminology before catching himself. "But he is a full-time H-back. He's your stud, the old-school fullback, if you would.

"He's a throwback player. Tyler really is a throwback player type of kid. If you looked up 1985-style football you might see a picture of Tyler in the fullback position."

Barnett said there are darn few players who could take on the role Jennings has been presented, but he certainly has embraced the position wholeheartedly.

"He's a great leader and he helps us so much on offense because he's an extra blocker," Barnett said. "But he's also deceptively fast and has great hands. We throw him a bone ever now and again and give the ball to him and throw the ball to him a little bit, but he is so beneficial with his blocking skills for us."

To play the fullback position, one not only needs to have the size and physical ability to handle the position, which Jennings

does. There's also another quality that is paramount to being the fullback — unselfishness.

Again, a trait that Jennings possesses.

"He and (senior center) Jackson Delaney are probably two of the most unselfish kids that I have ever been around," Barnett said. "They do what we ask them to do and that's it. They don't ask to do this or ask to do that, they do what we ask them to do. They say 'What do you want?' instead of 'Here's what I want.'"

The position has its own pressure too, but again, that's not a concern for Jennings.

"It's a lot. The running back runs behind you and it's a lot to put on your shoulders, but I love it," he said. "They (coaches) are putting the ball behind you. I like the responsibility. It makes me show out, makes me do my thing."

How did he become a fullback instead of, say, a running back or H-back?

"It's just what happened, I guess," Jennings said. "Coaches saw that I had the build for it and that's how it got started. I love it. I like that they have that confidence in me."

In turn, Jennings has confidence in the Wildcats' offense for the upcoming season.

"It can be phenomenal, it really can," he said. "We have to show up to work, but if we do what I think we can do and what I know that we can do, we won't lose."

What's most important in all of this to Jennings is that he is part of a team that consists of teammates — friends really — he has known most of his life.

"When you come up with the guys you were raised with it's a brotherhood then it's something you will never forget throughout your whole life. It means everything to me," Jennings said.

That's why Friday nights will always hold a special place for him.

"It's a dream come true," Jennings said. "I grew up my whole life wanting to be on this field, and that's very special. As a senior, it's going to be even more special every time we play this year."

And can this be a special season for the Wildcats?

"How good can this team be? Amazing," Jennings answered. "This year is going to be the best year Citronelle has seen in a while, in my opinion. I think we have the potential and the athleticism to really go somewhere with this team."



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