

GAME NEWS



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KANSAS CITY BLASTS LOS ANGELES, 62-45

Second-half explosion by Brigade fueled by rookie Boone

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When you're 3-7 but still have a good shot at the playoffs, every game is a must-win. So the defending Western Division champion Avengers went to Kansas City's Kemper Arena to face the first-year Brigade (1-9) not taking anything for granted ... and still lost.

And lost ugly, 62-45, to an offensively struggling team with the league's worst record. The defeat made Los Angeles' playoff situation even more precarious.

"We're just talking about trying to win a game right now," Avenger head coach Ed Hodgkiss said. "We just need to play well. The playoffs are far away from us right now."

L.A.'s postseason hopes aren't quite on life support, but their vital signs are erratic. With Chicago's overtime loss to Philadelphia, the Avengers (3-8) trail the Rush for the final American Conference spot by one game with five to play but are tied with two other teams that also beat them this year. The good news for L.A. fans is that after next week's division contest at Utah, the team finishes with four straight at home.

Against the Brigade, the Avengers' Achilles' heels remained the same as they've been all year: poor line play and inability to get stops on defense. L.A. gave up three more sacks and seemingly endless quarterback hits and hurries while registering no sacks of their own. The team has now allowed 28 sacks while dropping opposing quarterbacks only four times in 11 games. Hodgkiss acknowledged that although the Avengers' options are limited, changes have to be made.

"It's beyond the trade deadline, but we're not going to continue down the road we're going," he said. "We'll make a decision as the week goes on."

After riding fine efforts from quarterback Sonny Cumbie and wide receiver/defensive back Kevin Ingram to a 35-34 third-quarter lead, the Avengers gave up a game-turning 28-3 run by the heretofore low-scoring Brigade.

Kansas City was averaging under 40 points a game coming in; it racked up 34 in the first half alone against the Avengers on its way to a season-high 62. In only his fourth game as the Brigade's main man, quarterback Chris Sanders threw for seven scores and ran for another. L.A.'s defense registered only one stop for the entire game, on an interception by wide receiver/linebacker Greg Hopkins as time expired in the first half.

Ingram, who had eight receptions for 77 yards and four touchdowns to raise his team-leading total to 23, said, "We had a couple of missed tackles, weren't getting too much pressure on the quarterback. It's from the d-backs to the defensive line. But it's more than just the defense right now; it's offense and special teams too. We didn't convert on fourth downs, we fumbled, gave them short field. You can't just put it on the defense."

Despite taking another beating, Cumbie had a great first half with four touchdown passes -- including a bomb to offensive specialist Tony Locke, an all-focus, in-traffic, one-handed snag by Hopkins and a deflected pass that Ingram turned into a great catch that he took to the house.

Cumbie finished 23-of-35 for 248 yards and six TDs with no picks, improving his already sparkling TD-INT ratio to 36-3. But the Avengers' "Rookie of the Year" candidate was outshone by the Brigade's brand new stealth bomber, WR/DB Aaron Boone (not the third baseman). In his K.C. debut last week, Boone set a team record with 129 receiving yards. He shattered that mark Sunday against Los Angeles with 157 yards and five touchdowns on 13 catches, often dragging multiple tacklers for extra acreage.

Hodgkiss said that Boone was definitely on the Avengers' radar after his spectacular debut game.

"I thought he played like that last week," Hodgkiss said. "I thought the kid played great (against us, but) when he caught the ball, we didn't tackle him well."

So the Avengers are down but not out. They remain in the playoff chase, if far back in the pack, but they know they have the horses to finish strong.

"I know some guys are down," Ingram said. "We felt good before the game, feeling like were going to play hard and get a win. You know, one win can turn it around. There's some things we have to fix. We have to play harder. Hopefully something can happen and we can flick a switch and turn it on."

EXTRA POINTS

AL LUCAS REMEMBERED -- The game was played a day before the one-year anniversary of the tragic death of Al Lucas. "I thought about it this week," said Ingram, who was close with his fallen teammate. "We've got a lot of guys who (didn't know Lucas, but) I'm sure the core guys thought about it. I've got his number on my T-shirt. I talk to him, I pray for him before games. I always think of him, he's always on my mind."

PLAYOFF RACE UPDATE -- L.A. started Sunday one game behind Chicago for the final playoff slot in the American Conference. Fortunately for the Avengers, the Philadelphia Soul knocked off the Rush in overtime on an intercepted two-point conversion attempt. L.A. remains one game back, but is at a disadvantage on the head-to-head tiebreaker. The Avengers are also tied with two other teams -- Grand Rapids, which beat them earlier this season; and Utah, which topped them on a last-second stunner at STAPLES Center, but has to face a revenge-hungry L.A. team for the rematch next week.

THE NINTH MAN -- The deflected touchdown wasn't the only weird play Ingram was involved in. Early in the third quarter, he made a leaping grab on the sideline, only to have it broken up ... by a spectator. "I jumped up and made the catch and the fan took it away from me," he said of the play, which was legal because Ingram was reaching over the wall at the time.

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