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10/20/1982 - Kevin Stape Better Season

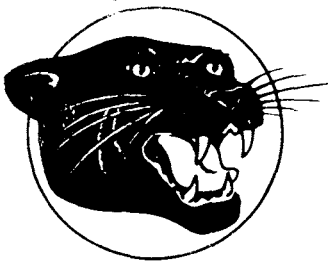
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Panther Sports News

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LS-AS-Hometowns

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--Last year Eastern Illinois University's football team lost a school record 31 fumbles and most accusing fingers were pointed in the direction of halfback Kevin Staple (Markham-Thornwood).

Staple is still the focus of attention this fall but his career has taken an 180 degree reversal. One of the top all-purpose running backs in NCAA I-AA, the 5-8 junior is the catalyst for an offense that has produced the best rush-pass balance since the 1978 championship season.

With 683 yards rushing (97.6 per game), he's on the verge of a 1000 yard season, has already set an EIU career record for pass receptions by a running back (60), and is averaging 120 yards in all-purpose running (rushing, pass receiving, kick returns).

The difference between 1981 and 1982? "Concentration . . . pure and simple concentration," says Staple. "Team success is of utmost importance but, personally, I want 1000 yards and be a special part of this team."

'This team' is indeed a 'special' one as the Panthers are off to their best start in over 50 years with a 6-0-1 record, and ranked No. 12 in the NCAA I-AA poll.

Last year, though, Staple and EIU struggled as he accounted for nearly half of the 31 fumbles, and this fall has not lost the ball one time on a running play, and just twice after pass receptions.

"You can't have a drill to teach someone not to fumble. It just wouldn't be like a game where the intensity is so high. I just told myself I wouldn't fumble, and Coach (Chuck) Dickerson has worked us hard in practice on that, also."

The first two weeks Staple was chosen the Mid-Continent Conference Offensive 'Player of the Week' after gaining 141 and 125 yards, respectively, against Illinois State and Northeast Missouri.

However his top offensive performance was against Youngstown State when he rushed for 159 yards including an 88 yard touchdown romp, caught two passes for 11 yards and returned

two kickoffs for 36 yards accounting for 206 all-purpose running.

Last Saturday against Indiana State, EIU's toughest opponent to date, he rushed for 85 yards and caught five passes for 28 yards. More than half of that total came during two critical fourth quarter drives when EIU knocked more than nine minutes off the clock enroute to a 16-12 victory.

Staple reported to fall camp in the best shape of his career which accounts for that improved fourth quarter stamina. "This summer I lifted lifted lifted. I was in the best shape ever. I put on 15 pounds and can bench 315. When I came here I was at 230. I look at pictures of myself two years ago and can't believe it's the same person."

Part of the credit for Staple's success goes to his running mate, Wes Nixon, an Illinois Valley CC transfer, who has kept opposing teams from focusing on Staple by proving to be an equally adept running threat.

"Wes did take some of the pressure off but now that he's injured they'll depend on me more and I want to be a leader. I love the pressure now . . . and I'm used to it because the timing is right.

"The first couple years here were like my first couple high school seasons. I was just running. I wasn't aggressive . . . just taking what the defense gave me," Staple explained.

"Now I'm much more relaxed. I want the ball 20-25 times a game, and I like the all-purpose running although I would rather just run and catch it. When I come out of the backfield catching the ball usually I'm one-on-one with someone, and that means I've got a good chance to break one."

Staple led the Panthers in rushing his first two years compiling 1276 yards entering this season. He needs just 42 yards in Saturday's game at Western Illinois to go over 2000 yards, and should end up as EIU's No. 2 all-time career rushing and all-purpose yardage leader behind Poke Cobb.