

Blackhawks rally past Koyotes, 34-31



Iowa Blackhawks wide receiver Mike Sturtart slips away from Kansas Koyotes defensive end Wayman Carter as he heads for the end zone in the beginning for the first period of the Friday night's game at the Mid-America Center.

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Iowa quarterback Chuck Wright is Italian, and he listened to the theme from "Rocky" on his way to the Mid-America Center for a showdown Saturday with APFL rival Kansas.

When he heard "Gonna Fly Now" again during the fourth quarter of the game, his team was in the process of playing out Rocky II on the field because the Blackhawks had to come off the canvas to knock out the champ.

Trailing by 15 in the fourth quarter, Iowa rallied for a stunning 34-31 victory over the Koyotes. Wright engineered a pair of final-period touchdown drives and kicker Jerry Lakin knocked home the game-winning field goal with 44 seconds left.

"Everybody - offense, defense and special teams with Jerry making the game-winner - was phenomenal," Wright said. "It was just everybody stepping up. It doesn't get any better than this."

Through three quarters, the Blackhawks seemingly didn't have a prayer. Iowa managed only three first downs on its first nine offensive possessions and was down 31-16 entering the fourth.

Then Wright got hot.

After being intercepted three times and completing only 5 of his first 12 passes, he connected on 5 of 6 attempts on a pair of touchdown drives that pulled the Blackhawks even at 31-31.

Kansas kicker Chris Thompson had a chance to put his team back in front with less than two minutes to play, but defensive lineman Jeff McQuinn blocked his 50-yard attempt to give Iowa the ball at the Koyote 16 and set up Lakin's kick.

It was the last of three big plays by Lewis Central graduate. The Blackhawks may not have even been in the game if it weren't for his sack and interception in the first half.

McQuinn sacked Koyote quarterback Carlos Kelly for a safety on the second play of second quarter to pull the Blackhawks to within four after they trailed 13-0. On the second play of Kansas' next possession, he intercepted a tipped ball at the Koyote 14 to set up a Steve Rush TD that gave Iowa a 16-13 lead.

"I try to be a ball hawk," McQuinn said. "Every time I see the ball, I run after it. After I got that safety, I wanted to do something else to get us even more sparked up. I just did what I can to help us get our heads back in the game."

The Koyotes moved back in front 21-16 with 4:06 left in the first half on a 9-yard TD pass from Kelly to Jeff Foster. They tacked on another 10 points in the third quarter to move in front by 15 before Wright took over.

The veteran Iowa QB had been alternating quarters behind center with rookie Ben Alford until he started to warm up late in the third. Blackhawks offensive coordinator Justin Kammrad stayed with him, which eventually led Iowa to a victory that puts it alone atop the APFL.

"I just went up to Coach Kammrad and told him, 'just put the team on my back and let me lead them,'" Wright said. "This puts us in a great position because we control our own fate now. As long as we take care of business and win all the games this year, we're going to host the first-ever championship game here in Council Bluffs."

Kansas (3-0) 13 8 10 0 - 31

Iowa (2-1) 7 9 0 18 - 34

K - Chris Thompson 41 FG

K - Thompson 34 FG

K - Solomon Brittian 13 blocked kick return (Thompson kick)

I - Steve Rush 4 run (Jerry Lakin kick)

I - Safety, Jeff McQuinn sacked Carlos Kelly in end zone

I - Rush 14 run (Lakin kick)

K - Jeff Foster 9 pass from Kelly (Justin Wrecke pass from Nathan Bolden)

K - Thompson 52 FG

K - Wrecke 25 pass from Kelly (Thompson kick)

I - Mike Stuart 1 run (Lakin kick)

I - Stuart 4 run (Ben Alford pass from Chuck Wright)

I - Lakin 37 FG