

Conquest looks to Cole for added fuel

Ex-RPI QB to lead Albany, has eyes on the playoffs

By **MARK SINGELAIS**, Staff writer

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ALBANY -- Albany Conquest quarterback Dan Cole shook his head after he overthrew a receiver down the left sideline in Tuesday's intrasquad scrimmage.

Then he lost a fumble that the defense returned for a touchdown.

Before the next drive, Cole told rookie head coach Jeff Hoffman, "Let's get it done."

Cole promptly threw a touchdown pass to rookie wide receiver Chris Bocage.

"I knew we would (score)," Hoffman said. "That's what's great about Dan Cole, and that's why he's our leader."

Cole, a Bishop Maginn graduate, is running the show for the first time since his brilliant career at RPI ended with a Division III semifinals appearance in 2003.

That's also when the Conquest last made the arenafootball2 postseason. Hoffman is counting on the 6-foot-2, 215-pound Cole to change that.

"I believe he's going to lead us to the playoffs," Hoffman said.

Cole is expected to be the starter when the Conquest opens their seventh season March 29 at Mahoning Valley. Albany makes its home debut against Peoria on April 13 at Times Union Center.

In his af2 debut, Cole served as the backup behind Ryan Hart for almost all of last season, starting only a season-ending upset of Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

Cole passed for 160 yards and four touchdowns and ran for two more scores in the 56-42 win over the Pioneers, who went on to reach the af2 title game.

"You always question whether you can play a full game and do what you know you're capable of doing," Cole said. "And playing that full game last year gave me the opportunity to get some experience and made me understand some parts of the game that I didn't understand."

Hoffman, an assistant last season, said the game confirmed to him that Cole should be the starter.

Hoffman said when he replaced Pete Costanza as head coach, he wasn't tempted to bring in another veteran passer to challenge Cole. Rookies Joe DeLuise of East Stroudsburg and A.J. Roque of Kean University are challenging for the No. 2 job.

"When I saw what Dan did when he got in last year, and what a team guy he was, I knew Dan was my guy," Hoffman said.

Hart, who threw 83 touchdown passes last season, signed with the Arena Football League's Grand Rapids Rampage. He left the team during training camp and is out of football.

Cole is still working out his timing with a receiving corps that includes returnees Jared Jones and Antwun Williams and Bocage, a newcomer who played at USC.

"Danny's got the great arm to put it on us," Bocage said. "It's a matter of us getting open."

Cole entered last year's camp simply trying to earn a roster spot. Now he's being counted on to lead the team, just as when he was at RPI.

"It's comfortable knowing that I'm the No. 1 (quarterback), but it's not satisfying," Cole said. "Because I can lose it at any point from now until the end of the season."

After four straight losing seasons, Cole said the Conquest are thinking postseason.

"We're all getting on that train to get to the playoffs again," he said. "We all have one objective."

Mark Singelais can be reached at 454-5509 or by e-mail at msingelais@timesunion.com.

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