

Gladiator News

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Gladiators win season opener

Defense was key in Bradenton's victory over Fort Myers

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BRADENTON - Before his team's Southern States Football League season opener against Fort Myers, Bradenton Gladiators coach Eddie Starling expressed concern about his team's inability to schedule a scrimmage game.

Saturday night at John Kiker Memorial Stadium, the Gladiators' offense needed a quarter to find its best stride. But the defense was in mid-season form, leading to a 31-13 victory against the Spartans in front of about 300 fans.

"We knew we would have to get some kinks worked out, and there was no chemistry on offense," Starling said. "But I was comfortable with the defense," which enabled a sluggish attack to build a 25-0 lead.

Linebacker Chris Peterson, who was in on about a dozen tackles, said the unit was eager to get physical.

"It was the first time we got a chance to hit somebody other than ourselves. If you can't get up for that, something's wrong," Peterson said.

Quarterback Edrick Sweeting - who is also the team's president - completed only two passes, but both were touchdowns to Jeff Charlton, of 19 and 8 yards. Running back Glenn Woods, who played for the Venice Vikings last year, rushed for 79 yards on eight carries.

"He gives us a whole new dimension with his speed," Sweeting said.

Mark Kennon scored on two 1-yard runs, and Joe Patoray added a 4-yard scoring burst off tackle. Fort Myers quarterback Harrison Thomas scored both Spartans touchdowns on runs of 5 and 8 yards.

The Gladiators are trying to improve on last year's SSFL runner-up finish.

"We're making positive steps, one day at a time," said Manatee High graduate Charlton, who played junior college football in 2005 at College of the Desert in California.