

Colonials top Albany in NAFL season opener, 29-8

JOHNSTOWN - For the first 10 minutes of Saturday's North American Football League opener, Albany's Sylvester Cooperwood ran all over the Glove Cities Colonials.

But, it was Glove Cities' Charles Tarver who stole the show with three touchdowns to help lead the Colonials to a 29-8 comeback win over the Albany Metro Mallers in their season opener at Knox Field.

"That was a big win for us obviously," Glove Cities coach Matt Capano said. "Albany is a perennial powerhouse and always on the top. For us to come in and beat them 29-8, that's a big win for us."

Glove Cities struggled early trying to contain Cooperwood. The Mallers' big running back rumbled for big gain after big gain and helped set-up Albany's first touchdown by leading a drive down to the four-yard line before Derek Adams punched in the touchdown to give Albany the early lead. Culture Branch brought in a catch in the corner end zone to complete a two-point conversion and give the Mallers an 8-0 lead with 5:04 remaining in the first quarter.

After a disastrous opening possession, which saw Glove Cities quarterback Justin Kastner throw a weak pass off his back foot that ended up getting intercepted and setting up Albany's touchdown run, the Colonials needed a spark.

They got it in the form of the 5-foot-9, 160-pound Tarver who took the ensuing kick-off 65 yards all the way to the end zone for his first of three touchdowns on the day to put the Colonials right back into the game.

"Charles has been a fantastic pick-up for us this season," Capano said. "He played an outstanding game. My hat is off to the guy. He comes to practice and works hard and he's a great player."

The Colonials swung the momentum completely in their favor when Pleasant Rowe picked off Albany quarterback Ken Schaefer on the next possession and took it all the way to the end zone for an 80-yard interception return and give Glove Cities its first lead of the game at 14-8 after Ralph Lott punched the extra point through.

After an explosive first quarter, the two sides dug in for the second 15-minute period with neither team gaining much on offense.

Glove Cities made sure it kept the momentum on its side heading into the locker room by adding a safety sack on Schaefer with 43 seconds left in the quarter to push the lead to 16-8.

Albany threatened in the third quarter after Schaefer completed a 46-yard pass to Branch. But, on the next play Dison Reynolds picked off Schaefer's pass to stop the Mallers right in their tracks.

After gaining next to nothing for much of the game, Glove Cities' offense finally broke through as Kastner threw a play-action pass to Tarver inside the five-yard-line.

Tarver stopped on a dime to shake the Albany defender and easily grabbed the pass and walked into the end zone to give the Colonials a 23-8 lead. Tarver cemented his outstanding performance with his third touchdown and third interception of the game by jumping a route and taking it all the way back to the end zone for a 52-yard touchdown return.

"Our team is offense, defense, and special teams and sometimes it takes one of those things to win it," Glove Cities offensive lineman Drez Morris said. "Tonight the special teams and defense won us the game. I tip my hat to the defense, they played phenomenal. Offensively, we struggled but it's not just about one unit, we won the game with a team effort and a cohesive unit."

Glove Cities picked off Schaefer six times and after the opening 10 minutes and the 46-yard big play to Branch, the Colonials' defense completely shut down Albany.

"We started to key on Cooperwood and we stacked up the front of the line and the middle of the defense and that's what worked," Capano said on the adjustments made to stop Cooperwood.

"We started putting some pressure on their quarterback and he never really had a chance to set and throw the ball."

Glove Cities hits the road for the next five weeks, starting with a game against arch-rival Glens Falls next Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

"We're glad we got the victory tonight, we're going to go celebrate and then get ready for practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays," Morris said. "We know we have a lot of work left to do and we appreciate the support we got from the community tonight."

The Colonials return home on Aug. 21 to take on the same Glens Falls team that they'll meet next Saturday.