

Making a statement



ABOVE: Junior wide receiver Hayden Brice, right, talks with Coach Johnny Nichols during the Saint Joseph-Natchez Cathedral football game earlier this year. *Photo by Leah Murphy/The Bear Facts*

TOP PHOTO: Senior running back Nick Louvier scores a touchdown during the Saint Joseph-Saint Aloysius football game earlier this year. Louvier moved from receiver to running back for the 2016 football season. *Photo by Catherine Cook/The Bear Facts*

*Bruins turn program around,
land first playoff spot since 2014*

Sports analysis
by Charlie Lott

The Saint Joseph Bruin football team will head to East Central Mississippi on Friday night to take on the Newton High School Tigers in a first-round playoff game.

The 8-3 Bruins will appear in their first playoff game in two years, a remarkable turnaround for a team that won three games last year and four the year before.

“Ever since the spring when Coach Lott came into the role of head coach, we’ve all felt like this team was going to be great this year,” said senior defensive back John Turner.

“Our attitude was totally different heading into this season and so was our knowledge about the game of football.”

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It has been different.

The Bruins ended the 2016 regular season play last week with a convincing 42-18 road win over the Pelahatchie Chiefs; that victory followed a 30-6 home win the week before over the Lake Hornets.

Other impressive high-scoring wins this season included 44-20 over Natchez Cathedral on Aug. 26, 50-26 over Saint Aloysius on Sept. 2 and 42-14 over arch-rival Saint Andrew's on Sept. 9.

QUICK TURNAROUND

How did the Bruins manage such

a dramatic turnaround? The chief reason: a new coaching staff brought together under first-year Coach Todd Lott, who also serves as Saint Joseph's athletic director.

Coach Lott, a high school and middle school football coach with stints at Germantown Middle School and Washington School in Greenville, installed new offensive and defensive schemes this year.

New assistant coaches, such as Johnny Nichols, completely re-tooled the Bruin offense and turned it into a major weapon. The Bruins averaged 38 points per game in 11 regular season contests.

The overall team effort increased dramatically. Players attended early-morning film and weight sessions. They also participated in after-school practices that were lengthened by about an hour and a half.

Minutes after the conclusion of the Pelahatchie game last week, Coach Lott leveled with his team in the locker room.

"If I offered you an 8-and-3 season and a seed in the playoffs before the season started, would you have accepted the offer?" Lott asked.

"Yes, sir," players responded.

Lott attributed the success this year to hard work.

HARD WORK

"I just think the hard work and preparation in the summer and throughout the season has played a major role as well as myself, the rest of the coaching staff, and the players focusing on improving ourselves each week," Lott said.

The transition wasn't easy. Student athletes were initially wary about the new football practice schedule and early-morning workouts. They weren't thrilled by the added responsibilities.

"At first, I was reluctant about the longer practices and early morning workouts," said senior defensive back

Chad Doiron.

"But I now realize that this has been a major factor in us being a successful football team this year."

Now, football players have their eyes focused on Friday night's playoff game. They know it won't be easy. They realize it will take extra effort on their part.

The goal: Bring home the first playoff win since 2012 when the Bruins defeated Enterprise at home following an undefeated regular season record of 12-0.

Win or lose, the Bruins have laid the foundation for an improved football program and a promising future.