

Prairie gains confidence after scaring Cedar Falls

Written by Jim Ecker

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Things didn't look good for the Cedar Rapids Prairie football team last week.

Demetrius Harper, their top weapon, broke his collarbone Sept. 2 and was lost for the rest of the regular season, and the Hawks had to face top-ranked Cedar Falls after being shut out by Xavier.

If you follow Prairie football, you know what happened next. The Hawks gave Cedar Falls a tough game before falling, 41-28, and their confidence has soared despite an 0-3 start.

"It makes us feel like we can play with anybody in the state now and that we can beat anybody," Prairie quarterback Jace Hanna said Thursday after practice.

The Hawks visit Iowa City West (2-1) Friday night, continuing their meatgrinder schedule that's featured Washington (2-1), Xavier (3-0), Cedar Falls (3-0) and now West.

"I think we've made progress from Week 1 until now," new head coach Mike Morrissey said. "It might not show it in the standings, but I feel like our kids are getting better.

"They're gaining confidence with what we're doing on both sides of the ball, and believing in themselves a little bit more. You see that in these guys even walking the hallway.

"Even though our record might not show it, these guys are winners. They've given a total effort, they understand what it means now. And eventually it will pay off."

Hanna completed 26 of 39 passes for 361 yards and two touchdowns against Cedar Falls. He's thrown for 718 yards this season, which leads all quarterbacks in the Metro area.

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"We had a game plan where we were going to come out and pass it around and try to keep up with them," said Hanna, a 6-foot-1, 175-pound junior. "We knew if we could keep up with them the first half we could beat them."

Jarred Edmonds caught nine passes for 178 yards and two TDs against Cedar Falls as the primary receiver, but Hanna spread it around without Harper on the field.

"I think the other guys stepped into their role," Morrissey said. "They just did a really nice job. We have some good kids who understand, if one guy goes down the show still goes on."

Hanna has completed 45 of 82 passes for 54.9 percent, with three TDs and four interceptions this season. He said the game has slowed down for him as he gains more experience.

"It has a lot. It's slowed down a lot," he remarked. "The game was so fast, and now it's a lot better."

He's learning a new offense, studying film, seeing the openings in somebody's defense and making better reads.

"I could watch him grow over the course of the summertime," said Morrissey, who played quarterback in high school and college. "Just seeing a few weeks then was impressive. From Week 1 until now, he really exudes confidence."

"I'm sure it has slowed down for him quite a bit. He's a smart kid and he's a competitor. He's taken on his role as a leader, and we wouldn't expect anything less of him."

At the end of practice Thursday, Morrissey had his field-goal unit race onto the field and attempt a winning field goal in the final seconds of a game. They went 2-for-2.

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The next step will be doing it in a real game. "That would be nice," Hanna said.