

Conquest fall apart in second half

By Bob Weiner

ALBANY A second-half collapse on both sides of the ball stymied the Albany Conquest Saturday night at Times Union Center.

After rolling out to a 35-12 lead with 3:58 left in the first half, the Conquest suddenly couldn't protect quarterback Dan Cole from an aggressive Tennessee Valley pass rush. And when the Vipers inserted backup quarterback Kevin Eakin just before the intermission, Tennessee Valley's dormant offense took control in a 61-49 arenafootball2 victory.

The Conquest, who saw their three-game winning streak end, fell to 3-2. Tennessee Valley, which won its third straight game, evened its record at 3-3.

Even though the Conquest were playing without their top two

receivers — Jered Jones is injured, and Antwun Williams missed the game to attend the New York Jets' rookie camp — Albany's offense clicked early and often in the first half.

Chris Bocage, a USC graduate who moved into the starting lineup at wideout, scored four touchdowns on a pair of receptions, a run and a 53-yard kickoff to help the Conquest forge a 35-12 cushion late in the first half.

Vernard Abrams also scored on a TD pass in the first half for the Conquest, who appeared to be in control of the game.

But the Vipers weren't done yet. Eakin took over for struggling starting quarterback Brent Dearmon and tossed a 25-yard TD pass to Maurice Brown one minute before halftime to slice the deficit to 35-18.

That play was just the beginning of the Vipers' comeback. After

Travis Blanchard tossed a halfback option pass to Brown for another score to begin the second half, Cole hit newcomer Travis Douglas for a six-yard TD pass to give the Conquest a 42-25 edge with 8:32 remaining in the third quarter.

From that point on, the game was all Tennessee Valley. The Vipers outscored the Conquest, 36-7, the rest of the way.

Defensively, Tennessee Valley shut down Cole and the Albany wideouts with seven quarterback sacks and a safety, when Eric Scott tackled Cole in the end zone.

Offensively, the Vipers took advantage of an injury to Albany defensive back Aharon Kiett. The Conquest's secondary was so beat up, they had to put several of their wideouts in the defensive backfield to help out.

Eakin completed 12 of 15 passes for 173 yards and four TD passes. Brown caught 10 passes for 147 yards and five touchdowns.

"We played a good first half, and we played a horrible second half," said Conquest head coach Jeff Hoffman. "I can't explain it. This team is too good to allow us to play that way in the second half. We were absolutely horrific. I don't know if we were too relaxed or complacent. Why we weren't able to handle their pass rush in the second half is a mystery."

Hoffman said the Vipers made some excellent adjustments in the second half.

"They're a good team, and they did some good things in the second half. Give them credit," he said.

Cole, who completed 18 of 29 passes for 187 yards and four touchdown strikes, was largely ineffective in the second half.

"It was a tale of two different teams in each half," he said. "I take responsibility for what the offense did. We failed to execute in the second half, and we didn't get the job done. But we've got to respond and bounce back from this loss by 8 a. m. [today] because we have another game on Thursday."

Bocage said he wasn't sure why the team collapsed.

"We needed to finish the game," he said. "We didn't execute on offense. I don't think they did anything different to us defensively. We just started to drop the ball and we didn't make any plays. We want to put this game behind us as quickly as possible, because none of us likes the way we feel after this one."

The Conquest, who are second in the American Conference East

Division standings, travel to Daytona Beach Thursday, and continue on the road May 16 at Wilkes-Barre/Scranton before returning home May 23 against Manchester.

Tennessee 12 6 23 20 - 61

Albany 21 14 7 7 - 49

A - Bocage 11 run (Fralicker kick).

T - Brown 39 pass from Dearmon (kick failed).

A - Bocage 8 pass from Cole (Fralicker kick).

T - Blanchard 3 run (kick failed).

A - Bocage 53 kickoff return (Fralicker kick).

A - Bocage 7 pass from Cole (Fralicker kick).

A - Abrams 7 pass from Cole (Fralicker kick).

T - Brown 25 pass from Eakin (pass failed).

T - Brown 2 pass from Blanchard (Hayes kick).

A - Douglas 6 pass from Cole (Fralicker kick).

T - Brown 28 pass from Blanchard (Hayes kick).

T - Brown 5 pass from Eakin (Hayes kick).

T - Safety, Cole tackled in end zone by Scott.

T - Blanchard 1 run (kick blocked).

T - Elliott 19 pass from Eakin (Hayes kick).

T - Nix 8 pass from Eakin (Hayes kick).

A - Cole 1 run (Fralicker kick).