

college football

Hicklin Hopes 'Real' Griffons Show Up for Bowl

By Bill Richardson
A Member of the Sports Staff

After winning six straight football games, Missouri Western accepted an invitation to play in the inaugural Moila Shrine Bowl at its stadium in St. Joseph.

Since then, the bottom has fallen out on the Griffons' season. They've lost four straight, and will go into the Nov. 24 post-season game against William Jewell, 9-1, with a 5-4 record.

"It's been a rough month for us, I'll guarantee you," Coach Rob Hicklin said Wednesday. "But now we're healthy, and the week off before the bowl game should do us some good.

"We're still the team that beat Kearney State, which is No. 4 in NAIA Division I. We said before the season that we could really have a good club if we could stay healthy. But we couldn't avoid injuries.

"We accepted the Moila invitation

when we did because the bowl people thought we would be the best team to draw, and get the game off to a good start.

"I'd prefer not committing for a bowl until the final game, or the next to final game. That might have hurt us. You know, you hold a carrot in front of the horse and maybe he'll run better."

Carrots wouldn't have been the cure for the major problems encountered by the Griffons. The heart of Hicklin's attack was stricken by injuries. Quarterback Mike Solomon of Blue Springs went out with a collarbone injury in the seventh game, and has played sparingly and in pain since. Fullback Rodney Stephenson has been hampered by an elbow injury.

"I don't like to use injuries as an excuse because everybody has them," Hicklin said. "But it really hurt us to lose Solomon, who has been our quar-

terback for four years. He's the key to our club. We were ahead 24-7 in the third quarter of the Missouri Southern game when he was injured and we wound up losing it 27-24.

"He didn't play in the Washburn game and we lost that one 23-21. We used him in the second half of the Pittsburg game in a shotgun formation, and he threw three or four passes well. Then his shoulder started bothering him and he wasn't as effective.

"Last week against Fort Hays State, he threw pretty well and I think he'll be in better shape when we play William Jewell."

Stephenson, a sophomore from Marshall, Mo., who has rushed for 1,113 yards and a 5.3 average, also saw limited duty in the 45-13 loss to Pittsburg Nov. 3.

"He had a swollen bursitis sac the size of a softball in his right elbow," Hicklin said. "The doctor says he can

play, and he has no pain in it. But he doesn't have the movement he should and that restricts what he can do with his right arm, and it affects his balance."

With Solomon and Stephenson in the lineup, the Griffons have a potent striking force. Marc Lewis, who has filled in at quarterback, can be utilized at his regular wide receiver post, along with Tim Hoskins and Pat Casey. The three have averaged about 16 yards a catch in Hicklin's big-play offense.

"We've got to play better defense, too," Hicklin said. "We've averaged 26 points a game, but we've given up 20. We've just got to regroup and do a better job against Jewell than we have in the last four games."

"I feel we're a good football team, and we can still play well. I guess this bowl game will be a mystery for us: Which team is going to show up, the

one that won the first six games, or the one that lost the last four?"

Hicklin said the Griffons have a bowl heritage to protect. They defeated Graceland 44-0 in the final Mineral Water Bowl game in Excelsior Springs in 1976, and edged Benedictine 35-30 in the Boot Hill Bowl in Dodge City in 1977.

Of the next bowl opponent, Hicklin observed: "William Jewell has a good team, or it wouldn't have gone undefeated for as long as it did. They have a very good passing combination in Mark Capra and Robin Schermerhorn, and a good running attack with David Cunningham and Vic Davolt. That's a lot of offensive weapons.

"I guess they were just drained in the second half of that Baker game (53-21 loss). Baker kept going at them and didn't give them a chance to catch their breath."

So, along with a healthier squad, Hicklin is looking forward to another tonic for his team in preparation for the bowl game.

"I'm anxious to see what happened to Jewell against Baker," he said. "We've got that film coming."

NAIA NOTES—Kearney (Neb.) State College and the University of Wisconsin-River Falls were selected Wednesday as the first two participants in the Division I playoffs, which begin Dec. 1. Kearney State is 8-1 and Wisconsin-River Falls is 9-1. . . . **Chris Waters** of Rockhurst High School and Southwest Missouri State has been named the Defensive Player of the Week by the Missouri Intercollegiate Athletic Association for his performance against Northeast Missouri State. Waters, a junior, intercepted four passes, tying a school record, and returned one of them for a 58-yard touchdown in Southwest's 49-0 victory.