

The Panthers open the SIFL playoffs at home Saturday night vs. Explosive Erie Offense

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ALBANY — The numbers are right out of a video game, just crazy, insane numbers — even for arena football.

That's what the Panthers are looking at on tape this week. They're looking at numbers that are staggering, mind-boggling and all too intimidating.

They're looking right at Adam DiMichele.

Don't know him? You will if you show up Saturday night at the Albany Civic Center, where the Panthers face DiMichele and the Erie Explosion in the opening round of the SIFL playoffs.

DiMichele will be easy to spot. He's the guy slinging bullets into the end zone. Nobody throws touchdowns like DiMichele, the most electric quarterback in the league.

Take a deep breath and read these stats: In 12 games this season, DiMichele has thrown 91 touchdown passes. That's not a misprint, that's 91 TDs, just nine shy of 100. He could reach the century mark Saturday.

"He's got a couple of games where he threw 10 touchdown passes," Panthers coach Lucious Davis said at practice Wednesday. "That guy has thrown a lot of touchdowns."

And not many interceptions. DiMichele has thrown only seven picks all season, while completing 235 of 427 passes for 3,247 yards. The numbers could have been even higher. In the regular-season finale, DiMichele threw only 23 passes all night, and completed just 15. But nine of those went for TDs.

How does he do it?

"He does a great job of extending the play and finding his receivers," Davis said. "You have to keep him in the pocket and put pressure on him."

He's mobile and elusive, but DiMichele doesn't look to run — he is always looking to burn you. Erie is averaging 70 points per game. The aptly named

Explosion had one night they will never forget in Fayetteville — a 138-0 win against the Force.

“They put a lot of points on the board,” Panthers general manager Will Carter said. “Their quarterback is mobile and buys time.”

That can be a nightmare for defensive backs, who have to stay with receivers longer because DiMichele milks every play until someone is finally open.

“It’s just like a drill we run,” Davis said. “It’s called the scramble drill.” The scramble drill is nothing more than good old fashion sandlot football, where receivers just improvise on their own and find a way to get open. Erie has been doing that all year, and improvised its way to a 9-3 record and the Northwest Division title.

No one improvises like receiver Kevin Concepcion, who — according to the SIFL — has caught more passes than anyone in one season in arena football history. He’s made 110 receptions in 12 games for 1,502 yards and caught 46 TDs.

Still, the Panthers aren’t intimidated.

“It will be a showdown,” said Panther cornerback Levance Richmond, one of the top defensive backs in the league. “I like playing against a great quarterback. I’m speaking for the whole secondary when I say that we want to face someone who is a challenge. I am a guy who wants a challenge. We want to face the best, and in this league he is one of the premier quarterbacks.”

DiMichele was a big-play quarterback before he arrived in the SIFL. He threw for 5,024 yards and 47 touchdowns in two years at Temple, where he is the fourth-ranked QB in the history of the Owls’ football program. He signed with the Philadelphia Eagles, but was waived Aug. 25.