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TOP STORY

WKU football Helton sees 'a lot of similarities' between WKU, Troy Hilltoppers, Trojans bounced back from tough losses with big wins Saturday

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Western Kentucky tight end Joshua Simon hurdles an FIU defensive line
Joe Imel/jimel@bgdailynews.com

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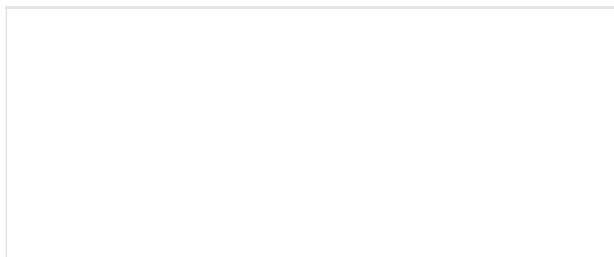
Tops bounce back, blow out FIU in C-USA opener

Western Kentucky and Troy are in similar positions entering this week's matchup.

The Hilltoppers bounced back from a tough loss at Indiana with a 73-0 drubbing of FIU on Saturday in their Conference USA opener, while the Trojans knocked off Marshall on Saturday after a heartbreaking loss at Appalachian State the week prior.

The two will face off at 6 p.m. Saturday at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

"Troy this week. Really, really excited about them," WKU head coach Tyson Helton said. "... Have a great opponent coming in in Troy. Really good football team, very competitive team. I've been really impressed with them. I think our team knows it's going to be a highly competitive game, so we're looking forward to the contest."





VIDEO: Tyson Helton talks about WKU's upcoming game vs. Troy

WKU is 3-1 after Saturday's win, in which it scored the most points in a single game in its FBS era and recorded its first shutout since 2011. It came after missing out on opportunities in Bloomington, Ind., to knock off the Hoosiers the week before – the Hilltoppers led by eight with less than four minutes to play and missed what would have been a game-winning field goal as time expired, before falling in overtime.

“They’re 3-1 on the year, only loss to Indiana in overtime,” Troy coach Jon Sumrall told reporters Monday. “ ... They could very, very, very easily be 4-0.”

Troy made the trip to Boone, N.C., the same week WKU played at Indiana, and lost 32-28 when Chase Brice

connected with Christan Horn on a 53-yard hail mary as time expired. Appalachian State was coming off a win at then-No. 17 Texas A&M and was hosting ESPN's College Gameday. The Trojans responded in a big way, beating Marshall – which upset Notre Dame earlier this year in South Bend, Ind. – 16-7 on Saturday to improve to 2-2. Troy's other loss came at Ole Miss in the opener.

“I think they're a tough-nosed football team, I think they're well-coached. Coach Sumrall's done a fantastic job with them,” Helton said. “You just don't go to App State and – technically in my mind they're supposed to win the game. For them to bounce back like they did, kind of like us against Indiana, says a lot about their football team.



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“ ... I think they're a complete football team and they're playing good football. When I look at them, I see a lot of similarities to us.”

The game also means the return of Jarret Doege to Bowling Green.

Doege transferred to WKU before spring practices and was in a competition for the starting quarterback job with Austin Reed through camp, but entered the transfer portal after Reed was named starter. Doege has seen limited action behind Gunnar Watson, and thrown for 124 yards and a touchdown on 6-of-12 passing in two appearances. Watson is ninth nationally with 1,249 yards passing, while Reed ranks sixth with 1,263 yards passing.

Sumrall told reporters Monday, “I’m not going to build our game plan around Jarret’s information, but I’m not going to ignore the fact we’ve got a guy that practiced with them this season,” and Helton also said he doesn’t expect it to factor much or be a distraction for his team.

“First of all, I love Doege, so it’s not a distraction. It’s going to be great to see him,” Helton said. “We don’t think about that. As far as game planning and all that, we kind of do what we do. Coach (Ben) Arbuckle’s done a great job early in the season and he’s always mixing in new signals and mixing things up, so I don’t think from a scheme or that kind of thing it affects us, them knowing what we do. I’m happy for him and I’m glad he’s there. It’ll be good to see him again.”

WKU opened as a six-point favorite for the game, which is set to be streamed on ESPN+.

While Helton said he “stirred the pot a little bit” leading into the FIU game, he doesn’t expect motivation to be lacking for the Hilltoppers’ game Saturday against Troy. The two

former Sun Belt foes have faced off 12 times – including seven straight years from 2007-13 as conference opponents – and the Trojans hold a 9-2-1 advantage in the series.

“From the motivational piece, they’re self-motivated. I just try to hit key points. They already watched the film against Troy before I even get to them in a team meeting. So when I look at them in their eyes, they already know that we’ve got to show up and play our best football,” Helton said. “They know what it’s going to take work-wise throughout the week and the preparation it’s going to take. They’re looking forward to that challenge. I think they respect the opponent we’re about to play and what they’re capable of doing.

“It kind of gets you going – you know you’re playing a good opponent, you know that it’s a good matchup and I think they’re excited about that, but I think there’s a lot of respect for that opponent as well.”{&end}

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

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