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NOT DETERRED
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PLAYERS TO
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Taylor emerges as leader in record books

BY BILLY RUTLEDGE
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There are many weapons on the high-powered WKU football team's offense.

They include sixth-year quarterback Brandon Doughty, senior receivers Jared Dangerfield and Nicholas Norris and one of the best tight ends in college football, senior Tyler Higbee.

But none may be as explosive, as fast or as likely to make big plays as junior receiver Taywan Taylor.

In his third season with the Hilltoppers, Taylor has separated himself as one of the best players on the team and has cemented himself as both a midrange and long-range option for the Hilltoppers this season.

"We've done some different things with him [this season]," Head Coach Jeff Brohm said. "Now he's more than just an outside receiver."

Nine games into the season, Taylor is already making historic strides.

He has accumulated 957 receiving yards on the season and only needs 43 more yards to become the second 1,000-yard receiver in program history.

In that club, Taylor is close to joining 1973 graduate Porter Williams, one of the best Hilltopper receivers of all time.

"He's a hard worker. He enjoys the game of football. He's a competitor. He's a strong, physical player," Brohm said. "Like I've said before, he's got a different gear when the ball is in the air. He can go get it and adjust."

Taylor is also only one receiving touchdown shy of breaking WKU's single-season mark of 11. Taylor has tied Williams' 1973 record and Dangerfield's 2014 record in that category barely halfway through the season.

"He's a big part of our offense. He's a big-play guy," offensive coordinator Tyson Helton said. "He's a guy we try to get the ball to, and we have to continue to try and find ways to get him the ball. He needs to keep on making those plays."

Taylor has proved he can play well against Conference USA foes as well as some of the best opponents in college football.

Against No. 5 LSU in rainy conditions, Taylor hauled in a team-high 10 catches, 103 yards and a touchdown. Against Big Ten Conference foe Indiana, Taylor had nine catches for a career-high 196 yards and a touchdown. Against rival Middle Tennessee, he had six catches for 120 yards and a career-high three touchdowns.

Taylor has consistently shown he has next-level ability and is making a name for himself in the WKU record books.

"It's been a lot of hard work over the past few years coming in and working and giving great effort," Taylor said when asked how he has been so successful. "Coming in with focus — looking to get better each and every day — has transferred over to the field this season."

There is a very good chance that Taylor will go down as one of the best receivers in WKU history, and he is still only a junior.

When asked how he wants to be remembered, Taylor said he didn't care about the personal accolades.

"I just want Hilltopper nation to know I'm a team-first player, and that's why I play so hard..."

Junior wide receiver, Taywan Taylor

WKU's wide receiver Taywan Taylor (2) tries to get around University of Miami (Ohio) defensive back Marshall Taylor (21) during the Hilltoppers' 56-14 win against the University of Miami (Ohio) on Sept. 26, 2015 at Smith Stadium. NICK WAGNER/HERALD

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2 TOPPER EXTRA
BY BILLY RUTLEDGE
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After another conference win last weekend, the WKU football team is looking toward its next opponent in Conference USA: the Florida Atlantic Owls (2-6, 2-3).

Saturday's contest marks Homecoming, where WKU is 51-29-3 all-time. It will be the first home game for the Hilltoppers in nearly a month after three consecutive road games.

Over those three games, WKU (7-2, 5-0) traveled more than 6,000 miles: the longest consecutive three-game swing in program history.

At home under Head Coach Jeff Brohm, WKU is 8-1 and currently riding a seven-game winning streak while averaging 50.1 points per game.

This season, the Hilltoppers have already defeated Louisiana Tech 41-38, Miami (Ohio) 56-14 and Middle Tennessee 58-28 at Smith Stadium.

“It’s good to come back home, and we’re excited about Homecoming,” Brohm said. “We’re playing a team that beat us last year. We had a big lead on them, and they came back and found a way to win.”

Brohm knows there could be similar challenges this time around.

“They present us some problems up front. They are big and physical and match up pretty well against us,” Brohm said. “It’s a game we’ve got to be ready to play and find a way to score points. Our defense has to come out and play at a high level.”

Last season, the Hilltoppers and Owls clashed in a game that went down to the wire.

Down in Boca Raton, Florida, the Owls scored 17 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to defeat WKU 45-38.

The defeat marked another late-game collapse for WKU last year and will be a motivating factor for the team this week.

Redshirt junior running back Anthony Wales shined in the last game against Old Dominion; he tallied 185 yards and four touchdowns.

Wales has been a huge factor after returning from a hamstring injury that kept him out the first half of the season.

His presence in the Hilltopper attack comes at a crucial point in the season. After Leon Allen sustained a season-ending injury, redshirt freshman D’Andre Ferby was dealt a far heavier load than anyone expected.

With the lengthy away-game stretch behind them, the Hilltoppers are anxious to play in Bowling Green again.

“It’s a great feeling to be back home,” senior cornerback Wonderful Terry said. “You know, we’ve been on the road every week, and I kind of forgot that we play at home sometimes. It’s a great feeling to be back home and play in front of this good crowd that we have.”

Over the past two seasons, the Hilltoppers are 8-1 in the month of November. Only Wisconsin, Ohio State and Florida State have won more games in November since 2013.

The game will kick off at 11 a.m. and is set to be broadcast nationally on Fox Sports Network.

Redshirt freshman running back D’Andre Ferby runs the ball during the Hilltoppers’ 48-20 loss to LSU Oct. 24 at Tiger Stadium in Baton Rouge, La. ANDREW LIVESAY/HERALD

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KEY PLAYERS FOR TODAY'S GAME

**WKU**
- **Taywan Taylor**
  - 6'1" | 195 lbs | Junior | Wide Receiver
  - Yards Total | 957
  - Receptions | 60
  - Touchdowns | 11 (leads WKU)
  - Yards per Reception | 15.9

**FAU**
- **Jenson Stoshak**
  - 6'1" | 195 lbs | Senior | Wide Receiver
  - Yards | 485 (leads FAU)
  - Receptions | 39 (leads FAU)
  - Touchdowns | 1
  - Yards per Reception | 12.4

**WKU**
- **Anthony "Ace" Wales**
  - 5'10" | 195 lbs | Redshirt Junior | Running Back
  - Catches | 71
  - Yards | 554 (leads WKU)
  - Yards per Carry | 7.8
  - Touchdowns | 8 (two receiving)

**FAU**
- **Greg Howell**
  - 6'1" | 205 lbs | Sophomore | Running Back
  - Catches | 105
  - Yards | 501 (leads FAU)
  - Yards per Carry | 4.7
  - Touchdowns | 3

**WKU**
- **Branden Leston**
  - 6'3" | 205 lbs | Redshirt Junior | Defensive Back
  - Tackles | 67
  - Tackles for Loss | 2-10 yards
  - Solo Tackles | 45 (leads WKU)
  - Fumble Recovery | 1

**FAU**
- **Azeez Al-Shaair**
  - 6'2" | 215 lbs | Freshman | Linebacker
  - Tackles | 63 (leads FAU)
  - Tackles for Loss | 4.5-14 yards
  - Solo Tackles | 31 (leads FAU)
  - Forced Fumbles | 1
Despite injury, Higbee’s impact resonates

BY JOHN REECER
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Tyler Higbee sat in a pool of sweat in the WKU football weight room after an intense lifting session with his teammates during the 2013 season. Even with scarce playing time for the Clearwater, Florida native, there was no time for anything less than his best effort.

“Your either get better, or you get worse each day,” Higbee told his teammates. “There is no staying the same.”

Fast-forward to the 2015 season, and the tight end’s hard work is paying off.

Prior to going down with a knee injury against North Texas on Oct. 15, Higbee sat atop all FBS tight ends in receiving yards with 459, receptions with 30 and receiving touchdowns with six through six games.

The 6-foot-6, 250-pound tight end only recorded 230 yards receiving and four touchdowns on just 15 receptions last year, but Higbee more than doubled his stats in just six games as a full-time starter.

While his breakthrough season might have come as a surprise to some Hilltopper fans, Head Coach Jeff Brohm saw Higbee’s talent early during his coaching tenure at WKU.

“He is a guy that we thought would break through a couple of years ago, but he has gotten a little nicked up every year,” Coach Brohm said. “When you have a big target like him that can own the game inside the hashes, it opens up other plays for our passing game.”

Higbee is certainly not the first tight end to put up big numbers for the Hilltoppers. WKU is quickly becoming a factory for high-quality players in that position.

After dominant senior seasons on the Hill in 2012 and 2014, tight ends Jack Doyle and Mitchell Henry both found homes in the NFL with the Indianapolis Colts and the Denver Broncos.

Higbee used his time wisely as he waited patiently for the chance to emulate these great players.

“While they were here, it was great to just watch and learn from them,” Higbee said. “I loved just picking their knowledgeable brains and obtaining what I could from them.”

Higbee was quick to note, though, that he did not just learn from the team’s starters.

“It wasn’t just them that I learned from,” Higbee said. “I have two guys that came in with my class in Devin Scott and Tim Gorski who helped me greatly in my transition from a receiver to a tight end.”

Higbee seems to be on a path similar to the tight ends before him. Prior to his injury, several pro scouts were predicting his being picked in the NFL Draft this upcoming season thanks in large part to his all-around game as a pass catcher.

“He is a just a big-time competitor, and he plays like a man on the field,” Coach Brohm said. “He is just a tough player, and during his time here, he has shown a knack for big catches and big runs after the catch. He has the ability to space the field out for other receivers because he is so dangerous in the middle of the field.”

Don’t just take Coach Brohm’s word for it. Henry, who now plays for the Denver Broncos, said he saw that type of competitiveness in Higbee all along.

“He has great potential,” said Henry. “Tyler is truly a heck of an athlete, and he has incredible size, which gives him the opportunity to make great plays.”

Henry said more than just athletic ability has helped Higbee blossom into a high-caliber athlete.

“Most important is that he truly loves this game, and that gives him the passion to get better,” Henry said. “I honestly think he has even more potential than I did whenever I came out of college.”

Another reason Higbee is enjoying such a successful year is his relationship with quarterback Brandon Doughty, which he started to develop before he even became a member of the football team.

“Doughty was actually the host on my recruiting visit here, so our connection really started there,” Higbee said. “Brandon is a great guy, and he brings it every day to the field. I have a great connection with him because his work ethic really shows, and he really makes it easier on all of the receivers. If we just continue to do our part, he will definitely get the ball there and put us in positions for big plays.”

At first WKU did not generate a lot of interest in the Florida native; however, one visit during Willie Taggart’s time on the Hill changed his interest for good.

“When I first took my visit, I really enjoyed the campus,” said Higbee. “This campus is so beautiful, and Ransdell has done a great job here. However, the main reason I wanted to come here was that I saw that the football program was on the rise, and I wanted to be a part of it.”

In Higbee’s eyes, the team’s current success is just the beginning.

“There are only two words he cares about at the moment: Conference Championship.

“I don’t want to lose another game here,” said Higbee. “I want to see a Conference-USA Championship. I want this team to go to a nice bowl game and get a win there and really put this program on the map.”

When his playing days for the Hilltoppers are finished, Higbee hopes his football career will continue on some level.

“I’m just going to try and ride this football wave for as long as I can,” Higbee said. “I’m about to get my degree in physical education and finish up school, so that’s going to be fun, but I’m going to try and ride this football wave for as long as I can.”

With the hard work and determination he showed when his number was not called, Higbee is glad he is making an impact in his final campaign. He is widely expected to return to action for the Marshall game on Nov. 27.
YOUR WKU DEPTH CHART

OFFENSE

WR 21 Jared Dangerfield 6-3 215 r-Sr.
   1 Nacarius Fant 5-9 185 So.
LT 76 Forrest Lamp 6-4 300 r-Jr.
   68 Parker Howell 6-4 275 Fr.
LG 51 Brandon Ray 6-2 285 r-So.
   78 Maurice Bennett 6-2 290 r-Sr.
C 70 Max Halpin 6-3 295 r-Jr.
   64 Dennis Edwards 6-1 305 r-Fr.
RG 79 Joe Manley 6-6 315 r-Jr.
   or 64 Dennis Edwards 6-1 305 r-Fr.
RT 62 Darrell Williams, Jr. 6-6 310 r-Jr.
   75 Jimmie Sims 6-5 290 r-So.

DE 72 Derik Overstreet 6-2 250 So.
   24 Devante Duclos 6-1 240 Jr.
DT 3 Jontavius Morris 6-2 305 Sr.
   92 Gemonie Brown 6-2 305 Sr.
DT 94 Bryan Shorter 6-2 280 r-Sr.
   9 Omarius Bryant 6-3 310 Jr.
DE 88 Gavin Rocker 6-2 255 r-Sr.
   11 Tanner Reeves 6-4 240 r-So.
LB 6 T.J. McCollum 6-3 230 r-So.
   34 Drew Davis 6-1 225 Jr.
   or 4 Joel Iyiegbuniwe 6-2 220 r-Fr.
LB 10 Nick Holt 6-1 230 r-Sr.
   25 Masai Whyte 6-0 218 r-Fr.
   or 54 Daeshawn Bertram 5-11 220 r-So.
LB 13 Nick Newton 6-4 245 r-Sr.
   or 17 Dejon Brown 6-3 250 Sr.
CB 5 Wonderful Terry 5-10 190 Sr.
   23 DeAndre Simmons 5-11 185 r-So.
S 31 Branden Leston 6-3 205 r-Jr.
   27 Martavius Mills 6-1 200 r-Fr.
S 8 Marcus Ward 6-3 210 Jr.
   29 Leverick Johnson 6-1 185 So.
CB 30 Prince Charles Iworah 5-11 190 r-Sr.
   7 Joe Brown 5-10 190 So.

SPECIAL TEAMS

PK 56 Garrett Schwettman 5-11 175 Sr.
   37 Ryan Nuss 5-10 190 r-Fr.
KO 37 Ryan Nuss 5-10 190 r-Fr.
   56 Garrett Schwettman 5-11 175 Sr.
P 15 Joseph Occchipinti 6-3 190 Jr.
   or 49 Jake Collins 6-0 190 r-Fr.
SNP 47 Nolan Dowling 6-3 225 r-Jr.
   82 Tyler Higbee 6-6 230 r-Sr.
PR 81 Kylen Towner 5-9 175 r-So.
   2 Taywan Taylor 6-1 195 Jr.
KOR 81 Kylen Towner 5-8 175 r-So.
   2 Taywan Taylor 6-1 195 Jr.
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