

ATHLETICS

Runnin' Bulldogs Move to 3-0 in Big South 48-40 Homecoming Win

BY OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS ON OCTOBER 31, 2022



▲ Jeff Sochko/ GWUphotos.com

GW Tied for First Place in the League with N.C. A&T

From GWUsports.com

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Gardner-Webb moved to 3-0 in the Big South Conference for the first time since 2003, beating Bryant 48-40 Saturday afternoon on Homecoming (Oct. 29).

The Runnin' Bulldogs (4-5, 3-0 Big South) have won three of their last four games, and two in a row, to remain in a tie for first place in the league with North Carolina A&T with two games remaining. Gardner-Webb's only loss in that stretch was a 21-20 setback to bowl eligible Liberty (7-1) on October 15.

Bailey Fisher completed 23-of-28 passes for 356 yards and five touchdowns, and ran for another score in his second dominant effort under center over the past two weeks. The Clayton, Ga., redshirt senior had a stretch of 10 consecutive completions in the first half – going 10-of-10 for 225 yards and two touchdowns.

After Bryant took an early 7-0 lead, Fisher engineered a 10-play drive that covered 75 yards in 4:54 to tie the game. He hit Cutrell Haywood from five yards out to cap the drive and completed all five of his attempts for 74 of those yards in the drive.

Gardner-Webb fell behind 14-7 with only 11.8 seconds left in the first quarter, but Fisher hit tight end Jonathan Burns on a 71-yard touchdown pass as time expired to knot the game heading into the second stanza.

He capped a 73-yard march to give Gardner-Webb the lead for good, scoring on a four-yard run to give the 'Dogs a 21-14 edge with 10:18 to play before halftime.

Gardner-Webb went up 28-17 on Narii Gaither's four-yard run, which capped a 73-yard drive in just 1:10 seconds. Fisher connected on three first down passes to aide that drive.

Bryant (2-6, 0-3 Big South) kept fighting, cutting Gardner-Webb's lead to 28-23 by the break, but Fisher found TJ Luther in the corner of the end zone from 20 yards out after an AJ Thomas interception to put the Runnin' Bulldogs up 35-23 with 10:40 left in the third.

The visiting Bulldogs cut into the lead again, but Fisher connected on a short touchdown toss to Haywood and found Burns on a four-yard score to put Gardner-Webb up comfortably by 19 points early in the fourth quarter.

Bryant cut the lead to 48-40 with 1:43 left on a long field goal, but would get no closer as Gardner-Webb's William McRainey knocked away a fourth down pass to seal the win.



▲ Photo by GWU Alumnus Ezekiel Martin /
d1photography.net

Gardner-Webb finished the day with 435 yards of total offense on Saturday in just 59 plays, as Bryant was able to control the clock with nearly an 11 minute edge. The Runnin' Bulldogs ran just 31 times, with Gaither leading the way with 17 carries for 54 yards and three catches for 59 yards. Fisher ran for 28 yards and a score – and was sacked just once.

Luther was his favorite target, catching eight balls for 124 yards and a score. Haywood added eight catches for 72 yards and two touchdowns, and Burns was strong with three balls for 78 yards and two scores.

Only five receivers caught a pass for Gardner-Webb – with Ephraim Floyd hauling in a 23-yarder to spark a GWU touchdown drive.

McRaney led Gardner-Webb's defense, which was on the field for a tiring 86 plays and more than 35 minutes. He had 11 total tackles (eight solo), a sack and two key pass break ups). Honus Wagner added seven hits, T.J. Jones and Tray Dunson each had six – with Dunson returning an interception 46 yards to set up a touchdown drive.

Ty French added six tackles and a sack and Thomas had three solo hits and two interceptions – including one in the end zone to change momentum.

Bryant posted 568 yards offensively on its 86 plays, led by quarterback Zevi Eckhaus. The sophomore completed 34-of-59 passes for 450 yards and three scores, but threw three costly interceptions and was sacked three times.

Landon Ruggieri caught 10 passes for 169 yards and a touchdown and 10 different receivers hauled in at least one of Eckhaus' completions.

Ishod Byarm ran 11 times for 63 yards, but the Bulldogs ran just 27 times in the game.

Linebacker Joe Andreessen had 14 tackles and a pair of tackles behind the line Saturday.

Gardner-Webb heads into its open date with two Big South Conference games remaining, beginning with the second annual N.C. East/West BBQ Bowl on November 12 in Buies Creek, N.C.

Related links:

[GWU Names 2022 Distinguished Alumni \(https://gardner-webb.edu/news/gardner-webb-names-2022-distinguished-alumni/\)](https://gardner-webb.edu/news/gardner-webb-names-2022-distinguished-alumni/)

[Hall of Fame Class of 2022 Honors Women Record-Breakers \(https://gardner-webb.edu/news/hall-of-fame-22-are-women-record-breakers/\)](https://gardner-webb.edu/news/hall-of-fame-22-are-women-record-breakers/)