

VOLS TOP SOUTH ALABAMA

Written by Brian Matthews Bruce
Saturday, 28 September 2013 19:30

Tennessee moved to 3-2 on the season with a 31-24 victory over South Alabama on Saturday afternoon. Brian Randolph's interception in the final minutes secured the win. The Vols overcame three of their own turnovers, but in the end the Jaguars' third miscue of the game enabled Tennessee to remain perfect at Neyland

Stadium this season.

"It's extremely hard to win in college football," said head coach Butch Jones. "We needed to get to victory number three; we got to victory number three. It's a difficult process, but we got there. I don't think I've ever been in a game like that. You take goods and bads from it. Positive, I'll look at the positive, this team found a way to win."

Rajion Neal ran for a career high 169 yards on 25 carries including a 53-yard run that set the Vols up for a Marlin Lane score. Lane also added a 54-yard rush as a part of his 66 yards on the ground.

Tennessee gained 278 yards on the ground. Butch Jones-coached teams are now 26-2 all-time in games where his teams run for 200-plus yards and 16-1 when his squads go over 250-plus yards.

Justin Worley was 20 for 36 through the air for 204 yards with two touchdown passes. He did throw three interceptions leaving room for a near comeback by South Alabama.

The Vols' yielded a quick touchdown to the visiting Jaguars as South Alabama quarterback, Ross Metheny, took off on a 32-yard touchdown run on the opening drive.

Tennessee was able to put points on the scoreboard after LaDarrell McNeil intercepted a tipped South Alabama pass giving the Volunteers prime position for a Michael Palardy field goal.

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The Vols went on to score 21 more unanswered first half points giving them a 24-7 lead at the half.

Worley had a pair of first half touchdown passes to true freshmen A.J. Branisel and Josh Smith.

After a beautiful play action pass, he found A.J. Branisel in the back of the end zone wide open. On the next drive, Worley hit Smith in stride for the Knoxville-native's first career touchdown catch.

The touchdown receptions were the first of Branisel and Smith's career and gave the Volunteers a lead that they wouldn't relinquish for the remainder of the game.

The Vols continued to stride past the Jaguars despite several turnovers. Lane's two-yard score after he stretched over the goal line made it 24-7 Volunteers.

After winning the coin toss and deferring to the second half, UT took their initial second half possession into the checkerboards. Neal scored from 11 yards out after the Vols drove 76 yards on seven plays and used only two minutes and 24 seconds of game clock to extend their lead to 31-7. The touchdown would be the ultimate game-winner.

The momentum shifted drastically however. The two teams traded turnovers, giving South Alabama the ball inside the UT 10 yard line. Two plays later, Metheny scrambled left and dove just inside the pylon for South Alabama's second score.

The Jaguars scored 10 more points and drove to within eight yards of a game-tying score with just minutes to go in the half.

It was all for naught though as redshirt sophomore Brian Randolph sealed the Volunteer victory, 31-24, with an interception in the end zone with just 1:51 left on the clock. A huge sack by Corey Miller on second-and-goal pushed South Alabama back to the 14-yard line.

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The interception was the third of Randolph's season and career. All three of Randolph's interceptions have come in the end zone.

Other Vol standouts include redshirt freshmen wide receiver Jason Croom who had three receptions for 50 yards and true freshmen receiver Josh Smith who reeled in three passes for 40 yards and his first-career touchdown.

The two runs (by Lane and Neal) of more than 50 yards marked the first time since the Volunteers faced Kentucky in 2000 that two different Vols have had rushes of 50 yards or more in the same game. Travis Stephens' 80-yard rush along with a 53-yard scamper by Travis Henry helped the Vols defeat Kentucky 59-20.

Tennessee returns to action next Saturday as No. 9 Georgia comes to Neyland Stadium. Kickoff time and television will be announced on Sunday.