9-30-2011

UA12/2/1 Topper Extra - WKU Opens Sun Belt Play

WKU Student Affairs

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Higher Education Administration Commons, Journalism Studies Commons, Mass Communication Commons, and the Sports Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/6314

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.
WKU opens Sun Belt play
Donate Blood  
Save Up to 3 Lives  
Enjoy food, fun, and festivities!

Enter to win exciting giveaways! Such as...  
A condo for one week on beautiful Hilton Head Island, SC.

Check out our Facebook for additional raffle updates!

To make an appointment, go to www.redcrossblood.org and click “enter sponsor code,” enter WKU.

The Heather Trew Foundation for Organ Donation and Research is dedicated to raising awareness of the importance of registering to be an organ, eye and tissue donor among individuals of all ages. 
Read Heather’s story at www.theheathertrewfoundation.org

Trew Friends thanks:  
American Red Cross  
Local Restaurant & Business Sponsors  
Coral Bands  
Trew Friends Affiliates SAE and ADPi
Kawaun Jakes has taken his fair share of criticism in his three years as WKU’s starting quarterback. That’s really no secret.

His critics got what they wanted last game when redshirt freshman Brandon Doughty started against Indiana State, only to leave three plays later with a torn anterior cruciate ligament that will sideline him for the remainder of the season.

The spotlight on Jakes is now even brighter as he remains the only logical option for WKU at quarterback.

Jakes has struggled in his time as a starter, especially this season. That’s also no secret.

His six interceptions lead the Sun Belt Conference and tie his total from the entire 2010 season. His 93.6 passer rating ranks last in the conference, and he carries a 2-20 record as a starter on his shoulders.

But the cushion that was there before with Doughty as the backup is now gone. If Jakes’ struggles continue, so will WKU. Its goals of a Sun Belt championship could go by the wayside.

It’s time now for Jakes to step up, because he’s really all WKU has at quarterback now.

He’s already gotten started during the bye week, embracing the idea that he needs to be more of a leader.

“Having everybody upbeat,” Jakes said, talking about what he’s done to be more of a leader in practice. “It’s an off week so some people probably don’t want to practice. Just having everybody want to be out here and want to go through practice.”

It’s easy to look back as Jakes’ career up to this point and convince yourself that Jakes might not have it in him to be the leader that WKU needs him to be.

But he’s shown flashes of success, albeit few and far between.

In his first career start against Navy, Jakes went 22-for-28 for 276 yards and two touchdowns.

In WKU’s 54-21 win over Louisiana-Lafayette last season, Jakes completed 18-of-22 passes for a career-high 262 passing yards en route to being named the Sun Belt Offensive Player of the Week.

Against Indiana State two weeks ago, Jakes went 22-for-30 with 237 yards and two touchdowns and an interception.

The talent and the ability is there. It just hasn’t been there consistently. That’s what needs to change.

Jakes knows it.

“I still have my own confidence. I never just fall down and don’t believe in myself,” Jakes said. “I’m just trying to get better.”

If Jakes doesn’t perform, WKU would have to relinquish freshman James Maurro’s redshirt year in order to provide a new look to the offense.

At this point, WKU can’t really afford to do that.

Taggart said before the season that Jakes needed to become more of a weapon.

He’s also said that Jakes has always been a leader in practice, but for whatever reason, has trouble translating that to gamedays.

WKU needs all of that to change now more than ever.

For WKU to win, Jakes has to step up.

**SPORTS BRIEF**

**WKU marketing to give away Luke Bryan tickets, two $500 shopping sprees to students**

WKU Marketing is sponsoring two $500 shopping sprees to be given out at halftime of Saturday’s game against Arkansas State.

The money can be put toward a shopping spree at Greenwood Mall on Campbell Lane.

“It’s our way to say thank you to all the WKU students who have come to all our games so far,” said Lindsay Thomas, assistant athletic director for marketing and ticket sales. “We had over 4,000 in Nashville (for the Kentucky game), over 5,000 for Navy and over 4,000 for Indiana State.

“We just want to do something fun and exciting for the great support we have.”

Thomas said WKU will also be giving away two free tickets to the Luke Bryan concert during Homecoming on Oct. 22.

Students can enter the drawing for both prizes on game day at the student gate and must show a valid WKU student I.D. to enter.

Students must also be present at halftime when the winners are announced.

— Cole Claybourn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WKU offense</th>
<th>ASU defense</th>
<th>ASU offense</th>
<th>WKU defense</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>scoring</td>
<td>30.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>first downs</td>
<td>22.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>131</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>rushing yards</td>
<td>138.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>yards per rush</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>162.3</td>
<td>218.8</td>
<td>passing yards</td>
<td>285.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>yards per pass attempt</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>293.3</td>
<td>347.8</td>
<td>total offense</td>
<td>469</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>yards per play</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>turnovers</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An 0-3 start wasn’t what Head Coach Willie Taggart envisioned for his 2011 Toppers.

But after a close loss to Kentucky and not-so-close losses to Navy and Indiana State, that’s where WKU stands.

Following a bye week, WKU gets the chance to turn the page from its rough start at 3 p.m. Saturday, when it hosts Arkansas State for a Sun Belt Conference opener.

Senior safety Ryan Beard said Saturday’s game is an opportunity for the Toppers to set aside the early season disappointments and begin a march to their first-ever Sun Belt title.

“All our goals are still intact as a football team. It’s obviously to win a conference championship,” Beard said. “We haven’t lost a single Sun Belt game so we’re still on track to (win the league crown), and I believe we can.”

The Toppers can take a measure of confidence into Saturday’s matchup, as WKU notched a 36-35 overtime win over the Red Wolves last season.

In that game the Toppers forced five turnovers, held the ball for more than 40 minutes and blocked a fourth quarter punt to send the game into an extra period.

Then, after matching an Arkansas State touchdown, WKU won when then-junior cornerback Derrius Brooks scored on a gutsy two-point conversion attempt called by Taggart.

After an 0-3 start, Taggart said the Toppers can use last season’s win as an illustration of what happens when they play to their potential.

“That was a good win. That was a good time to show our team that we can do it, that we can fight back, that we can beat adversity,” he said. “But it’s a new year, a new ASU football team and a new WKU football team.”

The Red Wolves are 2-2 so far in their first season under the helm of Hugh Freeze, who was promoted from offensive coordinator to head coach following the firing of former coach Steve Roberts.

Arkansas State features a potent passing attack led by quarterback Ryan Aplin.

Aplin, who threw for 2,939 yards and 21 touchdowns in 2010, has talented receivers Dwayne Frampton, Josh Jarboe and Taylor Stockemer at his disposal.

And when he’s not making plays with his arm, Aplin has the mobility to keep defenses honest, as he rushed for 11 touchdowns a season ago.

“That quarterback is the real deal,” Taggart said of Aplin. “He’s the commander-in-chief of that offense.”

But Aplin has been somewhat erratic this season, throwing more interceptions (five) than touchdowns (four).

If the WKU defensive line can pressure Aplin and force him into some bad throws, the Toppers will have a good chance to notch a win to start their Sun Belt season.

WKU has collected five sacks thus far in 2011, facing primarily run-based attacks.

Senior defensive end Jared Clendenin said that he relishes the chance to be able to pin his ears back and pursue Aplin.

“We love to play the run, but being a defensive end, I would be lying if I said we didn’t like going after that quarterback,” Clendenin said. “We need to get some hits on him early in the game.”

There are plenty of additional subplots going into Saturday.

Junior quarterback Kawaun Jakes will be making his first start after being on the sidelines for the beginning of the Indiana State game.

Senior running back Bobby Rainey will be attempting to rush for more than 100 yards for a school-record ninth consecutive game.

And, of course, the Toppers will be looking to snap a home losing streak that now stands at 17 games.

But, most importantly, WKU will be gunning for a 1-0 start on the road to what they hope is a Sun Belt title.

“Our goal is still attainable,” Rainey said. “It’s conference play. It’s time to get it.”
For many Topper athletes, WKU is a place to get an education and play sports.

For senior defensive back Ryan Beard, WKU is a lifelong passion and a dream fulfilled.

In an era where most Topper football players come from other states, Beard’s case has become the exception.

Beard grew up in Bowling Green, regularly attending WKU football games. He would come to Smith Stadium to cheer on his cousin, Patrick Reynolds, a key player on the Toppers’ 2002 I-AA national championship team.

And after a standout career at Bowling Green High School, Beard chose to keep with the family tradition and sign to play for the hometown Toppers.

“I’m a big family guy. I like being around my family, and that was huge in my decision,” Beard said. “I’ve got a lot of local friends I still run around with, so that was a big part of my decision.”

Beard’s arrival on campus in 2007 coincided with the beginning of WKU’s transition from Division I-AA (now the Football Championship Subdivision) to I-A (now the Football Bowl Subdivision).

Four years (including a redshirt season in 2007) and three games later, Beard has seen the program endure a coaching staff overhaul, a 26-game losing streak and other growing pains in the Toppers’ transition to college football’s top flight.

“It’s been a wild ride to say the least. We’ve come a long way,” Beard said. “From the players we have to the staff we have, there’s been a ton of changes, but I think everything’s been for the better and that we’re on the right track.”

In this tumultuous era of WKU football, Beard has been one of the team’s rare mainstays.

He started 10 games as a redshirt freshman in 2008, collecting a team-high three interceptions.

Beard played just two games in 2009 due to injuries but came back in 2010 to post 71 tackles — the second-highest total on the team.

Coming up from the secondary to collect those tackles has been one of his trademarks as a Topper.

Sophomore cornerback Tyree Robinson spoke of a play in WKU’s Sept. 10 loss to Navy in which Beard sustained a bloody lip and forehead after being hit on a hard block.

Robinson said Beard took a towel from a manager, wiped off the blood and went back onto the field.

“He goes hard every play,” Robinson said. “I respect him for that.”

First-year defensive backs coach Alonzo Hampton recalled the same play, saying Beard was “hit so hard I felt bad for him.”

“That guy came out one play, went and wiped it off and played the rest of the game,” Hampton said. “We talk about being blue collar. Ryan Beard is setting the example for these younger guys to follow.”

Beard may get some of his blue-collar mentality from Reynolds, who he described as a “smash-mouth guy” during his playing days.

“He gave everything he had every play and that’s what you come to expect from a Western defense,” Beard said. “That’s what I’m trying to instill in our younger guys, and that’s what we need to get back to.”

Of course, Reynolds’ career included the Toppers’ national championship.

Reynolds’ career included the Toppers’ national championship.

Beard said he also has championship aspirations of his own — winning the school’s first-ever Sun Belt Conference championship.

It would bring full-circle the career of a local kid living his dream.

“Bowling Green itself means so much to me, and so does Western Kentucky University,” Beard said. “Through all of the adversity, the loyal fans have still backed the football team 100 percent.

“That helps me know I made the right choice by coming here.”
Ultimate gameday experience during the Oct. 1 Arkansas State football game

Join the Pre-Game Topper Walk • Locker Room Pre-Game Speech with Coach Taggart • Run on the Field with the Team • Pre-Game Sideline Passes • Visit Press Box at Halftime for Radio Interview • Autographed Team Football • Pictures with Coach Taggart • Personalized Press Pass • Two Reserved Seat Tickets

facebook.com/chheraldsports • @wkuheraldsports
Lady Tops home again, looking to halt losing skid

The Lady Toppers have averaged two goals per match when playing at home, but less than one when playing on the road. They have also allowed 10 goals on the road compared to three at home.

“Our attacking play hasn’t been very productive (recently),” Neidell said. “You have to get shots and you have to create chances to score in the game of soccer. Against Rice a few weeks back we had enough chances, but this past weekend we certainly didn’t have enough chances to win soccer games.”

With four home matches over the next two weekends, senior midfielder Kelsey Meyer said the team has an opportunity to gain some momentum that it hopes to carry for the rest of the season. “I’m not trying to make excuses, but it’s hard to go and play somewhere else,” Meyer said. “Just getting these wins this weekend at home will be good for us and we’ll just carry that throughout the rest of the road games this year.”

Being focused and staying consistent throughout the matches will be the key for this weekend, according to Meyer. Buechel agreed with that notion. “We need to show up for each game and get the result and put some in the bank of the net,” Buechel said. “It’s just going to be a lot of hard work — getting in tackles and getting in energy to get us a win.”

Despite the three-game losing streak, Neidell is pleased with the way his team responded in the Denver game after a poor performance against North Texas two days earlier.

“I like the way our kids are keeping their heads up and keep battling,” he said. “Good things will come to people who keep working hard.”

CROSS COUNTRY

Toppers preparing for more competitive meet

By MERCEDES TRENT

The results will tell all when the WKU cross country teams finish their run on Saturday.

A larger meet showcasing anywhere from 40 to 50 teams, the Greater Louisville Classic, will give the Toppers their first chance to measure themselves against the competition. “I’m excited about the opportunity to test ourselves in a NCAA district-level competition,” Head Coach Emeritus Curtiss Long said. “It’s a fast course. It’ll be very well officiated and there are outstanding people in the race. You get a chance to measure each position on your team.”

The meet will feature local teams Louisville — the meet’s host — and Eastern Kentucky University, both of which are nationally ranked. “This is our preview meet so we anticipate there’ll be some outstanding teams there,” Long said.

Last year the Toppers came in behind 30 other teams, despite having one runner claim second place individually. This year WKU has higher hopes as a team. “I know going into this meet that we could be possibly a top contender — in the top three,” junior Landon Taylor said.

Gauging the men and women’s team performance this weekend is Long’s primary concern. “I want to see how well our top three guys do,” Long said. “And then obviously I want to see how close our team finishes. If we could finish within a minute of each other from one to five, we’ll have had an outstanding meet.”

The women’s team, which claimed fifth last year, looks for similar development. “This meet is getting more and more competitive every year,” women’s distance coach Michelle Scott said. “So really I’m just going to say, ‘Try for top ten and we’ll try our best and just keep moving forward from there.’”

Discovering how to move through the traffic that develops in bigger meets will be a key factor in the meet, Long said. “This meet gets more and more competitive every year,” women’s distance coach Michelle Scott said. “So really I’m just going to say, ‘Try for top ten and we’ll try our best and just keep moving forward from there.’”

Discovering how to move through the traffic that develops in bigger meets will be a key factor in the meet, Long said. “I think the big challenge…is that we need to be able to learn how to position ourselves in a big meet so that we’re in position to have a chance to succeed in the late stages of the race,” Long said. “You can get yourself behind people that aren’t as good as you are and then you got to fight your way up through. “We’re looking at this as the first experience of getting out fast, getting under control, and positioning ourselves well so that we’re successful throughout the race.”

In anticipation of the faster course the Toppers will tackle this weekend, the team has done a little more speed work and focused on strong, quick finishes in practice. “We’re trying to get ourselves acclimated to that faster, early pace you see at the national-level meet,” Long said.

As with the last meet, held at Kereiakes Park, the freshmen, who are unaccustomed to running in such large meets, will be “one of the intriguing factors of the weekend,” Long said.

Taylor said it will “open their eyes up a little bit.” “But I know they’ll compete well,” Taylor said. “I have faith in them. They know how to run.”

Sean Hurd is one such freshman but feels he is “where (he) needs to be” for Saturday’s meet. “I’ll have to go out with the front pack,” Hurd said. “I’ll have to stay with them because the first mile of the race is going to be pretty fast. So I have to go out with them and just try to hold on and run my own pace.”

While the women’s team is not primarily concerned with freshmen runners, Scott believes the second-tier runners will seal the meet for the Lady Toppers. Scott expects senior Marion Kandie — the Lady Topper’s leading competitor — to be “somewhere near the front,” finishing close to the top five place she took last year.

Seniors Michelle Finn and Varsity Chemweno are expected to follow close behind Kandie, but Scott said the four, five, six, and seven runners are “the key” for the team.

The chance to race in a more competitive meet will help set the pace for the rest of the training season, according to Long. “You’ve got a chance in a big meet to perform,” Long said. “Whether you perform to expectation or hope or potential, we’ll find out. But any way that we race I want them to give this a full shot and then we’ll learn something from it.

“We’ll move on to the next meet stronger.”
The Lady Topper volleyball team leads the Sun Belt in four out of five major offensive categories, boasts a 15-1 record and is currently ranked No. 29 in the country.

A major reason for that, according to the players and Head Coach Travis Hudson, is sophomore setter Melanie Stutsman.

“She’s basically the quarterback, like on a football team,” sophomore defensive specialist Ashley Potts said. “She runs everything. We get the pass up to her and she delivers it to our hitters.”

Head Coach Travis Hudson said the job of the setter, who gets almost all of the assists in most matches, is to pass the ball to the hitters after the back court players get it to her.

He kept with the football comparison in describing Stutsman’s role in the offense.

“The setter handles that second ball, just like when a ball gets snapped to the quarterback from the center,” he said. “With your setter, it’s not always her fault if we’re not playing well offensively. But it’s always her responsibility, just like it is with a quarterback. She has to literally be a coach on the floor.”

Stutsman, who was an honorable mention All-American last season, has lived up to her high expectations this season. She leads the conference in total assists with 616 — almost 200 more than the next closest athlete — and assists per set at 11.2.

But Stutsman credited her teammates for her success so far this season.

“We’ve got some really good setters in our league, so to come in with the assists lead is really exciting,” she said. “But I have to give a lot of the credit to the defense for giving me a lot of balls I can set up, and I have to give a lot of credit to the hitters, too, for getting a lot of kills.”

Stutsman said she wasn’t happy with how she started the season.

“I’ve been focusing more on what I need to do to get better, and I’m starting to do better than I have been doing. So hopefully I can keep improving,” she said. Stutsman’s work in practice paid off last Friday, when she set a new career-high in assists with 56 against Arkansas-Little Rock.

Hudson said he expects the Stutsman to get even better.

“There’s always going to be more that I want from her, and she knows that,” he said. “I’m probably as hard on her as I am anybody in our gym every day, but she’s a gifted kid and she has the potential to continue to improve and grow as a player.”

Stutsman and the rest of the Lady Toppers have a chance to improve this weekend at a tournament in Florida, where they’ll take on Florida International (10-3, 2-0) at 5:30 p.m. tonight and Florida Atlantic (3-11, 0-2) at 1 p.m. Saturday.

FIU will be retiring the jersey of four-time All-American Yarimar Rosa, who played during the 2006-2009 seasons, after the match. Hudson said he expects the gym to be full and loud.

“They’re a great team, and it’s going to be bananas in there (tonight),” he said. “Their talent level is always as good as anybody in the league. I think it’s the biggest challenge we have left, so we know we’ve got our hands full there.”

Stutsman said that the Lady Toppers are ready to play.

“It’s going to be a big road match. It’s going to be wild in that gym,” she said. “But I love playing against big road crowds. It gets me hyped, so I’m excited. We’re all excited. They’re going to be a really good opponent for us.”

By LUCAS AULBACH
sports@wkherald.com

'Startsman' running WKU's offense

"She's basically the quarterback, like on a football team. She runs everything."

—ASHLEY POTTS
Defensive specialist

Sophomore setter Melanie Stutsman sets the ball against Arkansas State in Diddle Arena on Saturday. WKU, now ranked No. 29 nationally, swept the Red Wolves for their 12th straight win.