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11/09/1982 - Quarterback Has Best Season

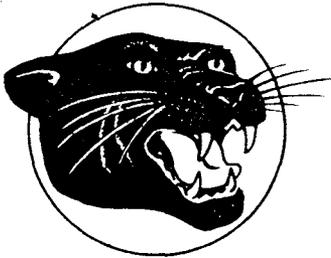
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Panther Sports News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--If the ultimate accomplishment is an unbeaten season, Eastern Illinois University's Jeff Christensen (Gibson City) is one game away from being EIU's best quarterback ever. The stats and team record prove it.

Christensen and Co. are 9-0-1 going into Saturday's finale against Kentucky State and ranked in the top five in NCAA I-AA. A playoff spot is all but assured awaiting the end of the regular season.

The 6-3, 205 senior, who ranked No. 3 in total offense last year, is not in the top ten this fall but is playing better than anytime in his illustrious three year career.

"I'm not throwing interceptions . . . that's my main personal goal," he said. Last year Christensen threw for a record 2672 yards but had 22 interceptions.

This fall he had nine through the first four games before doing an about face with only four picked off in the last six games, and only two of those were poorly thrown.

At one stretch he set an EIU and Mid-Continent Conference record 83 pass attempts without an interception and just one in 131 during October.

"I wanted to cut my interceptions in half after last year so when I reached 11 I told George Tuzil (starting center), 'that's it . . . no more'."

Christensen had two picked off Saturday at Southwest Missouri to bring his total to 13 but it was inconsequential as he set EIU and MCC passing and total offense records of 409 and 416 yards, respectively, completing 20 of 33 with two touchdowns. He was named the league's 'Co-Player of the Week'.

He now holds ten of a possible 12 EIU passing and total offense records, has moved into the top 15 in I-AA total offense with 196 yards a game, and is the leading contender for Mid-Continent Conference 'Player of the Year' honors.

This fall he has 1975 passing yards and 5987 in his career, needing just a handful against Kentucky State to top 2000 in '82 and 6000 career.

His 197 yards per game passing is down from last year's 238 figure but that is partially due to offensive coordinator Chuck Dickerson's more balanced attack which has produced 363 yards per contest, 165 of those rushing.

"We're more ball control so people have concentrated on stopping the run, and they can't stop both . . . plus we throw to the backs as well as the wideouts and never take chances in a downfield situation," Christensen explained.

He admits that early this year he was "trying to throw every ball in there . . . trying to be too perfect and complete 60% of my passes. Now I take what the defense gives me.

"Also I had trouble with downfield vision. I was having trouble picking up the DBs (defensive backs) where now I can see their body movement better.

"Overall, I'm more comfortable. When people are covered, I don't force the ball. When I throw an interception, it's a psychological lift for the other team and none of us want to make the big mistake . . . the turnover.

"I think we've only lost the ball a handful of times inside our 50, and any time the opponents have to go 60 yards or more against a defense as strong as ours, we're in pretty good position."

Dickerson did revert to some of last year's passing game after the Panthers struggled to an 18-17 win over Northeast Missouri in the third game. "We simplified the passing some and took advantage of maximum protection from the line," Christensen said.

And "maximum protection from the line" means playing behind a young but experienced group that averages 6-3, 265 allowing Christensen considerable time to set up and throw.

"At this point, all I want is to be No. 1 . . . just help us get there any way possible, and if that means handing off to a running back, fine. Everyone wants to be No. 1, and we've still got a shot at it."