

Lee's Terrell Mickens is on the field once again



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(Photo: Bridgewater College/Submitted)

BRIDGEWATER — They call him "Grandpa" at Bridgewater College.

Terrell Mickens is only 23 years old, but he's the oldest member of the Bridgewater football team. And he's only a sophomore when it comes to college eligibility.

Angela Mickens is thrilled her brother is back in school, but her joy has very little to do with his return to the football field.

Terrell Mickens was a star football player at Robert E. Lee High School, graduating in 2011. He signed to play at James Madison University and, after redshirting his freshman season, played cornerback for the Dukes

during the 2012 season.

But personal issues forced Mickens to make a difficult decision to leave JMU.

"It was a tough time," he said. "I was in a hard spot. It's just life, dealing with life."

During his time away from school, Mickens worked several jobs, including some in local factories. He also helped coach both basketball and football at Lee High. While he loved the coaching, it was the factory work that convinced him he needed to return to school.

"I was doing the same thing every day, eight hours a day, sometimes six days a week," said Mickens. "I decided I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life."

Now, three years later, he is back in school and back in football at Division III Bridgewater.

"Obviously, academics is more important than him playing sports," said Angela, who finished up her college basketball career last spring at JMU. "I just want him to finish school and get his degree."

Still, his sister knows that football is playing a big role in his return. For that, she said he is blessed to get that opportunity to play again.

Mickens has switched from the defensive backfield to wide receiver and kick returner. Since his high school playing days he's added 25 pounds to his 5-foot-11 frame, playing now at 180 pounds. That's been an adjustment, as well as working to get his speed back. But he loves playing football again, especially after spending a year coaching the sport.



Terrell Mickens, right, has found a home on the kick return team in his first year at Bridgewater. (Photo: Tommy Thompson/Submitted)

When Scott Girolmo arrived at Lee High in the summer of 2015 to take over as the school's football coach, he remembers walking through the school's weight room and seeing a photo of Mickens. He looked up some videos of the player during his Lee High days, then started asking others where the former Leeman was now.

The new coach found out he was still in Staunton and was helping coach the basketball team. Girolmo needed to fill out his coaching staff, so he put out some feelers and eventually talked Mickens into joining him at Lee.

"When you're trying to dial into the heartbeat of a group, of a community, it is invaluable to have people that understand the way of life," Girolmo said.

Mickens coached punt returners as well as defensive backs and wide receivers at Lee. But that wasn't the most difficult thing he did on the staff.

"The toughest job was he flipped our formation cards on offense," said Girolmo. "So he was in charge of putting offensive formations on the flip card, which is a really difficult, highly coordinated job. You have to be an athlete to do that. He picked it up in no time. Week one he had it done."



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As much as Girolmo enjoyed having Mickens on the staff last season, he knew it wouldn't last long. He had heard Mickens had eligibility left and wasn't finished with college just yet. So he would occasionally ask Mickens about his future plans. And when the assistant coach finally said he wanted to return to school, Girolmo couldn't have been more proud.

Girolmo helped get Mickens some college visits, but eventually it was another member of the Lee football staff, Teley Tate, who got Mickens in contact with Bridgewater head football coach Mike Clark. Six years ago, Tate was a 26-year-old senior on the Bridgewater football team, taking a similar path as Mickens to finishing school. He knew Bridgewater was a good fit for him and thought it would be for Mickens, too.

Mickens is working toward a degree in physical education. He wants to teach, possibly in elementary school. He also wants to coach, although he's leaning toward coaching basketball instead of football. He'll help out Lee High boys basketball coach Jarrett Hatcher again this season.

Still, Girolmo couldn't be happier. He can easily see Mickens as a head coach in whatever sport he chooses one day.

"He would freakin' be perfect," said Girolmo. "It's where he belongs."