**2022 Camellia Bowl Game Story**

**Tuesday, Dec. 27, 2022**

**Buffalo Controls Clock; Georgia Southern in Camellia Bowl Win**

**MONTGOMERY –** Buffalo led the Mid-American Conference in time of possession this season.

So it was no surprise the Bulls turned to their ball-control offense to secure a 23-21 win over Georgia Southern in the ninth annual Camellia Bowl at historic Cramton Bowl.

Buffalo (7-6) made it a two-score game in the fourth quarter with a methodical 10-play drive – all runs by backup running back Tajay Ahmed - to extend its lead to 23-14 with 8:38 left in the game. Ahmed ran for 39 yard and set up MAC Special Teams Player of the Year Alex McNulty with a 20-yard field goal to push the lead to nine points.

Georgia Southern (6-7) responded with a 13-play, 90-yard drive to cut the lead to 23-21. GSU quarterback Kyle Vantrease, who played three seasons at Buffalo, completed 7-of-9 passes for 72 yards and one touchdown on the drive.

Vantrease hit tight end Beau Johnson with a 42-yard strike on fourth-and-seven to give the Eagles a first down at the Bulls 19-yard line.  Four plays later, Vantrease hit a wide-open Jjay Mcafee with a 13-yard touchdown pass.

After the GSU score, Buffalo had one mission and that was to chew up the final 3:38 off the clock.

Ahmed ran for only three yards on the first two plays and the Eagles used two timeouts.

On third down and eight from the Buffalo 28-yard line, quarterback Cole Snyder, a transfer from Rutgers who took over for Vantrease, hit senior Justin Marshall with an 8-yard completion to move the chains.

Ahmed then ran for three yards, four yards and added another 4-yard run to clinch the game.

He finished with 27 carries for 97 yards and one touchdown.

“And all we do is churn out the clock,” Buffalo head coach Maurice Linguist said. ‘We led the Mid-American Conference in time of possession. That’s a stat that nobody loves any more (but) we love it. We love time of possession. That’s a forgotten stat with everybody else. We know how to play tough, we know how to play disciplined; we know how to take care of the ball.”

After a scoreless first quarter, Georgia Southern got on the board first with Alex Raynor’s 23-yard field goal to give the Eagles a 3-0 lead.

Buffalo came right back with an 81-yard touchdown drive, capped by Snyder’s 32-yard touchdown pass to Marshall to give the Bulls a 7-3 lead.

Marshall caught two passes on the drive for 48 yards and was the favorite target of Snyder all day long. Marshall was targeted 19 times and finished with 11 catches for 127 yards and one score.  He was awarded the Bart Starr MVP Trophy after the game.

“Oh my goodness, what a great player,” Georgia Southern head coach Clay Helton said. “We mixed up enough coverages to try and slow them down and I thought (defensive coordinator) Will (Harris) did a nice job. We went into the game saying, hey, let’s stop the run, let’s make the quarterback beat us.

‘What a special receiver. You could tell -- I don’t know how many times he was targeted, it had to be over 20, it felt like over 20 -- he is a very, very strong-handed catch player. When it was time to make plays, 12 for 19 (on third down), I don’t know how many of the 12 (third-down conversions) he made, but it felt like most of them was him.”

Georgia Southern marched into the red zone on its next possession, but again settled for 21-yard field goal by Raynor to make it 7-6.

Again, Buffalo answered with a touchdown drive as Ahmed scored on a 5-yard run to give the Bulls a 14-6 halftime lead.

The Bulls fumbled on their first snap of the third quarter after a 35-yard completion to the GSU 21-yard line.

The Eagles struck quickly with a Camellia Bowl record 79-yard TD pass from Vantrease to Joshua Thompson to cut the deficit to 14-12. Vantrease’s subsequent two-point pass knotted the score at 14-14.

After the game-tying score by the Eagles, Buffalo turned to its ball control offense. The Bulls drove 60 yards in 13 plays on its next possession, capped by McNulty’s 32-yard field goal to put the Bulls back in front 17-14.

Buffalo recovered a fumble on the first play after the kickoff at the GSU 19. The Bulls had first-and-goal at the six before McNulty hit a 23-yard field goal to make it 20-14.

“It wasn’t so much what they did, but it was about us,” Vantrease said. “We shot ourselves in the foot. We struggled in the red zone and we had two turnovers.’