

Gladiator News

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Gladiators slip from first place

St. Petersburg deals Bradenton first loss of year

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BRADENTON - In his first start at quarterback this season, Bradenton Gladiators president Edrick Sweeting was on the verge of engineering a dramatic comeback Saturday against St. Petersburg from a 10-point deficit.

Sharks defensive back Walter Flounory had other ideas.

Flounory stepped in front of intended receiver Mike Mills at the Sharks' 11-yard line for an interception with 1 minute, 9 seconds left, preserving St. Petersburg's 16-12 victory in front of about 400 fans at Southeast High.

The Sharks (5-1) reclaimed first place from the Gladiators (4-1) in the AFC West Division of the Southern States Football League.

"It was just a bad ball," said Sweeting, who had taken the Gladiators from their own 20 to the Sharks' 25 before the interception. "It should have been thrown a little more to the outside. (Mills) was not able to make a break on it. We were able to move the ball and do what we needed to do on that last drive, but we didn't capitalize on the breaks we had."

Sweeting, who was 5-of-15 passing for 64 yards and rushed for 40 yards in the second half, normally plays safety on defense. He started behind center because of an injury to fellow Southeast High graduate Tony Hale.

Two special-teams breakdowns dealt a damaging blow to the Gladiators' ambition of staying undefeated. A bad snap from punt formation resulted in a two-point safety early in the second quarter, and the Sharks added another safety in the period when Wade Alden's punt was blocked, forcing him to kick the loose ball out of the end zone.

"Mentally, we were not in the ballgame in the first half," said Gladiators coach Eddie Starling. "St. Pete has an excellent team, and we waited too late to start jelling. We played a stellar game defensively, but we have to play every down, every play."

The Sharks' 40-year-old quarterback, Leonard Johnson, threw a 59-yard strike to Phillip Webster to open the scoring en route to a 156-yard performance. Chris Hayes added a 1-yard scoring plunge in the third period.

Calvin Williams scored both Gladiators touchdowns, juking and weaving on a 26-yard run in the second quarter and adding a 20-yard score on a delay early in the fourth quarter to cut into the Sharks' 16-6 lead.

Williams rushed for 79 yards on 13 carries, and Joseph Patoray added 50 yards on five carries.

The Gladiators play the Fire on Saturday at Fort Pierce.