

Gladiator News

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Gladiators hope to make amends for last year's loss

HERALD STAFF

Redemption Saturday has arrived for the Bradenton Gladiators.

At 7 p.m. today at Southeast High, the Gladiators (11-1) face the Fort Pierce Fire (7-5) for the AFC Championship of the Southern States Football League. The Fire eliminated the Gladiators from the 2005 playoffs 17-14 on a last-minute touchdown.

Tonight's winner advances to the SSFL Rice Bowl Championship at 3 p.m. April 29 at the Citrus Bowl in Orlando against the winner of today's NFC Championship game between the First Coast Generals of Jacksonville and the Orlando Rage.

"We've been calling this 'Redemption Week,' " said Gladiators coach Eddie Starling, whose team defeated the Magic City Bulls 41-17 last week in the conference semifinals. "Fort Pierce bumped us out of the playoffs last year, and last week they beat the (St. Petersburg) Sharks, which is the only team to beat us this season.

"We have had some great practices this week and are ready to come out and do what we do."

The Gladiators' defensive charge is led by linebackers Chris Peterson and Terrance Fuller. On offense, Starling favors a ball-control attack behind the beefy offensive front of tackles Wade Alden and Jefferson Turner, guards Al Purdue and Reginald Nelson and center Joshua Holmes.

Last week's game against the Bulls ended prematurely via forfeit when the visitors came onto the field early in the fourth quarter to protest an official's call.

Starling said game videotape failed to show a Bulls assistant coach striking an official, but affidavits will be taken from witnesses to the incident to determine if there is reason to forward the matter to the state attorney's office.

Tickets are \$7, \$5 if purchased in advance from a Gladiators player or coach. Children 5 and under are admitted free. Fort Pierce is expected to bring a fan party bus to the game.