

Trends Continue in South Independent

Written by Pat Clifton
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Central Florida kept rolling the South Independent's South Division Saturday, while Florida Atlantic continued its forfeiture streak, Middle Tennessee picked up a big win over Memphis in the North and the rest of the SIRC's games were rained out. With a 40-15 win over Memphis, MTSU has improved to 4-0 in the North.

In the South, FAU isn't fielding an eligible side this season, so all their results are being recorded as 20-0 losses in the standings, but they played Florida State Saturday anyway, and the Seminoles won 23-19. The 'Noles are now 3-1 in conference, with their only loss coming 36-7 to undefeated Central Florida.

FSU was without a handful of starters that game for various reasons, and the Golden Knights were just better on the day.

"It was a closer game than that score line lets on," said FSU coach Kirk Swanner. "We had the ball, we were able to build up some phases and put some good stuff together, we just couldn't finish off against them, especially with the younger guys in there."

UCF improved to 4-0 Saturday with a 37-3 defeat of South Florida. They led just 5-0 at halftime, though.

"Basically we were trying to do too much in the first half," said UCF's Jason Ross. "We were taking pop passes from the ground when players didn't have support. We slowed stuff down in the second half and went back to basics and it paid off."

The Golden Knights haven't had a close game in conference yet this season. They have a new coaching staff, Jason Granich and Jeff Bogart, they had little turnover from last season, and

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they're a team on the rise.

"We have incredible athletes on our team, but having only played rugby for a couple years, most of them are still relatively new to the game," said Ross. "They want to showcase their athletic ability, but the coaches have really stressed the ideals of it's a team – the ruck that secures the ball that gets passed out for the try is just as important as the try itself."

UCF has been on the bubble of breaking through the last couple of years. The Knights have won some big games, won some 7s tournaments, and been in and out of the DI-AA Top 25, but they've not quite broken onto the national scene.

"This year is definitely the year," said Ross. "Everybody is hungry and everybody knows that with the talent we have, this is the year to make UCF a name."

Potentially standing in the Knights' way could be FSU. They play again in the regular season, but UCF has already punched its ticket to the SIRC playoffs, and the real decider for which other South team advances to the semifinals will be USF and FSU's match March 30. If the 'Noles win, they could potentially see UCF a third time in the SIRC playoffs.

"UCF is really athletic. They can shut things down pretty quickly. It should take us playing some really good rugby to beat them, but I think we have the team to do it."