

NEW ORLEANS BOWL
UAB VS APP ST

NEW ORLEANS -- Appalachian State running back Darrynton Evans turned a teammate's fourth-down fumble into a 31-yard touchdown.

The Mountaineers added another fourth-down score when receiver Thomas Hennigan wrestled an under-thrown pass away from a UAB defensive back who tried to intercept it.

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Those kinds of plays lifted No. 20 Appalachian State to a 31-17 victory over the Blazers in the New Orleans Bowl on Saturday night.

"We're not going to play scared at Appalachian State," newly promoted head coach Shawn Clark said. "We're going to play aggressive and let the cards fall where they fall."

The Mountaineers (13-1) scored twice in the third quarter on quarterback fumbles. Evans, who rushed for a 157 yards, scored his lone touchdown when quarterback Zac Thomas lost the ball on a fourth-and-1 sneak. The ball rolled back toward Evans, who cleanly scooped it, made a sudden move to his right and sprinted into the open field.

"It was just right place, right time," Evans said.

Later, outside linebacker Nick Hampton stripped UAB quarterback Tyler Johnston, and inside linebacker Trey Cobb picked up the ball and returned it 24 yards to put Appalachian State in front 24-17.

"There was more crazy things that happened in this game than 10 games combined," lamented UAB coach Bill Clark, calling the Appalachian State fumble that bounced straight back to Evans "pretty fluky."

"Give their running back credit," the UAB coach added. "He made a heck of a play."

Johnston, making his first start since injuring his knee Nov. 2 at Tennessee, passed for 298 yards and two touchdowns for UAB (9-5), but also was intercepted once and sacked four times.

Listed by odds makers as 17-point underdogs, the Blazers raced to a 14-0 lead in the first five minutes, only to be outscored 31-3 after that.

"We started off fast," Johnston said. "They brought more pressure in and I just kind of got a little frustrated."

The game marked the head coaching debut for Appalachian State's Clark, who took over after Eli Drinkwitz was hired by Missouri earlier this month. Clark is a former Appalachian State offensive lineman who'd been coaching the offensive line at his alma mater since 2016 -- first under Scott Satterfield, who was hired away by Louisville in 2018.

Now, Clark is running a program that has a good chance to end the season ranked inside the top 20.

"If you cut me open, I bleed black and gold," he said. "I'm here for the long haul. ... I can't wait to take this program places it's never been before."

Hennigan caught two touchdown passes for Appalachian State. The first came after UAB linebacker Jordan Smith was assessed a personal foul for leaping toward the line of scrimmage on Chandler Staton's missed 48-yard field goal attempt in the second quarter. Just two plays after the drive-extending penalty, Thomas found Hennigan for a 17-yard TD that cut UAB's lead to 14-10.

On his second touchdown, Hennigan had to rip Thomas' 27-yard throw from cornerback Starling Thomas as both fell to the turf in the third quarter, widening Appalachian State's lead to 31-17.

"I'm not the fastest guy; I haven't ever been," Hennigan said. "I'm not going to be strongest guy out there, but the reason I'm playing college football is making the tough catches."

Zac Thomas finished with 142 yards and two TDs passing for the Mountaineers, who were the Sun Belt Conference champions and finished the season on a six-game winning streak.

Austin Watkins caught 10 passes for 159 yards and a touchdown for the Blazers, but most of that came on UAB's first two possessions. Watkins made a 35-yard catch on the first play of the game. That set up Johnston's 25-yard pass to Hayden Pittman, who made a diving catch in the end zone to make it 7-0 a mere 1:14 after the opening kickoff.

Watkins, who entered the game needing 67 yards receiving to reach 1,000 for the season, surpassed that on his fourth catch, a 41-yard grab down the left side early in the Blazers' second possession. Two plays later, Watkins had a 25-yard catch-and run for a touchdown to make it 14-0.

THE TAKEAWAY

Appalachian State: The Mountaineers overcame relative struggles on offense with opportunism and athleticism. Their ability to win comfortably after falling behind by two touchdowns demonstrated why they were among the strongest mid-major programs in the nation this season.

UAB: The Blazers, with only one prior bowl triumph in program history, opened with an intensity that showed how much this game mattered to them. They kept it close until late in the third quarter, when mistakes and some bad bounces caught up to them.

POLL IMPLICATIONS

Appalachian State could move up a few spots, depending on subsequent bowl results, for its highest ranking this season.

| | | | | | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| Final | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | T |
| APP | 0 | 10 | 21 | 0 | 31 |
| UAB | 14 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 17 |

Scoring Summary -----

| | APP | UAB |
|---|------------|------------|
| FIRST QUARTER | | |
| UAB TD 13:46 | | |
| Hayden Pittman 25 Yd pass from Tyler Johnston III (Nick Vogel Kick) | | |
| 4 plays, 75 yards, 1:14 | 0 | 7 |
| UAB TD 10:28 | | |
| Austin Watkins 25 Yd pass from Tyler Johnston III (Nick Vogel Kick) | | |
| 4 plays, 77 yards, 1:23 | 0 | 14 |
| SECOND QUARTER | | |
| APP FG 14:11 | | |
| Chandler Staton 34 Yd Field Goal | | |
| 8 plays, -2 yards, 3:21 | 3 | 14 |
| APP TD 7:59 | | |
| Thomas Hennigan 17 Yd pass from Zac Thomas (Chandler Staton Kick) | | |
| 7 plays, 81 yards, 4:24 | 10 | 14 |
| THIRD QUARTER | | |
| APP TD 12:14 | | |
| Darrynton Evans 31 Yd Run (Chandler Staton Kick) | | |
| 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:46 | 17 | 14 |
| UAB FG 8:19 | | |
| Nick Vogel 49 Yd Field Goal | | |
| 7 plays, 44 yards, 3:55 | 17 | 17 |
| APP TD 6:16 | | |
| Trey Cobb 24 Yd Fumble Return (Chandler Staton Kick) | | |
| 4 plays, 4 yards, 1:19 | 24 | 17 |
| APP TD 0:44 | | |
| Thomas Hennigan 27 Yd pass from Zac Thomas (Chandler Staton Kick) | | |
| 9 plays, 85 yards, 3:56 | 31 | 17 |

| Team Stats | APP | UAB |
|------------------------|------------|------------|
| First Downs | 20 | 20 |
| Passes for First | 6 | 13 |
| Rushes for First | 9 | 5 |
| Penalties for First | 5 | 2 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 3-14 | 3-14 |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 2-2 | 2-3 |
| Total Yards | 403 | 338 |
| Total Plays | 65 | 67 |
| Avg Gain Per Play | 6.2 | 5.0 |
| Net Yards Rushing | 261 | 40 |
| Rushes | 40 | 33 |
| Yards Per Rush | 6.5 | 1.2 |
| Stat Name | | |
| Net Yards Passing | 142 | 298 |
| Comp-Att | 13-25 | 22-34 |
| Yards Per Pass | 5.7 | 8.8 |
| Times Sacked | 1 | 6 |
| Yds Lost To Sacks | -1 | -34 |
| Interceptions | 0 | 1 |
| Punts | 7 | 5 |
| Punt Average | 44.7 | 42.4 |
| Penalties | 11 | 8 |
| Penalty Yards | 130 | 76 |
| Fumbles | 1 | 2 |
| Fumbles Lost | 0 | 2 |
| Possession | 32:57 | 27:03 |

Individual Stats

RUSHING

| APP | Rush | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
|---------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Darrynton Evans | 19 | 157 | 8.3 | 1 | 57 |
| Marcus Williams Jr. | 6 | 54 | 9.0 | 0 | 27 |
| Zac Thomas | 9 | 28 | 3.1 | 0 | 11 |
| Daetrich Harrington | 3 | 26 | 8.7 | 0 | 23 |
| Malik Williams | 1 | 4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 |
| Team | 2 | -8 | -4.0 | 0 | 0 |
| UAB | Rush | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
| Spencer Brown | 14 | 39 | 2.8 | 0 | 14 |
| Jermaine Brown Jr. | 3 | 11 | 3.7 | 0 | 8 |
| Lucious Stanley | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Austin Watkins | 1 | -1 | -1.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Team | 2 | -2 | -1.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Tyler Johnston III | 12 | -7 | -0.6 | 0 | 6 |

PASSING

| APP | Comp | Att | Yds | Y/A | TD | Int | QBRat |
|--------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|------------|--------------|
| Zac Thomas | 13 | 24 | 142 | 5.9 | 2 | 0 | 40.1 |
| Malik Williams | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 | 1.3 |
| UAB | Comp | Att | Yds | Y/A | TD | Int | QBRat |
| Tyler Johnston III | 22 | 34 | 298 | 8.8 | 2 | 1 | 31.3 |

RECEIVING

| APP | Rec | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
|---------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Jalen Virgil | 3 | 62 | 20.7 | 0 | 32 |
| Thomas Hennigan | 3 | 50 | 16.7 | 2 | 27 |
| Malik Williams | 3 | 19 | 6.3 | 0 | 8 |
| Daetrich Harrington | 1 | 6 | 6.0 | 0 | 6 |
| Darrynton Evans | 3 | 5 | 1.7 | 0 | 7 |
| UAB | Rec | Yds | Avg | TD | Long |
| Austin Watkins | 10 | 159 | 15.9 | 1 | 41 |
| Hayden Pittman | 3 | 59 | 19.7 | 1 | 25 |
| Jermaine Brown Jr. | 2 | 20 | 10.0 | 0 | 11 |
| Markus Grossman | 4 | 20 | 5.0 | 0 | 9 |
| Kevin Davis | 1 | 17 | 17.0 | 0 | 17 |
| Dy'jonn Turner | 1 | 17 | 17.0 | 0 | 17 |
| Lucious Stanley | 1 | 6 | 6.0 | 0 | 6 |