

Albany State Falls to Central Arkansas in Playoffs

Rams unable to capitalize on turnovers, commit turnovers

By Scott Chancey

Special to HBCSports Press Association

ALBANY, Ga., Nov. 12, 2005 – Central Arkansas quarterback Nathan Brown passed for two touchdowns, Willie Hopson and Kentrel Rogers added one each, and the Bears defeated Albany State 28-20 in the first round of the NCAA Division II playoffs Saturday. Brown, who shared time at quarterback with Chris Reil, threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to Austin Cade, and completed another to Cade on a fake field-goal attempt early in the third quarter. Rogers scored from 3 yards out, and Hopson scored on a 16-yard run for the Bears, who rushed for 250 yards.

“I was surprised they were able to run the ball as well as they did,” said Albany State head coach Mike White, whose team ended the season 8-2. “Rushing defense is something we had always taken pride in.”

Central Arkansas advances to the second round to face Presbyterian on Saturday.

Albany State running back Antwan Andrews, who eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark in the regular-season finale against Fort Valley State, lost three fumbles in the game. Rams’

quarterback Hosea Harris also fumbled on their first scoring drive, but the ball went out of bounds. Most of Albany State’s offensive production rested on the legs of running back Antonio Atkins, who scored two touchdowns, rushed for 145 yards and caught four passes for 100 more. However, he was held to only 47 total yards in the second half.

“I think if anybody does well in the first half, they key on you in the third quarter and take it away from you,” Atkins said. “So I knew they were looking at me, but I just didn’t get it done in that second half.”

Albany State defensive back Marcus Jefferson, a 5-foot-9 junior, intercepted passes on the Bears’ first three possessions but the Rams only scored seven points off the turnovers. Jefferson’s first interception led to the first of Atkins’ two scores, a 56-yard run. The second interception was returned 30 yards for a touchdown, but was nullified after a blocking-in-the-back penalty. Andrews fumbled the ball at the Bears’ 1-yard line a short time later.



Albany State RB Antonio Atkins sheds a Central Arkansas tackler

“That was huge for us,” White said. “There was a big momentum swing when he scored and it was called back. When we got nothing out of that, that was huge. We could have been up 14, and we wound up not getting any points at all.”

The Rams were held three-and-out after Jefferson’s final interception. Rogers tied the game at 7 with his 3-yard run, and Albany State reclaimed the lead with a 69-yard pass from Harris to Atkins. After Central Arkansas once again tied the score, Albany State’s Brown found Cade for a 5-yard touchdown pass. Rams’ place-kicker Matthew Hawthorne missed a 41-yarder at the end of the first half that would have given the Rams a 17-14 lead.

Andrews lost his final fumble of the game early in the third quarter, and the Bears took a 21-14 lead on the fake field-goal attempt. Brown was the holder, and when he received the snap from center, threw a pass to Cade who was open in the end zone. Hopson scored on the Bears’ next possession, and Central Arkansas held a two-touchdown lead going into the final quarter. Harris, who finished with 185 yards passing, completed a 13-yard pass to Brandon Green with 4:36 left in the game, but that was as close as the Rams could get. On Central Arkansas’ next possession Brown converted a third-and-10 pass to Cade, and the Bears were able to run out the clock.