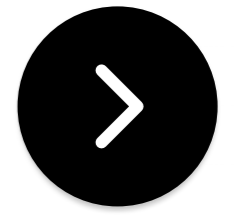




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TOP STORY

WKU FOOTBALL

Pigrome: 'I feel like they still believed in me'

WKU QB enters late against UTC, leads game-winning drive

By JARED MacDONALD jmacdonald@bgdailynews.com
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Western Kentucky quarterback Tyrrell Pigrome prepares to pass Sept. 19 against Liberty at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

Joseph Barkoff/For the Daily News

Following Western Kentucky's 13-10 win over Chattanooga on Saturday at Houchens-Smith Stadium, head coach Tyson Helton said his hat was off to three different groups.

First, it was the defense for keeping the score low and giving the offense an opportunity. Next, he said his hat was off to the offense for finding a way to score when the team needed it.



The third time was when he was talking about Tyrrell Pigrome, WKU's quarterback to start the season who hadn't played since midway through the third quarter of the team's blowout loss to Marshall on Oct. 10.

On Saturday, Pigrome entered the game late in the third quarter and led a game-winning scoring drive to lift the Hilltoppers over the Mocs that prevented a three-game skid.

"Really proud of Piggy coming off the bench. That's not an easy thing to do, especially on a night where it wasn't going great," Helton said. "... It's always hard coming in in those scenarios, so my hat's off to him, too, for making that throw and finding a way to score a touchdown."



The 5-foot-10, 210-pound dual-threat quarterback had impressed the coaching staff through the first three games with improvements he made in the team's 1-2 start, and even earned Conference USA's Offensive Player of the Week honors following WKU's win at Middle Tennessee.

To that point – and still – the Maryland graduate transfer was the team's leading rusher, but he struggled in the loss to the Thundering Herd. He was 12-of-21 passing for 61 yards, and had 28 yards on seven rushing attempts, with two fumbles resulting in Marshall scores. The Hilltoppers also botched a handoff attempt from Pigrome to Jakairi Moses that was returned by Tavante Beckett for a 38-yard Marshall touchdown to make it 35-0.

Kevaris Thomas took over from there and WKU scored two touchdowns. With the offense struggling and Pigrome battling turf toe, Thomas started the following week at UAB, and Pigrome didn't see action in Birmingham – his hometown where he led Clay-Chalkville High School to a pair of state championship games and was named the 2015 Gatorade Alabama Player of the Year. The Hilltoppers lost 37-14.



Pigrome entered Saturday with 12 seconds left in the third quarter to start WKU's first series since a 32-yard field goal from Brayden Narveson that made it 10-6. Helton said following Saturday's game Thomas had been battling a hip pointer from the UAB loss, and was hit while scrambling on the scoring drive and unable to continue after throwing for 59 yards on 12-of-17 passing.

On his first play, Pigrome completed a 38-yard pass to Mitchell Tinsley to get WKU to the UTC 35-yard line.

“We didn't bat an eye and said, ‘Piggy, you're up,’ and he went in there and did a couple of good things,” Helton said. “Wish he would have did some other good things, but at the end of the day we got a win. Again, that's tough. That's tough to come off the bench and try to go get a winning drive and I'm proud of him for doing that.”

His first drive stalled out and WKU went three-and-out its next possession, but got the ball back with 5:29 left and Pigrome delivered for the Tops. The Hilltoppers used a 10-play, 54-yard touchdown drive to take the lead and held on for a victory after confusion on the ensuing kickoff.



Pigrome ran the ball three times, and completed two of the three passes he attempted in the series. On the incomplection, UTC was flagged for roughing the passer to get WKU to the UTC 6.

Gaej Walker ran four yards, but then Pigrome and Walker were pushed back a yard each on the next two plays to bring up fourth down. WKU called a timeout, then UTC did the same. In the timeout, Helton and Pigrome were in agreement on the play call.

“We were both on the same page – I was like, ‘Fades,’ and he was like, ‘Yeah, we’re going to do a fade,’ “ Pigrome said. “I was like, ‘Good, we’re on the same page.’ “

Helton said with max protection, he gave Pigrome the option of Craig Burt Jr. on the left and Xavier Lane on the right. Both were big targets at 6-foot-4, but Pigrome went with Burt, who caught a 24-yard touchdown pass from Pigrome over a defender in WKU’s second game against Liberty.

Burt caught Pigrome’s pass for a 4-yard touchdown with 1:21 to play to put WKU up 13-10 Saturday.

“No matter who’s in there – if it’s Piggy, I believe he’s going to make plays, and if it’s KT, I believe he’s going to make plays just as much,” Burt said. “It doesn’t matter who’s in there, we’ve just got to keep doing the same thing no matter who’s back there running the offense.”

Pigrome finished with 73 yards and a touchdown on 4-of-8 passing in the game, and had two yards on four carries.

While the offense continued to struggle through much of the game – WKU had just 254 yards and currently ranks 89th of 101 FBS teams in total offense with 277.2 yards per game and 90th in scoring offense at 17.7 points per game – Pigrome came through in his first appearance since leaving the game against Marshall when he needed to for what Helton called “not a pretty win by any means.”



“At the end of the day, I’m with them. I’m with them from the start to the finish, regardless of where I’m at,” Pigrome said. “ ... If coach needed me to do that, needed me to come in there and help the team out, I’m here.

“I feel like, as a whole, they have my back, too, so it really wasn’t just a me thing. I feel like they still believed in me and I went in there and just tried to handle my business and came out on top.”{&end}

Jared MacDonald

Covering Western Kentucky University athletics for the Bowling Green Daily News.