

Vandals take on La. Tech  
Idaho looking to rebound from last week's 70-45 loss

By Sandra Kelly, Daily News staff writer

Posted on: Saturday, October 31, 2009

The Idaho football team is ready to start a new streak.

Last week the Vandals lost to Nevada 70-45. It was a brutal wakeup call to a team that was enjoying a five-game winning streak.

The Vandals are ready to put that game behind them and focus on the future.

"They were hungry as could be when we came in and ran that afternoon (Sunday)," Idaho football coach Robb Akey said. "They were anxious when we came to the team meeting together to get themselves back on track."

The coaches didn't dwell on all the negatives of the Nevada game. Each unit went through the tape and learned from it, and then the coaches instructed their team to get over it.

"We reminded them of all the good things that have taken place, and to me that was an important thing we needed to pay attention to. We knew what needed to be fixed. We didn't need to lose that football game again," Akey said. "We coach on every play, whether the last play was a good one or a bad one, you have to kick that to the curb and focus on the next play. If I'm going to teach them that way to play, I'd better teach them to play that way game to game also."

Today the Vandals face Louisiana Tech, a team in a must-win situation if they are going to go back-to-back bowl seasons.

The Bulldogs were the only WAC team last year to win a bowl game, and though they are down a bit, they still possess some big weapons.

La. Tech is the top punt-return team and has the best pass defense in the WAC. It is second in the conference in sacks per game with 4.14, and it has D'Anthony Smith, an All-American candidate, at tackle.

Phillip Livas leads the WAC in return yards at 30 a clip, and last week against Utah State he had a 100-yard TD kickoff return. He's also a slippery running back who scoots for 113 all-purpose yards a game and is a player Akey has been impressed with.

The Bulldogs also have Daniel Porter, who runs for 85 a game, averages nearly 6 yards a carry and has scored 6 touchdowns.

La. Tech likes to run the football. The team averages 172 yards on the ground and 355 total offensive yards per game, and it will be a good test for a Vandal defense that was No. 1 against the run before falling to Nevada.

"They are good at running the football," Akey said. "They have a good little running back who breaks more tackles - he's good at that. They've got a big offensive line, they've got a quarterback who's been running the show for them for a period of time now. They've got a receiver that has great ability with

the ball in his hands."

Junior Ross Jenkins took over under center midway through last season, and he throws for nearly 180 yards a game.

"I think they are a very athletic outfit," Akey said. "... They've got a linebacker (Adrien Cole) who's a very good player and two safeties (Tank Calais and Antonio Baker). They are a good, athletic group."

The best inner battle should come on the line between Idaho left guard Mike Iupati and Smith. Both have the potential to play in the NFL, and both are big, strong, dominating players.

"That should be a nice showdown within the showdown between him and Mike Iupati," Akey said.

On paper, Idaho has the slight edge. La. Tech averages 26 points a game while Idaho averages 31.5. Defensively, the Bulldogs hold teams to 22 points a game while Idaho averages 31. The Bulldog offense averages 355 yards a game while Idaho averages 360, and both are nearly even on time of possession with La. Tech holding the ball 29:32 and Idaho 30:28.

Two big things in Idaho's favor are playing at home and its goal of solidifying a bowl spot.

At 6-2, the Vandals are bowl eligible, but they aren't guaranteed anything, and their chances to get a bowl invite will greatly increase if they can get another win.

The Vandals also have the Dome, a place that when full can frustrate offensive play calling.

"I'm excited about having three of our remaining four games in the Dome," Akey said. "... Enjoying the confines of our Dome and all that comes with it - the atmosphere, the fans, having people on our side when we come into it. It's going to be awesome."

Kickoff is set for 2 p.m.

Sandra Kelly can be reached at (208) 882-5561, ext. 231, or by e-mail at [skelly@dnews.com](mailto:skelly@dnews.com).