



Rams Ruin Falcons hope of CIAA Championship Berth

Late Comeback by St. Augustine's falls short

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WINSTON-SALEM, N.C., Oct. 29, 2005 – Winston-Salem State gave its homecoming crowd of more than 19,000 plenty to crow about in its final CIAA game. And despite having to hold off a late charge, the Rams held steady long enough to turn back fast-closing St. Augustine's for a 35-33 victory at Bowman-Gray Stadium.

This was the last CIAA game for WSSU (6-4, 6-1), who will move up to Division I next season. The loss was agonizing for the Falcons (8-2, 5-2), who needed a victory to capture the league's West Division, which would have put them in the CIAA Championship game on Saturday, Nov. 5. However, several miscues and turnovers by St. Aug's combined with key defensive stops by Winston-Salem spelled their fate.

"Coming in, we knew that the team that made the fewest mistakes would have the best chance to win," said Michael Costa, St. Aug's coach. "We got off to such a slow start with those early turnovers. If we avoid those mistakes, we're right there with them."

The Rams defense took center stage, but they also got enough from the offense to keep the Falcons in a come-from-behind mode. Winston-Salem State, which never trailed in this game and led 21-13 at halftime, combined their power running game with short-range passing to orchestrate time-consuming drives. Jed Bines, voted WSSU's homecoming MVP, finished with 105 yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries while quarterback Monte Purvis kept the Falcons off balance with his scrambling and passing accuracy (9 of 15 for 126 yards, one touchdown and no interceptions).

In spite of their frequent miscues, the Falcons, who rolled up 511 total offensive yards, managed to keep the game within reach. Quarterback Darrell Nesbitt (412 total yards) had his moments tormenting the Rams secondary. He completed 18 of 42 passes for a season-high 313 yards and five touchdowns.

But while St. Aug's continued to pile up the yards, Winston-Salem State offset the Falcons proficiency with several momentum-changing plays. The Rams slowed Nesbitt down with three interceptions. Cornerback De'Ron Middleton had two of the interceptions and returned the second 74-yards for a touchdown to give WSSU a 35-20 cushion with 4:21 remaining in the game.

"I just did what I had to do," said Middleton, a freshman who didn't learn that he would start until Wednesday before the game. "When you do what you've been coached to do, you can't be beat."

St. Aug's scored two quick touchdowns in the last three minutes of the game to make the Rams sweat. The Falcons pulled to within two points of the lead when Nesbitt hooked up with Andre McGlone on a 25-yard touchdown pass with 54 seconds remaining. On the two-point conversion attempt -- which would have tied the game and forced overtime -- Nesbitt rolled to his right, but was stopped short of the goal on a solid hit by cornerback Demetrius Rivers.

For Coach Kermit Blount of Winston-Salem State, the game will be remembered for all the right reasons. "This one will always hold special memories," said Blount, who quarterbacked WSSU to back-to-back CIAA championships in the late 1970s. "It was homecoming and it was our last game as a member of the CIAA. It's always great to go out as a winner. Today was a test of wills between two teams. The difference is that we made a few more big plays than they did."