

Blackhawks set to play for APFL championship

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Published: Saturday, July 17, 2010 12:18 AM CDT

One defensive breakdown. One controversial call. One special teams injury.

If any of the three doesn't happen during an early June loss at Mid-Missouri, the Iowa Blackhawks would be playing for a perfect season tonight at the Mid-America Center.

Having a shot at a second consecutive American Professional Football League title will have to suffice instead.

The reigning champion Blackhawks host the Outlaws tonight in the league championship game at the MAC. Kickoff for the matchup between the top two teams in the APFL this summer is set for 7:05.

Iowa owner/president Jake Hiffenan, who is actively trying to sell his franchise, called this season the best his team has had in its 11 years of existence. It would mean little, however, if the Blackhawks can't finish it off with another title.

"Every year, we set out with that goal," Iowa coach Mike Wolff said. "I told our guys at the beginning of the year that we had the talent, barring injury, to do something special. Right now, we're on the cusp of that something special."

The Blackhawks (9-1) have won three straight games since suffering a 41-38 defeat at the hands of the Outlaws in Sedalia, Mo. In that game, Iowa gave up the winning touchdown on a fourth-and-goal play from the 16, had an ensuing touchdown wiped out and played the second half without attempting a field goal or extra point due to an injury to veteran kicker Jerry Lakin.

Two weeks later, Iowa avenged the loss while earning the home-field advantage throughout the APFL postseason. It was the Blackhawks' first win in three down-to-the-wire games against a Mid-Missouri team that has gone 8-2 in its first indoor season after winning three straight outdoor titles in the Central Plains Football League.

The Outlaws are led by dual-threat quarterback Kyle Middleton, playmaking wide receiver Eric Brown and energetic linebacker Tufue Tua. Tua and defensive lineman Tenny Barber actually played on Iowa's championship team in 2009 after Mid-Missouri's season ended.

Kicker Adrian Trevino, however, may be the Outlaws' top weapon. Called "the best kicker I've ever seen" by Iowa offensive coordinator Brett Ryan, the Missouri Valley College product hit field goals from 60, 56 and 46 yards in his last trip to the MAC.

"They can score from anywhere on the field," Wolff said. "With that kicker, they're a threat - even inside their own 5."

Kicking is just one area in which the Blackhawks have been hampered by injury this season. Iowa lost tailback Mell Holliday in the last game against Mid-Missouri and have played nearly the entire season without defensive standout Chris Moore, who was hurt in the opener.

The addition of running back/linebacker Chris Bradford, who is splitting time with Eric Johnson in the backfield, and the return of former players Scott Yates and Nick Freet have helped fill those voids.

Still, the Blackhawks have persevered to move within a win of another APFL title, which could make the Iowa franchise more interesting to a prospective buyer.

Hiffenan has expressed interest in selling the team since last September, but only to a party that's interested in taking the team to bigger and better things.

"It's not a matter that we wanted to sell it," he said. "Financially, I'm just not able to take it to the next level. We're

definitely shopping for the right party.”

Hiffernan started the Blackhawks franchise, then called the Council Bluffs Rams, by buying equipment with a credit card 11 years ago. He brought Wolff aboard immediately and the team began play in a recreational league in Nebraska.

Since then, Iowa has grown into a championship franchise in a professional league. And Hiffernan believes the Blackhawks still have their best days ahead.

“If we get the right people in that will spend money the right way, this thing could be amazingly successful,” he said.