

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

A spring in their step

There are multiple reasons why the defense's gold jerseys might have seemed a bit brighter in the Black and Gold game April 17, 2010, at Memorial Stadium. For the first time in three seasons, the sun warmed the fans, the players and the Faurot Field turf during football's annual spring sneak preview.

But the gold-clad Mizzou defense also appeared to outnumber the offense at times, as sophomore end

Aldon Smith, junior linebacker Will Ebner and senior cornerbacks Carl Gettis and Kevin Rutland led the squad in a 34-6 second-half rout.

The event featured a new scoring system for the first half, in which the No. 1 offense and No. 1 defense competed against all other strings and the reserves were given a 14-0 lead at kickoff. Smith dazzled with the day's top highlight, blowing by the offensive line, sacking true freshman quarterback James Franklin and causing a fumble that sophomore defensive lineman Brad Madison picked up and ran in for a 14-yard score. It was tied 14-14 at halftime, and the score reset to 0-0 for the second half.

"It's all about improvement," Smith says, confidently. "As you can see, I think we improved from last spring to this spring. We all looked good."

However, the offense struggled with its timing, especially in the passing game. MU



Running back Derrick Washington (24) and wide receiver Wes Kemp (8) celebrate after Washington's touchdown in the first half of the Black and Gold game April 17, 2010, at Memorial Stadium. Photo by Clay McGlaughlin

quarterbacks were intercepted four times, while dropped passes and route-running mistakes plagued the receiving corps.

On the bright side, junior quarterback Blaine Gabbert's ankle — which he injured last season during a 27-12 loss to Nebraska Oct. 8 in Columbia — seemed fully recovered on a 25-yard scamper that was nearly a 49-yard touchdown (Gabbert was nicked by junior safety Kenji Jackson, by rule downing the quarterback). Senior running back Derrick Washington followed with a nine-yard second-quarter touchdown.

But even Gabbert gushed about the defense.

“The strides they’ve made from last year are tremendous,” Gabbert says. “From the new schemes [Defensive Coordinator] Dave Steckel is putting in, to playmakers stepping up. And we have two of the best defensive ends in the nation in [junior] Jacques Smith and Aldon Smith. I’ll put them up against anybody.”

Coach Gary Pinkel tempered his optimism by emphasizing how much work the team has to do between now and the season opener against Illinois Sept. 4 in St. Louis.

“There is still a lot of competition,” he says. “We set the depth chart going into August for our first practice, but when we start that first practice, all the jobs are open again.”

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