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By Bob Weiner

DeLuise ready to make first start at quarterback

Backup quarterback Joe DeLuise hasn't logged many minutes this season, but he will play a major role when the Albany Conquest host the Manchester Wolves in an arenafootball2 game tonight at 7 at Times Union Center.

When starting quarterback Dan Cole was injured late in last week's game at the Louisville Fire, DeLuise came on to throw one touchdown pass and run for the game-winning score to lead the Conquest to a 41-35 win that kept the team's very slim playoff hopes alive.

DeLuise will get his first af2 start tonight. The Conquest must defeat both Manchester tonight and Wilkes-Barre/Scranton next week to have any chance at the playoffs. The Conquest also need the Wolves to lose their final game against Corpus Christi, and have either Louisville or Quad City lose their final two regular-season games.

Cole injured his knee last week against the Fire and won't return for the rest of the regular season.

"Cole is done, but if we make the playoffs, we could bring him back," said Conquest head coach Jeff Hoffman. "We thought originally that when he got that high-low hit last week he could return, but when the trainer looked at him, Dan couldn't put any pressure on the knee at all. He's been walking around a little bit, but he has no mobility right now. It's probably a non-surgical situation, but remember, we need a mobile quarterback. We've been sacked 40-50 times already this season."

DeLuise's mobility helped him rush 10 times for 47 yards last week. It was the highest total of any Conquest player this year, and it occurred in less than a half.

Hoffman said he won't make any gameplan changes with DeLuise in the lineup.

"Joe seems to be very comfortable making things happen. He's always been able to go out of the shotgun formation, and even in camp, he asked me if one of his options was to run the ball. He's doing a good job for us, the best job that he can. He's a competitor."

"Joe fits into our regular scheme. We won't make any changes, like quarterback sweeps, or anything like that," Hoffman continued. "But we might do a few things with him here and there. We know that he's ready to run the offense."

Hoffman said that he is proud that his 5-9 Conquest still have something to play for this late in the season, especially since they suffered a seven-game losing streak midway through the season.

"Our guys have played hard all year. Things didn't always pan out our way, but we've worked hard, and I'm proud of both the players and the effort they've put forth," he said. "I just wish we had executed better this season. I've said all along that when we go into games, we shouldn't be playing

the what if game. Right now, that's exactly what we're doing.

"We should be locked into the playoffs right now, but we're not. Aside from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, no team has dominated us completely, but we haven't capitalized on our opportunities. I think we've kind of hurt ourselves more than other teams beating us."

Antwun Williams continues to be the Conquest's primary big-play receiver with 88 receptions, 1,123 yards and 29 touchdowns. Chris Bocage tops the team in the kick-return department with 39 returns for 855 yards and a pair of scores.

Defensively, Michael Lewis paces the Conquest in quarterback sacks with six. Brandon Taylor is the tackles leader with 69.5.

Manchester (7-7) has won two of the first three meetings with the Conquest this season. Quarterback Joe Pinkney has completed 187 of 293 passes for 2,440 yards and 50 TD passes. He also has rushed for 13 scores. Bradley Chavez (80 catches, 1,031 yards, 24 TDs) and Emery Sammons (73 catches, 1,015, 19 TDs) are his favorite targets.