

## UI braces for Nevada's effective ground game

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By Jesse Baumgartner Of the Tribune

Colin Kaepernick...

A week after seeing Hawaii's pass-dominant offense, the Idaho defense has had to change gears quickly.

Instead of the aerial attack UH presented with the run-and-shoot scheme, the Vandals will be focusing mainly on the ground game when they go up against the nation's top rushing offense in the Nevada Wolf Pack.

"We're going from one extreme to the next," defensive coordinator Mark Criner said. "And my God, you couldn't have picked a worse situation or combination to have."

But that's the hand Idaho has been dealt as it enters its most high-profile WAC matchup of the season on Saturday in Reno (1 p.m., KLEW).

Nevada junior quarterback Colin Kaepernick is easily the most recognizable face of that vaunted ground game, though he's also an accomplished passer with nine touchdowns so far this season. His ability to do both is what makes Nevada dangerous, but the running game is the team's staple.

Kaepernick has put up 461 yards rushing so far this year, while running backs Vai Taua and Luke Lippincott have 463 and 497, respectively. They provide the bulk of Nevada's nation-leading 292.8 rushing yards per game (6.8 ypc), which is the main reason the Wolf Pack are fourth in the country in total yards with 479.5.

"The reason why this run game is so successful is because this quarterback in what he does, they involve him within the option running game," Criner said.

"And so now, they'll add receivers, they'll add tight ends to be able to run the option, or forms of the option with the quarterback involved in that."

As a sophomore last season, Kaepernick exploded for 39 total touchdowns and averaged more than 300 total yards a game. He put up 243 passing yards, 57 rushing yards and three touchdowns in last year's 49-14 romp over Idaho in the Kibbie Dome.

"You've gotta look at him first - he's the trigger man," Idaho coach Robb Akey said. "He's about 6-foot-12 now. He runs a four-two 40, he's got a strong arm - he's got a cape on him."

"I think the guy is a hell of a player, I really do. I'm not being a smart-tail when I say that. I think the guy is a very talented player."

Kaepernick and his Wolf Pack teammates opened this season with a tough stretch against Notre Dame, Colorado State and Missouri, and things looked rocky after an 0-3 start.

But they've rebounded strongly since and won their first two WAC games to even their record at 3-3.

That included a come-from-behind 35-32 victory last week on the road against Utah State.

"It says an awful lot. It really does," Nevada coach Chris Ault said of the win.

"The first half on both sides of the ball we were really inconsistent, and the second half (we) made some offensive adjustments and really did a nice job.

"I thought the kids executed very, very well with some of the adjustments we made. I think it shows you're growing up."

During these last three games, Nevada has quickly become the offensive juggernaut that most people predicted coming into the season, and that unit poses plenty of problems for an Idaho defense that has lived by the bend-but-don't-break philosophy.

Idaho has the top rushing defense in the WAC at 95.6 yards a game, and Criner said this week will be the biggest test his team has had in that area.

But the danger with Nevada is Kaepernick's ability to also drop back and find receivers, which means the Vandals will be putting a major emphasis on reading plays at the line and trying to figure out what the dangerous quarterback is doing on each snap.

"What these guys do, it's not traditional power, outside zone or inside zone (run game)," Criner said.

"They do those things, but they do misdirection and option along with an inside zone, and outside zone.

"They do a good job with their play-action off of their outside zone. They try to match every pass for every run that they do have, which is important."

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