

Prince's reputation rests on shoulders of his defense

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The honeymoon is over for Kansas State football Coach Ron Prince.

This year, Wildcats' fans are not going to keep quiet if the team's defense continues to play badly. The K-State fan base is a tolerant bunch, but they have their limits. And another game like the debacle against Louisville may push them over the edge.

Prince did a tremendous job in his first year as head coach, leading the Wildcats to the post-season for the first time in three years.

Unfortunately, his second year as coach did not go well. The Wildcats' defense collapsed with four games remaining in the season. The defense did not just look bad; it looked helpless.

According to my own tabulations, the Wildcats gave up an

average of 49.2 points in their last four games. 49.2 points! It's bad to let a team ever score that many points against you, but it is beyond awful to give up that many points on average. It was during this time when people started questioning whether Prince was really the right guy for the job.

When the season mercifully ended, it was clear to the Wildcat faithful that some major adjustments needed to be made in the off season in order to fix what seemed to be a fatally flawed defensive system.

After watching the Cardinals run up and down the field against the Wildcats a couple of weeks ago, it's hard for me to see much improvement on defensive since last year.

The Cardinals piled up 576 yards against the Wildcats on their way to a 38-29 victory on Sept. 17. They gained 303 yards on the ground and freshman running back Victor Anderson

torched K-State defenders for 176 yards and 3 touchdowns. The game showed how far K-State still has to go before they can call themselves a good defensive ball club.

If K-State continues to struggle on defense, Prince will receive the brunt of blame. He will be castigated by the media for being unable to make adjustments when things are going wrong for his team, and fans will start calling his hire a mistake.

This is why it's essential for Prince to get together with Defensive Coordinator Tim Tibesar and find out what needs to be done.

K-State has no chance of being competitive this season if the defense keeps giving up massive amounts of yards every game. For Prince's sake, I hope he figures out what ails his defense before the Wildcats faithful lose confidence in his coaching.

Sisters' solid year continues

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The Colby High boys cross country team ran seventh at the Hill City meet Thursday with 152 points overall.

Junior Bob Shroeder led the Eagles, coming in 18th with a time of 19 minutes, 34 seconds and freshman Jared Nally finished 33rd with 20:33.

"Bob Schroeder had a good run and looked smooth throughout the race," said Coach Bob Mannebach.

Ness City placed first at the meet with 34 points overall.

The girls team came in third place with 73 points overall. Sophomore Katrina Kaus continued her impressive season by finishing third with a time of 16 minutes, 30 seconds and sophomore Katherine Kaus followed in fourth at 16:48. Both won medals.

Sophomore Amy Schroeder finished 27th with

19:39.

"They had very good times," Mannebach said.

Norton High School finished first in the girls meet with 42 points.

The Colby junior varsity team saw a couple of its members perform well, as junior Brandon Rasmussen and freshman Jordan Rasmussen finished with 22:05 and 22:54 respectively. Both of them snared individual medals.

"Our team was a little tired running in this meet after running at Ulysses on Tuesday (Sept. 23)," Mannebach said, "however, every runner who ran at Hill City last year had a better time this year except one."

Mannebach said he was impressed with the way the girls team performed at the meet.

"The girls overall had a very good performance, while boys did not run as well as they did at Ulysses," he said.

Chiefs cherish first victory

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — A year without winning can play tricks on a man's mind.

Just ask Herm Edwards, who had trouble sleeping Sunday night after his Kansas City Chiefs halted a franchise-record 12-game losing streak with a 33-19 victory over Denver.

"I kept asking my wife about 1 o'clock, 'We won, right?'" Edwards said Tuesday. "She said, 'Yeah, you won, honey.'"

Their first victory since Oct. 21, 2007, was especially important for the raft of young players on the roster of the rebuilding Chiefs, Edwards said. Coaches had noted that many of the rookies were beginning to doubt whether they even belonged in the NFL after an 0-3 start that included back-to-back blowout losses to bottom feeders Oakland and Atlanta.

"I think they were questioning themselves," Edwards said. "They were questioning their talent. You can't question that. The way you overcome that, you've got to just keep playing. Just play with energy. Just keep going fast. Just keep playing hard."

Two-time Pro Bowler Larry Johnson ran for 198 yards, but most encouraging for Kansas City's long-term picture was the

energy and verve displayed by rookies. Two were given game balls. Dantrell Savage had a 51-yard kickoff return that swung the fourth-quarter momentum right back to Kansas City, and cornerback Brandon Carr played well all day against Denver's high-powered passing attack.

"The one thing you have when you're a young guy, you have talent. That's what gets you in this league," said Edwards. "But you also have passion. You're not going to know how to do everything correctly. That's part of the process of learning how to play. And so, you've got to keep playing with your passion. Don't let your passion die because you make mistakes and start thinking, over-analyzing things, and you play like a robot."

"You've got to go play. We made some errors. We didn't do everything right on either side of the football. But I thought the way we played, we played so hard, you cover up for it. If you continue to play that way, you're going to continue to get better. That's what we're trying to do."

Rookie left tackle Branden Albert, one of two first-round draft picks starting for the Chiefs, injured his elbow in the first half and

may not be able to play this week at Carolina. Edwards said the elbow was in a brace.

"I would say he's probably questionable this week," Edwards said. "His elbow is pretty swollen."

Royals finish season strong

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (AP) — The Kansas City Royals bumbled through August, with poor pitching, weak pitching, even botched popups, turning another disappointing season downright ugly.

Then came September.

The pitching got better, the bats produced hits and runs in bunches and the wins started piling up. The monthlong run wasn't enough to make up for the disappointment of the 14th losing season in 15 years. Losing always hurts, even when you've done it as much as the Royals.

What it did do, though, is provide something that's been missing in Kansas City for a long time: hope.

"Certainly, with the way we finished, I think we had more highs than lows," Royals manager Trey Hillman said Tuesday.

The Royals started off great in Hillman's first season, winning six of their first eight games. Then came a seven-game losing streak in April, followed by a 12-game slide in May that snuffed out hope of playoff contention.

That led to another August with nothing to play for, and the Royals acted like it, losing 18 of 21 games, the lowlight coming in a 3-2 loss to Texas on the 27th, when pitcher Brian Bannister flubbed a routine

popup to allow the go-ahead run to score, dropping Kansas City to a season-worst 21 games under .500.

Somehow, the Royals bounced back, opening September with a 5-4 win over Oakland, finishing it 18-8, their best month since opening the 2003 season 17-7.

Normally, a last-place team making a run the final month of the season doesn't mean much.

September is when teams out of the playoff hunt pack it in, when rosters are filled with call-ups getting their first look at the big leagues or career minor leaguers hoping to make an impression. Performing well in September doesn't always mean it's going to happen next season; the numbers are skewed too much.

Still, give the Royals some credit.

While most of its September wins came against Oakland, Cleveland and Seattle, teams that didn't have much left to play for, Kansas City also won two of three at Minnesota the final weekend, forcing the Twins into Tuesday's one-game playoff with the Chicago White Sox.

The Royals (75-87) finished with six more wins than last season, moved out of last place in the AL Central for the first time in five

years and cut their deficit in the division to 13 games after being 27 back at the end of 2007.

They can't help but feel like things are going to change.

"We had a couple bad stretches and got ourselves into too big of a hole," right-hander Gil Meche said. "Everybody feels pretty good with the way we're finishing and I think everybody is realizing we're really not that far."

Those bad stretches were tough to take, though.

Kansas City had three losing streaks of at least seven games and lacked power all season, finishing next to last in the AL with 120 homers. Right-hander Brian Bannister seemed to lose some of the steam he generated last year, when he went 12-9 with a 3.87 ERA, losing nine straight decisions before winning two of his final three starts. There also were problems with handling popups, one of the most routine plays in baseball.

Then there was Jose Guillen.

After becoming the highest-paid player in Kansas City history with a three-year, \$36 million deal, Guillen gave the Royals what they expected on the field, adding some needed pop to the lineup with 20 homers and 97 RBIs.



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