

No. 1 Alabama Takes Down No. 3 Florida State in Atlanta, 24-7

Atlanta, Georgia - Confetti rained down on Alabama during a celebration in the middle of the new Mercedes-Benz dome in Atlanta where Alabama had just taken down the Florida State Seminoles in what had been billed as the *Greatest Opener (of) All Time!*

The top-ranked Crimson Tide hopes to return to Atlanta in both December and January for even bigger games.

Dominating on defense and taking advantage of an awful special teams showing by No. 3 Florida State, the Crimson Tide got started on what has become its annual quest for the national title with a 24-7 win over the Seminoles on Saturday night.

"It's good to get a win, but we have a lot of work to do," Alabama coach Nick Saban said, before adding ominously for the rest of the nation:

"We'll get better."

The new stadium, filled to the rafters with 76,330 fans split almost evenly between the schools, hosted one of the most anticipated opening games in college football history.

At the end of the season, it will be the site of the national championship game.

Don't bet against Alabama making a return appearance.

"It's one game. We have a long season," Saban said. "The focus that we have right now is what's ahead, not what's behind."

Damien Harris ran for a touchdown and blocked a punt, while Jalen Hurts chipped in with a scoring pass in a game that basically required the sophomore quarterback to make no major mistakes.

This one was all about that dynamic Bama defense.

And Florida State's not-so-special teams.

"We work 30 to 35 minutes a day on special teams," coach Jimbo Fisher moaned. "We had breakdowns. Those were critical plays in the game."

Coming off a last-second loss in last season's title game, Alabama picked off two passes by Deondre Francois in the second half, snuffing out any hopes of a Florida State comeback. Throw in a blocked punt, a blocked field goal and a fumble recovery on a kickoff return, and there was really no path to victory for the Seminoles in the first opener between two teams in the top three of The Associated Press preseason rankings.

The Tide led 10-7 at halftime, catching a huge break in the closing seconds when the officials didn't call a pass interference penalty.

Tony Brown never looked for the ball, running into Nyqwan Murray as he tried to go for a scoring catch that would have given the Seminoles a lead. When Florida State was forced to settle for a 37-yard field goal attempt, Minkah Fitzpatrick leaped up to make the block on the final play of the half, preserving the lead and prompting a round of boos from the FSU faithful as the officials trotted off the field.

FSU never got anything going over the final two quarters. Levi Wallace and Mack Wilson both had interceptions, and Francois' night ended with him being helped off the field - putting no weight on his left knee - after being sacked from behind by blitzing safety Ronnie Harrison.

Francois grabbed at his knee even as he was going down.

It was a potentially crushing blow on a night that already went bad enough for the Seminoles.

"I hugged him," Fisher said. "We'll get the diagnosis and figure out what we've got to do from here."

With the Tide still clinging to that three-point lead, the game was essentially decided by a seven-play sequence toward the end of the third quarter.

Logan Tyler's punt was smothered by Harris, racing in from the left side, and Dylan Moses fell on it at the Florida State 6. The Seminoles made an impressive stand, forcing Alabama to settle for Andy Pappanastos' 25-yard field goal.

It was all for naught when, on the ensuing kickoff, Keith Gavin muffed the ball in the end zone, picked it up, ran into one of his own men, and then fumbled on a hit by Moses. Keith Holcombe recovered at the 11, and Harris ran up the middle for a touchdown on the very next play, splitting two would-be tacklers at the 5.

Florida State managed only 65 yards in the second half and finished with 250 in the game. Alabama had just 269 yards but it didn't really matter with all the chances created by the defense and special teams.

"This game tells us where we are," Saban said, "and where we need to go."

Alabama looked very much like a team worthy of its No. 1 ranking. While the no-call on the potential pass interference penalty was a huge break, there was no doubt about the better team in this game. The offense still needs a bit of work, especially the passing game. Saban grumbled that his team "didn't make a lot of explosive plays."

Florida State was looking to regain a bit of their swagger after back-to-back 10-3 seasons, which would be a cause for celebration at most schools but not in Tallahassee. Florida State thought it had the squad to contend again for a national title, but the offense was no match for the Crimson Tide. Throw in Francois' injury, and the outlook is suddenly a whole lot bleaker.

	1	2	3	4	Final
Alabama	3	7	11	3	24
Florida State	0	7	0	0	7

	Alabama	Florida State
Score	24	7
First downs	16	13
3rd Down Efficiency	3-for-16 (19%)	4-for-13 (31%)
4th Down Efficiency	2-for-2 (100%)	0-for-1 (0%)
Total Yards	269	250
Rushing		
Rushes-Net Yards	42-173	27-40
Average Per Rush	4.1	1.5
Passing		
Comp-Att	10-18	19-33
Passing Yards	96	210
Average Per Pass Play	5.3	6.4
Penalties-Yards	5-30	4-30
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	1-1
Interceptions Thrown	0	2
Time of Possession	32:47	27:13