

Gators Clip Vols, 31-17

Written by Betsy Devine

Sunday, 22 September 2013 08:24

The Vols couldn't overcome four first-half turnovers and dropped a 31-17 decision to 19th-ranked Florida at Ben Hill Griffin Stadium before 90,074 on Saturday afternoon. Tennessee (2-2) dropped its second game in a row as it continues its gauntlet of a schedule. Florida, coming off a bye week moved to 2-1 and rebounded after a loss to in-state foe Miami, two weeks ago.

The Vols made a change at quarterback, as redshirt freshman and native Floridian Nathan Peterman drew his first career start and played nearly the entire first half before he was replaced by junior Justin Worley in the final seconds. Peterman was ineffective, completing 4-of-11 for five yards with two interceptions. Worley came on to throw for 149 yards on 10-of-23 passing and a touchdown.

Florida overcame three of its own first-half turnovers including an interception returned for a touchdown by Tennessee and the loss of its starting quarterback Jeff Driskel to extend its winning streak over the Vols to nine games. Tennessee last beat Florida in 2004 and last won at The Swamp in 2003.

Gator backup signal caller Tyler Murphy threw for 134 yards on just 8-of-14 passing with a touchdown in his most extensive playing time. The redshirt junior, who had never taken a snap under center in his four seasons with the Gators, also added 84 yards on the ground and a touchdown to head up the Gators' ground attack. Mack Brown rushed for 86 yards and a score. Solomon Patton had three catches for 73 yards and his first-career touchdown. Quinton Dunbar hauled in four catches for 63 yards. Florida racked up 382 yards of offense and controlled the clock with 39:37 time of possession.

The Vols were limited to 220 yards on offense by Florida, which came into the game third in the nation in fewest yards per game allowed (208.5).

Rajion Neal (42) and Marlin Lane (16) combined for just 58 rushing yards. Marquez North had four catches for 43 yards, including a career-long 32-yard reception. Pig Howard was the Vols leading receiver and had four catches for 75 yards and a touchdown.

The teams combined for nine turnovers which resulted in 24 of the game's 48 points.

Florida took advantage of the Vols' fourth first-half turnover as the Gators took a 17-7 lead on a Mack Brown 3-yard rush with 37 seconds left in the first half. Darious Cummings 30-yard interception return of a Peterman pass set the Gators up on the Vols' 40-yard line.

The Gators gained its first lead of the day at 10-7 on a 52-yard screen pass from Murphy to Patton with 13:23 left in the first half.

Freshman walk-on Devaun Swafford gave the Vols a 7-0 lead on a 62-yard interception return with 9:23 left in the first quarter. For Kingsport native, the huge play came in his first game as the Vols' primary nickelback. It was also Tennessee's first 'Pick 6' at The Swamp since another true freshman -- Eric Berry -- had one back in 2007.

At 7-3, Tennessee held its first lead at the end of the first quarter since 2001, when the Vols were up 14-0 on the way to a 34-32 victory on Dec. 1.

After the Vols cut the lead to 17-10 on a Michael Palardy 44-yard field goal early in the second half, Florida answered back with a 79-yard drive covering 11 plays as Matt Jones rumbled in to the end zone over left tackle. That put the Gators ahead 24-10 with 7:03 left in the third quarter. Murphy finished off a 84-yard drive on a 7-yard rush up the middle to put Florida ahead 31-10 with 13:52 left in the fourth.

The Vols continued to fight and cut the deficit to 31-17 on an 18-yard connection between

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Worley and Howard with 10:20 on the clock. After a Worley interception, the Vols defense held Florida to a 40-yard field goal attempt that went wide left.

Worley came in after the field goal miss and hit Pig Howard for a 29-yard gain followed by a 24-yard pass play to Jason Croom on the next play. But the Vols could not find the endzone and turned the ball over on downs with 2:29 remaining in the game.

Both teams were loose with the football as they combined for nine turnovers (Tennessee with six and Florida with three). The first half saw the teams combine for seven turnovers as Tennessee lost the ball four times (two in interceptions and two on fumbles). Florida fumbled the ball away twice and was intercepted once -- resulting in the Vols' lone score of the first half. Tennessee returns home to face South Alabama, next Saturday, Sept. 28 at 12:21 p.m. That game will air on SEC TV and can be heard on the Vol Network.

Photo Courtesy: Devaun Swafford, UT Athletics