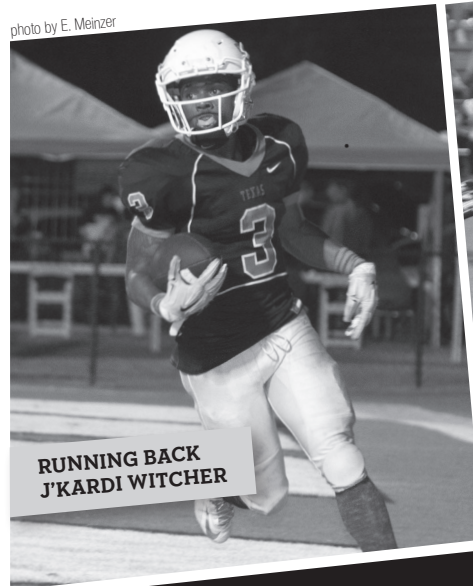
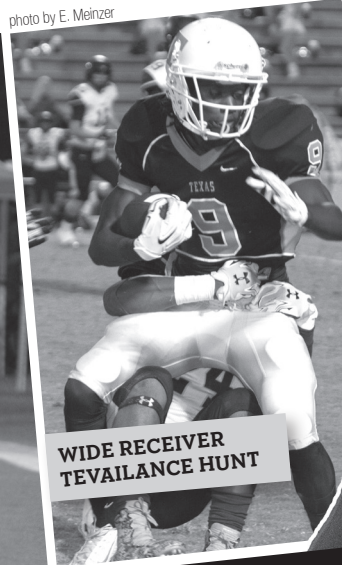


photo by E. Meinzer



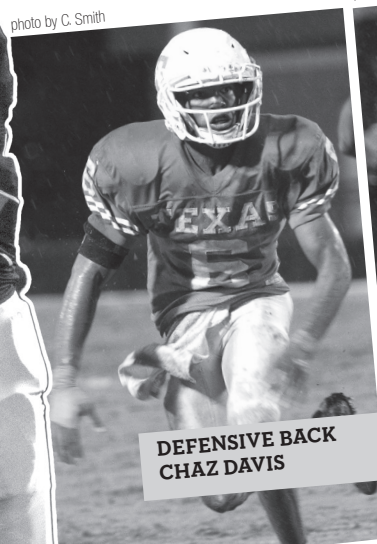
**RUNNING BACK
J'KARDI WITCHER**

photo by E. Meinzer



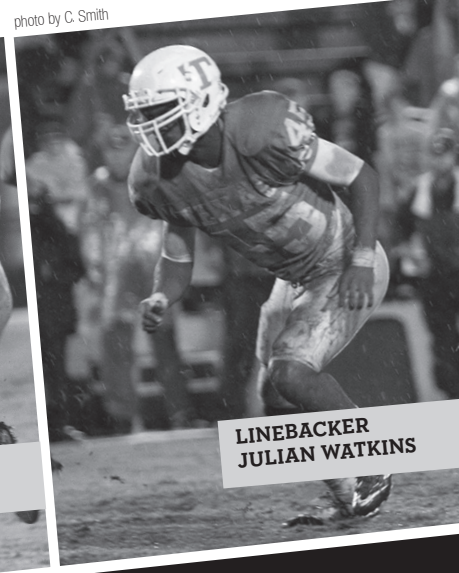
**WIDE RECEIVER
TEVAILANCE HUNT**

photo by C. Smith



**DEFENSIVE BACK
CHAZ DAVIS**

photo by C. Smith



**LINEBACKER
JULIAN WATKINS**

MAKING THEIR OWN THUNDER

**QUARTERBACK
CADE PEARSON**

Football team advances to playoffs, co-district champions

by **JESSICA EMERSON**
online editor-in-chief

Mud matted in their jerseys and wide grins on their faces, the football team has fought through adversity and doubt, currently placed in a three way tie for the district championship with a 6-2 record after defeating 7-0 Marshall on Friday, 27-7.

"Well [Marshall] was a perfect game for us, we needed a good tough football game," head coach Barry Norton said. "Going in, they were leading the district. They beat Longview, Longview beat us, we were able to get the win, and it gives us a chance, if we win our next two, that we share the district championship, which is important to our kids."

Although the team fell to Longview and Kilgore earlier in the season, the loss taught them to overcome their difficulties and grow stronger as a team mentally.

"I think this season has actually taught us a lot from our losses," senior captain Jacorien Walker said. "I feel like sometimes we would get too high. We need to stay at a consistent level and never get too high or get too low. I feel like the season had us going through things that we needed to. We faced things early so

that we can always remember when we take off through the playoffs."

Physically, they have learned to play larger and quicker than anticipated, adjusting to injuries and being prepared on both sides of the ball. Although the team lacks size, they have enhanced their strengths to compensate.

"Some of the challenges we've had as a team are a few injuries here and there, and we're a little undersized on the defensive side of the ball," senior Matthew Knobloch said. "But we make up for that by being fast and our will to win."

With a heartbreaking and unexpected loss to Kilgore following the victory over Arkansas High, the team has learned to not expect a win, but to play hard each half.

"We prepared for it, but we didn't come out and show it," junior Quan Hampton said. "We just had to push through it the whole game. We can't come out and start and then stop working. On the defensive side we let them run through us, on the offensive side we didn't keep the momentum going. We'd catch a pass and then stop."

Longview, the first district loss of the season, increased the intensity for the Marshall game. While the defensive end

lacked a spark, the loss ignited a flame that burned through the downpour on Friday.

"[Defense] could have came out more aggressive in the first half [of the Longview game]," senior Jacoryn Larry said. "Our intensity wasn't as high as it was in the second half. That factor played a big role in the game. But it gave us a fire; we don't like losing."

As the rest of Texarkana played their games earlier in the week due to rain and flooding in the forecasts, the Marshall game remained to stand strong under the weather conditions. Facing a team that averaged 480 yards a game, with a small but dedicated group of fans, the team went on to win their biggest game of the season thus far.

"I think the Marshall game was good for us because there weren't too many fans out there and we just had to feed off of each other's energy and I feel like that was a good deal," Walker said. "That was something that we never had to go through before. But we actually did really good, we played really good against a good offense. They had averaged 480 yards coming into the season and we held them to 187. I think offensively we did a really good job. J'Kardi Witcher got back on his 'A Game' against Marshall, so it was good.

I feel like if we keep it up on these two games we have left in the season that we can keep it going through playoffs."

With playoffs looming over them, the team is mentally and physically preparing to fight through a tough team, feeding off the confidence of a successful season.

"[The season] has gone a lot better than just about everybody expected," Knobloch said. "Everybody expected us to lose to Marshall, and I think we proved ourselves by beating them pretty good. We definitely have a lot of competition in the playoffs right now because we're probably going to end up playing Lufkin, which is a really good physical team. We've got our work cut out for us, but I think we can do it."

After a week of practice and preparation, they will face Greenville tomorrow night in the senior night match up.

"I feel like the game I played against Marshall was good," Witcher said. "Me and my team, we executed how we were supposed to from practice. We came out on Friday and we did it so hopefully this week of preparation can be the same kind of way. We can't go in underestimating any team. Hopefully we'll get the win if practice goes as well as it did last week."