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WKU football

Tops still have 'a lot to play for'

WKU enters final four-game conference stretch after loss to BYU

By JARED MacDONALD jmacdonald@bgdailynews.com

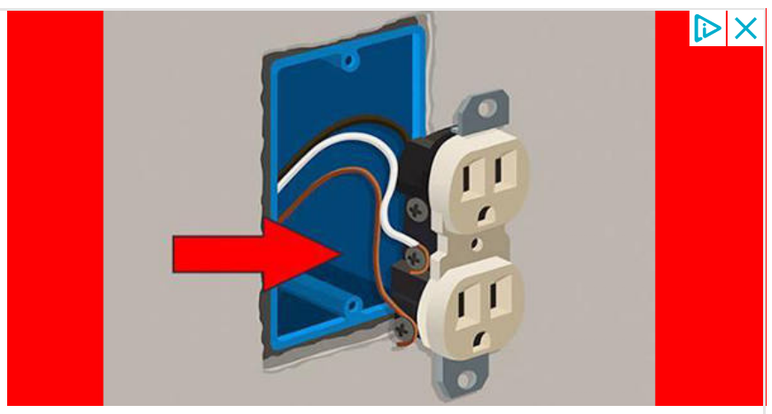
Nov 1, 2020

Western Kentucky defensive back Dominique Bradshaw (left) breaks up a pass to BYU wide receiver Keanu Hill (center) as WKU defensive back Kendrick Simpkins watches during BYU's 41-10 win Saturday in Provo, Utah.

Rick Bowmer/AP

PROVO, Utah – Since he's been Western Kentucky's head football coach, Tyson Helton has stated clearly that, win or lose, the team will wake up on Sunday and prepare for the next opponent.

Even after a 41-10 loss to No. 11 BYU at LaVell Edwards Stadium in Provo, Utah, on Saturday that dropped the Hilltoppers to 2-5 on the season, the second-year head coach is not straying from that approach as his team prepares for an important four-game conference stretch to close the regular season.

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"So long as I wake up in the morning, that's what's going to happen," Helton said following the loss. "I'm going to wake up in the morning and go to work, and there's a lot to play for. We've got four games left, they're conference games, have an opportunity to have a winning record and finish strong to be able to say, 'Hey, we had a solid football team.' "

This week, however, the team might be getting to work on limited sleep. WKU flew back from Utah immediately following Saturday's game and arrived back in Bowling Green in the early morning hours Sunday. The trip west was one of three long road games in the final five games for WKU. It's a stretch that includes a game against FAU in Boca Raton, Fla., this week, and a game at Charlotte to close out the regular season.

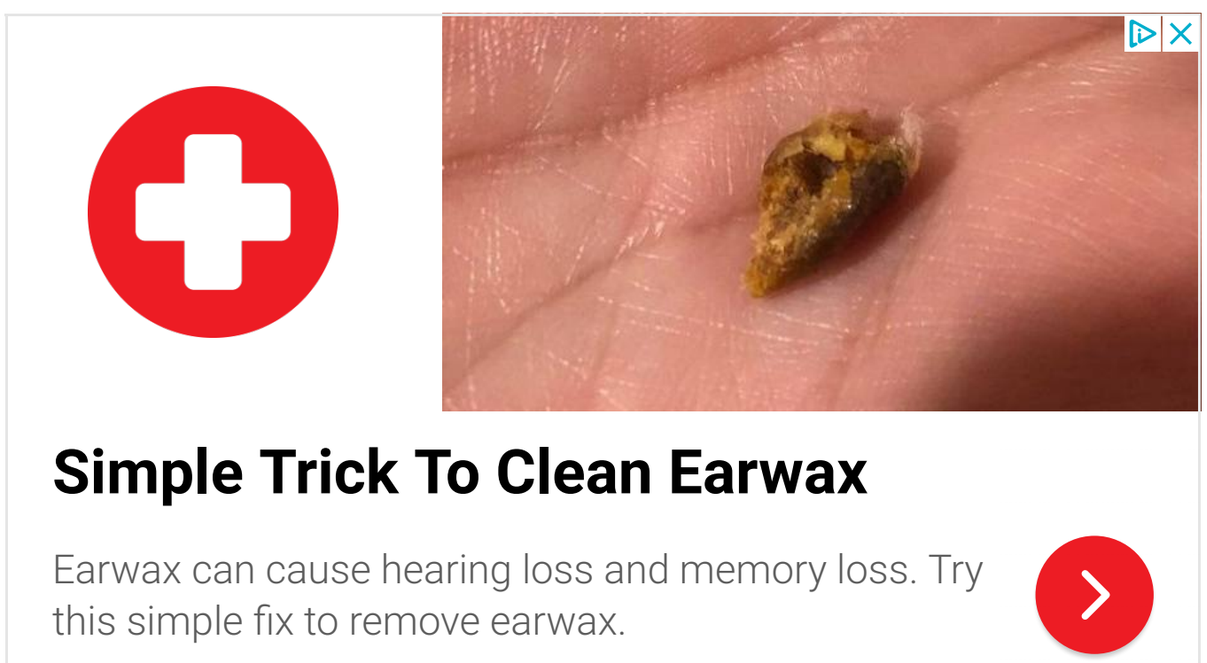


“We don’t think about it that much. It’s just part of what we do, it’s just part of the game,” Helton said Monday leading up to the BYU game. “We’re just glad to be playing, to be quite honest with you. We could be sitting at the house, so I don’t think anybody’s sitting here worried about how far you’ve got to travel.

“... Again, we’re just in the mindset of we’re glad to be playing, what’s the best thing for our program, all those kind of things. If we’ve got to play every game on the road, that’s what we’ll do, just let us play the game.”

The team will have limited time to prepare for FAU, with teams not practicing Tuesday for Election Day, and will have to make up that time in other ways. And despite WKU’s record, the Hilltoppers are confident heading into the closing stretch hoping to improve on the current 1-2 mark in Conference USA play, even after suffering Saturday’s loss.

The stretch includes an FAU team that has only been able to play three games – all conference – and sits at 2-1. It’ll follow with games against Southern Miss (1-5 overall, 1-2 C-USA) and FIU (0-3, 0-1) at Houchens-Smith Stadium, and then a trip to Charlotte (2-3, 2-1).



“You’d like to say like, ‘Oh, there’s some doubt’ or whatever when you’re in this position. I don’t feel that,” WKU junior offensive lineman Mason Brooks said after the loss to BYU. “I feel confident – I really do. I feel confident in the locker room. I was just in there. You don’t see a lot of guys hanging their head – a lot of guys are mad, no one likes to lose, me included – but you don’t see a lot of guys hanging their heads. Guys want to play. I think we’re hungry for a win. We’re pissed off.

“ ... My confidence is high as far as down the stretch. I like where the guys’ minds are at. I feel like we’re locked in. Most of the guys’ eyes in there are locked in, focused. We’ll see. I’m ready for this week at practice for sure.”

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