

ASU Upends No. 1 Georgia Southern

Written by Mike Flynn

Saturday, 29 October 2011 21:51

Brian Quick (Columbia, S.C./Ridge View) scored the go-ahead touchdown on an acrobatic 15-yard catch with 9:24 to go and Appalachian State University's defense made the lead stand up in the Mountaineers' 24-17 win over No. 1 Georgia Southern on Saturday afternoon at jam-packed Kidd Brewer Stadium. ("The Catch" shot by Tom Lanier) With its first win over a top-ranked team in 12 years, Appalachian (6-2, 4-1 SoCon) gained the inside track on winning an unprecedented seventh-straight Southern Conference championship and handed Georgia Southern (7-1, 5-1 SoCon) its first loss of the year.

"The first thing I would say is that I am proud of our football team, of the players and what they accomplished today, and of the Appalachian family," said ASU coach Jerry Moore. "We raised the bar, we are playing with so many young players. We started a freshman center, a freshman left guard, a kid that played a little bit last year at left tackle, and I am proud of them. And our defense just time and time again rose to the occasion. They are growing up, and this was a great win for our program."

In front of 30,018 black-clad, boisterous fans on Black Saturday at The Rock, the Mountaineers held Georgia Southern — the NCAA Division I FCS leader in scoring (44.6 points per game) and rushing (369.7 yards per game) coming in — to just 17 points, 135 rushing yards and 201 yards of total offense, 286 fewer than the 487.3 yards per game it rolled up en route to its 7-0 start.

Appalachian's defense was especially stout when it mattered the most, as it turned the Eagles away inside the 10 yard line twice in the final 15:30 of the ballgame and stuffed GSU's Robert Brown for a one-yard loss on fourth-and-one from the ASU 46 to essentially seal the victory with 1:45 to go.

"I feel that the coaches prepared us great, they were telling us that they have great backs, and it felt like we had the hunger to stop them, and we were working hard all week to prepare for them," said ASU defensive end Ronald Blair. "We knew we had to top them, if they came in they would have built their momentum, and we knew if we didn't keep them out of the end zone it was going to be tough to win in the end, so we had to stop them."

The Mountaineers exploded out of the gates, turning a pair of first-half interceptions by Demetrius McCray (Covington, Ga./Newton) into touchdowns en route to grabbing a commanding 17-3 halftime lead. Georgia Southern quarterback Jaybo Shaw, who hadn't thrown an interception all season, was picked off on the fourth play of the game by McCray, and Appalachian needed only six plays to turn the miscue into points. On third-and-two from the GSU 25 yard line, ASU quarterback Jamal Jackson (Atlanta, Ga./North Atlanta) stood in the face of a blitz and delivered a strike to a wide-open Andrew Peacock (Durham, N.C./Northern Durham) who waltzed into the end zone to give the Mountaineers a 7-0 lead less than five minutes into the contest.

After the teams traded field goals early in the second period, Georgia Southern moved into ASU territory late in the first half looking to knot the score before the break. However, on a

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third-and-12 play, Shaw once again took to the air and, once again, McCray picked him off, giving the Mountaineers the ball on their own 20 with 1:29 to go in the opening half.

Just 72 seconds later, Jackson hit Quick in stride down the left sideline for a 56-yard touchdown that gave Appalachian a commanding 17-3 halftime lead. The 56-yard strike not only staked ASU to a two-touchdown advantage but also put Quick over the 3,000-yard receiving mark for his career, making him only the second Mountaineer and seventh player in SoCon history to join the exclusive club.

"We have faith in him because he is our quarterback," Quick said. "He is young but he is still our leader, and all the eyes are on him and he handles the pressure really well. He stays humble, and he's making good throws and making good reads."

The third quarter was all Georgia Southern, with the Eagles using their patented triple-option rushing attack to roll up 118 yards on just two possessions. On its first possession of the second half, GSU marched 60 yards in 12 plays, chewing up seven minutes off the clock before J.J. Wilcox dove in for a three-yard touchdown that cut the ASU lead to 17-10.

It appeared the Eagles were poised to pull even going into the final period when they drove 56 yards to the ASU three yard line on their very next series. However, on fourth and goal from the three, Brandon Grier (Charlotte, N.C./West Charlotte) stopped Shaw for a two-yard gain to preserve the Mountaineers' 17-10 lead going into the fourth quarter.

However, Georgia Southern was able to draw even without even putting its offense back on the field, as it forced Appalachian to punt from its own end zone following ASU's goal-line stand and Darreion Robinson made the first coverage man miss, broke several tackles, barely kept his balance on at least two occasions and twirled his way into the end zone for a 46-yard return that tied the ballgame at 17-17 with 13:57 left to play.

With momentum firmly in Georgia Southern's corner and the crowd at The Rock at its quietest of the afternoon, Jackson engineered perhaps the finest drive of his young career when he directed a nine-play, 67-yard masterpiece that culminated with Quick leaping high to haul in a floating pass in the back of the end zone, then using his entire 6-5 frame to get a foot down before falling out of bounds. Jackson completed 3-of-4 passes for 41 yards and rushed twice for seven yards on what proved to be the game-winning drive, which gave Appalachian a 24-17 lead with 9:24 to go in the ballgame.

"I know my feet were in, in college you only need one foot in, I know I defiantly kept that foot down, and concentrated on catching the ball," Quick said. "In the end I had possession of the ball, and when I fell I cuffed it up and made sure I protected it as I was falling to the ground." From there, the ASU defense took over. After forcing a GSU punt after the go-ahead touchdown, the Mountaineer defense was back on the field just two plays later when Jackson made his only mistake of the day, an interception that was returned 26 yards by Georgia Southern's Laron Scott to the ASU nine yard line. However, despite being less than 10 yards from paydirt and possessing the nation's top rushing attack, Shaw and the Eagles inexplicably threw three-straight passes inside the 10 yard line, the third of which was batted away by DeAndre Presley (Tampa, Fla./Middleton) on fourth down to give the Apps the ball back with

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4:33 left and their seven-point lead still intact.

A three-and-out by the Mountaineer offense gave Georgia Southern the ball near midfield with under three minutes to go but once again, the Appalachian defense stood tall. On fourth and one from the ASU 46, Grier made yet another critical stop when he stuffed Brown for a loss of one yard to give the Mountaineers the ball back with 1:45 to play. A GSU timeout forced Appalachian to punt the ball back to the Eagles one last time but on the game's final play, John Rizer (Fayetteville, N.C./Jack Britt) sacked GSU backup signal-caller Ezayi Youyoute on the final play of the game to set off a frenzied, field-rushing celebration by the fifth-largest crowd in Appalachian history.

In all, ASU turned away Georgia Southern on all four of its fourth-down attempts and limited GSU to just 4-of-13 on third downs. Linebackers Jeremy Kimbrough (Decatur, Ga./Cedar Grove) and Grier led the dominating performance with 16 and 14 tackles, respectively — both career highs. Troy Sanders (Chester, S.C./Chester) chipped in with nine stops while Rizer and Ronald Blair (Greensboro, Ga./Greene County) added eight tackles and a sack apiece.

"We were able to come out and tie it up. Great run by Darreion Robinson, great individual effort to tie it up at 17- 17" said Georgia Southern coach Jeff Monkey. "Unfortunately, that last td down there, we blew an assignment, let their best player run wide open all by himself in the back of the end zone. Just couldn't make a play down there. Had a chance at the end, just couldn't make a play. Credit to Appalachian State they've got a great football team. Well coached."

In addition to holding the Eagles to 234 yards below their season rushing average, the Mountaineers also wreaked havoc on GSU's passing game. Georgia Southern attempted just 11 passes but completed only four with Appalachian either breaking up or intercepting the other seven. McCray led the way with the first two-interception game of his career, giving him four in the last four games. Presley had two of ASU's five pass break-ups, with both ending drives in the fourth quarter.

Offensively, Quick led the charge with 119 yards and two touchdowns on just four receptions. He matched a school-record with his third-straight 100-yard game and upped his career yardage total to 3,056 yards, just 68 shy of the school record of 3,124 set by current ASU senior associate athletics director Rick Beasley from 1978-80.

Jackson turned in his third 200-yard passing effort in as many career starts, going 13-of-26 for 222 yards and a career-high-tying three touchdown passes. He also notched team highs with 13 rushes for 54 yards.

Brown paced Georgia Southern's paltry offense with 47 yards on 15 carries while Jerick McKinnon and Shaw chipped in with 40 and 37 yards on the ground, respectively. Firmly in control of its own destiny for an unprecedented seventh-straight SoCon championship, Appalachian returns to action next week when it travels to face red-hot Furman (5-3, 4-2 SoCon) in Greenville, S.C. Kickoff between the longtime rivals is set for 1:30 p.m. at Furman's Paladin Stadium.

NOTES: Appalachian moved to 3-5 all-time versus No. 1-ranked teams, including a 3-2 mark at home ... ASU's last win over a top-ranked team came on Oct. 16, 1999, when it also defeated No. 1 Georgia Southern, 17-16, at Kidd Brewer Stadium ... the win was the Mountaineers' 16th-straight regular-season triumph at home and its 60th in its last 64 games at The Rock

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overall ... ASU moved to 31-2 in its last 33 SoCon games ... in an ironic role reversal, the win avenged last year's 21-14 loss at Georgia Southern when Appalachian was undefeated and ranked No. 1 nationally ... the Mountaineers won for the sixth time in their last nine meetings with Georgia Southern and avoided dropping consecutive decisions to the Eagles for the first time since 2001-02 ... the loss was just the second in the last 15 games for Georgia Southern ... prior to Quick's current run of three-straight 100-yard games, the only Mountaineers to ever record three-consecutive 100-yard receiving outputs were DaVon Folkes (2004) and Bob Agle (1968) ... prior to Saturday, the last time that GSU returned a punt for a touchdown and the last time that ASU allowed a punt return for a score was when the Eagles' Raja Andrews took a punt back 84 yards for a touchdown against the Mountaineers in 2008 ... McCray's two-interception game was the first by a Mountaineer since Mark LeGree picked off Elon twice in a SoCon title-clinching 27-10 win in 2009 ... Appalachian was without starting left tackle Kendall Lamm (Charlotte, N.C./Butler) and left guard Sherman Holt (Leicester, N.C./Erwin), who both sustained ankle injuries in practice this week ... in their place, sophomore Ian Barnard (Norcross, Ga./Wesleyan School) and freshman Graham Fisher (Waynesville, N.C./Tuscola) made their first-career starts at left tackle and left guard, respectively ... ASU running back Travaris Cadet (Miami, Fla./Central) sustained a head injury late in the game but walked off the field under his own power ... his condition will be reevaluated on Sunday.

SCORING:

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | T |
|-------------------|---|----|---|---|------|
| Georgia Southern | 0 | 3 | 7 | 7 | - 17 |
| Appalachian State | 7 | 10 | 0 | 7 | - 24 |

SCORING SUMMARY:

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1st Quarter

Appalachian St Touchdown - 25-yard pass from Jamal Jackson to Andrew Peacock. (Drew Stewart kick). 10:14 Remaining.

2nd Quarter

Appalachian St Field Goal - 24-yarder by Drew Stewart. 12:58 Remaining.

Ga Southern Field Goal - 22-yarder by Adrian Mora. 10:35 Remaining.

Appalachian St Touchdown - 56-yard pass from Jamal Jackson to Brian Quick. (Drew Stewart kick). 0:17 Remaining.

3rd Quarter

Ga Southern Touchdown - 3-yard run by J.J. Wilcox. (Adrian Mora kick). 6:12 Remaining.

4th Quarter

Ga Southern Touchdown - 46-yard punt return by Darrieon Robinson. (Adrian Mora kick). 13:57 Remaining.

Appalachian St Touchdown - 15-yard pass from Jamal Jackson to Brian Quick. (Drew Stewart kick). 9:24 Remaining.

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STATISTICS:

FIRST DOWNS: GSU 11, ASU 15

TOTAL YARDS: GSU 201, ASU 320

RUSHING YARDS: GSU 135, ASU 98

PASSING YARDS: GSU 66, ASU 222

TURNOVERS: GSU 2, ASU 1

PENALTY YARDS: GSU 2-10, ASU 3-30

TIME OF POSSESSION: GSU 31:54, ASU 28:06

3RD DOWN CONVERSIONS: GSU 4-13, ASU 6-15

4TH DOWN CONVERSIONS: GSU 0-4, ASU 0-0

RUSHING:

ASU: JACKSON 13-54

GSU: BROWN 15-47

PASSING:

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ASU: JACKSON 13-26-222-INT-3TD

GSU: SHAW 4-10-66-2INT

RECEIVING:

ASU: QUICK 4-119-2TD

GSU: McKINNON 3-26

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