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Conquest star sidelined with injury

By Bob Weiner

Talk about poor timing.

A day after finding out that wideout Jared Jones was named the af2 Schutt Offensive Player of the Week, Albany Conquest head coach Jeff Hoffman learned that he won't have the 6-foot, 200-pound Syracuse graduate's services for tonight's 7:30 game against the Manchester Wolves at the Ver-izon Wireless Arena in Manchester, N.H.

Jones recorded an af2 season-high 325 all-purpose yards (153 kickoff, 37 field goal return, 129 receiving and six rushing) in the Conquest's 55-54 overtime victory over the Peoria Pirates on Sunday at Times Union Center. But he injured his right ankle and right knee in the final minutes of regulation. He will be out of action for at least tonight's game, and Hoffman said he may have to put Jones on the injured reserve list, meaning he could miss several more weeks.

Jones, who scored three touchdowns, including a 55-yard kickoff return, against the Pirates, leads the 1-1 Conquest in receiving (21 catches, 268 yards, four touchdowns), scoring (36 points) and all-purpose yards (504).

"I'll know after this game whether Jared was my best player or not," said Hoffman with a laugh. "Obviously, he's a great player, and his first two games were excellent. However, just because he's banged up, we're not going to lay down and say we're in trouble. We're going to go ahead and battle."

Hoffman said he was extremely happy with the way his team fought back time after time against the Pirates in their home opener.

"I was very pleased with my guys," he said. "If you work hard, play for each other and execute, you will be successful. That's what they did in the final minutes of regulation and in the overtime. If we had just won the game in a normal fashion in regulation, it would have been good enough, but look how we won. We came back and rallied to win the game on a two-point conversion in overtime. When you take that into account, it was a great lift for the guys. It gave them something to believe in."

Hoffman said that three Conquest players will try to fill Jones' shoes as a wideout, running back and kick returner.

Chris Bocage, a 25-year-old rookie from USC, will get his first playing time of the year, while defensive back Brandon Taylor will now also see time on the offensive side of the ball. Veteran Clarence Curry, a defensive specialist who filled in for Jones and caught the Conquest's final TD in overtime against Peoria, will also be in the mix.

Manchester, like Albany, is 1-1 in the af2's East Division standings.

"The key for us on offense will be the same as it was last week. We've got to protect Dan [quarterback Dan Cole.]" Hoffman said. Cole tossed five touchdown passes against the Pirates and had three more in Albany's opener at Mahoning Valley.