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## Vipers' potent attack dismantles Firecats

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Tennessee Valley above .500 with 69-43 win victory

Benji McDowell has scored touchdowns before for the Tennessee Valley Vipers.

Just not on interception returns.

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The second-year defensive lineman, who had five TDs last season in his spare time at fullback, was the beneficiary of a collective team effort late in the second quarter of Saturday night's game against Florida at the Von Braun Center. In his case, McDowell's "return" constituted catching the ball in a rugby scrum in the end zone after teammate Eric Scott engulfed Firecats quarterback Chris Wallace.

"The DBs did their job and Eric caused it," McDowell said. "I was just the recipient of what everybody did around me."

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The defense did its job on several other occasions too - preventing Florida from scoring on three of four possessions during one stretch - which provided the Vipers the necessary breathing room to post a 69-43 victory in front of an announced crowd of 3,726.

The win moved the defending arenafootball2 champions above .500 for the first time this season and gave Tennessee Valley (3-2) a boost heading into next week's home game against South Division leader South Georgia.

"We needed this," Vipers coach Dean Cokinos said. "We're just trying to grow as a team. We started off a little slow this year, but we're trying to put it together."

After trading early jabs with the Firecats (2-3), Tennessee Valley put together an effective one-two punch midway through the second quarter that set the tone for the rest of the game.

Chris Bocage answered a 1-yard touchdown pass from Wallace to Chris McKinney with a 55-yard kickoff return for a score at the 9:54 mark, giving the Vipers a 20-14 lead.

"Something we noticed was that their kicker (Garret Rivas) kicked the ball across the net," said Bocage, who also had three receiving TDs in his night's work. "I tried to bring the coverage to that side, Bradly (Chavez) sealed the edge and I brought it to the other side."

Highlighted by a Tyrell Elston sack, Tennessee Valley forced the Firecats to turn the ball over on downs on the ensuing possession. The Vipers offense took immediate advantage, too, with Kevin Eakin (25-of-33, 245 yards, seven TDs) finding Larry Shipp for a 23-yard touchdown.

McDowell's score came moments later, giving Tennessee Valley a 34-14 lead.

"Anytime you can force a team to turn their possession over or force a turnover, that's excellent," McDowell said.

The Vipers, in contrast, didn't have a turnover for the game and didn't turn the ball over on downs until the second half.

"That's the name of the game out here," Cokinos said. "When you don't turn it over, you've got a chance to win any game you play."



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