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Contact: Heather Jeffcoat

Cell: (205) 515-1972

Georgia Southern Defeats Appalachian State, 29-10 in 19th JLab Birmingham Bowl

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. – Georgia Southern quarterback JC French IV threw for 171 yards to break the school's career passing yards record, leading the Eagles to a 29-10 victory over App State in the 19th JLab Birmingham Bowl on Monday afternoon at Protective Stadium.

French IV was 18-of-25 for 171 yards and a touchdown, while adding 38 yards on the ground. The redshirt junior's 171 passing yards brought his career total to 5882, breaking the previous Georgia Southern career passing yards record set by Tracy Ham in 1986 (5,757 yards).

Georgia Southern running back OJ Arnold led the game in rushing with 152 yards on just 11 carries, the second-most in JLab Birmingham Bowl history. Arnold finished three yards shy of the all-time bowl record set by Southern Miss' Damion Fletcher in 2007 against Cincinnati.

Georgia Southern finished the season 7-6 overall, winning their first bowl game since the New Orleans Bowl in 2020. App state concluded the season 5-8.

On defense, Georgia Southern's Dorrian Smith intercepted two passes, while Devin Collier and Tracy Hill Jr. each added one. The Eagles gained 413 total yards to the Mountaineers' 379, but the four interceptions proved pivotal in the contest.

For App State, quarterback Matthew Wilson appeared in his first game under center and rushed for 110 yards. The freshman scored the Mountaineers' lone touchdown and completed 12-of-22 passes for 122 yards with two interceptions.

After a quick three-and-out by App State to begin the afternoon, Georgia Southern opened the scoring with 8:23 left in the first quarter, as Terrance Gibbs ran in from a yard out for the first touchdown of his career.

The Mountaineers drove into Eagles territory on the ensuing possession but came up empty after a missed 56-yard field goal attempt. The App State defense then forced a quick three-and-out, but Georgia Southern's Dorrian Smith intercepted Noah Gillon to get the Eagles the ball back with 14:20 remaining in the second quarter.

Georgia Southern capitalized on the forced turnover with an 11-play, 73-yard drive that took 5:20 off the clock. Tripp Bryant finished the drive with a 23-yard field goal to extend the Eagles' lead to 10-0.

With a two-possession lead, Tracy Hill Jr. forced his first turnover of the year, intercepting Matthew Wilson's pass on the Georgia Southern two-yard line with 6:39 remaining in the first half. However, the Eagles were unable to capitalize and were forced to punt the ball back to the Mountaineers after their second three-and-out of the half.

With 1:51 remaining in the first half, Matthew Wilson put App State on the board with a six-yard touchdown run, the first of his career. Tripp Bryant then knocked through a 36-yard field goal as the first half clock expired to give Georgia Southern a 13-7 halftime lead.

OJ Arnold ripped off a 58-yard run on the first play of scrimmage to open the second half, setting Georgia Southern up deep in App State territory. Two plays later, Weston Bryan punched in his third rushing touchdown of the season to make it 19-7 with 13:34 left in the third quarter.

Dorrian Smith intercepted Noah Gillon for the second time in the contest on the next App State possession, and this time Georgia Southern capitalized on the turnover with a touchdown. In just 1:22, JC French IV connected with Marcus Sanders Jr. for his fifth receiving score of the year to extend the lead to 26-7 with 8:50 remaining in the third.

A Dominic De Freitas 27-yard field goal made the score 26-10 for the Mountaineers' first points of the second half. Ethan Johnson then created App State's first takeaway of the afternoon, picking off Georgia Southern's Dalen Cobb with 2:56 left in the third quarter.

With 13:59 remaining in the fourth quarter, the Eagles went on a 17-play, 81-yard drive that consumed 10:02 of game time. The drive culminated in a 27-yard field goal by Tripp Bryant, giving Georgia Southern a comfortable 29-10 lead.

With 59 seconds remaining, Devin Collier solidified the victory with the Eagles' fourth interception of the game. Georgia Southern then took a knee and celebrated their first bowl victory since the 2020 season.