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Fast-striking Vipers win third straight

Sunday, May 03, 2009

By REGGIE BENSON

Times Sports Staff reggie.benson@htimes.com

Tennessee Valley coasts 54-28 over South Georgia

Three weeks after South Georgia jumped all over Tennessee Valley, the Vipers returned the favor Saturday night.

Kevin Eakin threw five touchdown passes, while Tennessee Valley's defense came up with two scores of its own and harassed Wildcats quarterback Darnell Kennedy throughout a 54-28 victory before a crowd of 3,301 at the Von Braun Center.

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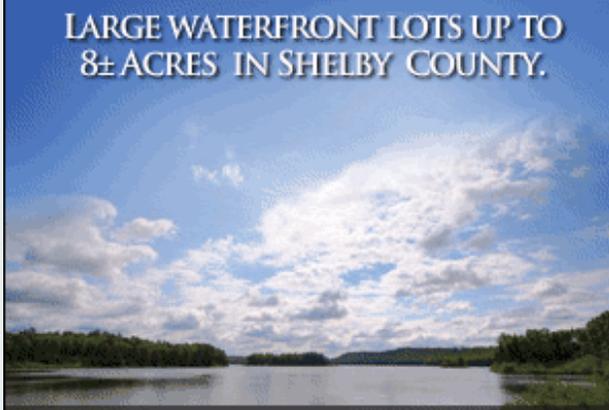
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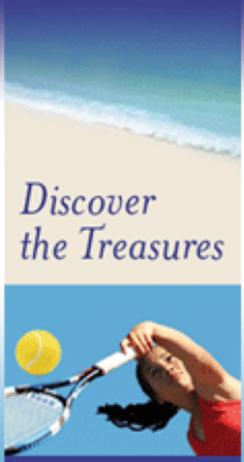


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"We got some revenge," said Vipers defensive back Desmond Foster regarding a 55-33 loss to South Georgia on April 11. "Now, we're even."

Tennessee Valley (4-2) won its third in a row, climbing within a half-game of division leading South Georgia (5-2).

The Vipers led 13-7 early in the second quarter before scoring 34 unanswered

points to take a 47-7 lead at intermission.

"We played extremely well in the first half in all three phases of the game," Vipers coach Dean Cokinos said. "We executed on offense, and defensively we got pressure on the quarterback and special teams played well. It was one of the best halves we've played all year."

The Vipers wasted no time in taking control.

Eakin found Larry Shipp with a 12-yard touchdown pass on the fourth play of the game to get Tennessee Valley rolling.

Travis Blanchard scored on a 6-yard run late in the first quarter to put the Vipers up 13-0, but South Georgia responded when Kennedy found Alvance Robinson with a 12-yard touchdown pass on the third play of the second quarter.

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Fast-striking Vipers win third straight - Page 2

Robinson, a former Alabama State standout, beat Demetrius Derico, his former teammate, for the touchdown.

It was all Vipers after that.

Tennessee Valley scored 34 unanswered points to take a commanding 47-7 halftime lead and never looked back.

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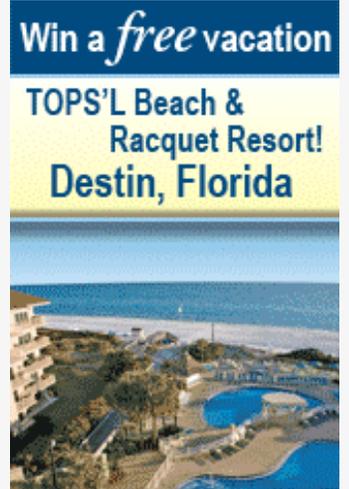
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"We made the plays we needed to make," said Eakin, who was 18-of-30 for 212 yards, five touchdowns and one interception. "We got every turnover and turned most of them into points. I think we shocked South Georgia by the way we started."

Shipp scored on a 40-yard catch and run from Eakin and later **Eakin connected with Chris Bocage for a 19-yard touchdown pass.** Jeremy Grier, playing in place of Michael Johnson, who was out with a groin injury, hauled a 5-yard touchdown pass from Eakin to make it 34-7 with just over four minutes left in the first half.

The Vipers' special teams and defense came up with Tennessee Valley's next two touchdowns.

Derico recovered a fumbled South Georgia kickoff in the end zone, and Bradley Chavez recovered a Kennedy fumble and raced 26 yards for a touchdown with 29 seconds left before intermission. Chavez recovered a fumble earlier in the quarter that led to Bocage's touchdown and he also had an interception helped set up Grier's touchdown.

"They say if you hustle good things will happen," Derico said. "I hustled down and was able to fall on it the end zone."

South Georgia put up a fight in the third quarter, scoring 21 unanswered points to pull to within 47-28, but the game was already out of reach.

"We came out flat," said Kennedy, who threw for 248 yards and four touchdowns, but was sacked four times, fumbled twice and threw an interception. "I rushed some throws and missed some throws in the second quarter and the game got away from us."

The Vipers managed only one touchdown in the second half and failed to convert on a fourth-and-goal from the 1, but despite that, Cokinos didn't seem overly concerned.

"We played great in the first half, but we got some guys nicked up in the second half and got a little sloppy," he said. "Still, it's a big win because it's a division game and we had some new guys emerge."

Grier, who played for Daytona Beach last season, finished with a game-high 10 catches for 88 yards and a touchdown. Bocage and Shipp had two touchdown catches apiece.

Chavez and Foster made seven tackles each.

Tennessee Valley visits Corpus Christi next week.

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