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UA12/2/1 Topper Extra - Jordyn Skinner

WKU Student Affairs

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Jordyn Skinner, national player of the week
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If WKU wins on Saturday, how will you celebrate?

This Saturday could be a momentous day for WKU. For the first time since Sept. 20, 2008, the Hilltoppers could win a home football game.

Against a Football Championship Series opponent in Indiana State, it’s clearly WKU’s best chance to win at home this season.

That raises a question that hasn’t been asked around here for a while: How should fans celebrate a win?

“I’ve heard fans talk about tearing down the goalposts,” senior linebacker Ben Duvall said. “I’d like to see that happen.”

What would be the appropriate way of celebrating? This game is unique in that it presents two ways to react to the win, both of which would be appropriate.

On one hand, there are fans who will probably want to storm the field. After all, those who are seniors haven’t seen a win since the first game they could attend as freshmen — that is, if they went. Some students have never seen a win.

Every student dreams of being a part of that kind of moment where they can celebrate a big win. And yes, a win over Indiana State at home would indeed be a big win for WKU.

But then you’ll likely have a group of fans who think WKU should hold itself to a higher standard, as if it should expect to win this game. You know — act like they’ve been there.

Let’s be honest. The Toppers really should win this game. They’re bigger. They’re stronger. They’re a Football Bowl Subdivision team.

That hasn’t gotten to Head Coach Willie Taggart’s head, though. “We’re not in a position to underestimate anyone, so I don’t think you’ll see that from the Hilltoppers,” Taggart said. “If anything, you might want to ask Indiana State not to underestimate Western Kentucky right now.

“Our guys understand that if we don’t come ready to play, Indiana State can come in and beat us.”

But nonetheless, for the first time in a while, WKU is the decided favorite in a game.

So I ask again: How should fans celebrate?

Seriously, students. This is a big decision. How you choose to celebrate will be remembered for a long time, so you better make sure you do it right.

I can only imagine the conversations that will ensue if WKU manages to have a lead in the fourth quarter as time winds down.

One fans says, “Hey, we’re rushing the field!” That person’s friend next to him replies, “Come on, man. It’s Indiana State. Who cares?”

A brief debate will follow about how WKU hasn’t won at home in three years and how any win is big.

Then again, there might not be many people in the stands anyway with Louisville and Kentucky kicking off at the same time as WKU and Indiana State.

But for those of you who plan to attend, might I offer some suggestions that were provided on Twitter earlier this week:

WKU could provide fans with:
- a free soft-serve ice cream cone
- $1 off any roast beef combo at Arby’s
- $1 burrito coupons at Puerto’s
- Willie Taggart commemorative lapel pins
- Six free wings from Toot’s
- or, of course, a snow day in September.

Perhaps fans could celebrate by planking on the goalposts, although that hasn’t gone over too well in the past.

The Bowling Green media will celebrate by finally talking to the offensive line, which has boycotted interviews until WKU wins a home game. Junior tight ends Jack Doyle and Ryan Wallace joined in with them as well.

And since the media can’t talk to the quarterbacks in the wake of the quarterback controversy, we’re simply running out of people to talk to.

So unless you want to hear from the same five people each week, you better hope for a win.

Of course if WKU loses, all of this is a moot point and something we’ll have to get to at a later time. And at that point, the post-game reactions might be wilder than if the Toppers win.

Either way, I’ll be anxiously waiting to see what you all come up with.
WKU finds itself in an unfamiliar position this week — as a favorite.

The Toppers host Indiana State, a Football Championship Subdivision opponent, at 6 p.m. Saturday at Smith Stadium.

Now in its third year as a bowl-eligible, Football Bowl Subdivision team, some may expect WKU to disregard Football Championship Subdivision (formerly I-AA) competition.

But Head Coach Willie Taggart said his 0-2 Topper team won’t be looking past any opponent.

“We’re not in a position to underestimate anyone, so I don’t think you’ll see that from the Hilltoppers,” Taggart said Monday. “If anything, you might want to ask Indiana State not to underestimate Western Kentucky right now.

“Our guys understand that if we don’t come ready to play, Indiana State can come in and beat us.”

The Sycamores are 1-1 on the season, having beaten in-state, FCS opponent Butler, 48-34, last week after a season-opening 41-7 road loss to Penn State.

They are led in the passing game by quarterback Ronnie Fouch, a former back-up to Jake Locker at Washington now in his second season at Indiana State.

The Topper defense will also have to bottle up Sycamore fullback Brock Lough, a first-team All-Missouri Valley Conference selection a year ago who ran for three touchdowns last week against Butler.

WKU and Indiana State last met in 2007, when WKU cruised to a 56-7 victory.

Taggart went 3-1 against the Sycamores, including a 1995 victory in a postseason Topper quarterback but said the Sycamores’ talent level has vastly improved in recent years.

“They’ve got some really good athletes in there,” Taggart said. “Their teams in the past didn’t play with a lot of confidence, but you watch this football team and they do.”

Indiana State may be able to take some confidence from the successes FCS programs have had in the past decade.

Recent examples include Virginia Tech’s 2010 loss to James Madison, Appalachian State’s shocking 2007 upset of then-top-10 Michigan, and closer to home for WKU fans, the Toppers’ 2009 loss to Central Arkansas.

Offensive coordinator Zach Azzanni said “the line has blurred” between FBS and FCS competition.

“You see it every Saturday — you can’t take anyone lightly,” he said. “I know here we don’t take anyone lightly. We’re just trying to get a W, and whoever you put in front of us, we’re going to play as hard as we can.”

Senior running back Bobby Rainey was part of WKU’s loss to Central Arkansas two years ago. He agreed with Azzanni, saying the Toppers aren’t in a position to brush off the Sycamores.

“Even though we know Indiana State is an (FCS) team, at the same time we haven’t won a game either,” Rainey said. “We don’t have a luxury to overlook anybody.”

An underlying subplot for Saturday’s game will be WKU trying to snap its 16-game home losing streak, which dates back to Sept. 20, 2008.

Should the Toppers win, senior linebacker Ben Duvall said he’s fine with fans celebrating however they wish.

“I’ve heard fans talk about tearing down the goalposts,” Duvall said. “I’d like to see that happen.”
Skinner hopes to keep up 'special' season

By LUCAS AULBACH
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Head Coach Travis Hudson saw junior outside hitter Jordyn Skinner’s potential long before she came to the Hill.

Hudson saw so much promise in Skinner, in fact, that he flew to her hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich., one afternoon while she was in high school just to see her practice.

“We don’t have the budget to do that with kids and I certainly don’t have the time to do that,” Hudson said. “But there was just something that was just tugging at me that said get up there and get to know this kid.”

It appears all of that paid off.

Skinner has more than justified Hudson’s vote for her as the Sun Belt Conference preseason Player of the Year. She leads the Sun Belt in kills and became the second player in WKU history to be named National Player of the Week on Tuesday after recording 70 kills during the WKU Tournament. Her 30 kills against Xavier on Friday were the second-most ever for a WKU athlete in a match.

Skinner’s play has also helped WKU rise to No. 31 in the most recent national poll — the highest ranking in school history.

What’s scary for opponents is that Skinner is just starting to reach her poten-
Sophomore outside hitter Ja-nee’ Diggins said the Lady Toppers will get to do some sightseeing in the nation’s capitol this weekend while at the American University Tournament.

But first, Head Coach Travis Hudson said WKU needs to take care of business.

“Going up there to D.C. and getting a couple more quality wins would be a really nice finish to this non-conference portion,” he said. “It gives us three more chances to continue to enhance our resume and more importantly get ourselves playing well going into conference play.”

The No. 31 Lady Toppers (10-1) will face No. 32 Missouri — a team WKU beat last season — at 3:30 p.m. CST Friday in their first match. Even with the recent success WKU has had against Missouri, Hudson said he knows not to take them lightly.

“Missouri was a Sweet 16 team last year,” he said. “They’re extremely athletic and we will certainly have our hands full in that match.”

WKU will finish the tournament Saturday against American University and Villanova.

Diggins said the D.C. tournament will be important to set the tone for the team’s upcoming Sun Belt Conference schedule, which begins on Sept. 23 against UALR.

“Missouri and Villanova are supposed to be really good teams,” she said. “I feel like if we beat them, we’ll go into conference play with a lot of confidence.”

Even with a 10-1 record and a No. 31 national ranking, Hudson said this weekend will be important for the Lady Toppers’ case for a potential at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament later this season.

“What we’ve done to this point is give ourselves opportunity,” he said. “Through 11 matches, we’ve given ourselves opportunity to really put ourselves in a good place in terms of at-large consideration if we play this thing out.”

Junior outside hitter Jordyn Skinner agreed, saying the Lady Toppers are focusing on winning now to help put themselves in good position at the end of the season.

“We’re just trying to go out there every game and do our best to win,” she said. “If we do well at the tournament this weekend, I think we’ll be in a good spot to get an at-large bid.”

WKU will have one more non-conference match this season to boost their résumé — an October 18th bout on the road against Cincinnati.

Hudson said doing well in Washington would be important for WKU’s national standing, and like Diggins said, it’s momentum coming into Sun Belt play.
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**SOCCER**

**WKU closing out its non-conference schedule**

By AUSTIN LANTER

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Soccer Head Coach Jason Neidell has said multiple times that the Lady Toppers’ non-conference schedule this year is the toughest in his 11 years at WKU.

Even so, WKU boasts a 5-2 non-conference record with one more game on Saturday against Rice before its Sun Belt Conference schedule begins.

Neidell said his main focus was that his players get better during those matches.

“I don’t really know if I had any expectations for wins and losses,” Neidell said. “One of the things we’ve been stressing to our kids is all non-conference is about is performance and taking care of the process and not worrying about wins and losses. Those will come.”

Senior midfielder Lindsay Williams said the Lady Toppers did just that.

“I think we did really well,” Williams said. “Our record shows us at 5-2, but I think the most important thing is that we’re doing better now than we did at the beginning. I would really like to have another chance at the teams we lost to in the beginning.”

The two losses on the season were both 2-0 shutouts. The first one came at Vanderbilt, and the second at home against Memphis, who was ranked No. 20 in the country at the time.

Something that Neidell has been pleased with all season is defense and how the whole team is starting to defend, not just the defenders.

WKU has allowed just six goals all season, which ties them at second in the Sun Belt with North Texas for the least goals allowed.

Neidell also said that the midfield and forwards are both starting to defend as a group better, but there is still room for improvement.

Senior forward Kaylyn Pratt agreed.

“We need to be defensively minded as a team and being a unit,” she said. “We need to make sure that we’re taking care of our danger areas, attacking or defending them with purpose and making sure we’re all on the same page.”

Pratt added that players are talking a lot more on the field.

“We’ve done really well at just trying to communicate and work some things out even through the rough parts we’ve had,” she said. “We’re all just on the same page, and if we’ve had problems, we’re just trying to work them out — just all giving our hearts and just everything we can.”

Team chemistry is how Neidell described it, saying that there’s more on this year’s team than last year’s.

However, Williams said she’d still like to see more consistency, especially with the conference schedule just around the corner.

“It’s all about a consistent effort,” Williams said. “We’ve been playing hard, but we need to pair that with extra concentration and focus on what we’re supposed to be doing tactically in the game.”

The Lady Toppers will be tested right from the start once conference play rolls around, playing at North Texas and Denver in the same weekend. Neidell said both teams, along with WKU, are among the top five in the conference.

“The intensity goes up quite a bit (in conference play).” Neidell said. “It’s just a little bit different in the intensity. Every match matters and every minute in every match matters.”

Williams echoed Neidell and said he has been stressing the need for good results.

“It’s a whole different attitude that you take with it,” she said. “You’ve got this rivalry with these teams that you play every year, and it’s just like coach said after the game speech the other day — it becomes about winning a little more and it’s important to get those results.”

“It’s a different mindset. You need to go in there and win every weekend.”

**CROSS COUNTRY**

**Toppers to run tough Kereiakes course**

By MERCEDES TRENT

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Improvement is the key word for the men’s and women’s cross country teams as they prepare to compete in the Old Timers Classic Saturday at Kereiakes Park.

“We just want to improve what we did at Memphis,” said women’s distance coach Michelle Murphy Scott. “Every week is going to be an improvement.”

The levels of fitness come into play for both teams, and the coaches are keeping an eye out for such development, Scott said.

“You want to see the kids are getting stronger, where their strengths are in the race,” Head Coach Erik Jenkins said. “With anybody who is competing, I’m looking for improvement.”

The Old Timers Classic is the first 8K race this season, a significant difference for many freshmen who only ran 5Ks in high school.

Freshman Sean Hurd believes this meet will be a key experience for the team.

“If they can run an 8K on this course, they can do it anywhere else and do it well,” Jenkins said.

Jenkins praised his group’s teamwork in being able to do well on tough courses.

“You watch them throughout the race, picking each other up. They’ll run for each other.”

Hurd said he enjoys “having people on the team push me.”

“They want to see everyone get better,” Hurd said.

Jenkins said building team unity is a step in the right direction to another Sun Belt Conference crown.

“We want to enjoy the journey to our ultimate goal, which is hopefully the conference championship,” Jenkins said.

But while Jenkins and the teams look to utilize the improvements gained at Kereiakes Park this weekend, he said the team simply relishes the chance to run.

“We’ll take advantage of the opportunity and just race,” Jenkins said. “Any time you get the opportunity to race is a great thing.”
When Antonio Andrews spoke to the media Monday, the name card sitting in front of him didn’t read running back, wide receiver or any other position. It simply read “ANTONIO ANDREWS — ATH,” meaning athlete.

That may be the best way to describe the WKU sophomore.

“You don’t want to be one-dimensional. You want to be multi-dimensional,” Andrews said. “It’s always a great thing to play more than one position.”

Andrews’ reputation as a pure athlete was well-known in the state before he arrived at WKU. During his days as quarterback at Fort Campbell High School, he threw for 50 touchdowns and rushed for another 56 scores. Andrews led the Falcons to a 29-0 record during his last two high school seasons, including a pair of class 2A state championships. His accolades earned him the title of 2009 Kentucky Mr. Football.

After initially enrolling at the Air Force Academy, Andrews transferred to WKU weeks before the start of the 2010 season. He was used primarily as a backup to running back Bobby Rainey during his freshman year.

But coaches have said they won’t be shy about using Andrews anywhere on the field this season.

“We’ll play him at receiver, play him at running back, play him at quarterback,” Head Coach Willie Taggart said. “We might even let him kick.”

Taggart has promised that Andrews, who was banged up throughout training camp, will see a larger role in what has been a struggling WKU offense.

Andrews touched the ball just three times in the Toppers’ season opening 14-3 loss to Kentucky but accumulated 202 special teams return yards in WKU’s 40-14 loss to Navy last Saturday.

“He’s getting himself back in game shape now, and I think that’s what you saw the other night,” Taggart said. “He had missed a lot of training camp, didn’t see much of the first game, but practiced well last week and showed us what he’s capable of doing once he gets the ball in his hand.

“I expect to see more of him as the year goes on.”

Andrews said he’s received the majority of his recent practice reps returning punts and kicks and working as a running back.

He said he enjoys getting reps as a “Wildcat” quarterback from time to time but said he’s most comfortable as a running back, where he’s been working with Rainey.

“(The Wildcat) is always a fun package, just being able to get the ball in your hands on the first snap and being able to go out there and make a play,” Andrews said. “But after a while it kind of gets boring back there. Shoot, running back — that’s a big job, because you see how well Bobby does it.”

Offensive coordinator Zach Azzanni said he hopes to see Andrews become one of the offense’s premier playmakers and prevent a drop-off in situations when Rainey needs a play off during games.

“He’s good with the ball in his hands, and we’re trying to establish some playmakers on offense,” Azzanni said of Andrews. “Antonio can always provide a blow for Bobby and we don’t have to go down a step in production.”

Andrews said running backs coach Terry Obee has set a 1,000 all-purpose-yard goal for his sophomore back.

Andrews will attempt to run, pass and return his way to that mark.

“I’ll put my foot in each door and see which door opens,” he said.