

Gladiator News

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Gladiators fall to Generals in SSFL Rice Bowl

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ORLANDO - The Bradenton Gladiators picked a lousy time to play their least inspired game of the season.

First Coast quarterback Steve Mott threw three touchdown passes to J.B. Balom, and the Gladiators rushed for a total of 15 yards on 29 carries as the Jacksonville-based Generals won the Southern States Football League Rice Bowl Championship 26-3 on Saturday at the Florida Citrus Bowl.

"This is the best team our guys have faced all year," said Gladiators coach Eddie Starling, "but unfortunately, the Gladiators did not show up. I have the utmost respect for (Generals) coach Joe Davis and his staff, but I thought it was more our mistakes that made the difference.

"We've had a great season, but we did not step up to the Generals' level."

The Gladiators (12-2) were poised to grab an early lead after Bon Bean's 56-yard punt return and a face-mask penalty against the Generals resulted in a first down on First Coast's 27-yard line.

Seven consecutive rushing plays set up a 1st-and-goal on the 4, but James Adams fumbled on the next carry, and Sidney Madison recovered for the Generals (13-1). From that point, the physical Generals defense kept the Gladiators from threatening until the outcome was assured.

The Generals took a 6-0 halftime lead on a 50-yard strike from Mott to Balom midway through the second quarter.

"We noticed their safety (Mike Mills) is very aggressive, and when I moved up in the pocket to run, he came up," said Mott. "(Balom) continued with his route and got wide open."

To a crowd of about 500, the second half held promise of an exciting finish. But the confident Gladiators squad that swept three playoff opponents at Southeast High was nowhere to be found after halftime.

When Mott and Balom connected for a 21-yard touchdown on 4th-and-12 on the Generals' first possession of the second half to go ahead 13-0, even the most fervent Gladiators fans sensed it was not their day.

"I think we underestimated them," said Gladiators president Edrick Sweeting, who played defensive back and receiver. "It was a good first half, but the second half, I guess it just looked like we fell apart.

"We couldn't get into a rhythm - the running backs, the quarterback, the receivers or the defense. We lost, so you accept it and get prepared for next time."

"They weren't 12-1 coming in here for nothing," said Gladiators linebacker Chris Peterson. "I think we're a better team personally, but (Saturday) we weren't. They kept us off balance all game. They never seemed out of rhythm."

Mott was 8-of-22 passing for 143 yards, and when he went out for a spell after twisting his knee, backup Mike James tossed a 37-yard touchdown pass to John Session, who leaped above Demetrius Craddock for the catch and a 19-0 lead.

Gladiators quarterback Tony Hale was 6-of-26 with three interceptions, struggling with the blustery winds on the floor of the stadium.

With the score 26-0 and less than 4 minutes remaining, Gladiators defensive lineman Robert Carlisto recovered a Generals fumble, leading to a 35-yard field goal by Dominic Fragomeni.

The following Gladiators were named to the SSFL AFC team: Bean; Sweeting; Peterson; Craddock; defensive backs Anthony Rawls and Thomas Jefferson; linebackers Terrance Fuller and ZeZe Singleton; tight end Frankie Romo; and offensive lineman Wade Alden.