

TOP STORY

WKU football

Tops' chance at winning record ends with loss at FAU

Helton: 'We've only got one choice -- try to go win the next one'

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Western Kentucky's Kyle Bailey (center) returns an interception during Saturday's 10-6 loss at FAU Stadium in Boca Raton, Fla.

Steve Roberts/WKU Athletics

BOCA RATON, Fla. – Western Kentucky entered last week's preparation following a blowout loss at BYU with confidence and an opportunity to still finish the season with a winning record, despite a start that didn't see the team have the success it would have liked.

Hilltopper head coach Tyson Helton said his defense deserved the honor of winning Saturday at Florida Atlantic because of how it played, but the offense struggled to put points on the board in the 10-6 loss that ended any opportunity at a winning season.



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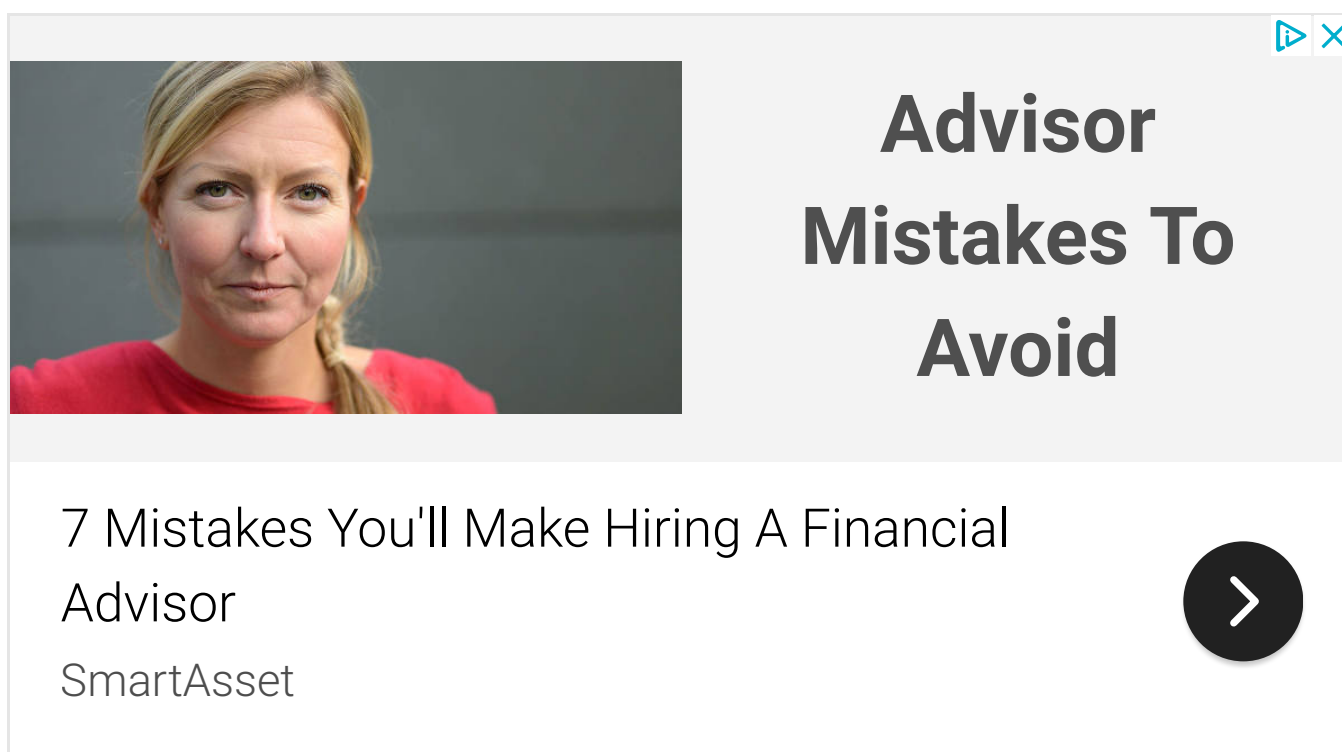
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“I am sad for those guys, I’m sad for our football team, but like we always say, we’ve got more to play,” Helton said following Saturday’s loss. “We’ve only got one choice – try to go win the next one.”

WKU now sits at 2-6 with three regular-season games remaining. The NCAA Division I Council announced in October bowl eligibility was waived for the 2020-21 bowl season, so teams no longer need a .500 record to qualify for a bowl game. It also waived the minimum number of contests required for FBS teams. But even in the unlikely event the Hilltoppers are invited to one of 37 bowl games, the best the team could finish is .500.



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The Hilltoppers claimed a victory in the SERVPRO First Responder Bowl over Western Michigan to cap off last year’s 9-4 turnaround season after going 3-9 the year prior. WKU will aim to finish better than that with home games against Southern Miss and FIU and a trip to Charlotte still on this year’s schedule.

“We’re kind of disappointed in the locker room, but ultimately you’ve got to wake up the next day, learn from your mistakes, watch the film and move on to the next opponent – I think it’s Southern Miss,” WKU redshirt junior defensive end Juwuan Jones said following Saturday’s loss. “You can’t dwell on the past. The last three games, it’s three opportunities to put your best self on tape. That’s how I’m approaching it and I’m pretty sure everyone else is approaching it.”



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The closing stretch is perhaps the easiest portion of WKU's schedule, too. Southern Miss sits at 2-5 after a comeback victory over North Alabama on Saturday, FIU is 0-3 and Charlotte is 2-3.

In comparison, WKU's six losses consisted of three teams – Liberty, Marshall and BYU – that are undefeated and in the AP Top 25. It also included Louisville from the ACC, as well as losses at UAB and FAU – both of which entered the year with expectations of competing for a Conference USA title.

But if the Hilltoppers want the regular season to end with positive momentum heading into the offseason, they'll need to play better offensively than they have through the first eight games.

“It's a lot of disappointment in the locker room, but we're going to come back to work and get ready for Southern Miss,” WKU junior Mitchell Tinsley said following the loss at FAU. “There's nothing really to talk about. Go over our mistakes, see what we did wrong, see what we could have done better and push on. This is just adversity.”

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WKU's defense allowed just 273 yards and 10 points in Saturday's loss, with the lone touchdown surrendered coming in the final three minutes of the fourth quarter. The offense got the ball back with time to score, but couldn't mount a comeback and turned the ball over on downs.

It's been a similar story for much of the season.

WKU failed to find the end zone Saturday, after scoring just one touchdown each of the two games before that – a 41-10 loss to then-No. 11 BYU and a 13-10 victory over FCS Chattanooga. The Hilltoppers had just 14 points each in losses to UAB and Marshall the two weeks before, and have scored the same number of points or fewer each game since scoring 24 in a six-point loss to Liberty in the second week of the season.

The Hilltoppers are now last in the league and 114th of 123 FBS teams in scoring offense at 15.2 points per game.

“I think there was a lot of boxes you could check that says we gave ourselves an opportunity to win the football game, but we're not scoring and you've got to score,” Helton said. “We ran the ball decent at times, we threw it decent at times. We had way too many dropped passes by our receivers. At the end of the day we've got to score.

“It’s hard to look positively at things when you lose a football game 10-6. Again, our kids just battled hard. All of our kids battled hard. I’m sad for those kids. That’s a tough loss for them, but we’ll bounce back.”{&end}

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