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Tackling the challenge

Ferndale High senior makes the move to the offensive line for football team

By Christian Davis
 C & G Sports Writer

FERNDALE — It was a simple request from Ferndale High football coach Ryan Dunlap met with a simple answer from his senior captain, Rian Thomas.

“I called him this weekend and said we needed him (at tackle). He said, ‘No problem. I’ll do whatever you need,’” Dunlap recalled during a Sept. 22 practice.

Thomas is a three-year starter on the defensive line, but hasn’t started on the offensive line since he was “a little one.”

But Thomas is grown up now, at 6 foot 1 and 235 pounds, and he’s taking over the left tackle spot, which covers senior quarterback Deonte Cooper’s blindside, along with anchoring the defensive line.

“Just do whatever it takes to make the team win,” said Thomas, as the Eagles were 2-3 overall. “It’s going to be kind of hard, but it’s playing football, something I’ve been doing my whole life.”

Harassing opposing quarterbacks is something Thomas has done his whole varsity career.

Dunlap said Thomas’ athleticism makes him a force on inside and outside running plays. He also noted that Thomas owns several team weight lifting records.

“He could be a linebacker at a lot of schools; he could be a rush end. But we need him in the middle to stuff the run,” the coach said of Thomas, who has 21 tackles, two sacks and six quarterback hurries through four games. “What he can do that a lot of guys can’t is run the ball down. His lateral movement is great.”

So is his leadership, according to Dunlap.

“He’s a tough kid that’s going to fight to the end, not give up and ooze that enthusiasm to the rest of the team,” he said. “He’s doing the right thing in terms of leading his teammates. He’s a senior and getting the young guys to follow his lead. The kids that are his age are looking up to him, too.”

Thomas said the goal this season is to continue the winning tradition, as Ferndale has made it to the playoffs for three straight seasons.

“That means everything to me — show these juniors how it feels to win, and for my senior class, just win,” Thomas said. “We’re pretty positive we can still make the playoffs.”



Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Ferndale High senior captain Rian Thomas tracks down an Auburn Hills Avondale ball carrier Sept. 25 at home. The Eagles lost 29-20.

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Though he has played fullback and tight end some this season, up until last week, Thomas had been on the sideline when the Eagles were on offense for the most part.

Dunlap said he's a little concerned that the extra playing time could wear on him, but it's a risk he's willing to take.

"He's a tough dude, and he can play every snap as far as I'm concerned," Dunlap said. "I'll take him a little tired over just about anyone else at full strength."

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