

Gladiator News

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Gladiators steamroll winless Venice

ANTHONY GAGLIANO
Special to The Herald

BRADENTON - A stunned Venice team never recovered from Bradenton's surprise onside kick to open the game, leading to a 43-6 Gladiators victory Saturday at Southeast High.

Of course, in a matchup between the AFC West Division-leading Gladiators (8-1) and the winless Vikings (0-9), it wasn't exactly a big shock. Still, the Gladiators managed to grab the momentum quickly by emerging from the huddle with an onside kick. Bradenton pounced on the ball after it rolled 10 yards, then shocked Venice with a fly route on the first play from scrimmage.

Quarterback Edrick Sweeting hit Bon Bean, who weaved his defender dizzy before walking in for the 60-yard strike.

"It got me excited and in the game," Bean said. "Then, there's no telling what can happen. It's all up in the air."

The Gladiators, who will host a playoff game April 8, had the undermanned Vikings - who brought just 20 players - in a hole, but their own mistakes let last-place Venice hang around. A fumble on Bradenton's second possession gave the Vikings the ball at midfield.

Sweeting tried to pitch on the ensuing drive, but a Venice defender intercepted his lateral and was wrestled down at the 25 by the last Gladiator to prevent a score.

The stout Bradenton defense turned away each drive, holding Venice to 111 total yards.

After a failed fake punt by Venice following the second Gladiators fumble, Bradenton gained steam on the ground. Torrye Shatteen burst through for 18 yards on 3rd-and-1 to move the ball into Vikings territory, then ripped off 35 yards before being tackled at the 2.

"Straight up, that's the theme," Shatteen said. "I just run hard. It's all about how bad I want the ball, and I want it so bad."

A busted play ended the first quarter, but Calvin Williams took a toss left from three yards out to score on the first play of the second quarter. The diminutive tailback hid his 5-foot-4 frame behind his blockers as the play stretched out to the sideline before he dove in for the score. After a blocked kick following the first touchdown, Sweeting elected to go for two, scoring on a quarterback sweep left.

Tony Hale entered the game at quarterback for Bradenton's next drive but misfired on his first three attempts. Wade Alden connected with Tony Davis on a fake punt for 15 yards, and Hale hit Bean for a 26-yard score to push the lead to 21-0. Bean pitched the ball back to the beaten Venice cornerback, who responded by kicking the ball back at Bean in the first sign of the Vikings' frustration.

"He asked for that," Bean said. "Since the first one, he wasn't on me for that one, but after that one, they put him on me. He followed me everywhere. He talked, talked, talked about how I was not going to get the ball. So I had to show him. When I did score, I felt he wanted the ball, but I had to get it first."

A botched reverse resulted in a fumble on 3rd-and-22 for Venice, which Terrance Fuller scooped up and rumbled 25 yards for the score. An interception gave the ball back to Bradenton, which capitalized with a 28-yard touchdown pass from Hale to Matt Dunbar.

The Gladiators play their season finale next week in Sebastian against the Hurricanes.

Should the Gladiators win that game, they'll earn at least a share of the division title with the St. Petersburg Sharks, the only team to defeat Bradenton during the regular season. It's given the team a measure of confidence heading into the playoffs.

"We're going all the way," Bean said. "It's a done deal. Put 'Gladiators' on the rings and set up the parade."