

Gladiator News

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Team's debut a winner

Gladiators win first game in overtime over Venice Vikings

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VENICE - The Bradenton Gladiators picked up where their predecessors left off.

The now defunct Manasota Stars won the 2001 championship of the United Football League of Florida before going belly-up. The Gladiators, Bradenton's newest semi-pro football team, just needed a little more time to get the job done Saturday night at Venice High School.

The Gladiators didn't beat the rain, but they did beat the Venice Vikings 27-21 in overtime in their Southern States Football League debut.

Armed with a roster loaded with ex-Manatee County high school stars, the night belonged to former Southeast Seminoles such as quarterback Antonio Hale.

Hale scored the game-winning touchdown on a 1-yard sneak with 10 minutes, 16 seconds remaining in overtime.

A pleasant evening turned into a wet one as the Gladiators appeared to be putting together a winning drive with two minutes to go in the fourth quarter when the skies opened up. Instead of scoring, Bradenton lost the ball on a fumble, its fifth turnover.

However, the Gladiators overcame their mistakes to come away with a victory.

Hale scored on another 1-yard run in the first quarter and passed for 194 yards.

Bradenton's other two touchdowns also belonged to former Seminoles. Anthony Rawls capped a monstrous drive that ate up more than 11 minutes of the third quarter with a 1-yard run on 4th-and-goal.

Thomas Jefferson scored Bradenton's other TD on a 5-yard fumble return late in the third quarter.