

USD Faces Rival SDSU In Final Home Game Of Season



P&D FILE PHOTO

South Dakota linebacker Tyler Starr (11) looks into the offensive backfield during a home game earlier this season. Starr, who has 27 career sacks and 41 career tackles for loss, and the Coyotes will be looking to finish the home portion of their season on a positive note as they host rival South Dakota State today (Saturday).

BY JEREMY HOECK
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VERMILLION — Ten years later, the Coyotes and Jackrabbits will meet on the DakotaDome turf.

Certainly a lot has changed since October 2003: Both the University of South Dakota and South Dakota State are at the Division I level, one side has gone through two coaches and something as small as the dome turf is different.

What hasn't changed is the passion, according to USD senior linebacker Tyler Starr.

"This is the one where you could tell someone you went

to USD and they'd be like, 'Did you beat State?'" Starr said this week after a practice. "It's something everyone will ask you.

"Not many people will get to play in a game like this. It'll be something to remember."

And so it goes without saying: USD (4-6, 3-3) circled today's (Saturday) 1 p.m. sold out game in the DakotaDome with the Jackrabbits on its schedule.

"It's the circle every year," head coach Joe Glenn said, with emphasis this week. "Every year I played here, I loved it."

As both head coaches pointed out this week, games like this bring with it a differ-

ent level of intensity.

"When you play an arch rival, it brings a little more out of you, as a competitor, as a team," Glenn said. "You lose, you just grin and bear it. If you win, you celebrate it for a year. There's a spring in your step, because you know you're the best team in the state."

One of 14 in-state players on USD's roster, sophomore linebacker Keyen Lage knows all about the rivalry. A majority of his family, in fact, attended SDSU.

"Coming here is when I actually realized the hatred everyone has for SDSU," Lage said. "It makes it that much better, because you realize

how much it means to everyone."

From the standpoint of defending their home turf, the Coyotes are understandably geared up to close out their home schedule in style. The Jackrabbits (6-4, 3-3), meanwhile, again have other goals — they need a win to stay in the FCS playoff hunt. A loss would seemingly eliminate them from contention.

"It doesn't matter what the records are, doesn't matter what league we're in, this game, any in-state rivalry when approached right is a huge contest," SDSU head

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9B: Pirate Perfection



JEREMY HOECK/P&D

Avon's Devin Tolsma, right, scampers in for a touchdown run during Friday's Class 9B championship game against Hamlin at the DakotaDome. Tolsma earned game MVP honors as the Pirates edged Hamlin 24-22. The title was Avon's fourth title in seven championship appearances since 2002.

Rare Passing Attack Lifts Avon To 24-22 Victory Over Hamlin In Class 9B Final

BY JAMES D. CIMBUREK
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VERMILLION — The Hamlin Chargers held Avon to just over half of their normal 370 yards rushing per game, forcing the Pirates to do something they're not accustomed to doing: throwing the ball.

But Avon still did what it is accustomed to doing.

Winning.

Avon scored on a 38-yard pass from Logan Mudder to Kole Beeson — just the ninth completed pass of the season for the Pirates — with 1:08 to play to claim a 24-22 victory over the Chargers in the S.D. Class 9B championship football game on Friday at the DakotaDome in Vermillion.

The victory completed a 12-0 season for the Pirates, their fourth championship in seven title appearances since 2002.

"It feels great," said Avon running back Devin Tolsma, who celebrated his 17th birthday by winning the game's MVP award. "I'm going to miss these seniors, but most of us are back."

Tolsma rushed for 94 yards and a score on offense, and had a game-high 16 tackles on defense to lead Avon. Brandon Kocmich, named the game's outstanding back, finished with 99 yards rushing, a 31-yard pass completion and a 42-yard catch.

Also for the Avon defense, Kocmich had eight tackles, and Jacob Knodel, Alex Balvin and Josh Knodel had seven stops each. Cody Namminga had both turnovers for the Pirates, recovering a fumble then picking off a pass on Hamlin's final possession to ice the win.



JAMES D. CIMBUREK/P&D

Avon head coach Tom Culver, right, hoists the championship trophy after the Pirates victory over Hamlin on Friday.

Hamlin quarterback Brody Grantham rushed for 154 yards and a touchdown, and was 4-12 passing for 79 yards and two scores. Dustin Quiram rushed for 97 yards. Ryder Grantham and Austin Niemann each caught touchdown passes in the effort.

Brody and Ryder Grantham, and Tristen Namken each had 10 tackles for the Charger defense. Quiram had both an interception and a fumble recovery. Niemann had a game-best three tackles for loss.

Avon's 195 yards rushing was well below their season average, something Hamlin head coach Jeff Sheehan was confident his team

would be able to do.

"We've been physical all year," he said. "We'd heard all week about how well they could run the ball, but we knew we could play with them. We've got a great group of guys."

Avon took the early lead on a Tolsma run on the game's opening possession, but the Pirate offense stalled shortly after. The Pirates would go three-and-out on their next three possessions and, by the time they got the ball moving again, they were down 14-8.

The next Pirate drive stalled on the Hamlin 24-yard line, with the Chargers getting a stop on fourth-

and-1. Hamlin used a 31-yard run on a direct snap to Quiram, and a 38-yard catch by Ryder Grantham to set up Brody Grantham's 12-yard scoring run.

Trailing 22-8 at the half, Avon came out ready to play in the second half. The Pirates stalled Hamlin's opening possession near midfield, and a 36-yard return by Kocmich gave the Pirates solid field position. After a Tolsma run to the endzone was called back for a hold, Kocmich hit Namminga on a 31-yard pass to set up Kocmich's 8-yard TD.

It was Avon's first completion since Oct. 11 and just the second first down by pass the entire season.

"We usually work on our two-minute offense every week," said Mudder, the team's quarterback. "It paid off when we needed it."

Hamlin shut the Pirates down on their next three possessions, stopping Avon on the Charger 17-yard line, then forcing turnovers on consecutive possessions. But the Chargers could not do anything with their possessions, and gave the ball back to Avon with just over two minutes left to play.

"We went from a 5-1 to a 3-2," Kocmich said of the Avon defensive changes that helped slow down Hamlin in the second half. "We were more spread out, and that helped us contain them."

After a short Mudder run, a pass interference call on Hamlin and an incomplete pass, Mudder found Beeson on a short screen pass, and he rambled down the left sideline for the 42-yard game-tying score.

"That was a design screen," Mudder said. "They had been bringing pressure up the middle hard."

Tolsma ran in the two-point conversion, giving Avon the lead with 1:08 to play.

"Hats off to Avon," Sheehan said. "They kept their composure and did what they needed to do."

Brody Grantham kept the Chargers alive with his legs, getting one first down. But Namminga jumped a pass rout with 23 seconds left to ice the win for Avon.

The title came one year after Avon had a rare season in which it was ousted in the quarterfinals.

"I have to give the kids credit," said Avon head coach Tom Culver. "They did what they needed to do. I'm proud of them."

Hamlin finished with a 10-2 record.

AVON 24, HAMLIN 22

AVON — 8 0 8 8 — 24
HAMLIN — 8 14 0 0 — 22

First Quarter
AVN — Tolsma 20 run (Mudder run), 9:16.
HAM — Niemann 25 pass from B. Grantham (B. Grantham run), 4:27.

Second Quarter
HAM — R. Grantham 10 pass from B. Grantham (pass failed), 7:51.
HAM — R. Grantham 12 run (Grantham run), 4:1.

Third Quarter
AVN — Kocmich 8 run (Kocmich run), 7:09.

Fourth Quarter
AVN — Beeson 38 pass from Mudder (Tolsma run), 1:08.

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First downs	14	16
Rushes-yards	50-195	38-251
Passing Yards	111	79
Passes	3-7-1	4-12-1
Punts-yards	4-43.3	7-33.7
Penalties-yards	6-60	8-61
Time of Possession	24:56	23:02

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS
RUSHING — AVON: Kocmich 21-99, Tolsma 16-94, Anderson 2-4, Mudder 9-2. HAMLIN: B. Grantham 20-154, Quiram 18-97.
PASSING — AVON: Mudder 2-5-1, 80 yards; Kocmich 1-1-0, 31 yards; Anderson 0-1-0. HAMLIN: B. Grantham 4-12-1, 79 yards.
RECEIVING — AVON: Kocmich 1-42, Beeson 1-38, Namminga 1-31; HAMLIN: R. Grantham 2-48, Niemann 1-25, Koisti 1-6.

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