

WEEK Three
Barnett rallies South Florida to 25-19 win over Illinois

CHICAGO -- For the second straight week, South Florida found a way to erase a double-digit fourth-quarter deficit against a Power Five school.

Blake Barnett threw two touchdown passes in the fourth quarter to Darnell Salomon and South Florida rallied from 12 points down to defeat Illinois 25-19 on Saturday. Barnett was 23 of 40 for 411 yards passing with two touchdowns and two interceptions, and Jordan Cronkrite ran for 136 yards and a score for the Bulls (3-0).

Trailing 19-7 early in the fourth quarter, Barnett cut the Illinois lead with a 14-yard pass to Salomon to make it 19-14. Two possessions later, Barnett found a leaping Randall St. Felix for a 55-yard catch, which set up a 22-yard field goal from Coby Weiss with 7:47 left. After another South Florida stop, Barnett connected with Salomon from 50 yards to score with 2:24 left to give the Bulls a 25-19 lead.

Last week, the Bulls scored 21 unanswered in the fourth quarter against Georgia Tech. "It was very similar to last week. We unfortunately put us in this position where we had to do that," said Barnett. "We had to make something happen. Fortunately, like last week it worked out." South Florida coach Charlie Strong wasn't thrilled with the way the Bulls began the game. "You watched the way we played in the first half, never had so many penalties," Strong said. "You look at where we are in penalties. ... But this a lesson we'll learn, and this is a good thing."

The Illini couldn't score on its final drive thanks to a sack by Tyrone Barber at the South Florida 25 with six seconds left. Freshman quarterback M.J. Rivers II threw the ball out of the end zone as time expired. Illinois coach Love Smith was impressed with his team despite the loss. Last season, they suffered a 47-23 defeat at the hands of the Bulls. "We've come a long way. Last year we played South Florida, we weren't really competitive," Smith said. "This year is completely different game. I thought the guys came out strong. ... We had some critical mistakes that allowed them to win the football game."

Chase McLaughlin converted a field goal from 52 yards to give Illinois a 16-7 halftime lead. After a shaky first possession, Mike Epstein scored on a 43-yard touchdown run on Illinois' third play from scrimmage. Epstein rushed for 113 yards on 19 carries. South Florida, which scored 49 points in a win against Georgia Tech last week, answered with a 75-yard drive. Cronkrite went in from the 3 to tie it at 7, but the Illini defense held for the rest of the half and forced interceptions by Jartavius Martin and Del'Shawn Phillips, which set up field goals by McLaughlin.

McLaughlin connected again from 41 yards, banging off the right upright, capping a 10-play, 53-yard drive late in the third quarter to extend the lead to 19-7. "I mean it feels good, but in the end, the team didn't win. That's what I'm there to do: help the team win," said McLaughlin. "I have to go out there and do the best that I can." Rivers, in his first career start as quarterback, was 20 of 29 for 168 yards passing for Illinois (2-1). Rivers relieved A.J. Bush Jr., who was injured in the win against Western Illinois.

Illinois played a home game at Soldier Field for the fourth time in school history. The game attracted a small crowd with empty seats in the west side upper level. "When you go on the road, you'll never know what the crowd will be," Smith said. "We didn't play at Memorial Stadium today for a home game. I know that the fans that showed up, we heard them."

Smith was back in a familiar place, returning to the sideline where he guided the Chicago Bears to a 2006 NFC Championship. Smith was also backed by his former player and newly inducted Hall of Famer Brian Urlacher, who was at attendance. It was like old times for Smith, who saw his team thoroughly dominate South Florida on defense and special teams in the first half, a staple of his mid-2000 Bears teams.

THE TAKEAWAY

South Florida: One week after South Florida was sparked by two kickoff returns for touchdowns by Terence Horne, the South Florida special teams were disappointing. Coby Weiss, who was filling in for Jake Vivonetto because of an illness, missed two field-goal attempts. Jake Stone and Trent Schneider also struggled with the punting duties. South Florida won its fifth straight game against a Power Five opponent. Tight end Mitch Wilcox helped the Bulls offense with eight catches for 109 yards.

Illinois: Despite the loss, Illinois looked considerably better than the 47-23 loss last year in Tampa to South Florida. Illinois showed a strong running game and was solid on special teams. However Penn State on Friday will be another major test. "Games like this are tough for our football team, but we'll learn from it. We have a quick turnaround with Penn State coming into town," said Smith.

UP TO SPEED WITH THE PLAYBOOK

Barnett looks very comfortable with the South Florida offense and is making a nice transition from last year's Bulls offensive player of the year Quinton Flowers. "As you can tell tonight, we were all on the same page on what we were doing, what our assignment was and how to completely execute it," said Barnett.

THEY GOT THE MESSAGE

Cronkrite said Strong was pretty clear what they needed to do in the second half after a sluggish first half. "He just told us, that we need to come out more aggressive and have more sense of urgency about ourselves," Cronkrite said. "Finish drives, we were going down there stalling and not putting the ball in the end zone. He just told us to finish the game."

| | | | | | |
|--------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Final | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | T |
| USF | 7 | 0 | 0 | 18 | 25 |
| ILL | 10 | 6 | 3 | 0 | 19 |

Scoring Summary -----

| | USF | ILL |
|--|-----|-----|
| FIRST QUARTER | | |
| ILL TD 10:54 Mike Epstein 43 Yd Run (Chase McLaughlin Kick) | | 7 |
| 3 plays, 80 yards, 0:54 | 0 | |
| TD 7:52 Jordan Cronkrite 3 Yd Run (Coby Weiss Kick) | | 7 |
| 11 plays, 75 yards, 3:02 | 7 | |
| ILL FG 3:35 Chase McLaughlin 26 Yd Field Goal | | 10 |
| 9 plays, 57 yards, 4:17 | 7 | |
| second Quarter | USF | ILL |
| ILL FG 11:48 Chase McLaughlin 46 Yd Field Goal | | 13 |
| 8 plays, 32 yards, 2:43 | 7 | |
| ILL FG 0:00 Chase McLaughlin 53 Yd Field Goal | | 16 |
| 2 plays, 11 yards, 0:07 | 7 | |
| third Quarter | USF | ILL |
| ILL FG 2:56 Chase McLaughlin 41 Yd Field Goal | | 19 |
| 10 plays, 53 yards, 4:43 | 7 | |
| fourth Quarter | USF | ILL |
| USF TD 14:53 Darnell Salomon 14 Yd pass from Blake Barnett (Coby Weiss Kick) 11 plays, 75 yards, 3:03 | 14 | 19 |
| USF FG 7:47 Coby Weiss 26 Yd Field Goal | | 19 |
| 6 plays, 71 yards, 2:08 | 17 | |
| USF TD 2:24 Darnell Salomon 50 Yd pass from Blake Barnett (Blake Barnett Pass to Randall St. Felix for Two-Point Conversion) | 25 | 19 |
| 6 plays, 85 yards, 1:17 | | |

Team Stats

| | USF | ILL |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------|
| First Downs | 29 | 18 |
| Total Yards | 609 | 396 |
| Total Plays | 80 | 78 |
| Avg Gain Per Play | 7.6 | 5.1 |
| Net Yards Rushing | 196 | 222 |
| Rushes | 40 | 47 |
| Yards Per Rush | 4.9 | 4.7 |
| Net Yards Passing | 413 | 174 |
| Comp-Att | 23-40 | 20-31 |
| Yards Per Pass | 10.3 | 5.6 |
| Times Sacked | 5 | 1 |
| Yds Lost To Sacks | -34 | -7 |
| Interceptions | 2 | 0 |
| Punts | 5 | 6 |
| Punt Average | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Penalties | 14 | 6 |
| Penalty Yards | 122 | 65 |
| Fumbles | 0 | 2 |
| Fumbles Lost | 0 | 1 |
| Possession | 27:20 | 32:40 |

Individual Stats

RUSHING

| | Rush | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
|------------------|------|-----|-------|----|------|
| USF | | | | | |
| Jordan Cronkrite | 22 | 136 | 6.2 | 1 | 24 |
| Tyre McCants | 4 | 28 | 7.0 | 0 | 13 |
| Blake Barnett | 10 | 17 | 1.7 | 0 | 9 |
| Elijah Mack | 4 | 16 | 4.0 | 0 | 5 |
| Dave Small | 2 | 12 | 6.0 | 0 | 7 |
| Terrence Horne | 1 | 4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 |
| Trevon Sands | 1 | 2 | 2.0 | 0 | 2 |
| ILL | | | | | |
| Mike Epstein | 19 | 113 | 5.9 | 1 | 43 |
| Reggie Corbin | 12 | 98 | 8.2 | 0 | 32 |
| Ra'Von Bonner | 4 | 19 | 4.8 | 0 | 7 |
| Dominic Stampley | 1 | 7 | 7.0 | 0 | 7 |
| M.J. Rivers II | 11 | -12 | -1.1 | 0 | 10 |
| Team | 1 | -13 | -13.0 | 0 | 0 |

PASSING

| | Comp | Att | Yds | Y/A | Long | Int | QBRat |
|----------------|------|-----|-----|------|------|-----|-------|
| USF | | | | | | | |
| Blake Barnett | 23 | 40 | 411 | 10.3 | 2 | 2 | 150.3 |
| ILL | | | | | | | |
| M.J. Rivers II | 20 | 29 | 168 | 5.8 | 0 | 0 | 117.6 |

RECEIVING

| | Rec | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
|-------------------|-----|-----|------|----|------|
| USF | | | | | |
| Randall St. Felix | 6 | 120 | 20.0 | 0 | 55 |
| Mitchell Wilcox | 8 | 109 | 13.6 | 0 | 20 |
| Darnell Salomon | 5 | 95 | 19.0 | 2 | 50 |
| Tyre McCants | 3 | 77 | 25.7 | 0 | 34 |
| Stanley Clerveaux | 1 | 10 | 10.0 | 0 | 10 |
| ILL | | | | | |
| Mike Epstein | 19 | 113 | 5.9 | 1 | 43 |
| Reggie Corbin | 12 | 98 | 8.2 | 0 | 32 |
| Ra'Von Bonner | 4 | 19 | 4.8 | 0 | 7 |
| Dominic Stampley | 1 | 7 | 7.0 | 0 | 7 |
| M.J. Rivers II | 11 | -12 | -1.1 | 0 | 10 |