

Gladiator News

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Gladiators win amid chaos

By MIKE HENRY

BRADENTON - Losing 41-17 against the Bradenton Gladiators early in the fourth quarter of Saturday's Southern States Football League playoff game was more than some members of the Magic City Bulls could handle.

After Bulls quarterback Tony Smith was ejected for removing his helmet and cursing at the referee, Magic City coaches and players charged onto the field.

As chaos ensued and players from both teams milled on the field, a Magic City coach - identified afterward by a member of the Bulls as assistant Darryl Hence - struck game official Bill Lehnert on the side of the head. Lehnert, who was not injured, said he plans to file charges.

SSFL Commissioner Dave Rice, who watched the fracas from the Southeast High stands, immediately forfeited the game to the Gladiators (11-1), who advance to Saturday's SSFL AFC final at Southeast against the Fort Pierce Fire. The Fire upset the St. Petersburg Sharks 26-20 in overtime. The winner moves on to the SSFL Rice Bowl Championship on April 29 in Orlando.

"It's an easy decision (to end the game) when safety is involved," said Rice, who added the Bulls (9-3) will not be invited back to the SSFL for 2007. "We do not tolerate violence in any form. We had a good game going, but when things got a little tough for the Bulls, they lost control, and their coaching staff did not respond with the discipline we expect."

Gladiators coach Eddie Starling, who happens to be a detective with the Manatee County Sheriff's Office, said videotape of the game will be examined to make a positive identification of Lehnert's assailant.

"If we can find the actual culprit who struck the official, we will issue a warrant for his arrest, and he will have to answer to a Manatee County judge," Starling said.

"The Bulls came here (from Miami) with a real different attitude. They were talkative and antagonizing, and we knew we couldn't feed into that."

After the Bulls took a 6-0 lead, the Gladiators dominated. Bon Bean set up their first touchdown - a 1-yard run by James Adams - with a 51-yard punt return. On the Bulls' next series, Terrance Fuller forced a fumble that Chris Peterson returned 21 yards for a Gladiators touchdown.

The hosts increased the lead to 24-9 at halftime on a 32-yard field goal by Dominic Fragomeni and a 16-yard touchdown pass from Tony Hale to Bean. Subsequent Gladiators touchdowns came on a blocked punt and 7-yard return by Anthony Rawls and a 36-yard interception return by Derrick Hugine.