

Hubbell having a blast at Louisville

Written by Jim Ecker

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Ryan Hubbell visited Iowa and Iowa State when he was a senior at Marion High School three years ago, but neither school offered him a football scholarship.

"I had Division II offers, but that was it," he said.

Instead of playing for the Hawkeyes or Cyclones, Hubbell has been playing for one of the top college football teams in the country this year at Louisville.

The Cardinals were 9-0 and ranked 11th in the nation before falling at Syracuse on Saturday, 45-26. That dropped Louisville to 20th in the AP poll with two games left in the regular season.

Hubbell spent two seasons at Iowa Western Community College before enrolling at Louisville last January. He's now a junior with another year to go.

Hubbell had offers last year from Louisville and Northern Illinois, but saw a greater opportunity with the Cardinals.

"Just the opportunity that I'd get to play, and I thought they'd have a successful season," he said. "I knew what they had coming back and I knew there was a chance to do something big."

Hubbell, a 6-foot-5, 232-pound tight end, has caught 10 passes for 169 yards and two touchdowns. He got free for a 72-yard touchdown reception against Temple two weeks ago in a 45-17 victory.

"It was awesome," he said. "I can't put it into words. Scoring a touchdown in a big game like that, it definitely provided a nice kick."

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The loss to Syracuse dropped Louisville to 4-1 in the Big East Conference, but the Cardinals can still win the league title if they beat Connecticut and Rutgers in their final two games. In any case, a bowl trip is likely.

Louisville finished 7-6 last season, but Hubbell studied the roster and liked what he saw.

"I didn't know to what extent, but I knew there was a chance to be successful," he said. "They had a lot of young players last year that were coming back and they had a lot of guys coming back with experience."

Hubbell has been the No. 2 tight end most of the season, but has started a few games due to injury to the man ahead of him on the depth chart.

"I'm excited," he said last week, before Louisville dropped its first game. "I'm excited for what's happened and what's been happening and everything that's going on for us right now."

"It's very exciting, to go to Iowa Western and coming here and having it happen so quick. I know we expected a good season, but I don't know if we expected this."

Louisville (9-1) defeated Kentucky, Missouri State, North Carolina, Florida International, Southern Miss, Pittsburgh, South Florida, Cincinnati and Temple before losing at Syracuse. The Cardinals were 9-0 for the first time in school history and had climbed to ninth in the BCS standings and 11th in the AP rankings before losing.

Louisville has enjoyed an average home crowd of 50,720 this season. Hubbell said the folks on campus and in town have been terrific.

"Everyone is really supportive," he said. "It's a fun place to be right now."