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Houston Roughnecks quarterback Anthony Brown hands off to running back Lorenzo Lingard during Friday's loss to the St. Louis Battlehawks at TDECU Stadium.

St. Louis gallops past Roughnecks in UFL opener

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Special to The Eagle

The St. Louis Battlehawks ran over the Houston Roughnecks, 31-6 Friday at the University of Houston's TDECU Stadium in the season-opening game for the United Football League.

The Battlehawks set a UFL record with 273 rushing yards including a 74-yard touchdown run by Jarveon Howard.

The Roughnecks threw interceptions on two of their first three drives. Houston ran just five plays in the first quarter, generating 10 yards of offense. The second quarter wasn't much better as they ran 12 plays for 38 yards.

Meanwhile, the Battlehawks scored two touchdowns on short runs and kicked two field goals to give them an 18-0 halftime lead. St. Louis scored two more touchdowns in the fourth quarter, before the Roughnecks' Justin Hall caught a 5-yard pass from Nolan Henderson for their first touchdown of the game and season.

For Houston, Anthony Brown completed five of 11 passes for 21 yards with two interceptions. Nolan Henderson replaced Brown in the third quarter and completed seven of 18 passes for 68 yards and a touchdown. He also ran four times for 54 yards. Justin Hall caught five passes for 40 yards and one touchdown.

Manny Wilkins led the Battlehawks by completing 17 of 22 passes for 189 yards. He also rushed eight times for 43 yards and two touchdowns. Howard carried the ball 13 times for 115 yards and a touchdown, and Jacob Saylor caught 10 passes for 98 yards and a touchdown.

After a 1-9 season in 2024, the Roughnecks were hoping to start the new season with a win.

"Tough, tough game. We got off to a slow start," Roughnecks head coach CJ Johnson said. "On defense we need to improve our tackling. On offense, we must possess the ball better and avoid turnovers. Our execution and timing issues affected our initial drives. I think we had a tendency to think too much rather than play freely. We need to avoid embarrassment when playing good teams, and this was an embarrassment. For next week, we need to focus on urgency and energy to avoid feeling out of control. We need to establish a quicker tempo and rhythm on offense."



St. Louis quarterback Manny Wilkins slides down after a run Friday night against the Houston Roughnecks.



St. Louis Battlehawks quarterback Manny Wilkins escapes Houston Roughnecks defender Darrius Moragne during Friday's game at TDECU Stadium.

Round two

The UFL enters its second season after the merger of the XFL and the USFL. There are eight teams in the league, with two conferences of four teams each. The USFL Conference includes the Birmingham Stallions (2024 record 9-1), the Michigan Panthers (7-3), the Memphis Showboats (2-8), and the Houston Roughnecks (1-9). The XFL Conference consists of the

St. Louis Battlehawks (7-3), the San Antonio Brahmas (7-3), the DC Defenders (4-6) and the Arlington Renegades (3-7).

The UFL is a joint venture between Fox Sports, RedBird Capital Partners, Dany Garcia, and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson. Fox Sports owns 50% of the league, while the other 50% is shared by the remaining three partners. The league differs from the NFL in that

all of the teams are owned by the league.

This year the league is implementing MindFly BodyCam technology, a camera in a mesh vest weighing under two pounds with a shatterproof lens that attaches to players' shoulder pads. The camera offers viewers a player's perspective with broadcast-quality video.

The chain gang no longer exists as the UFL is also

implementing the TruLine virtual first down measurement system, which provides accuracy within four millimeters, and is also working toward developing ball-spotting technology.

There are some clouds on the UFL horizon as the season has started without a collective bargaining agreement between the league and the players union. The main point of contention is that the players are seeking

either year-round health care or a wage increase that would let them pay for it on their own. Last year the base salary was \$50,000 for a 10-week season plus a weekly \$400 housing allowance. The players have threatened to strike if an agreement is not reached.

Also, two of the teams' head coaches abruptly quit a week before the season started. Ken Whisenhunt, the head coach of the Memphis Showboats, is taking a season-long leave of absence, citing personal reasons, and Reggie Barlow, head coach of the D.C. Defenders resigned to take over as the head coach at Tennessee State University.

About the Houston Roughnecks

The Houston Roughnecks play their home games at the University of Houston's TDECU Stadium. Their head coach is Charles "CJ" Johnson. Previously, he coached the United States Football League (USFL's) Houston Gamblers. Johnson has 40 years of coaching experience, including four as head coach at Tulane University and 33 seasons in all as an assistant coach in the NFL, college and high school.

The Roughnecks will travel next to play the Renegades at 11 a.m. Sunday at Choctaw Stadium.

The Renegades' head coach is Bob Stoops, who was the head football coach at Oklahoma from 1999 through 2016.