

WEEK SIX
UCF at CINCY

Ahmad Gardner's INT return leads Bearcats to upset of UCF

CINCINNATI -- As a reward for his game-turning interception, freshman cornerback Ahmad Gardner was invited to address teammates in the locker room as Cincinnati Bearcats celebrated a breakthrough win.

Nothing shy about this freshman, on the field or in front of the team.

"We brought him up to say a few words, and we had to cut him off," coach Luke Fickell said. There was plenty to talk about after the Bearcats finally beat the team that had dominated them, taking control of the American Athletic Conference race with quite a defensive performance.

Gardner returned an interception for a go-ahead touchdown and Cincinnati clamped down on freshman quarterback Dillon Gabriel and No. 18 UCF's high-scoring offense Friday night for a 27-24 victory that ended the Knights' streak of 19 conference wins.

After getting blown out in their previous two matchups against the two-time defending AAC champs, the Bearcats (4-1, 1-0) gave themselves an early edge in this season's race by finding a way to finally keep up with UCF (4-2, 1-1). They rotated cornerbacks and safeties to keep them fresh against UCF's quick-snap offense.

That approach made the difference in front of a capacity crowd that stormed the field. The Bearcats had lost their past 13 games against ranked teams since 2009.

"The biggest win for this school in a long time," tight end Josiah Deguara said.

In addition to Gardner's 16-yard interception return, the Bearcats picked off Gabriel's passes at the Cincinnati 2 and 6 as they took control and closed it out, taking advantage of his inexperience.

"He's a freshman," Gardner said. "We were going to try to get into his head. That's what the adjustment was. It worked."

UCF's Tre Nixon turned a short pass into a 45-yard touchdown that cut it to 27-24 with 3:11 to go, but the Bearcats ran out the clock, converting a fourth-and-1 at midfield in the closing seconds.

"I guess there's no sweeter way to seal the deal against a team that's the best in the league, been the best the last two years," said Fickell, who didn't hesitate to call the quarterback sneak. "The only way you're going to knock off the best is to continue to be aggressive. The only way you beat the best is to take those chances."

It was a deflating performance for the Knights, who had several cherished streaks snapped.

Gabriel came in leading the AAC in passing efficiency, but finished 25-of-46 for 297 yards with three decisive interceptions against a pressing defense that dared him to throw deep. The true freshman also botched a handoff at the UCF 19 that set up the first of Desmond Ridder's two touchdown passes and got the crowd chanting "Overrated!"

"Three turnovers are unacceptable," Gabriel said. "I didn't do my part."

The Knights had scored at least 30 points in each of their last 31 games, the longest such FBS streak since 1936. The four turnovers made the difference.

"I thought Dillon responded to the pressure at times, but he didn't take care of the football," coach Josh Heupel said. "No matter what age you are, you have to take care of the football."

Ridder was 17-of-31 for 149 yards. He also threw an interception that set up Greg McCrae's 1-yard touchdown run with 58 seconds left in the half that put UCF ahead 16-10 lead.

Gardner changed the game by stepping in front of a sideline pass and returning an interception 16 yards untouched in the third quarter, and Gabriel couldn't rally the Knights.

"I knew he was going to throw it," said Gardner, who also is a freshman. "I knew I was going to jump it, and it was going to be there."

Michael Warren II had a 61-yard run that set up Ridder's second touchdown pass early in the fourth quarter for a 27-16 lead.

THE TAKEAWAY

UCF: The Knights' lack of experience at quarterback cost them their long streaks of conference wins and 30-point games. Cincinnati: After giving up 51 and 38 points in its last two losses to UCF, the Bearcats started preparing for their quick-snap offense during camp. After UCF opened the game with a field goal drive, the Bearcats' defense settled in and took control.

POLL IMPLICATIONS

UCF's second-straight road loss leaves the Knights in a tenuous spot. They were ranked No. 15 when they lost at Pittsburgh 35-34 on Sept. 21.

ONE STREAK SURVIVED

The Knights have a rushing and a passing touchdown in their last 32 games, the longest current streak in the FBS.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
UCF	3	13	0	8	24
CIN	0	10	10	7	27

Scoring Summary -----

	UCF	CIN
FIRST QUARTER		
UCF FG 11:46 Dylan Barnas 24 Yd Field Goal		
12 plays, 70 yards, 3:14	3	0
SECOND QUARTER		
CIN FG 12:08 Sam Crosa 38 Yd Field Goal		
10 plays, 58 yards, 4:31	3	3
UCF FG 9:46 Dylan Barnas 22 Yd Field Goal		
10 plays, 46 yards, 2:22	6	3
CIN TD 6:49 Trent Cloud 5 Yd pass from Desmond Ridder (Sam Crosa Kick)		
4 plays, 19 yards, 1:58	6	10
UCF FG 3:52 Dylan Barnas 31 Yd Field Goal		
8 plays, 60 yards, 2:57	9	10
UCF TD 0:58 Greg McCrae 1 Yd Run (Dylan Barnas Kick)		
4 plays, 12 yards, 2:02	16	10
THIRD QUARTER		
CIN FG 10:06 Sam Crosa 26 Yd Field Goal		
10 plays, 66 yards, 4:54	16	13
CIN TD 5:08 Ahmad Gardner 16 Yd Interception Return (Sam Crosa Kick)		
1 play, 0 yards, 0:07	16	20
FOURTH QUARTER		
CIN TD 14:55 Alec Pierce 11 Yd pass from Desmond Ridder (Sam Crosa Kick)		
3 plays, 77 yards, 0:45	16	27
UCF TD 3:11 Tre Nixon 45 Yd pass from Dillon Gabriel (Dillon Gabriel Pass to Adrian Killins Jr. for Two-Point Conversion)		
4 plays, 93 yards, 0:50	24	27

Team Stats

	UCF	CIN
First Downs	29	18
Passes for First	12	8
Rushes for First	10	10
Penalties for First	7	0
Third Down Efficiency	6-17	4-16
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Total Yards	423	341
Total Plays	88	72
Avg Gain Per Play	4.8	4.7
Net Yards Rushing	126	192
Rushes	42	41
Yards Per Rush	3.0	4.7
Net Yards Passing	297	149
Comp-Att	25-46	17-31
Yards Per Pass	6.5	4.8
Times Sacked	3	1
Yds Lost To Sacks	-16	-9
Interceptions	3	1
Punts	6	8
Punt Average	41.0	40.0
Penalties	5	9
Penalty Yards	42	91
Fumbles	3	0
Fumbles Lost	1	0
Time of Poss	28:08	31:52

Individual Stats

RUSHING

UCF	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Greg McCrae	17	71	4.2	1	30
Otis Anderson	12	45	3.8	0	19
Adrian Killins Jr.	4	23	5.8	0	18
Dillon Gabriel	9	-13	-1.4	0	5
CINCINNATI					
Michael Warren II	23	133	5.8	0	60
Desmond Ridder	12	41	3.4	0	12
Gerrid Doaks	3	23	7.7	0	13
Team	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
Tavion Thomas	2	-3	-1.5	0	1

PASSING

UCF	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Dillon Gabriel	25	46	297	6.5	1	3	19.9
CINCINNATI							
Desmond Ridder	17	31	149	4.8	2	1	27.5

RECEIVING

UCF	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Gabriel Davis	13	170	13.1	0	29
Tre Nixon	6	76	12.7	1	45
Marlon Williams	1	22	22.0	0	22
Otis Anderson	3	20	6.7	0	11
Jacob Harris	2	9	4.5	0	7
CINCINNATI					
Josiah Deguara	5	64	12.8	0	22
Rashad Medaris	3	25	8.3	0	26
Michael Warren II	4	19	4.8	0	10
Jayshon Jackson	2	18	9.0	0	12
Trent Cloud	2	12	6.0	1	7
Alec Pierce	1	11	11.0	1	11