

CAMELLIA BOWL
FIU VS ARKANSAS ST

MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- Blake Anderson no longer had to hold the emotions in check once the season, and the bowl win, were wrapped up. The Arkansas State coach, whose wife died in August after a two-year battle with breast cancer, both celebrated victory and mourned her absence in the aftermath of a 34-26 win over Florida International on Saturday night in the Camellia Bowl. It didn't come easily. Nothing did for the Red Wolves in a season which their coach started on a leave of absence. "Honestly, (I) just broke down," Anderson said. "All I could think of was I wish Wendy was here, to be a part of it. I've been trying to hold onto it for months and get to the finish line. "It was a really tough few days, a really long day today, just knowing that she wouldn't be here to be a part of it." Anderson's team delivered for him. And for Wendy. Layne Hatcher passed for 393 yards and four touchdowns, including a late 13-yarder to Jonathan Adams. The Red Wolves (8-5) came back to life offensively for a final big drive, highlighted by All-American and game MVP Omar Bayless's 52-yard catch down to the 12. Then they had two interceptions in the final minutes.

"It's going to be one that we'll never forget, a season that we'll ever forget," Anderson said. "They'll have a special place in my heart honestly."

The Panthers (6-7) converted a fourth-and-5 play with a pass to Austin Maloney, who matched the huge game of Bayless. But James Morgan's overthrow on the next play was intercepted by Jeremy Smith, who returned it 21 yards into FIU territory.

Arkansas State worked the clock down to 37 seconds and a punt left FIU starting at its 12 with no timeouts remaining. The Panthers got one first down on a pass interference call against Logan Wescott, who tipped the next pass into the arms of Darreon Jackson to seal the win.

Hatcher completed 27 of 51 passes and had an interception. Bayless, the nation's No. 2 receiver, caught nine passes for 180 yards and a touchdown.

It wrapped up an emotional season for not only Anderson, but his team. Now, he's planning a Colorado getaway with his three kids for Christmas.

"All year long, days went by when I knew he was down," Bayless said. " just always texted him, uplifted him. Just to get this for him, it's just an honor."

Added Smith: "He rarely broke down, but we could tell he was hurting. Everything we did, we tried to keep him in mind."

Morgan passed for 312 yards and a touchdown before the ending interceptions. Maloney caught 10 passes for 178 yards and the TD.

FIU had a chance to take its first lead but Jose Borregales' 29-yard field goal attempt went wide left with 5:10 left. Borregales had already made four attempts, including a 48-yarder and 52-yarder in a four-minute span extending into the fourth quarter.

Through it all, Anderson felt his late wife was watching over the Red Wolves.

"She may have blocked that kick, I don't know," he said. "That guy doesn't miss from there, we all know that. We got a gift there."

The nation's No. 2 receiver, Bayless then delivered two big plays deep into FIU territory. The first was negated by a personal foul against Javonis Isaac for a blind-side block.

Then Bayless delivered again, stepping out of a defender's grasp along the left sideline on his way to the final big gain.

FIU had cut a 14-point deficit down to seven after Sage Lewis forced and recovered a fumble by Hatcher. FIU's offense captalized with Morgan's 19-yard touchdown to Austin Maloney.

"There was plenty of chances where it looked like the momentum was going to get out of hand," FIU coach Butch Davis said. "They kept fighting and fighting and fighting."

Borregales's 52-yards had cut it to 27-26 with 11:52 to play. It was set up by Rishard Dames' interception of an underthrown ball one play after Arkansas State converted a fourth-down play in its own territory.

The Red Wolves then failed to score on the fourth straight possession. Hatcher's fourth-down pass to Bayless under pressure fell short.

THE TAKEAWAY

Arkansas State: Totaled 28 plays and 170 yards on its first two drives but wasn't nearly so effective for most of the second half -- until it counted most.

FIU: Wiped out most of a 27-13 deficit in the second half, but kept having to settle for kicks instead of touchdowns. Has made three straight bowls and just five in program history.

EJECTIONS

Arkansas State defensive end/linebacker Jeffmario Brown was ejected for targeting on the first play of the second quarter. Florida International receiver Tony Gaiter IV was ejected after getting involved in a pile after a loose ball in the third.

"That's definitely a motivational thing," Morgan said. "And if you know Tony Gaiter, you know he's a stand-up guy. He's not a dirty player or anything like that."

Final	1	2	3	4	T
FIU	0	13	10	3	26
ARST	14	6	7	7	34

Scoring Summary -----

	FIU	ARST
FIRST QUARTER		
ARST TD 9:25		
Omar Bayless 4 Yd pass from Layne Hatcher (Blake Grupe Kick)	15 plays, 80 yards, 3:17	0
ARST TD 0:55		
Kirk Merritt 9 Yd pass from Layne Hatcher (Blake Grupe Kick)	13 plays, 90 yards, 3:35	0
SECOND QUARTER		
FIU TD 12:50		
Napoleon Maxwell 3 Yd Run (Jose Borregales Kick)	9 plays, 71 yards, 3:05	7
ARST FG 9:31		
Blake Grupe 46 Yd Field Goal	10 plays, 47 yards, 3:19	7
FIU FG 5:30		
Jose Borregales 25 Yd Field Goal	8 plays, 47 yards, 4:01	10
ARST FG 3:05		
Blake Grupe 37 Yd Field Goal	8 plays, 59 yards, 2:25	10
FIU FG 0:40		
Jose Borregales 25 Yd Field Goal	10 plays, 70 yards, 2:25	13
THIRD QUARTER		
ARST TD 12:22		
Reed Tyler 15 Yd pass from Layne Hatcher (Blake Grupe Kick)	11 plays, 74 yards, 2:38	13
FIU TD 3:48		
Austin Maloney 19 Yd pass from James Morgan (Jose Borregales Kick)	2 plays, 23 yards, 0:48	20
FIU FG 0:38		
Jose Borregales 48 Yd Field Goal	5 plays, 50 yards, 1:16	23
FOURTH QUARTER		
FIU FG 11:52		
Jose Borregales 52 Yd Field Goal	6 plays, 32 yards, 2:02	26
ARST TD 3:37		
Jonathan Adams Jr. 13 Yd pass from Layne Hatcher (Blake Grupe Kick)	5 plays, 80 yards, 1:33	26

Team Stats	FIU	ARST
First Downs	23	31
Passes for First	13	20
Rushes for First	5	8
Penalties for First	5	3
Third Down Efficiency	6-16	12-19
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	1-2
Total Yards	444	525
Total Plays	74	89
Avg Gain Per Play	6.0	5.9
Net Yards Rushing	132	132
Rushes	35	37
Yards Per Rush	3.8	3.6
Stat Name		
Net Yards Passing	312	393
Comp-Att	22-39	27-52
Yards Per Pass	8.0	7.6
Times Sacked	0	3
Yds Lost To Sacks	0	-17
Interceptions	2	1
Punts	3	3
Punt Average	49.3	39.7
Penalties	7	10
Penalty Yards	62	142
Fumbles	0	1
Fumbles Lost	0	1
Possession	31:40	28:20

Individual Stats

RUSHING							
	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
FIU							
Napoleon Maxwell	13	66	5.1	1	20		
Anthony Jones	21	65	3.1	0	9		
James Morgan	1	1	1.0	0	1		
ARST							
Jamal Jones	10	59	5.9	0	20		
Marcel Murray	17	38	2.2	0	13		
Layne Hatcher	9	37	4.1	0	22		
PASSING							
	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
FIU							
James Morgan	22	38	312	8.2	1	2	66.2
Anthony Jones	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	3.3
ARST							
Layne Hatcher	27	51	393	7.7	4	1	81.0
Omar Bayless	0	1	0	0.0	0	0	2.9
RECEIVING							
	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	Long		
FIU							
Austin Maloney	10	178	17.8	1	48		
Shemar Thornton	3	86	28.7	0	42		
Sterling Palmer	5	24	4.8	0	11		
Tony Gaiter IV	1	15	15.0	0	15		
Kamareon Williams	1	8	8.0	0	8		
Napoleon Maxwell	1	2	2.0	0	2		
Darrius Scott	1	-1	-1.0	0	0		
ARST							
Omar Bayless	9	180	20.0	1	52		
Jonathan Adams Jr.	4	63	15.8	1	20		
Marcel Murray	5	52	10.4	0	19		
Kirk Merritt	6	43	7.2	1	14		
Brandon Bowling	2	40	20.0	0	30		
Reed Tyler	1	15	15.0	1	15		