

Standing tall at 6'4, a black hoodie covering his frame and a smile across his face, redshirt junior and Mechanical Engineering major Jalen Morton showed the level of confidence one would expect from the football team's starting quarterback.

Thus far this season, Morton has 1,852 passing yards with 134 completed passes and 13 touchdown passes. He has 529 rushing yards and 5 rushing touchdowns.

However, after speaking with Morton, there is a depth to this student-athlete that is unique. Not only has his journey been one of determination, focus and constant growth, his ambition is inspiring to young athletes looking to balance athletics and education.

Morton began playing contact football and baseball at a very young age and he excelled at both sports throughout high school. Although he had the choice of going to a JUCO for baseball and heading down the major league route, he ultimately chose to play football on a collegiate level even though baseball had always been his first love.

He came to Prairie View in 2015, redshirting his first year on the team. Morton cited being slightly overwhelmed, the number of people ahead of him in his position and PV's five-year Mechanical Engineering program as reasons for opting into the developmental year.

In 2016, Morton began his first active year. He ended the season with 72 of 146 passes completed for 945 yards with eight touchdowns. He rushed 58 times for 190 yards and six touchdowns. It was also this season that he was awarded his first career accolade as the 2016 SWAC Newcomer of the Week.

Despite only playing in six games during the 2017-18 season, he had 8 completed passes for 107 yards.

This year, Morton has embraced his new starting position for the current 2018-19 season.

Head Coach Eric Dooley said since taking on his new role, Morton has had a positive impact on the team.

"He's had a huge impact because I think he's had to win the guys over," Dooley said. "He's never been a full time starter and this is his first time starting in that role. At quarterback you're already a leader regardless of if you want [to be] or not. That position does a lot so I think he still has a ways to go, but he's doing a great job."

Since joining the team in 2015, Morton says he's seen changes in himself that's allowed him to be more of a leader of the team. Being vocal was one thing he's immediately had to adapt to.

Because he'd always been a 'show' type of leader, working on finding his voice was something different. He explained how being the new leader of the team meant adapting to different methods of relating to his teammates.

He learned to be more vocal, and had to master the ability of gathering his team in both good or bad situations. Morton also had to learn how to give and receive constructive criticism, as well as learning how to properly communicate with the individual personalities of his teammates.

Offensive Coordinator and Quarterback Coach, Ted White said he's also noticed the good qualities and a change in Morton since the beginning of this season.

"I definitely see someone who's a great leader, and when I got here, he wasn't that person," White said. "He was humble, but on the football field he was very quiet. Now, because I think he's had the opportunity to really play, he's very vocal. The guys respect him and at the quarterback position, that's what you have to have."

The personal success he's achieved so far can be chalked up to three things: his abilities, his size and his ever so present 'hate losing more than I love winning' mentality.

Often being one of the largest players on the field, Morton has his size and speed as immediate advantages. Being able to do more than just sit in the pocket and throw, run down the field or hit certain yardages are just a few abilities he says separates him from other players in his position.

His hard work and dedication have been reflected in accolades given this year such as BOXTOROW National Player of the Week, Sports Madness Player of the Week, SWAC Offensive Player of the Week and FCS National Offensive Player of the Week.

However, personal stats and accolades don't mean much to the QB, as both coaches and Morton himself stress his focus on the team aspect of the sport.

“They’re important to me, but at the same time they’re not important to me,” he said. “We have one main goal, and that’s to win the SWAC Championship and the Celebration Bowl. So they’re cool and all, and I’m all for it, but at the same time I wouldn’t even have those without the people I play around.”

White describes Morton as a “selfless” player who only wants to win and enjoy playing the game without caring who gets the football or the accolades that may come with a win.

Morton has even accredited players around him such as the offensive linemen and a state-recognized running back for making his job easier.

While football may be time consuming and takes up most of his week, Morton makes sure to equally divide his time between the field, the classroom and things he enjoys.

He is currently in his fourth year of the university’s five-year Mechanical Engineering program, a program his father said he chose when he was in seventh grade.

Reflecting on his childhood, Morton says he enjoyed breaking and taking things apart such as toy cars or trucks just to see how they worked and then would fix them again. A self-described “destructive” but “curious” kid, Morton learned to work well with his hands through learning and spending time with his father.

Because his classes are difficult, he must spend most of his time studying, which has prompted him to make some social choices and master the art of time management.

“Time management is very key for me,” he said. “Especially with engineering because engineering and football don’t go well together.”

To him, being a student-athlete means you’re held to a higher standard. Morton acknowledges that getting up at 5 or 6 A.M throughout the season and not returning home till 10 or 11 P.M while also having classes, practices, workouts and meetings throughout the day isn’t something a lot of people could handle.

He, however, makes it work to the best of his ability. Even going as far as to say that sometimes he doesn't sleep because he's both juggling football and the need to study.

Morton's focus on studying and acquiring his degree, along with his overall skill level, has also impressed the coaches around him.

"That guy is an all-pro," Dooley said. "He's good at what he does. [But] what I'm more impressed with is that he takes care of his business in the classroom as well as on the football field. So his approach to life is the same regardless of what he's doing."

Once his final two years are up, Morton says he definitely knows what he's doing next: entering the NFL Draft.

"I'm definitely trying to go to the draft," he said. "I'm not putting in all this work not to. That's definitely up there. That's definitely a goal, a dream, whatever you want to call it. I want to be in the NFL. I can't shy away from that. I don't sleep at night because I feel sometimes that someone is outworking me. That's how bad I want it."

His determination is clear. Morton says he's so sure of himself and what he wants to do, that he doesn't believe in having a back up plan. Instead, he chooses to focus only on the task at hand.

His plans include going to the league and playing for as long as he can, before going into his engineering field and working for The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) post football career.

But until then, he and the football team are solely focusing on getting through the rest of the season and reaching their goals. With only three regular season games left, Morton says he expects to have no regrets once the season comes to a close.

"At the end of the day, if I have a regret, it's not winning the SWAC championship or the Celebration Bowl," he said. "That's the only thing. My team looks at me and they know I'll put it all on the line and they know I'm not going to give up. The only thing I would expect for myself is to win. So whoever we have to play in the SWAC Championship is done for, whoever we have to play in the Celebration Bowl is done for. And then that's two rings on my team's fingers, on my fingers, that we accomplished."