

New Hampshire defeats Hampton in seesaw affair

Coleman's 143 yards not enough as Pirates drop third straight playoffs game

Hampton, VA., Nov. 25 – The eighth ranked Hampton Pirates and the New Hampshire Wildcats put up a total of 79 points in Saturday's first round of the NCAA Division I Football Championship. Unfortunately for Hampton they were on the wrong side of the score falling 41-38. It was the third year in a row the Pirates lost a first round game and the second year in a row they lost at home.

"Both sides came out and put fourth an outstanding effort," said Hampton head coach Joe Taylor the third winningest active coach in the Division I Football Championship Subdivision. "I knew it would come down to who had the ball last and it just came down to one play on fourth down. But I'm proud of our football team and the things we have accomplished."

It was quite clear early on that the game would be a shootout as both teams combined for 34 points in the first quarter, with the longest drive by either team taking three minutes and 10 seconds.

The Wildcats took the opening drive and marched 75 yards in just two minutes, 27 seconds to go ahead 7-0 on a 1-yard pass from Ricky Santos to Aaron Brown. Kevin Teel returned the ensuing kickoff 69 yards to give the Pirates the ball at the UNH 21. From there HU quarterback Princeton Shepherd completed 4-of-4 passes, the last coming on a 4-yard touchdown to Marquay McDaniel to tie the game 7-7.

A special teams breakdown led to the Wildcats' next score when J.E. Frederickson broke free and blocked a punt by Hampton's Jahmal Blanchard giving New Hampshire a 1st and 10 at the Pirates 28. Santos threw his second TD of the day to Keith Levan who caught a pass in the flat and broke a tackle to go in for the 25-yard score. The extra point attempt was missed but the Wildcats held a 13-7 lead late in the first quarter.

Once again the Pirates wasted little time answering the challenge when on the first play from scrimmage, senior Alonzo Coleman reeled off his longest run of the year, a 65-yard touchdown to give Hampton its first lead at 14-13. Hampton added to the lead behind the arm of Shepherd who directed an 80-yard drive to close out the first quarter, connecting with Onrea Jones and McDaniel for consecutive 16-yard completions. Shepherd followed that with a 21-yard strike to McDaniel, setting up a 4-yard TD run by Kevin Beverly giving Hampton a 21-13 lead.

The Wildcats would score three straight touchdowns to take a 34-21 halftime lead.

Hampton came out of the locker room with the focus clearly being to run the ball against a defense that came in allowing over 150 yards per game. The duo of Coleman and Beverly rushed for 61 of Hampton's 80 yards on the opening drive of the second half and Princeton Shepherd ran it in from six yards out after being flushed from the pocket, bringing Hampton to within 34-28.

The Hampton defense appeared to settle down forcing the Wildcats to punt on their first possession and on the next Santos was picked of by HU strong safety Derius Swinton who returned it to the UNH 23. The Shepherd to McDaniel (6 receptions, 59 yards, 2 TDs) combination hooked up again, this time on a 6-yard pitch and catch that gave the Pirates a 35-34 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

Andrew Paterini's 43-yard field goal with just less than nine minutes to play extended the Hampton lead to 38-34. However, Santos and the battle-tested Wildcats would not go down easy.

Forced into a passing situation, Santos was sacked by Pat Preston and Kendall Langford on consecutive plays to put the Wildcats in a third and long situation. An 18-yard completion to Matt O'Brien brought up a 4th and 5 situation. The Wildcats lined up in punt formation, but the up-back Maurice Duper took the snap and raced 19 yards for a first down to the Hampton 48. The Wildcats made their way to the Hampton 25 where they were again faced with a fourth down (4th and 16) and their season on the line. Santos found Chad Kackert in the back of the end zone for the game-winning 25-yard touchdown with 4:40 remaining.

Santos finished the afternoon 27-of-40 for 315 yards and five touchdowns as the Wildcats racked up 411 yards of total offense against an HU defense that came in ranked No. 1 in the country against the pass.

Coleman became just the sixth player in I-AA history to rush for 1,000 yards in four consecutive seasons, by running for 143 yards on 21 attempts.