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Georgia Southern runs past Bowling Green 58-27 in GoDaddy Bowl

DECEMBER 24, 2015



Quarterback Favian Upshaw ran for a career-high 199 yards and four touchdowns, and Georgia Southern scored 35 unanswered points and rushed for 452 yards to power past Bowling Green, 58-27, in the GoDaddy Bowl Wednesday night in Ladd-Peebles Stadium.

It was the first bowl game in program history for Georgia Southern (9-4), which is in its second season playing FBS football and was selected for a bowl game in its first season of eligibility.

Upshaw averaged 16.5 yards on 11 carries and completed a pass for 17 yards to earn the game's overall MVP honors.

Wesley Fields rushed nine times for 75 yards and a score, and Kevin Ellison ran for 70 yards and threw for 65 yards and a touchdown. Matt Breida ran for 68 yards and a touchdown, and L.A. Ramsby gained 44 yards and scored a touchdown.

"This meant a lot to us," said Upshaw. "We just wanted to band together and do what we did the whole season and just play for each other."

Much was made prior to the contest that the Georgia Southern defense would be overmatched against Bowling Green, and that turned out not to be the case. The Eagles pitched a shutout in the second half, had two takeaways and forced the Falcons to turn the ball over on downs twice. Nardo Govan had two fumble recoveries and a quarterback hurry, and Caleb Williams broke up five passes.

"We've had some great corners here at Georgia Southern, and I told Caleb Williams that was the best performance by a Georgia Southern corner that I've ever seen," said senior safety Matt Dobson. "They kept running go routes on him, and he'd make a play and jog back to the line, and they would put a fresh guy in, run another one, and he'd make another play."

Fields was named the Offensive MVP, Dobson was named Special Teams MVP and Govan was named Defensive MVP.

"Favian did a great job reading the zone option; his reads were great," said Interim Head Coach Dell McGee. "The offensive line blocked really well, and the guys did a great job squeezing the ball – we didn't have any turnovers. It was one of the best performances we've played all year. Our players, coaches and staff wanted to make sure our seniors go out winners. They all bought in, and it culminated in our performance tonight."

Matt Johnson threw for 246 yards and three touchdowns for Bowling Green (10-4), and Travis Greene finished with 79 yards and a touchdown on 10 carries. Ronnie Moore caught five passes for 83 yards and a touchdown.

Trailing 27-23 at halftime, the Eagles began their 35-point barrage with a methodical 75-yard, 14-play scoring drive that chewed up 7:30 to open the second half, and Upshaw capped it with a 3-yard touchdown run to give Georgia Southern the lead back. Upshaw keyed the drive with an 18-yard run and a 17-yard pass to Keigan Williams, and Fields put the Eagles in scoring position with an 18-yard run in which the freshman broke a tackle at the line of scrimmage.

Bowling Green drove deep inside Georgia Southern territory on its ensuing possession and elected to go for it on 4th-and-9 from the Eagle 21-yard line. Govan and Antwione Williams shot through the line and stopped Greene for a 1-yard gain to turn the ball back over to the Eagles.

Upshaw faked a handoff to Matt Breida, pulled it back, went up the middle and split the safeties with breakneck speed for an 80-yard quick-strike touchdown on the next play of the game, giving the Eagles a 37-27 lead with 2:55 left in the third quarter.

The Eagles got the first turnover of the game when Govan fell on a Johnson fumble at the Falcon 14-yard line. Upshaw took it to the 1-yard line with an option keeper on the next play, and followed that with a pitch to Breida who easily found paydirt with the help of a tremendous block by senior James Dean. Younghoe Koo's extra point made the score 44-27 with 1:51 left in the third quarter.

Govan recovered another Johnson fumble on Bowling Green's next series, this time at the Falcon 10-yard line. Breida took it two yards to the 8-yard line, and Upshaw finished the job with another keeper and the aid of a big block by senior Darien Foreman to make the score 51-27. Upshaw broke another one for 42 yards down the left sideline to seal the victory with 5:25 remaining in the contest.

"It just started opening up in the second half," said Upshaw. "I don't think they had an answer for that zone read option."

Ramsby scored his 13th rushing touchdown of the season with a 1-yard run on the Eagles' first drive of the game – the first touchdown in Georgia Southern bowl history. Johnson hit Roger Lewis with a 45-yard touchdown pass just over a minute later, making the score 7-6, but Darrius White blocked the extra point attempt.

Dobson scooped the ball up at the 5-yard line, tore down the right sideline, got a couple blocks and went the distance for two points and a 9-6 Georgia Southern lead. Bowling Green scored on its next two possessions to open a 20-9 advantage, but the Eagles scored twice on a Fields 26-yard run and a 31-yard pass from Ellison to Montay Crockett to regain the lead 23-20.

The Falcons scored a touchdown less than a minute later with the help of a 52-yard run by Greene, and Greene finished it off with a 1-yard run, giving Bowling Green a 27-23 lead at halftime.

The Eagles return 12 starters, six on each side of the ball, to the 2016 squad. New head coach Tyson Summers will be officially introduced at a press conference on Dec. 26 in Statesboro.

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