

Missouri preparing for Independence Bowl

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A 6-5 season and another low-level bowl has left Missouri athletics director Mike Alden happy, but not impressed.

The Tigers are preparing to play Steve Spurrier's South Carolina team in the Independence Bowl Friday in Shreveport, La. For Alden, who longs for a return to the glory days of the 1960s when Missouri had 10 straight winning seasons and finished in the top 25 eight times, this year's showing is evidence of some progress.

"I think people forget that we are where we are today not based on last year, or the year before that; it's based on 20 or 30 years," Alden told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. "If I was to look at a snapshot of the year overall, I think I'm pleased with how we played this year."

"With that being said, we're not going to be satisfied with being 6-5 and just trying to work our way into bowl games. You want to do that consistently, and then you want to see those wins improve over the course of time."

Missouri is preparing for just its fourth bowl game since 1983. But

critics of coach Gary Pinkel say the momentum he gained early in his tenure has stalled.

This season, Missouri appeared on the verge of challenging for the Big 12 North title after a 3-1 start. But they lost three of their last four games, including a loss to rival Kansas, and needed to beat lowly Baylor just to get a bowl bid.

"I guess the only satisfaction out of the season is that we did make a bowl game," senior linebacker Derrick Ming said. "This was definitely not the season everybody expected to have. You look back at some of the games that we should have won, and it's disappointing."

Fans aren't enthusiastic, judging by Independence Bowl ticket sales. Through Friday, the team had sold only 2,500 of its tickets, which would be the lowest number by a Big 12 team since the Independence Bowl began its affiliation with the conference in 1998.

Pinkel said the season wasn't all Missouri wanted, but was still a success.

"Missouri's been to four bowls in 22 years. I'd suggest that it's a suc-

cessful season," Pinkel said.

"I told the players at the beginning of the season that we were going to have our ups and downs. That's the way it is. And I thought they did a good job handling everything."

Alden and Pinkel said the program was in shambles when Pinkel took over five years ago. Pinkel had to regain the trust of high school coaches around the state and rein-vigorate fans and boosters. But the most important thing Pinkel had to do was produce a marketable product.

In the 22 years following coach Warren Powers' last bowl appearance in 1983, the Tigers have had 11 seasons in which they've won three games or fewer. Pinkel has won at least five games in each of the past three years.

Pinkel and Alden acknowledge that they're not deaf to the comments being made about the team, the coaching staff and a desire for change.

Most of that desire for change is not directed at Pinkel but toward members of his coaching staff,

chiefly offensive coordinator Dave Christensen. He already had been a popular target for trying to make quarterback Brad Smith, the NCAA's all-time leading rusher among quarterbacks, a pocket passer last year. Missouri changed the offense this season to suit Smith, but at times it reverted back to some of its play from last season.

"I coach my coaches, and I feel very good about my staff," Pinkel said. "I think it's really easy to sit there and change coaches. To show people that, 'Hey, he's making a change and he's doing this and that.' But I won't do that. I'll do it if it's the right thing to do. I'll do it in a heartbeat if it's the right thing to do."

Alden said, "For us to be able to say that we've had two winning seasons in the last three years, and we've been to two bowl games in the last three years, there's hopefully a pattern that's starting to develop. My thought right now is that Gary and his staff and our team are starting to gain some traction there. That consistency will start to come."

Arizona Wildcats top Rutgers at Insight Bowl

PHOENIX (AP) — Rudy Carpenter threw for 467 yards and four touchdowns and Arizona State amassed an Insight Bowl-record 678 yards Tuesday night, holding off Rutgers for a wild 45-40 victory.

The teams combined for an Insight record 1,210 yards.

The Scarlet Knights (7-5), in their second bowl game in school history and first since 1978, led 33-31 after Jeremy Ito's 48-yard field goal with 12:56 to play.

But the favored Sun Devils (7-5) took the lead for good when, on second-and-25, Carpenter threw a 42-yard touchdown pass to Matt Miller.

The two-point conversion pass to Brent Miller was good and Arizona State led 39-33 with 10 minutes left.

Consecutive false start penalties ruined Rutgers' next possession, and the Sun Devils scored again on

an eight-play, 69-yard drive, Rudy Burgess getting his second TD of the night on a four-yard run to put Arizona State up 45-33 with 4:26 remaining.

Ryan Hart's 29-yard touchdown pass to Tres Moses kept it close at 45-40 with two minutes to go, but Zach Miller recovered the onside kick and the Sun Devils ran out the clock to win consecutive bowl games for the first time since 1987.

Hart, in his final game for Rutgers, completed 24-of-38 for 374 yards and three scores, two to Moses.

Burgess had 103 yards in 16 carries. Ray Rice, the Knights' 18-year-old freshman, gained 108 yard in 20 attempts.

Ito kicked four field goals, including a career-long and bowl record 52-yarder.

Carpenter, a redshirt freshman who took over for injured Sam

Keller eight games into the season, also had a 42-yard touchdown pass to Matt Miller, a 1-yarder to Zach Miller and a 22-yard TD toss to Terry Richardson.

Rutgers led 24-10 in the first half before Arizona State scored late to make it 24-17 at the break.

The Scarlet Knights went 80 yards in eight plays on the game's first possession. Hart was 4-for-4 on the drive.

His 21-yarder to Moses put the ball on the 14, and his 12-yard pass to Brian Leonard made it first-and-goal at the 1-yard line.

Hart threw a yard to Clark Harris for the touchdown.

Arizona State matched it with an 80-yard drive after the kickoff. Carpenter connected with Matt Miller for the 43-yard score.

Rutgers mowed through the ASU defense again on its next possession.

Eleven perfect entries so far in bowl game contest

After the first nine bowl games, there are 11 perfect entries in the 790 KXXX and Colby Free Press 2005 College Bowl Spectacular.

Perfect entries are from Don Hartman of Grainfield, Bob Mackley of Winona, Darlene Lauer of St. Francis, Rich Epp, Brent Wiedeman, Larry Ummel, Jake Haines, Kathy Elliott, Harold Jones, Scott Chrisman and Tim Moeder all of Colby.

There are 39 entries with one miss.

Epp, who works with 790 KXXX, is not eligible to win the grand prize, but is playing anyway.

In addition to the individual winner, the town that has the best scoring entries from people who live in that town, will receive a trophy.

There are 261 entries and 28 bowl games.

AP Briefs

PRO FOOTBALL

LUTZ, Fla. (AP) — Tony Dungy blinked back tears, straining to compose himself.

The Indianapolis Colts coach buried his eldest son, James, lovingly recalling the 18-year-old who died in an apparent suicide last week as a "mama's boy" with a "compassionate heart."

Someone who loved to smile and have fun.

Dungy spoke for nearly 20 minutes during an emotional two-hour funeral service attended by NFL stars, past and present, league officials, including commissioner Paul Tagliabue, the entire Colts team and four other NFL head coaches — Herman Edwards, Dennis Green, Lovie Smith and Jack Del Rio — along with University of Washington coach Ty Willingham.

Hall of Famer Mean Joe Greene and ex-Washington Redskins cornerback Darrell Green were also among the 2,000 mourners who came to Idlewild Baptist Church in this Tampa suburb.

Dungy left the Colts last Thursday, the day his son was found, and it remains uncertain when he will return.

A preliminary autopsy report indicated the teen took his own life, but the exact cause of death won't be released until a toxicology examination is completed in four to six weeks.

BASEBALL

TOKYO (AP) — New York Yankees outfielder Hideki Matsui has decided against joining Japan's squad at the 16-nation World Baseball Classic next March.

Matsui told Japan squad manager Sadaharu Oh late Monday he would sit out the inaugural tournament, according to Hiroshi Kimura, a spokesman for the Oh's Japanese league team, the Fukuoka Daiei Hawks. Kimura said he could not elaborate.

Kyodo News agency quoted the slugger as saying he wanted to concentrate on his role in the Yankees.

HOCKEY

PHOENIX (AP) — Coyotes coach Wayne Gretzky, who took a leave of absence on Dec. 17 to return to Canada and be with his dying mother, is expected to rejoin the team Wednesday.

The Arizona Republic reported on its Web site that Gretzky flew to San Jose and could be back coaching in Wednesday night's game against the Sharks.

Phyllis Gretzky, 64, died Dec. 19 in a hospital in Brantford, Ontario, after a yearlong battle with lung cancer.

TORONTO (AP) — Maple Leafs forward Darcy Tucker was fined \$2,500 by the NHL for pulling off the helmet of New Jersey's Cam Janssen during a wild fight and twice hitting the winger on the head.


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