

Gladiator News

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Gladiators continue to have impact in county

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Special to the Herald

PALMETTO — Whether they were juking, shaking or speeding past an on-looking defender, the Bradenton Gladiators' offense was clicking. The defense was too, dishing out bone-crunching hits en route to a 48-0 victory against the Nature Coast Knights in a Florida Football Alliance AFC West division football game Saturday at Harlee Stadium.

But the team is more than just lighting up the scoreboard.

"This team is more visible than any team I've ever coached in 14 years," Gladiators head coach Ernest Givins said.

The Gladiators (6-1) put on fundraisers, and they have a scholarship program to help graduating high school seniors.

Former Southeast High football player Terrence Hall in on the defense. He said the Gladiators did a Toys for Tots fundraiser.

"We got to do something positive for the kids," Hall said.

Edrick Sweeting plays quarterback and is the president for the organization. Sweeting said there's been some player turnover since he started the team five years ago.

"We're losing a lot of people, who are actually going off to school, and that's what the program's about," Sweeting said. "Basically, we're just trying to send individuals to that next level."

Givins concurred and said he's put almost 50 players back into school.

"That's what this league is about, giving these guys a second chance," Givins said.

As for the game itself, Bradenton stormed out to a 35-0 halftime lead. Bobby Dawes and Glenn Woods churned out the ground attack as the Gladiators cruised along, forcing a running second-half clock when Woods galloped 11 yards for a touchdown.

He scored on runs of 8 yards and 1 yard as well.

"As far as touchdown-wise, this was my best game," said the 5-foot-7 Woods, who describes himself as a slasher.

Dawes did most of his damage as a punt returner, setting up Woods' first touchdown with a long return inside the Knights' 10-yard line.

Dawes said he's trying to get to the next level. It's a goal not uncommon for the rest of the Gladiators.

"Instead of not playing and just sitting around the house playing video games and eating and getting into trouble," Dawes said, "instead I'm working and coming out here playing ball with these guys, helping get me back into shape to where I want to be at to get to the next level."

Mike Mills held the Knights' offense in check on the defensive side with several first-half sacks.

The Gladiators' next home game is against the undefeated Port St. Lucie Bobcats in two weeks. Sweeting said tickets can be purchased for \$5 from any player in advance or \$7 at the gate. The Bobcats handed the Gladiators their only defeat this year. Bradenton heads to Fort Myers to play the Spartans next Saturday.