

©Here's the preview to Saturday's UAB - Army football game.

Army looks for Sixth Win

vs. UAB Saturday at West Point

By John Chuhran

CAMMVets Media

West Point, N.Y. – Undefeated Army (5-0, 4-0 in the American Athletic Conference) has had a dream start to the 2024 college football season and enough games have been played to show that the record is no mirage. The team from the banks of the Hudson River is for real and the reason behind it is simple to say but difficult to execute.

The Black Knights are the top running college football team in the nation (averaging 361.3 yards per game) and the defensive squad has kept the opposition in check so much that Army has never trailed in this campaign. That balance has enabled the Black Knights to post their first 5-0 record since the 1996 Army team, a group that went 10-2 and earned an invitation to the Independence Bowl (losing a close 32-29 struggle with Auburn).

Head coach Jeff Monken and the rest of the Army coaching staff have put together a team that plays in synchronicity, and they never look beyond the next game. This Saturday, the Black Knights host the Blazers of the University Alabama at Birmingham (12 PM EDT start with TV on the CBS Sports Network and radio on the Army Sports Network) at West Point's Michie Stadium.

The running game has been stunningly effective – so much so that while the offensive unit posted a season-high 49 points Saturday week to defeat Tulsa, it scored so efficiently that Army uncharacteristically finished with a time of possession of just 25:31 (resulting in Army falling from second in the nation to third with a new average ToP of 34:19).

Army still amassed 321 rushing yards – an average of 8 yards per carry – which was a result of beginning several drives with excellent field position and then having an impressive nine plays with gains of at least 20 yards. Leading the way was the dominant Offensive line Fullback Kanye Udoh, who logged 138 yards on the ground (including TD runs of 61 and 63 yards). Quarterback Bryson Daily ran for 110 yards and two TD while completing 5-for-5 passes for 140 yards and a TD to earn AAC Player of the Week honors. Daily leads the AAC with a rushing average of 120.4 yards per game (eighth in the nation) and 10 TD on the ground (third in the nation).

“I think you identify pretty quickly their (the opposition's) mentality and what they're trying to accomplish,” said Army Offensive Coordinator Cody Worley, “and what they're trying to stop going into the game. When we're efficient in the pass game and do concepts that we've been working since the summer – whether it's a perimeter game, whether it's inside run, whether it's change ups, whether

it's pass game – it gives us a critical advantage. We've got to be able to get to those things and execute them.

“I thought that they (Tulsa) did a really good job keeping us off balance, but we were able to take advantage of how they were playing us. They were pretty reckless in the secondary – they committed to stopping the run. We were able to hit some big passes in the first half to kind of soften them and then get other aspects of the game going.

“Everybody was saying, ‘that wasn't a typical Army drive or a typical Army performance.’ I think it's our responsibility to execute and score. We've talked about it in the preseason. If we score in two plays or we score in 18 plays, that's the goal. It was really good to see the halftime adjustments – our guys adjusted to the (defensive) front and how they were playing us.”

After intermission, Army scored 28 points and Tulsa was shut out.

Udoh and Daily delivered when given the opportunity, but make no mistake – much of the success of the running game rests on the shoulders of the Army offensive line. Center Brady Small, Guards Bill Katsigiannis and Paolo Gennarelli, and Tackles Connor Finucane are not the biggest or strongest lineman in college football, but they work as a unit to open and clear holes for runs and they buy time in holding the pocket open so the QB can find a receiver and complete a pass.

“I think our guys are confident,” Worley said. “They expect to be able to move the ball. At some point somebody's going to do something different and we've got to be able to adjust and overcome, but I've been really proud of how they've approached each and every drive.”

According to Army Head Coach Jeff Monken, UAB has a deceptive record. The Blazers (1-4, 0-2) may have only won once for second-year Head Coach Trent Dilfer, but at times they have played strongly, as Monken pointed out.

“Arkansas just beat Tennessee (ranked 4th in the nation at kickoff) on Saturday night,” Monken said, “a huge win. About two weeks before, UAB had them on the ropes and had the lead to start the game and had it tied up late. Their team is perfectly capable.”

Perhaps UAB is capable, but the 37-27 loss to Arkansas happened several games ago – an eternity in a sport where it is often thought “you are only as good as your last game.” Since then, the Blazers have lost three times, most recently last Saturday in a 71-20 rout by Tulane. Still, the Black Knights are taking nothing for granted.

“They're probably the most athletic unit we've played to date,” Worley said. “They've got a slew of transfers and guys that are really long and talented and athletic, so that forces us to be really good fundamentally and not invent new techniques. They present challenges in a lot of different ways. They're going to be multi-front, they're going to play long. They're athletic – they beat blocks. They do a good job of running to the football, playing physical, so they present challenges at each level.

“Really, every snap is different and that's what we stress to our guys. Just because they did something on the snap before doesn't mean they're going to do it again, so we've got to be fundamentally sound. We've got to continue to do our job and trust our fundamentals and not let how they're playing dictate our play.

“Every play is a unique play. It's a series of one plays, so we've got to do a good job of stressing that and executing and doing that as players.”

Players to watch on the Blazers include QBs Jacob Zano and Jalen Kitna; they have combined to throw 7 TD and 8 interceptions. Lee Beebe Jr. is the team's top runner with 347 ground yards on 65 carries and 3 TD.

With a win, Army will gain its sixth victory and become Bowl eligible at the earliest calendar day in program history.

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