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## K.C. game tonight gives Blaze shot at playoffs

By [Loren Jorgensen](#)

Deseret Morning News

The Arena Football League is not too discriminating when it comes to its postseason. There are 18 teams in the league and 12 make the playoffs — meaning the 16-game regular season eliminates just one-third of the entrants.

Still, getting to the postseason is a huge deal for the Utah Blaze. Making the playoffs for a team in its first year would be a major accomplishment.

But it won't be completely unexpected — at least not to the Blaze players and coaches.

"Our goal all year long has been to get to the playoffs," said Blaze offensive specialist Siaha Burley. "We never gave up hope and we knew, in this league, we could always turn things around and make the playoffs."

It now comes down to this: One win tonight against the 3-12 Kansas City Brigade, and the Blaze are in. Even with a loss, the Blaze could back their way into the postseason as long as Chicago beats Grand Rapids on Saturday.

But Utah isn't even thinking about that possibility. The Blaze are considering tonight's game a do-or-die situation.

"It's like a playoff-like environment," said Blaze coach Danny White. "Fortunately, we have a lot of guys who have experience in situations like this on our team even though we are an expansion franchise."

Utah could actually still get a home game in the first round of the playoffs, but it would need some help. The top two teams from each conference earn first-round byes. That means the third and fourth seeds host the fifth and sixth seeds in the opening round. The Blaze will be the American Conference's fourth seed if they win tonight and both Chicago and Nashville lose on Saturday.

To be talking about the possibility of hosting a playoff game entering the final week of the regular season is incredible, considering the Blaze lost four straight games midseason to fall to 3-8. Utah won three straight games — before getting drubbed last week in Chicago — to move back into the playoff picture.

White has been taking his time naming a starting quarterback this week, saying that he has confidence in both Andy Kelly, the veteran who has started the past four games — including three wins — and Joe Germaine, who was the Blaze starter for the first seven games before getting injured.

Kelly, who began the season with the Brigade before getting cut and quickly picked up by the Blaze, struggled last week in Chicago. The Rush jumped out to a 35-0 lead after Kelly threw two interceptions and had a fumble returned for a touchdown in the first half. Germaine, meanwhile, played well in the second half in his first action in eight weeks, but it was already after Chicago had the game well in hand and its defense wasn't putting him under nearly the pressure Kelly saw.

White claims his delay in naming a starter is not an attempt to keep the Brigade guessing.

"(Kansas City) knows Andy really well," said White. "And they've got plenty of film on Joe."

Instead, the Blaze coach just wants to be sure before he makes an announcement.

The Brigade started the season 1-9, but then won two of three games before losing two more in a row entering tonight's contest.

"They might have the best defensive line in the league," said White. "Their guys can rush the passer as well as anybody. That is clearly where they have put their focus, while we've put our focus more on the offensive side of the ball. It will make for an interesting match-up from that standpoint."

**BLAZE BRIEFS:** Three two-way mainstays for the Blaze have been re-signed to multi-year contracts. WR/DB **Orshawante Bryant**, OL/DL **Hans Olsen** and WR/LB **Justin Skaggs** have signed new two-year deals to stay in Utah. Bryant is second on the team with 83 catches for 975 yards with 10 TDs. Olsen, the former BYU star, is the team's starting center and noseguard, while Skaggs has 48 catches and 13 scores this year . . . Former Millard High and Snow College football standout **Aaron Boone** will return to Utah to play in his first football game since leaving Snow to play at the University of Kentucky. Boone, who is the older brother of ex-University of Utah star center **Jesse Boone** and current Ute lineman **Jason Boone**, has been amassing yardage and touchdowns for the Brigade. Entering the league mid-season, Boone has played in six games for the Brigade as an offensive specialist, grabbing 14 touchdown passes on 53 catches.

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