

KansasCity.com

Posted on Mon, Apr. 10, 2006

Victory leaves Brigade QB flying high

Sanders has 7 TD passes in 62-45 win over Los Angeles

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The Kansas City Star



JIM BARCUS/The Kansas City Star

Aaron Boone's arm may be a little sore today after spiking the ball so much on Sunday. Boone had five touchdowns among his 13 catches.

They kept telling Chris Sanders to calm down, but that was simply unrealistic.

What was Sanders doing, anyway? After his second touchdown pass to Aaron Boone at the end of the first half Sunday, Sanders sprinted toward Boone and knelt down, grabbing onto Boone's leg. This was clearly the act of someone who hadn't thrown too many touchdown passes in his day.

Or, how about after the Brigade's 62-45 victory over Los Angeles, when Sanders strutted around the field asking his teammates, "Why aren't you cheering?!"

"Guys were telling me, 'Act like you've been here,' " Sanders said. "But I've never been here. I haven't won in Kansas City.

"With a lead like that, the way we played, you're not going to calm me down."

Sanders, starting his fourth game with the Brigade, 2-9, after taking over for Andy Kelly, might have needed this one more than anybody in Kemper Arena. Sanders, a four-year AFL veteran, connected on 26 of 32 passes for 265 yards and seven touchdowns, helping the Brigade to its first victory since Feb. 19 against Columbus.

"I've really wanted to get a win to get these guys to believe in me," Sanders said. "I needed a game like this to really get us over the hump offensively."

There's no question the hump would have been much harder to climb without the offensive specialist Boone, who topped last week's 10-catch, two-touchdown performance with 13 catches for 157 yards and five touchdowns.

Not bad for a guy playing his second game as a leading man in the AFL, a guy who was simply a "throw-in" in the trade that brought Cyron Brown to Kansas City and sent Steve Smith to Philadelphia three weeks ago.

Asked how he had taken such big steps in only two weeks, Boone was cut off by Brigade coach Kevin Porter.

"*Carpe diem*," said Porter with a knowing smile. He and the Brigade front office — in dire need of a move to pay off — had also seized the day by bringing in Boone.

"Aaron was kind of an unknown for us," Porter continued. "We got in a situation where we were talking with Philly, trying to get Cyron. If we're going to trade Steve, you have to give us a receiver, too. Silly them."

Silly Philly indeed. Boone impressed Sanders so much during the first week of practice that one day when he was driving Boone home from practice, Sanders popped the question: Will you be my go-to guy?

"I had it in high school and college," Sanders said. "When it's tough, that's who I'm going to. Aaron wants to jump for everything. I keep thinking I'm overthrowing him, but he'll go and get it."

The Brigade defense did its part, making three critical stops in the fourth quarter. With the score 41-35 Brigade, Kansas City held Los Angeles to a field goal. Then, the defense put together two stops in a row, allowing Sanders, Boone and company to build a 62-38 lead.

The Brigade offense had been steadily improving under Sanders' lead the previous three games. But still, the team sent a message last week by signing Raymond Philyaw, a proven AFL veteran with some startling career numbers, to replace Kelly on the roster. Despite Philyaw's arrival, the Brigade still touted Sanders as the starter, and he took every snap on Sunday.

"If there's a QB out there as good as Ray Philyaw, you'd be dumb not to bring him in," said Sanders, who played in college at Tennessee-Chattanooga. "That is only going to make me push myself that much more."

The Brigade is still 2-9, but this makes Sanders 1-3 with five games to go. Colorado is next, and he'll be under the microscope again.

"Chris is our man right now," Porter said, "and we're going to ride with him."

Whether he's been there or not.