

Atlanta Xplosion wins season Opener 43-0

By Hal Lamar

On a beautiful and a windy day in Dekalb County, the Atlanta Xplosion's defense contributed seven sacks and scored one of the team's six touchdowns enroute to a season opening 43-0 pasting of the visiting Clarksville (Tennessee) Fox 43-0 Saturday, April 11 at DeKalb County's James R Haliford Stadium (formally known as Dekalb Memorial Stadium.)

Before a largely partisan crowd of 1,000, the Xplosion overcame a shaky first quarter via their scrappy and determined adversaries to score their first touchdown at the 12:47 mark of the second quarter when starting quarterback April Ditto found Tanika Stephens in the end zone to finish an 11 play, 28 yard drive. The Xplosion, with a decided advantage over the Foxes numerically, exploited it to the hilt with two more scores before the break, one of them a 43 yard interception for a score by Mickieon Dozier with a minute and change left in the half that brought the crowd to its collective feet.

The Fox, last year's Tier 2 Midsouth division winners who finished with an 8-2 mark before losing the tier II national title to the Montreal Blitz, never gave up despite the three touchdown deficit. In fact, an opening drive in the second half by Atlanta was stopped at midfield on an interception by the Fox's Jennifer Hunt. But the team couldn't exploit the turnover. On their second possession of the half, Atlanta scored its fourth TD when Lee Lee Cannon took Ditto's handoff and raced unmolested 48 yards into the end zone. Cannon, voted co-MVP of the contest, carried nine times for 113 yards and scored twice. Tailgating her rushing performance was backfield comrade Launa Sims who carried the pigskin 12 times for 90 yards and scored six on a 12 yard run in the closing moments of the third period.

But at least part of the game ball in the opening season win should go to the Xplosion's exalted defensive elevens who kept Clarksville's quarterbacks entrapped in their own backfield seven times. Those sacks were shared by seven different defenders with veteran Carla "Smiley" Odom leading the way with five solo tackles, three assists and a sack. "We have new players but they are also athletes," said Odom, one of only a handful of veterans held over from the Xplosion's 2006 championship squad. " They have a lot of self confidence." Maurice Tyler, in his first year as head coach, agrees. " A lot of these players have excelled at other sports. Now, they have to learn the finer points of football. But I'm counting on the leadership of the veterans to bring them along."

The win Saturday partially erases 2008's opening season loss to the Orlando Mayhem on the road. Ironically, the team's second 2009 game will return the Xplosion to Texas to take on the Houston Energy. In 2008, the team lost its second game to the Dallas Diamonds. It was the first time the team had lost back to back in the opening stanza of any season since 2004 when they dropped a 28-21 squeaker to the New York Sharks in

their inaugural season with the Independent Women's Football League (IWFL).

And what about this weekend's opponent? "What I do know about them (Houston) is that they throw the football," said Tyler. "They are also a veteran team that spreads the field."

On April 11, the Energy was crushed by Dallas 69-0.

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Scoring Summary

Atlanta

2nd- 12:47-Ditto to Stephens-5 yds (11-28-3:58)-PAT -7- 0

2nd – 1:35-Ditto to Martin-11 yds (10-43-4:17)PAT- 14- 0

2nd-1:09-Dozier-43 yd int for TD-(1-43-:18)-PAT- 21- 0

3rd-9:47-Cannon-48 run (1-48-:12) 2PAT 29- 0

3rd-4:28-Sims-12 run (7-29-2:08)-PAT 36-0

3rd-1:51-Cannon-9 run-(1-9-:07) PAT 43-0

STATISTICAL HIGHLIGHTS

Rushing leaders

Cannon-9-113 yds-2 TDS

Sims-12-90 yds-1 TD

PASSING

Ditto-9-2-16 yards-2 int

DEFENSE	a	u	sacks
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Odom-	3	5	1
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Moore	3	1	1
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OFFICIALS:

R-Ralph Green

U-Greg Smith

LJ-Willie Crosby

FJ-Jacque Cooper

BJ-Terrance Candace

L-Freddie Chapman