

Tied at half, No. 1 Alabama romps past The Citadel 50-17

Tuscaloosa, Alabama (AP) No. 1 Alabama finally found a team that could play toe to toe with the Crimson Tide, at least until halftime.

The surprise twist: It was The Citadel, an FCS team, not a Southeastern Conference rival.

Tua Tagovailoa passed for 340 yards and three touchdowns, but the Tide struggled for 30-plus minutes before putting away The Citadel in a 50-17 victory on Saturday.

Alabama coach Nick Saban said his team learned a lesson - it must be mentally prepared.

"I don't really care who you're playing," he said.

"Every team that comes here and plays us is going to give us their best shot," Saban added. "These guys have got everything to gain and nothing to lose, and we've got nothing but downside in the game."

Alabama (11-0), which had coasted against SEC opponents, went into halftime tied at 10 with the Bulldogs (4-6). It wasn't until `Bama scored two touchdowns in a 12-second span on its way to a 27-point third quarter that the Tide could rest easy.

"I thought we played a great first half, and our players believed we had the best first half we could have had," The Citadel coach Brent Thompson said. "We could have hung in there a little longer."

Tagovailoa completed 18 of 22 passes in three quarters, including touchdowns of 21 and 5 yards to Jaylen Waddle and a 68-yarder to tight end Irv Smith Jr. He broke AJ McCarron's school single-season record of 30 touchdown passes, reaching 31.

"Thirty-one touchdowns, that's cool," Tagovailoa said. "But we've got another game to finish off this season and another game after that. We're more focused on finishing this season the right way."

Alabama still has Auburn and then No. 5 Georgia in the SEC championship game.

Damien Harris got most of his 83 yards on a 73-yard run in the fourth quarter, but he was injured on the play. He stayed on the ground for a couple of minutes before trotting off after Saban went across the field to check on him.

Saban said Harris appeared to have a mild concussion.

Henry Ruggs III gained 114 yards on six catches.

Dante Smith ran for a 45-yard touchdown in the first half and a 44-yarder in the fourth for The Citadel, whose triple option offense gave Alabama troubles at times. Smith finished with 130 yards on nine carries.

Quarterback Brandon Rainey attempted only two passes, both incomplete, but ran 25 times for 79 yards.

Alabama was coming off back-to-back shutouts of ranked SEC West rivals but lost two fumbles in this one.

Jacob Godek had sent the Bulldogs into the half all even with a 48-yard field goal on the final play.

"We're not scared of anybody," Rainey said. "I think we came out and played our butts off."

After the Tide fumbled away the second-half kickoff, the Bulldogs missed a field goal attempt that would have given them the lead.

Finally, Alabama's offense got going. Tagovailoa hit Ruggs down the right sideline for a 54-yard gain. Then he found Waddle for a 5-yard touchdown and the Tide regained the lead.

Anfernee Jennings scooped and scored on an 18-yard fumble recovery shortly after that, and it was a more comfortable 24-10 game with a lead that continued to grow.

The Citadel managed to keep Alabama's offense off the field for large chunks of the first half, including 21 plays and trips across midfield on its two opening possessions. Had 60 carries for 275 yards.

Alabama didn't flex its muscles until the second half. Kicking troubles continued with Joseph Bulovas missing an extra point and getting another blocked.

Alabama backup quarterback Jalen Hurts came into the game in the fourth quarter to a loud ovation. Hurts had missed the past two games with an ankle injury, and Saban said the goal going into the game was to get him 12 to 15 plays.

Alabama set the school record with its 25th consecutive home win. The previous mark of 24 was set from 1971-74.

Alabama tries to complete a perfect regular season at home against rival Auburn in the Iron Bowl.

	1	2	3	4	Total
Citadel (4 - 6)	0	10	0	7	17
Alabama (11 - 0)	7	3	27	13	50

	Citadel	Alabama
1 st Downs	13	21
3 rd down efficiency	6 - 17	3 - 5
4 th down efficiency	2 - 3	0 - 0
Total Yards	275	561
Passing	0	371
Comp-Att	0 - 2	21 - 26
Yards per pass	0.0	14.3
Interceptions thrown	0	0
Rushing	275	190
Rushing Attempts	60	23
Yards per rush	4.6	8.3
Penalties	6 - 50	6 - 68
Turnovers	1	2
Fumbles lost	1	2
Interceptions thrown	0	0
Possession	36:23	23:37