Arizona State improved to 5-1 with a tight 23-21 defeat of Air Force Saturday night in Tucson.

ASU had to work very hard for the victory; the Sun Devils started the game without flyhalf Stevie Johnston, who was unavailable to play. Instead Adam Sandstrom stepped in.

"He hasn't played flyhalf since high school but he acquitted himself well and did the best he could," said Arizona State Head Coach Gary Lane. "Air Force are an up-and-coming team and I thought they played excellently. They created turnovers and kept possession nicely."

Lane praised his own team's defense, led by Travis Hughes, who was inspirational. Huges was also a big player with the ball, scoring three tries and taking his team-leading total to nine.

Sandstrom added a try and Matt Bulkley added a penalty goal to round out ASU's scoring.

"I thought our first phase possession was very good," added Lane. "We did well scrummaging and in the lineout. And our defensive structure held. The tight five deserves a lot of credit tonight as they held their own against a much bigger pack."

"It was a very tough loss to take," added Air Force coach Joe Muehlbauer. "We felt like we

could have won it. We felt we had the game in hand at one point and we've been on the upswing, but it didn't go our way. We turned the ball over at critical times and Arizona State played well."

Carson Cleveland scored two tries for Air Force and also converted them, as well as the try scored by flanker Matt Griffin.

But the key moment came at the end of the game. Air Force was driving toward the Arizona State line. They got a penalty and quick-tapped. They got another penalty and did the same, only to knock the ball on and see the game end right there.

The game itself was an exciting one in front of a huge crowd at ASU's soccer stadium.

"College rugby is all about games like this," said Lane. "It was just a nailbiter from start to finish."

Arizona State 23
Tries: Hughes 3, Sandstrom
Pens: Bulkley

Air Force 21
Tries: Cleveland 2, Griffin
Convs: Cleveland 3