

WEEK ONE
RICE at ARMY

Army holds off Rice 14-7

WEST POINT, N.Y. -- Stymied off and on by a swarming Rice defense in a tight game, Army quarterback Kelvin Hopkins Jr. finally did what he's become so accustomed to doing -- guiding a time-consuming scoring drive that sank the hard-luck Owls.

Army converted five third downs on an 18-play, game-winning drive that took over 9 minutes of the fourth quarter and left the Owls in a hole they couldn't climb out of in the season opener for both teams. Hopkins hit Kell Walker with a 17-yard touchdown pass with 3:48 left and Army escaped with a 14-7 victory on Friday night at Michie Stadium.

A false start on third down had pushed the ball back to a third-and-8 at the 17 before Hopkins found Walker all alone on the left side near the goal line with 3:58 left in the game.

"Honestly, it was just the mindset of the offense," Hopkins said. "We knew that we were going to have to make a drive, make a push, especially with time winding down. Thirteen minutes, that's right around where we want to get the ball and hold it as long as possible. The defense was carrying us a lot at points. We were putting them in some bad spots."

The Owls threatened one last time, driving into Army territory. Quarterback Wiley Green lost the ball while scrambling and Army's Jacob Covington nearly covered it before Aston Walter fell on it for Rice with just over a minute left. A last-gasp sideline pass on fourth down by Green was broken up by Jaylon McClinton at the Army 15 with seconds to play.

"It's all about staying composed," Army linebacker Cole Christiansen said. "We're used to things like that happening. We thought we had won the game. I think it's a testament to our team."

The Black Knights have won 14 straight games at home and 10 straight overall, the second longest active winning streak in college football, behind only national champion Clemson.

"That game could have gone either way," Army coach Jeff Monken said. "Our guys in the end found a way. We just overcame a lot."

Hopkins, who last year became the first player in academy history to run for 1,000 yards and pass for 1,000 yards in a season, finished with 80 yards rushing on 21 carries and was 3 of 8 passing for 53 yards as he operated with a new center and a new backfield.

Army, which finished last season ranked No. 19, lost a key part of its offense to graduation with the departure of fullbacks Darnell Woolfolk and Andy Davidson. Woolfolk was the workhorse, accounting for 956 yards and 14 TDs. Senior Connor Slomka (74 carries for 324 yards, 4.4 average and five TDs) and junior Sandon McCoy (16-65, 4.1) were being counted on to carry much of the load this season, but Slomka has been hobbled by an undisclosed injury and did not play.

The Owls, who started preparing for this game in the spring, held the Black Knights in check in the first half, limiting them to 120 yards on 30 plays, 103 of it on the ground on 27 carries, a 3.8-yard average. Last season, Army averaged 4.9 yards per carry, ranked second nationally with 312 yards per game, and won a school-record 11 games with its ball-control offense. The Black Knights finished with 231 yards rushing against the Owls, averaging 4.1 yards per carry.

"Obviously, a very tough loss and a game that we thought we could have won," said Rice linebacker Antonio Montero, who had a career-high 11 tackles. "But this gives us a lot of confidence knowing that if we can hang in there with a really good team like Army we can win a lot of games this season and down the road."

"I couldn't be prouder of these guys," Rice coach Mike Bloomgren added. "That's a great team on the other sideline. They made a few plays. It's a credit to that team."

Hopkins gave the Black Knights a 7-0 lead on a 2-yard run midway through the second quarter, and big plays set up the score in a drive that took 16 plays and lasted nearly 10 minutes. After Army converted twice on third down and once on fourth, wide receiver Christian Hayes ran a reverse right for 35 yards on a third-and-9 play. One play later Hopkins hit Hayes again, this time along the left side for 17 yards to set up the score.

Rice tailback Nahshon Ellerbe, who missed almost all of last year with a knee injury, tied it at 7-7 with a 54-yard touchdown run on the Owls' next possession.

Ellerbe finished with 103 yards rushing on nine carries and Walter had 72 yards rushing on 18 carries.

POOR FIELD POSITION

Army started three drives inside its own 10-yard line.

KICKING WOES

Rice place-kicker Will Harrison missed field goals of 26 and 44 yards.

NO TURNOVERS, PLEASE

Last year Army lost only five fumbles in over 900 plays, but the Black Knights were bitten once in this one. McCoy had a nice gain up the middle into Rice territory late in the third quarter, but defensive lineman Elijah Garcia stripped the ball and linebacker Blaze Alldredge recovered for the Owls. The Army defense forced a punt.

GAMBLING MAN

Last season, Army led the nation in conversions on third down (112 of 196, 57% success rate) and fourth down (31 of 36, 86%), coach Jeff Monken's mantra as a gambling man. Without its powerhouse backfield from last year, Army sputtered early. The Black Knights, at their own 15-yard line, were held for no gain on third and fourth downs on their first possession of the game, needing just a yard to convert. But they escaped when Rice kicker Will Harrison shanked a 26-yard field goal attempt.

"That's who they are," Bloomgren said. "Our defense stood tall. It really should have changed the game. We should have got points on the board there. We missed an opportunity, for sure."

THE TAKEAWAY

Rice: The Owls were 2-11 last season, the first under coach Mike Bloomgren, who used a slew of freshmen and redshirt freshmen to build experience into his system. He also added seven graduate transfers to the roster with a total of 202 games of college experience and 144 wins. That should help the Owls improve going forward.

Army: The Black Knights lost a lot in the run game, and Monken had little experience in the backfield with the 240-pound Slomka out. McCoy gained 70 yards on 20 carries, a nice showing. Monken said he expected Slomka back for practice this week.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
RICE	0	7	0	0	7
ARMY	0	7	0	7	14

Scoring Summary -----

	RICE	ARMY
SECOND QUARTER		
ARMY TD 8:50 Kelvin Hopkins Jr. 2 Yd Run (Cole Talley Kick)		7
16 plays, 95 yards, 9:48	0	
RICE TD 6:30 Nahshon Ellerbe 54 Yd Run (Will Harrison Kick)	7	
4 plays, 75 yards, 2:20	7	
FOURTH QUARTER		
ARMY TD 3:58 Kell Walker 17 Yd pass from Kelvin Hopkins Jr. (Cole Talley Kick)		7
18 plays, 96 yards, 9:21	7	14

Team Stats	RICE	ARMY
First Downs	10	17
Passes for First	2	3
Rushes for First	7	14
Penalties for First	1	0
Third Down Efficiency	3-11	9-15
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	1-2
Total Yards	243	284
Total Plays	44	64
Avg Gain Per Play	5.5	4.4
Net Yards Rushing	181	231
Rushes	30	56
Yards Per Rush	6.0	4.1
Net Yards Passing	62	53
Comp-Att	7-14	3-8
Yards Per Pass	4.4	6.6
Times Sacked	0	0
Yds Lost To Sacks	0	0
Interceptions	0	0
Punts	5	4
Punt Average	44.4	43.8
Penalties	3	4
Penalty Yards	20	26
Fumbles	1	1
Fumbles Lost	0	1
Time of Poss	25:09	34:51

Individual Stats

RUSHING

RICE	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Nahshon Ellerbe	9	103	11.4	1	54
Aston Walter	18	72	4.0	0	9
Wiley Green	2	4	2.0	0	6
Cameron Montgomery	1	2	2.0	0	2

ARMY	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Kelvin Hopkins Jr.	21	80	3.8	1	12
Sandon McCoy	20	70	3.5	0	12
Christian Hayes	1	35	35.0	0	35
Kell Walker	4	25	6.3	0	11
Artice Hobbs IV	4	15	3.8	0	7
Cade Barnard	2	7	3.5	0	4
Jabari Laws	1	3	3.0	0	3
Malik Hancock	1	-1	-1.0	0	0

PASSING

RICE	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Wiley Green	7	14	62	4.4	0	0	4.9
ARMY	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Kelvin Hopkins	3	8	53	6.6	1	0	49.6

RECEIVING

RICE	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Austin Trammell	4	40	10.0	0	38
Nahshon Ellerbe	1	15	15.0	0	15
Brad Rozner	1	6	6.0	0	6
August Pitre III	1	1	1.0	0	1
ARMY	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Artice Hobbs IV	1	19	19.0	0	19
Kell Walker	1	17	17.0	1	17
Christian Hayes	1	17	17.0	0	17