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UA12/2/1 Topper Extra - The New Face of WKU's Defense

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The new face
of WKU's
defense

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FOOTBALL

WKU planning patriotic home opener

By COLE CLAYBURN

Fans are encouraged to arrive at football games early each week, but on Saturday they might want to make an extra effort to do so.

With Navy visiting Smith Stadium a day before the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, several patriotic events are scheduled to take place prior to kickoff.

“It’s the 10-year anniversary of 9/11 and we wanted to do something to honor those who lost their lives and those who continue to serve and continue to lose their lives,” said Lindsay Thomas, assistant athletic director for marketing and ticket sales. “We couldn’t have had for a home game,” Stewart said.

Director Todd Stewart said tickets are “moving” for Saturday’s game, but added that plenty of seats will be available on Saturday for those who still want to attend.

He said Saturday has the potential to be a “historic” day for WKU football.

“We obviously have the utmost respect for the Naval Academy and the sacrifice that all of them go through and what they do for our country,” he said.

“But on Saturday at 6 o’clock we need to win that football game. If we’re able to do that, it would be a landmark win for our program.”

Having Navy as an opponent…I think is a fitting backdrop to the emotion of that 10th anniversary,” President Gary Ransdell said.

Army Lt. Col. Scott Walker, a 1990 graduate of WKU and three-year letterman on the football team, will serve as an honorary captain.

Senior Associate Athletic Director Todd Stewart said 500 midshipmen will be in attendance, along with 800 other Navy fans.

Wounded Warriors from Fort Knox and Fort Campbell will also be at the game and will be recognized during the game.

“You could make a compelling argument that the overall atmosphere, with everything, will be the best we’ve ever had for a home game,” Stewart said. “We always say ‘arrive early,’ but I think in particular for this game, you really want to be in your seats shortly after 5:30 because a lot of the unique things are happening before the game.

“People would really feel like they missed out if they heard about it and could have been here to see it.”

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1. GET BOBBY HELP

It was no secret coming into the 2011 season that the WKU offense would revolve around senior running back Bobby Rainey, the Football Bowl Division’s third-leading rusher in 2010. But there was an expectation that sophomore Antonio Andrews and highly-touted freshmen Quarterio Morgan and Marquis Sumler would come off the bench to help Rainey in the rushing game. That proved not to be the case in the Toppers’ Sept. 1 opener against Kentucky. Andrews saw just three carries, while Sumler and Morgan didn’t touch the ball. A strong WKU rushing attack will help the Toppers keep Navy’s vaunted option offense off the field. But Andrews, Morgan, and others will have to contribute and keep Rainey fresh.

2. FILLING IN FOR "X"

Sophomore outside linebacker Xavius Boyd has been one of WKU’s most dynamic playmakers since he first saw the field as a freshman in 2010. He was a force against UK, recording five tackles, including a sack. This week WKU coaches have decided to move Boyd to defensive end, strengthening what may arguably the Toppers’ deepest position. He’ll rotate with junior Quanterus Smith and seniors Jared Clendenin and Bo Adebayo Saturday. But who will fill Boyd’s vacated outside linebacker spot? Look for sophomore Bar’ee Boyd and junior Tyler Julian to see time at the position. They will be responsible for keeping Navy’s running backs from getting to the sidelines on option plays.

3. THE SMITH STADIUM GHOSTS

The Toppers haven’t won a game at Smith Stadium since a 50-9 win over Murray State on Sept. 20, 2008. When WKU beat the Racers that day, David Elson was Head Coach, Wood Selig was Athletic Director and Willie Taggart was at Stanford coaching running backs. In the time since, the Toppers have had heartbreaking fourth quarter losses in 2008 to North Texas, in 2009 to Arkansas State and in 2010 to Louisiana-Monroe and Middle Tennessee State. Will WKU’s tough home fortunes change in 2011? They’ll get their first chance for a home win Saturday.
Navy football is easy to recognize. The heavy-brass sound of the school fight song, “Anchors Aweigh,” the military dress of the school’s midshipmen and the legendary rivalry with Army create an aura around the team.

And on the field, the team pays homage to Midshipmen football tradition by running an option offense reminiscent of military academy football’s olden days.

Simply put, an option offense is a run-based attack in which the quarterback is given the responsibility of reading the defense and, in most cases, deciding to hand to a fullback up the middle, run the ball himself or pitch to a trailing running back.

As more college teams have transitioned to spread or pro-style attacks, Navy’s option offense has continuously caught teams off guard, as the Midshipmen have played in bowl games for eight straight years.

WKU will get a firsthand look at Navy’s option game when it hosts the Midshipmen at 6 p.m. Saturday in Smith Stadium.

Head Coach Willie Taggart preached the importance of his defenders fulfilling individual duties on each play in order to slow down the Navy’s offensive attack.

“When you don’t do your assignment against a team like this is when bad things happen,” Taggart said. “We’ve got to be a very disciplined football team. Anybody that has that ball in their hands, they’ve got to get hit, and get hit hard.”

Taggart has plenty of familiarity running such an offense. He led the Toppers’ option-based attack as a dual-threat quarterback in the 1990s.

Meanwhile, defensive coordinator Lance Guidry gained experience facing the option during his days at McNeese State. While there, he coached against Georgia Southern, which ran a flexbone option offense under future Navy Coach Paul Johnson.

Guidry said defenders have to be “relentless” when facing the option, and also be prepared to face a technique known as the “chop block,” in which offensive linemen dive to take out defenders’ legs and open holes in the running game.

“They’re going to chop us a lot,” Guidry said. “You have to get up and run and keep our hands down and just try to get as many hats to the football as we can to stop them.”

When WKU has the ball, the storyline will be the performance of junior quarterback Kawaun Jakes.

Jakes made his first career start two seasons ago in a 38-22 loss to Navy and played well, going 22-of-28 for 276 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions.

But he struggled last week in a 14-3 loss to Kentucky, going 9-of-27 for just 93 yards with four interceptions.

Jakes said he expects a better performance against Navy then what he had against the Wildcats.

“(UK) was just a bad game for me personally. I felt rusty,” Jakes said. “All I can do is learn from it and move on.”

Jakes and the offense will be tasked with helping a Topper defense that played outstanding against the Wildcats, holding them to just 74 yards through three quarters.

WKU forced three turnovers in that game, and sophomore middle linebacker Andrew Jackson said facing an option offense that uses multiple tosses and handoffs will provide the chance to tally more takeaways.

“Triple option — that just means more opportunities for turnovers,” Jackson said. “We’re just going to have the same approach as always — play hard and fast.”
Defensive coordinator Lance Guidry said he sensed something special in sophomore middle linebacker Andrew Jackson as soon as WKU players strapped on pads during fall camp.

In one particular practice, Jackson was responsible for stopping a scout team quarterback on an option play. He used his 6-foot-1, 250-pound frame to barrel through the line of scrimmage and force the quarterback to pitch to the tailback, who he then chased down and tackled for a loss.

“He had no business even being around that play and he ran it down,” Guidry said. “I was like, ‘Wow, that big guy can run.’”

Jackson has run and tackled his way from a relatively unknown player to one of the Toppers’ defensive leaders in a little more than a month.

He was forced to sit out much of his freshman season due to issues with the NCAA Eligibility Center.

Jackson said missing an entire year provided plenty of motivation for the 2011 season.

“Missing that season basically taught me how to fight adversity,” he said. “I just started practicing like it was my last time practicing.”

Jackson used the motivation to come out in fall camp with an intensity that caused coaches to nickname him “Angry” Andrew.

Jackson, who was not on WKU’s two-deep depth chart at the start of fall camp, turned heads to the point he was named starting middle linebacker for WKU’s opener against Kentucky.

The college football world got its introduction to Jackson that night, as he racked up a team-high 12 tackles in his first career start.

Linebackers coach Karl Maslowski said he was most impressed by the leadership Jackson showed from the middle linebacker position against the Wildcats, making calls that put his defenders in the right spots.

“For a young guy, he really has the ear of coaches and players,” Maslowski said. “Everyone follows him, and when we realized he was that kind of leader, we knew that he had all kinds of potential to be a starter.”

Jackson said he has tried to put more effort into the mental aspects of the game, especially watching film.

He said he watches more than 10 hours of film every week whether during free time or in meetings with coaches.

“When he’s not watching film of himself or opponents, Jackson said he watches footage of some of football’s greatest middle linebackers, trying to learn from them.

He said his favorites are Baltimore Ravens Pro-Bowler Ray Lewis (they both attended Kathleen High School in Lakeland, Fla.) and NFL Hall of Famer Dick Butkus.

Maslowski said he sees similarities between Jackson and Butkus.

“On the field he was the meanest guy on Earth and knew where everyone was supposed to be,” Maslowski said of Butkus. “Not that Drew’s at that level yet, but he reminds me of Dick Butkus the way he runs around and tries to inflict pain on people.”

Sophomore outside linebacker Xavius Boyd got to experience that pain firsthand when the two wrestled during a spring drill.

Boyd said he lost to Jackson that day but added that the two are always competing, whether in the weight room, running sprints or on the practice field.

Jackson said the two have developed a close friendship, saying, “he’d fight for me and I’d fight for him.”

Boyd said playing next to Jackson gives him a greater appreciation of his friend’s football abilities.

“Tfeed off him,” Boyd said. “When he makes a big hit that just makes me want to make a big hit.

“Well someone is that big and fast and has a mindset to go smash people, you want him on your team.”
SOCCER

Now a senior, Stout a 'head figure' for WKU soccer team

By AUSTIN LANTER

Four wins were all that separated senior goalkeeper Libby Stout from being WKU’s all-time winningest player when the season started.

That number is now down to one, and with two home matches this weekend, it’s possible she could pass that mark in front of a home crowd.

Stout shrugged off the idea that she could set a record, but her achievements on the field aren’t hard to notice. As a freshman, she rewrote the record books en route to a 14-1-3 record in goal and a Most Valuable Player award. Along the way she’s held several shutout streaks and has been named to the All-Sun Belt Conference team each year.

“She has just always had that leadership role where anyone can come up to her and talk to her about anything, even as a freshman,” senior midfielder Kelsey Meyer said. “I think that’s a big part about being captain.”

Stout’s relationship with her teammates is something that means a lot to her. Even more than any of the records that she holds or will hold when her collegiate career ends.

“The records are nice to have. I wouldn’t take anything away from what I’ve done,” Stout said. “But the people I’ve met here mean the most to me. I’ll carry these people with me the rest of my life.”

Stout added that her teammates are her best friends and her sisters, saying they’ve gotten her through a lot.

Head Coach Jason Neidell said Stout is a leader both on and off the field — part of why she’s a team captain for the Lady Toppers.

Neidell described her as someone who’s not only a vocal leader, but a leader by example as well.

“On the field we look to her to make big saves and we look to her to show us the mentality that we should have every game,” he said. “Off the field, she is just a good kid with a really good character, and she’s assertive. She’s willing to speak her mind and say what she thinks needs to happen.”

Meyer agreed and said that having Stout lead the team is important for developing younger players.

“They can all look up to her and see this is how they should be and this is how they should act in their four years,” she said “Hopefully they will be just like Libby.”

Even though Meyer is the same age as Stout, she said Stout has such a huge influence on the team that everyone looks up to her, including herself and the other seniors. She called Stout a “head figure” for the team.

By the time her senior season ends, Stout will hold multiple records and awards for the success she’s had as a goalkeeper at WKU.

But Stout said she’s just thankful for the experience.

“It has meant everything to me,” Stout said. “I have always wanted to play college soccer, and Western has been the perfect place for me. I wouldn’t take it back for the world. I wouldn’t change anything about it.”

Stout

SOCCER

Lady Toppers not overlooking Belmont, Eastern Michigan

By AUSTIN LANTER

The best way to rebound from a loss is to come right back out and play.

After Sunday’s loss to No. 20 Memphis, the Lady Toppers (3-2) will have two chances at home this weekend to get back on the winning track.

WKU hosts Belmont at 6 p.m. Friday and Eastern Michigan at 1 p.m. Sunday. Head Coach Jason Neidell and the Lady Toppers aren’t looking past either team.

“We’re playing two more good teams this weekend,” Neidell said. “It’s a matter of competing at a consistently high level now. It’s the challenges within ourselves.”

WKU last played against Belmont during the 2008 season and was able to get away with a 2-0 win. However, Sunday will be WKU’s first ever meeting with Eastern Michigan.

Senior forward Lindsey Goad said that having played Belmont in the past will prove to be beneficial, but Eastern Michigan will be more difficult due to the fact that the teams have never gone head-to-head.

“We’ve played Belmont before so I think we have an idea about them,” Goad said. “But definitely playing Eastern Michigan, we have never played them before so I think just coming out with a good attitude and playing hard against them is definitely a big importance for winning both games this weekend.”

Sophomore midfielder Chrissy Tchoula agreed and said that coming out strong will be the key, especially in the Belmont game.

“Belmont is a team that we should beat, and those are sometimes the hardest games,” she said. “You come out thinking that you will be victorious, and then you do not play as well. But they’re a good side and we just need to keep playing hard and take it one game at a time.”

Neidell said the Lady Toppers played well Sunday against Memphis, but he’d still like to see more consistency.

Goad agreed. “We’re 3-2 right now, and definitely keeping a winning record is important,” she said. “Having two big wins this weekend would be really awesome to set us up for the rest of the season.”

Something both Goad and Tchoula said that will bode well for the Lady Toppers this weekend is how strong their lineup has been.

“We have had a lot of great individual performances,” Tchoula said. “I am really proud of a lot of the freshmen. They’re coming in and really making an impact and our chemistry is really good. We haven’t had a problem with working hard. That’s a standard that we can keep and raise throughout the season.”

Goad agreed and said that having the younger players step up has been really important so far.

“I definitely think that having a strong lineup, like playing different people and different classes and everything has been really important,” she said. “It has shown a lot through our games so far.”

Neidell said he sees room for improvement in certain areas, but overall he’s been satisfied with how the players have progressed as a team.

“I am actually pretty pleased with where the team’s mentality is five games into the season,” Neidell said. “I feel really good about the progress we have made and if we can continue to make progress through the next five games, we will be in good shape.”
Sophomore defensive specialist Ashley Potts liked everything she saw when she first visited WKU, but one factor in particular helped Potts make up her mind to play volleyball on the Hill.

That one thing? Big Red.

Potts' older sister Kelly Potts, who played for WKU through last season, said Ashley Potts is "obsessed" with Big Red. But Head Coach Travis Hudson said no matter what got Ashley Potts to WKU, he's happy she's here.

"I coached her older sister Kelly, who was a really good player for us here, so I've known Ashley since she was a young girl," Hudson said. "Her talent has always been obvious to me. I knew she would be great for the team."

In the first weeks of the season, Ashley Potts has been just that — great. The sophomore was recently awarded Sun Belt Conference Defensive Player of the Week and is averaging 5.13 digs-per-set, which is second in the Sun Belt.

Hudson credits Ashley Potts' improvement to hard work in the preseason, when she earned the starting job at libero.

"We did a lot of stuff technique-wise this summer," he said. "We spent a lot of time just trying to improve her balance and improve her footwork."

Sophomore setter Melanie Stutsman, Ashley Potts' roommate, said her hard work throughout the preseason was easy to see.

"During the spring season she worked as hard as she could every day," Stutsman said. "You could tell she was always trying to get better. She went out there every day and worked her hardest, and it paid off because now she's so good."

Ashley Potts said her work this offseason started well before the preseason.

"We've been working on certain things defensively since we started practicing in February," she said. "We just worked on it like ten times harder over the preseason."

Her hard work has paid off so far. The Lady Toppers have started the season 6-1, thanks in large part to her defensive play.

"Ashley is one of the best kids I've ever coached. She's great," Hudson said. "Other kids take breaks. They get tired. But this kid just has a great will to keep going."

One thing Ashley Potts has is experience. She said she's been playing volleyball since she was 5 years old. Ashley Potts followed her sister's footsteps and joined a competitive club team at age 11, where she played for seven years.

"Our club team was close with a lot of college coaches, so Travis was already seeing her potential when she was like 11 or 12," Kelly Potts said.

By Ashley Potts' sophomore year at Sacred Heart Academy in Louisville, she had already been offered a scholarship from WKU. Potts said her relationship with Hudson goes beyond the volleyball court.

"He's more than just a coach. He's like my second dad," she said. "He's always there for me no matter what."

Ashley Potts and her sister were able to play together for just one year — last season — because Kelly Potts redshirted at WKU.

"She always wanted to play with me, but with the four-year difference, we never really had the chance," Kelly Potts said. "Once I redshirted a year and she saw that we could have that opportunity, I think it really helped her make up her mind to come to WKU."

Kelly Potts is now working toward her masters at the University of Louisville, but Ashley Potts said the two still talk often.

"We still haven't gone two weeks without seeing each other," Ashley Potts said. "I still talk to her every day."

Kelly Potts was in Lexington last weekend and was able to see her younger sister in action for the first time this season.

"It just blew my mind seeing where she is now compared to where she was this time last year," Kelly Potts said. "It's hard to believe she's only a sophomore. This is just the beginning for her."
VOLLEYBALL

Lady Tops expect big crowds for first home matches

By LUCAS AULBACH
sports@wkuherald.com

After having what Head Coach Travis Hudson called a “doggone good start” to the season, the WKU volleyball team is looking forward to performing in front of what they expect to be a big home crowd.

WKU went 6-1 in its first seven games, all on the road. Hudson said teams the Lady Toppers face this weekend are as good as any other teams they’ve taken on this year.

“The challenge this weekend is going to be good,” Hudson said. “It’s kind of a down week for us. I think we’re going to get good matches against Xavier.”

The challenge this weekend is great, just as it was a week ago (in teams they’ve taken on this year. The Lady Toppers beat Xavier 3-1 last year in Cincinnati, but Hudson expects a closer match this year.

“Our match against Xavier last year was really competitive, so I expect them to be really good,” Hudson said. “I think LSU is the most highly thought of group around the country of the three right now but certainly all three teams can beat us if we don’t play well.”

Admission to the games, which will be played at Diddle Arena, is free to WKU students and Saturday’s match against LSU is free for everyone. Hudson said he’s hoping for a good fan turnout.

He said he expects a big showing from “Hudson’s Hillraisers,” a student group that comes out and cheers at all the volleyball home games. The group gets free t-shirts and food before the games and are vocal during matches.

“You’ll know who they are — that’s for sure,” Hudson said. “Volleyball’s a game of energy, and I think it really gives us a big boost when the fans are here.”

Junior defensive specialist Sarah Rogers said that the Lady Toppers are excited to have the support of the home crowd after starting the year with seven matches on the road.

“It’ll be nice to actually be the ones with fans there cheering for us, instead of of the other team,” she said. “At Kentucky they had a big fan section on Friday night and I think just hearing our cheering section will help us a lot.”

Rogers said that a big student turnout inspires the team to perform better.

“Having everybody cheering on every point and being loud with you makes a huge difference,” she said. “It brings everybody’s game up.”

Sophomore defensive specialist Ashley Potts agreed, saying that the team should be motivated to perform well in front of a crowd of familiar faces.

“We’ve been on the road a lot but I think we’re all excited just to be back in Diddle and to see our home fans and friends,” she said.

Sophomore setter Melanie Stuttsman said she’s expecting the student section to be big and loud.

“From what I hear we’re going to have a lot of fans here, which is exciting,” she said. “Hopefully they’ll get out there and do some heckling.”

CROSS COUNTRY

Rwaheru fighting back from injury to prepare for Olympics

By MERCEDES TRENT
sports@wkuherald.com

Deus Rwaheru said he’s never afraid.

After moving from Kampala, Uganda, to Bowling Green his sophomore year and sustaining an IT band injury — an arm injury — that put him out of the spring track and field season his junior year, the senior Rwaheru was fearless when he finally competed again.

Rwaheru captured first place at the Brooks Memphis Twilight Classic on Sept. 3, with his high finish boosting the WKU men’s cross country team to its first win since 2008.

His performance in Memphis also earned him the Sun Belt Conference Cross Country Runner of the Week Award.

While he tries to build on that success to do well this season, he’s also hoping it will help prepare him to try out for Uganda’s Olympic team in the spring.

“Right now this cross country (season) is a building block for my next year,” he said. “I’d love to go home and run for my country.”

Head Coach emeritus Curtiss Long acknowledges Rwaheru’s Olympic ambition as a “high goal” and added that it will be “difficult.” That’s because Rwaheru is busy completing a degree in economics and running while those he’d be competing against for a spot can simply “eat, sleep, and run.”

“I really admire him for his dedication to his academics,” Long said. “He is accomplishing outstanding things on the track while being very, very motivated in the classroom.”

Rwaheru is aware of the competition he’ll face, but said he’s not intimidated, adding that he’s “never scared.”

The injury is still a fresh challenge for Rwaheru, who had to work all summer to overcome it and prepare for this cross country season.

But teammate Kyle Chettleburgh said he’s impressed by Rwaheru’s progress.

“He struggled over the summer,” Chettleburgh said. “It shows how his dedication and hard work came together.”

Rwaheru also remains mindful of the toll his injury may take on the rest of the season and his need to overcome it for the Olympic tryouts.

“Right now, I can’t speculate,” Rwaheru said. “It depends on how my body heals. If my body heals, I’ll be prepared to run for nationals.”

Qualifying for the NCAA National Championships is the ultimate goal for Rwaheru in his final cross country season.

But Long said he encourages Rwaheru in his pursuit of his goal.

“We want him to perform well and we want him to take people with him (to the championship),” Long said.

Last season the Toppers sent one competitor to the NCAA Championship — Shadrack Kipchirchir.

Along with Kipchirchir, Rwaheru also looks up to Patrick Chepteck, a former WKU runner who graduated last year but still continues to train with Rwaheru. The two knew each other back in Uganda but didn’t compete together until they got to the Hill.

“He is one of the people who keeps my spirits high,” Rwaheru said.

Rwaheru said keeping his motivation strong will be the key to accomplishing his dreams this year.

“It’s easy to lose focus on your running and become demotivated,” said Rwaheru. “You have to motivate yourself. I’m just keeping my hopes high.”
Think you are the ultimate fan?

WKU

[Image of a person wearing a red and black WKU hat and wig]

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