

Blackhawks begin postseason at MAC

By JOSH MURPHY

Published: Friday, July 8, 2005 2:00 AM CDT

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The Iowa Blackhawks will take on the Wichita Aviators in the first-round American Professional Football League playoff game on Saturday at 7:05 p.m. at the Mid-America Center.

Iowa (5-3) comes into the game on a roll, having beaten the Kansas Storm 54-3 and the Nebraska Bears 45-34 in its previous two contests. The Blackhawks will also have health on their side, something that has not been common this season.

"We're basically back to 100-percent, health-wise," said Blackhawks general manager Jake Hiffernan. "We're finally getting the players back healthy, and they're just playing great football."

Defensive lineman Shun Wells will be returning from a knee injury that has sidelined him for the past two games. Wells will team up with Demetrius Richards, named APFL Defensive Lineman of the Year by indoorfootballfan.com, to form a formidable defensive tandem.

"(Wells) practiced and he didn't show any signs of an injury," said Hiffernan. "With him back, we'll be at full strength."

Wide receiver Kurt Ferguson played while injured against Nebraska, and he is expected to be healthy on Saturday.

"(Ferguson is) close to 100-percent, so he's ready," Hiffernan noted.

The Blackhawks have also upgraded their offensive line, having signed Jack Conley, who played for the Nebraska Bears during the regular season. Conley, an imposing figure standing at 6-foot-4 and 365 pounds, was named one of four Offensive Linemen of the Year by indoorfootballfan.com, along with fellow Blackhawk Tyrice Ellebb.

"(Conley) is extremely mobile," said Hiffernan. "He'll give (quarterback) Chuck (Wright) that extra half-second of protection."

"With him being as big and as good as he is, we couldn't say no (to signing him)."

Coach Mike Wolff, named APFL Coach of the Year by indoorfootballfan.com, will rely on his high-scoring offense, with Wright leading the way in the contest.

"(Wright) looks like he's in midseason form," Hiffernan said. "He's peaking at the right time."

Wright's primary targets will likely be wide receivers Ferguson, George Patterson III, and Yano Jones.

"We're going to need (Jones) tomorrow," said Hiffernan. "We'll probably (also) run him quite a bit on defense tomorrow."

The Blackhawks also have one of the strongest offensive weapons in the APFL in running back Justin Kammrad. The former Thomas Jefferson and Nebraska-Omaha standout leads the league in touchdowns and yards gained from scrimmage.

Iowa will face a Wichita team which, despite losing 30-26 to the Kansas Koyotes on July 2, comes in red hot. The Aviators (5-5) beat the Blackhawks 27-24 on June 4 at the MAC in their previous matchup, and the Blackhawks beat Wichita 40-35 in Wichita in their first game of the season.

The Aviators will be led by former Kansas State quarterback Jonathan Beasley and wide receiver Donald Payne, an indoorfootball.com Wide Receiver of the Year.

"He's one of the league's best," Hiffernan said.

The winner of Saturday's game will travel to Topeka, Kan. on Saturday, July 16, to take on the Koyotes in the APFL championship game. Hiffernan said that Wichita will provide a challenge but he feels confident that the Blackhawks will prevail.

"They're a tough team, but I'm confident we'll beat them," Hiffernan said.