

COMMENTARY: Will the real ASU Sun Devils please show up?

By Ashley Zeldin Daily Trojan

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Los Angeles, CA (U-WIRE) -- For the last two years, Arizona State hasn't lived up to expectations.

2003 was supposed to be their breakout year, with an experienced quarterback, three promising young receivers, and a solid ground attack bolstered by a veteran offensive line.

But the Sun Devils burnt out, going 5-7 - only 2-6 in Pacific-10 Conference play - and failing to make a bowl game.

In 2004, Arizona State was supposed to be a faint flicker on the football field.

Instead, the Sun Devils lit up their opponents, losing only to Oregon, California and USC, while edging Purdue in the Sun Bowl. In those three losses, however, the Sun Devils were outscored 100-20.

Can the Sun Devils turn up the heat this year?

"In 2003, (we thought), 'Oh, we don't have to work too hard, we're going to beat everybody anyway,'" senior wide receiver Derek Hagan said. "Obviously that didn't happen...We're making sure that doesn't happen again."

Hagan and junior quarterback Sam Keller head the offense. Keller led Arizona State's comeback win over Purdue with a 25-of-45 performance for 370 yards and three touchdowns.

He'll be "protected" by an offensive line that allowed 39 sacks last season - eighth worst in the Pac-10.

While Arizona State's passing offense led the Pac-10 last year, its running game remains uncertain.

The team said goodbye to running back Loren Wade, who was charged with murdering a teammate this offseason. In his place are Rudy Burgess, last year's No. 6 receiver on the depth chart, and Randy Hill, who sat out the spring with a torn ACL.

"I don't know if he's the long-term answer," Koetter said of Burgess. "I don't know about his durability, but I do know he's a playmaker."

None of nine prospective tailbacks scored a rushing touchdown last year. But senior Cornell Canidate, the team's leading rusher as a freshman with 493 yards, is back after being sidelined last season.

The corners are a concern for the Sun Devils, whose pass defense ranked 85th nationally last year. The secondary is banking on contributions from two transfers - safety Derron Ware and cornerback Keno Walter-White.

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