

Aggies Make Comeback Under Head Coach Alonzo Lee

Contributed by Daniel Henderson -- Black College Wire
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Win over WSSU marks beginning of new era

It was a game that marked the beginning of a new era for first-time head coach Alonzo Lee and the North Carolina A&T football program.

And the "Lee Era" was kicked off with a defensive prowess that lived up to the hype that was noted upon his arrival.

The Aggies held Winston-Salem State to just 90 total offensive yards Saturday, Sept. 5, by executing Lee's defensive schemes as they defended their I-40 title in a 19-10 win Saturday evening at Bowman Gray Stadium. It was Lee's first victory as a head coach and the Aggies first away win in 3 seasons (40-33 at Morgan State October, 8, 2005). [Related story: Aggies Defeat Norfolk State Sept. 12]

"It feels great," Lee said. "Winston has a great team and to hold them under 100 yards total offense -- that's awesome."

But the stout defense was not the only game-changing factor that gave the Aggies an edge.

They received a 67-yard kickoff return from freshman running back Mike Mayhew shortly before the end of the first half and a 44-yard punt return from junior cornerback Quay Long at the start of the fourth quarter.

But neither of the returns translated into points, as freshman kicker Patrick Courtney struggled off of injury and quickly got Lee's attention.

"I was really trying to take pressure off my freshman kicker," Lee said about opting not to kick a field goal to end the first half.

"You know one thing we lost from last year was our kicker and different things like that and we found out our freshman had to step up a week ago."

"He came into camp with an injury and just started kicking August 23, so he's just been kicking for a few days. We just tried to take some pressure off him."

Meanwhile the offense showed signs of an immense improvement from last season.

They generated 285 total yards with quarterback Carlton Fears finishing 17-of-31 with 131 passing yards and 78 rushing yards.

It was the first time Fears passed for over 100 yards in his A&T career and something that had not been done in five games, dating back to last season.

Not only did the unusual passing game play a key role in the Aggies victory for spectators, they also found a way to overcome a familiar sight -- turnovers.

They fumbled three times with none leading to Winston-Salem State taking over on downs.

"We have to stop inflicting wounds on ourselves with penalties, turnovers and little things like that," Lee said. "If we can we're going to be a pretty good football team."

The Aggies took 10-3 lead on a 1-yard touchdown run by Fears midway through the second quarter that was set up after a 20-yard completion to wide receiver Larry Raper.

Winston-Salem then answered with an 8-play, 53-yard drive of their own that ended with running back Jarrett Dunston's one-yard touchdown and kicker Landen Thayer extra point tied the game at 10-10.

The game would remain scoreless until the fourth quarter when A&T capitalized off a bad snap from the Rams on an intended punt.

That put them in scoring position and eventually led to Courtney's 25-yard field goal through the upright giving them 13-10 lead with 9:23 left in the game.

Winston-Salem State was never able to get back into Aggie territory throughout the quarter and quarterback Branden Williams fumbled with just over four minutes remaining in the game, leading to the second turnover for the Rams.

Five plays later, sophomore running back Mike Mayhew powered through and pass the line for a 2-yard touchdown, the first of his Aggie career.

Mayhew, along with fellow underclassmen Dontavious Paynes accounted for 78 of the 169 yards on the ground building optimism in the first-year head coach about his team's future.

"We're just a freshman, sophomore team, Lee said. "We're looking forward to great things and their only going to get better.

That opportunity will come when the Aggies host their season opener Saturday against Norfolk State at 6 p.m. in Aggie Stadium.

They will try to avenge last season's 27-21 loss on the road to the Spartans.

"We already got in our minds that we're champions – that we're going to win the championship," Glasper said after finishing the game with three tackles. "That's our focus and what we work hard for."

"We gonna chill a little bit Monday and Tuesday get back to the drawing board and get ready for Norfolk State."

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Daniel Henderson is sports editor of The Register, the North Carolina A&T State University student newspaper, which originally published this article.