

Blackhawks seek rhythm following bye week

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Mike Wolff can see the benefits of a bye week in the middle of a rugged season as much as any other football coach. But considering the way his unbeaten Iowa team had played thus far in 2009, he's not sure a break is what the Blackhawks really needed.

While he appreciates the opportunity for his players to heal their war wounds, he can't help but wonder if they can regain the momentum they had before the recent break in their schedule.

Iowa enters tonight's 7:05 game against Mid-Missouri at the Mid-America Center with a perfect 5-0 record in American Professional Football league play. But Wolff is concerned about whether his team can pick up where it left off when it hosts the Central Plains Football League-champion Outlaws, who recently capped a 10-0 season of their own with a third consecutive league title.

"We need to get back to the same rhythm that we were in," he said. "I wish we'd have played (last) Saturday night; we were kind of on a roll. When you're playing as hot as we were, you just want to keep playing."

There's no denying that Iowa has been in a groove, especially on offense. In the first five weeks of the season, the Blackhawks averaged 54.6 points per game.

They scored 69 in their opening-week win over Nebraska. Three weeks later, they put 80 on the board against Denver.

Iowa also tallied 55 in its road win over six-time defending APP\PPFL champion Kansas, a team that it had never beaten away from Council Bluffs, in its last outing. And Wolff said that monumental 20-point victory could've been a lot more decisive had his team not made a few mistakes.

"After watching in a film session, we felt that we were five or six touchdowns better than them that night," he said.

The key to the Blackhawks' impressive offensive display, Wolff added, has been a nice blend of youth and experience. It has meshed into a unit that has become virtually unstoppable come Saturday night.

"We've got an extremely talented football team," Wolff said. "We've got some rookies who have stepped up and filled some roles. When we mix that in with some of the veterans we have back, then all of a sudden you have a very potent offense."

"When you know that you have that kind of talent on the field and they can execute the Xs and Os that you draw up in indoor football, the sky's the limit in terms of the number of points you can score."

Leading the way for Iowa has been field-stretching wide receiver Marque McCray. The Californian, who started his collegiate playing career at Nebraska before transferring to Wayne State, has hauled in 14 passes for 303 yards and six touchdowns in the Blackhawks' last two games.

McCray's status as a deep-ball threat has opened up the field for running back Mell Holliday. The Omaha native, who completed his college career at Colorado, has scored 14 touchdowns in only four games.

Quarterback Chuck Wright has been the beneficiary of their play, along with that of receivers Steve Rush, Zach Hood and Andrew Seymour. The veteran signal-caller has thrown for eight TDs in the last two games.

"Really, it's the players we have around him that's allowed (Chuck) to succeed the way he has," Wolff said. "And you can't speak enough about the play of the offensive line. I don't think Chuck has been sacked for three straight games."

The gaudy numbers put up by the Iowa offense have overshadowed the fact that its defense has played very well, for

the most part. The Blackhawks should be tested by a Mid-Missouri offense that averages 45.4 points per game and got eight TD passes from Kyle Middleton in the CPP\PPFL championship game last week.

That league, however, plays football outdoors on an indoor-sized field. And Wolff said the Outlaws could have a rude awakening tonight when the walls on each sideline at the MAC come into play.

"When you can catch a ball and run out of bounds, that's pretty easy," he said. "When you can catch a ball while getting driven into the wall and hold on to it, you've done something special."

Tonight's game, win or lose, will not affect Iowa's status in the APP\PPFL. The Blackhawks have a two-game lead on both Kansas and Springfield, Mo., at the halfway point.

Wolff said "things are good" as far as where Iowa sits right now, but he's being cautious with his approach toward the second half of the season.

"We really control our own destiny right now," he said. "It's a matter of taking opponents one week at a time, making sure we have a sound game plan and letting our guys go out and execute it."