

DU Seeking Redemption in Jonesboro

Written by Pat Clifton

Wednesday, 13 March 2013 13:07



Arkansas State hosts Davenport Saturday in Jonesboro, Ark. in a meeting between a team riding high off a win over Life and a team looking to rebound from a loss to the Running Eagles.

The Red Wolves are 1-0 in the Mid-South after a 28-22 win over Life on Saturday, and Davenport is 0-1 having lost 53-0 in Marietta, Ga. the week prior.

“I think [Davenport’s] going to come down here a much improved team,” said Arkansas State coach Alex Houser. “From watching the film of their Life match, they improved within that game, drastically from the first half to second half. So they’re going to be much better than that score line showed of them.”

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Houser said he has spoken to his team about moving on from the emotional win over Life and turning attention to the Panthers.

“It’s something that we’ve talked about. It’s great, but that win was last weekend and still just one match,” he said. “I came away feeling like we could have put in a better performance, and it was great to hear the guys echo the same sentiment. We’re looking to go out and get a solid performance and hopefully get a good result in our favor.”

Davenport’s game against Life was its first-ever in DI-A. The back-to-back DI-AA National Champions got accustomed to the speed of the game as minutes wore on and Life’s lead increased, and the Panthers never stopped competing.

“One thing that stood out to me was, I think after they scored their first try, Angus Maclellan told the guys, ‘We’re getting scored on, but I’m still having fun. This is the level I want to play at,’” said Davenport head coach Kruger Van Biljon.

“So my guys know what’s expected at the next level now, and I think we will adjust accordingly. If you don’t play that level you’re not going to get used to it...Game fitness and field fitness are two totally different things.”

Davenport and Arkansas State have never clashed before, in 15s or 7s, but both coaching staffs are aware of each other’s dangerous personnel.

“They’ve obviously got a kid in JP Eloff who can kick the ball really well who is also talented,” said Houser of Davenport’s All American flyhalf.

“He is almost a blend of [Joe] Cowley and Colton [Cariaga] in that kind of aspect. He’s got a big foot like Cowley, but he’s a little more agile and athletic like Colton, so we’ve got to make sure he doesn’t beat us, and do the typical things – make our tackles and keep the ball.”

“We have to be ready for in everything you can think about. They’ve got speed, they’ve got size, they’ve got skill. They’ve got everything you want in a rugby team,” said Van Biljon of the Red

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Wolves.

“We can’t just focus on [Dylan Carrion], who’s a phenomenal rugby player. If you focus on him, they’re going to burn us on the outside. If you focus on the outside, they’ll burn you in the forwards. We have to back ourselves.”

The game has huge significance in the Mid-South standings, as does every league game. If the Red Wolves win, they can do no worse than 2-2. If the Panthers win, they can do no better than 2-2. The winner of the Mid-South automatically advances to the DI-A quarterfinals, while second place can be challenge by the winner of the Allied Rugby Conference.

“Playing in a small but very talented conference with only four league matches doesn’t leave much room for error,” said Houser, “so we’ve definitely got to take care of our work here in our place, for sure.”