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Kansas Outlasts South Dakota State, 31-17, in Season Opener

LAWRENCE, Kan. - Kansas running backs [Taylor Cox](#) and [Tony Pierson](#) each rushed for over 100 yards while the KU defense forced four turnovers, as Kansas defeated the South Dakota State Jackrabbits, 31-17, in its season opener Saturday night inside Memorial Stadium.

Kansas is 1-0 for the eighth time since the 2004 campaign, while South Dakota State drops to 0-1 on the season.

It was a tale of two halves, as Kansas outscored the Jackrabbits, 21-10, in the second half starting Charlie Weis' KU head coaching career off on the right foot.

The South Dakota State defense had no answers for the KU rushing attack, which gained a total of 263 yards on the ground. Pierson and Cox each notched career highs on the night, collecting 128 and 125 yards, respectively.

The duo's performance marked the first time Kansas featured a pair of 100-plus yard rushers in the same game since [Brandon McAnderson](#) and [Jake Sharp](#) both hit the century mark against Central Michigan in 2007.

KU's defense used several big plays to tame the pesky Jackrabbit offense. The Jayhawks notched four interceptions, also a first since the 2007 season. KU held SDSU to just three third-down conversions on 14 attempts.

KU used a strong start to the second half to out outlast the visitors from Brookings, S.D. Pierson got the Jayhawk offense going after the intermission when he broke free on an off-tackle run. The East St. Louis, Ill., native took it 47 yards for the score with less than five minutes into the third quarter. The run matched his career high and gave the Jayhawks their first two-possession lead of the contest.

The KU defense then applied the pressure when it forced the first turnover of season on the ensuing Jackrabbit drive. Senior safety [Bradley McDougald](#) stepped in front of SDSU quarterback Austin Sumner's first pass of the game to snag his fifth-career interception.

The McDougald pick gave the Jayhawks prime field position, which they used to their advantage. Crist found senior tight end [Mike Ragone](#) on a 2-yard touchdown pass at the end of a seven-play drive to up the KU lead, 24-7. The score marked the first touchdown reception in Ragone's collegiate career and the first touchdown pass for Crist in a Jayhawk uniform.

Crist went 17-of-36 for 167 yards and added a touchdown pass in his Jayhawk debut.

The Jackrabbits didn't say die however, scoring 10 points in the first six minutes of the fourth quarter to narrow the Kansas lead to seven.

The Jackrabbits opened the scoring in the game when sophomore Zach Zenner broke free for a 99-yard touchdown run with 6:30 minutes into the opening quarter. The rush was the longest in Jackrabbit history and the longest run ever given up by a Kansas defense.

The Jayhawks responded eight minutes later when [Tony Pierson](#) found the end zone for the first time on a rush from three yards out to even the score, 7-7.

Later in the half, the Jayhawk special teams unit came up big when junior [Josh Ford](#) blocked an SDSU punt, giving Kansas great field position once again. The KU drive ended in a [Ron](#)

[Doherty](#) field goal, giving the Jayhawks a 10-7 advantage as they headed into the locker room.

Kansas will return to the gridiron on Saturday, Sept. 8 for a matchup against the Rice Owls. Kickoff is slated for 2:30 p.m., and will be televised on Fox Sports Net.