Florida gave them all they could handle, but top-ranked Bowling Green outlasted the bigger Gators en route to a 21-18 victory in the final of the Bowling Green, Ohio regional Sunday.

Bowling Green standout flyhalf Nick Viviani opened the game with a penalty, but Florida responded with the match's first try not long after. Viviani attempted to skip a pass to the outside, but it floated and Florida center Corey Penca intercepted it and raced 70 meters for the score. Matias Groetaers slotted the conversion to put UF up 7-3.

Viviani made up for the costly error by putting center Dominic Mauer through a hole, created by the flyhalf's own probing run, for the Falcons first touch down, which he converted. Florida rebutted with a Groetaers penalty to draw level before the half, but Florida had the chance to take a lead into the locker room.

"They were down in our end a pretty decent amount of time near the end of the first half, and we were able to turn them away," said Bowling Green coach Tony Mazzarella. "Getting into the locker room without giving up points there was big."

Also big was the stature of the Gators' pack, which punished the smaller Falcons much of the opening stanza.

"Probably one of the biggest teams we've seen in terms of size," said Mazzarella. "They've got some guys who looked like they came right off an NFL field. They were pretty massive, and they definitely gave us problems up front in the scrums, and it was a long day for a lot of guys, let's put it that way."

Bowling Green talked about how to cope with the size disadvantage during the break.

"In the scrums we went to an open channel with the locks so the ball would come straight back. We were able to quick a few times with an eight man pick. That worked for us," added Mazzarella. "In open play, we talked about how we had to tackle low, had to bring them down, couldn't afford to let their big guys carry us in the tackles for an additional four, five, six meters. We had to go low and stop the leg drive, and for the most part we did that well. We stayed in front of them, we made sure we made the key tackles."

Bowling Green struck first in the second half when Florida muffed a kick reception deep in their own end. After Falcons secured possession and set up shop, No. 8 Kyle Bonek squirted through Florida's defense for the go-ahead try. Florida answered with a Goretaers penalty to narrow the gap at 15-13.

Viviani missed a penalty that would have extended BGSU's lead. However, he didn't let the three points go unscored, nailing a drop goal from about 45 meters out, which lifted the estimated 1,000-plus Bowling Green faithful out of their seats.

"They touched (the missed penalty) down and kicked a 22. A guy caught it, went in and set the ruck, and we had one more reset off the pick-and-go. Nick dropped back a little bit and had the wind with him and hit it right down the center of the posts," described Mazzarella. "It probably would have been good from about 10-15 meters further back. Any time you get a drop goal, especially at this level and in this kind of pressure-packed game, it gives you a momentum boost."

Viviani gave BGSU a two-score lead with another penalty, extending the advantage to 21-13. The Gators promptly drove into Bowling Green's territory, but the Falcon defense turned them away repeatedly before Florida actually reached pay dirt, drawing to within three points. Time ran out on the Gators, though, and Bowling Green escaped 21-18 winners.

With the win, BGSU returns to the DI Final Four for the first time since 1988. Mazzarella was in attendance at that Final Four as the 13-year-old son of then coach Roger Mazzarella. Bowling Green how has four Final Four appearances, second amongst all current DI programs (Harvard is first with five). Awaiting the Falcons in the semifinals is UC Santa Barbara, who also hosted their regional.