

## **Botched field goal attempt, turnovers doom SC State in upset playoff bid**

HBCSports Press Association

BOONE , NC - For three and a half quarters, Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference Champion South Carolina State went toe-to-toe with Appalachian State, who is one year removed from being the three-time defending FCS national champions. As a matter of fact this was a rematch of last year's first round NCAA FCS Playoff game in which Appalachian State won 37-21.

Midway through the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter the Bulldogs lined up to attempt a 32-yard field goal that would have given them a 16-13 lead. Instead an unexpected snap by freshman long snapper David Davis sailed past the holder and ASU's Dominique McDuffie scooped it up and ran it back 50 yards for the touchdown turning the tide of the game as the Mountaineers escaped with a 20-13 victory before a crowd of 12,216 at Kidd Brewer Stadium.

"That's a tough way to lose a ballgame right there," said Bulldogs head coach Buddy Pough. "I think it was a miscommunication. The holder gave the ready call and while he was checking to see if everyone was in the right place, the snapper thought he heard the rest of the cadence. So not only was the snap early, nobody was even looking so it was by both of them before they even realized the ball had been snapped."

A few plays earlier, it appeared the Bulldogs would take their first lead of the game after Devonne Quattlebaum's second interception of the game gave Pough's team a 1st and 10 at the Mountaineer 24 yard line with 9:05 remaining. SC State, however, was unable to make a first down and called on kicker Blake Erickson - who had knocked down two earlier tries -- for a 31-yard field goal attempt. As the Bulldogs lined up for the kick, Davis , perhaps bothered by crowd noise, snapped the ball too soon and it went pass holder Matt Washington and Erickson. McDuffie's score and the subsequent PAT gave Appalachian a 20-13 advantage with 7:42 remaining. SC State was unable to score during its last two possessions.

The Bulldogs offense turned the ball over four times as well during the game and while the Bulldogs defense had five takeaways, one of which they returned for a touchdown and the other which the ASU offense forced a turnover on the same play, the SC State offense did not capitalize.

For the second straight year, SC State's season ended with a loss at Appalachian State, the FCS champion from 2005 through 2007. The Bulldogs, who are perfect in the MEAC at 8-0 for a second consecutive year, finish 10-2 overall, while the Mountaineers improve to 10-2 and will meet Richmond next Saturday in quarterfinal action of the FCS playoffs.

Both defenses played well, limiting respective high-powered offenses. SC State held an Appalachian State offense, which came into the game averaging close to 500 yards of total offense per game, to 302 yards. Meanwhile, the ASU defense held South Carolina State to 229 yards, as the Bulldogs came in averaging close to 400 yards per game.

Despite the effort by the SC State defense, which forced Mountaineer standout quarterback Armanti Edwards into three interceptions, the Bulldogs were unable to generate enough offense to pull out a victory. In fact, the contest marked the only game all season that Pough's team did not get an offensive touchdown.

"We played good at times and had our moments on both sides of the ball, but didn't do enough on offense to win the ball game," said Pough. "We got a big break (Quattlebaum's interception) down the stretch, but couldn't get a first down and tried the field goal and you all know what happened after then. We just needed to be more efficient on offense, where we struggled most of the afternoon."

The Bulldogs took the opening kickoff and drove 57 yards to the Appalachian State 14-yard line before settling for a 31-yard Erickson field goal and a 3-0 lead with 9:49 on the first-period clock.

Jason Vitaris 19-yard field goal with 12:03 left in the half pulled the host even at 3-3. The Mountaineers went ahead 10-3 when Edwards connected with Brian Quick from seven yards out with 4:35 left in the half.

Rafael Bush's 46-yard interception return for a touchdown and the PAT tied the game at 10-10 with just 1:34 left in the half. But two 15-yard SC State penalties - one for excessive celebration on the touchdown and another for a personal foul on the extra point try - forced Pough's team to kick off from its own seven, giving Appalachian State great field position at the SC State 33 and led to a 24-yard Vitaris field goal and a 13-10 Mountaineer lead at the half.

SC State, on its first possession of the second half, drove to the Mountaineers four-yard line before settling for an Erickson 19-yard field goal tying the game once more at 13-13 with 9:06 left in the third quarter. The score remained tied until the field goal attempt midway through the final quarter that led to ASU's winning touchdown.

The Mountaineers bottled up the SC State running game, limiting the Bulldogs to just 33 net yards rushing. Junior quarterback Malcolm Long attempted 36 passes, completing 18 for 189 yards. He threw a season-high three interceptions.

SC State was without star running back Will Ford after the third quarter when he left the game with an injury. His condition will be evaluated this week, and the injury is believed to be a sprained knee. The senior, who became the MEAC's all-time rushing leader, picked up 22 yards in eight attempts before the injury.

Oliver Tre' Young had seven catches for 92 yards. That total gave him 995 and a new SC State record for yards receiving in a season, eclipsing the 933 yards of Monte Stokes in 2003. Young earlier set record for career receptions and career receiving yards.

SC State linebacker Julius Wilkerson led the Bulldog defensive effort with 15 tackles, seven unassisted.

Edwards, the defending Walter Payton award winner for the best player in FCS completed 19-of-30 passes for 218 yards with 1 TD and 3 ints.