



## POSTGAME NOTES

# EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES 20 (7-6, 4-4 MAC) VS. LIBERTY FLAMES 56 (8-5)

*LENDINGTREE BOWL | HANCOCK-WHITNEY STADIUM | MOBILE, ALA. | DEC. 18, 2021*

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### Team Notes

- Eastern Michigan was the eighth bowl eligible team the Flames faced during the 2021 season. During Liberty's previous two full seasons at the FBS level, the Flames faced a combined five bowl eligible teams (4 in 2019; 1 in 2020).
- Today's bowl game marks the second-straight season the Flames have played a bowl game on ESPN. Liberty defeated No. 9/11 Coastal Carolina, 37-34 in overtime, on Dec. 26 at the FBC Mortgage Cure Bowl on ESPN in 2020.
- Today's game marks the first time Liberty and Eastern Michigan have faced since the 1989 season. Liberty won the game in 1989, 25-24, on Oct. 14 in Ypsilanti, Mich.
- Today's matchup between Liberty and Eastern Michigan is the 10<sup>th</sup>-longest hiatus between two teams during the 2021 bowl season (longest is UCLA vs. NC State in the SDCCU Holiday Bowl, which is 61 years between their last matchup).
- Liberty, in its third year of full FBS eligibility, earned its third straight bowl victory. The Flames, who also won the FBC Mortgage Cure Bowl in 2019 and 2020, join Appalachian State (2015-20) as the only teams to win bowl games in each of their first three years after transitioning to FBS from FCS.
- Liberty is now 2-0 all-time against Eastern Michigan in football. The Flames' last meeting with the Eagles was a 25-24 Liberty win on Oct. 14, 1989, which was Liberty's first-ever win over an FBS program.
- Liberty improves its record against Michigan schools to 3-1 all-time. The Flames are 2-0 against Eastern Michigan and 1-1 versus Saginaw Valley State.
- Liberty now holds a 4-9 all-time record against MAC schools. Coach Freeze's first win at Liberty was a 35-17 victory over Buffalo on Sept. 14, 2019 in Williams Stadium.
- The Flames won three games inside the state of Alabama this season, also winning at Troy and UAB. Prior to this season, Liberty was 0-6 in Alabama. Liberty is the first FBS team this season to win three games in the same state outside of its home state.
- This is the fourth straight season that Liberty has finished with a win. Liberty was one of nine FBS schools to win its final game of the 2018, 2019 and 2020 seasons.
- The Flames are now 7-4 under Coach Freeze in games immediately following a loss.
- Liberty recorded the 13th eight-win season in program history and third in a row. Liberty (2019-present), Appalachian State (2015-present) and Marshall (1997-2003) are the only FBS programs to win eight or more games in each of their first three seasons as full FBS members after transitioning from FCS.
- Liberty is the first FBS Independent team since Army (2016-18) to win bowl games in three straight years.
- Liberty is now 4-1 all-time in games played during the month of December, including 4-0 since joining the FBS in 2018. Prior to that, Liberty's lone December game was a 29-22 loss at Villanova during the 2014 FCS Playoffs.
- Prior to Liberty allowing Eastern Michigan to score on the today's opening drive, the Flames had not trailed in a bowl game in school history (today's is Liberty's third bowl game in school history).
- The Flames jumped to a 7-0 lead against Georgia Southern in the 2019 Cure Bowl and then led from 13-7 on the way to a 23-16 win.
- In last year's Cure Bowl, Liberty built a 14-0 lead, and Coastal Carolina tied the Flames 34-34 late in the fourth quarter before Liberty won 37-34 in overtime.
- In three bowl games, Liberty has only trailed for 4:30 (coming during the first quarter of today's game).

- The Flames finished the game with 528 total offensive yards (233 rushing; 295 passing). This marks the fourth time this season Liberty has amassed 500 or more total offensive yards in a game.
- Liberty finished the game with four passing touchdowns, giving the Flames a single-season record of 33 passing touchdowns. The previous record was 29 passing touchdowns in 1990 and 2019.
- Liberty finished the game with seven total touchdowns, giving the Flames a single-season record of 60 touchdowns (23 rushing, 29 passing). Liberty's previous school record was 57 touchdowns in 2013 (36 rushing, 21 passing).
- With their 22 first downs today, Liberty's a new program record for first downs in a season (293). The previous record was 289 in 2019.

#### **Bowl Game MVP – QB Malik Willis**

- Joins a distinguished list of past MVP winners of the LendingTree Bowl which includes such NFL standouts as LaDainian Tomlinson (TCU, 2000), Byron Leftwich (2001-02), Ben Roethlisberger (Miami (OH), 2003) and Kareem Hunt (Toledo, 2015).
- Liberty's all-time bowl MVPs are: Jessie Lemonier (2019 FBC Mortgage Cure Bowl), Malik Willis (2020 FBC Mortgage Cure Bowl), Malik Willis (2021 LendingTree Bowl).

#### **Player Notes**

##### **QB Malik Willis**

- Will return to Hancock Whitney Stadium on Feb. 5, 2022 to compete in the Reese's Senior Bowl. Willis is the sixth player in program history to receive an invitation to play in the Senior Bowl.
- Has been responsible for 40 touchdowns (27 passing, 13 rushing) this season. He broke his own single-season program record of 34 touchdowns (20 passing, 14 rushing) which he set last year.
- His 3,735 total yards this season are the second-most in a single season in program history and most since Stephen Calvert's 3,512 total yards in 2019 (school record is Mike Brown, who finished the 2010 season with 3,810 yards).

##### **LB Storey Jackson**

- With his nine tackles today against the Eagles, linebacker Storey Jackson finishes the season with 102 tackles, which is the most tackles by a Flame at the FBS level (Solomon Ajayi had 93 tackles in 2019). becomes the first player since 2014 to finish a season with 100 or more tackles (Jacob Hagen had 108 stops in 2014).
- With his nine tackles today against the Eagles, linebacker Storey Jackson becomes the first player since 2014 to finish a season with 100 or more tackles (Jacob Hagen had 108 stops in 2014).

##### **S Skyler Thomas**

- Skyler Thomas returned an interception 27 yards for a touchdown at the 2:27 mark of the first quarter. The interception return was Liberty's first for a touchdown since 2019 (45-yard return by Ceneca Espinoza, Jr. vs. Hampton on Sept. 21, 2019).

##### **RB T.J. Green**

- T.J. Green picked up his fourth rushing touchdown since transferring to Liberty from Utah during the offseason. The redshirt junior scored on a 34-yard play in the second quarter, his second longest run of the season.

##### **TE Johnny Huntley**

- Johnny Huntley scored a 20-yard touchdown midway through the second quarter. Huntley now has six career touchdown receptions with two coming during bowl games (also had a 57-yard touchdown reception during the Cure Bowl in 2019).

##### **P Aidan Alves**

- Aidan Alves finished the game with three punts for 146 yards (48.7 yards per punt). Alves had a 63-yard punt during the third quarter, his second 60-plus yard punt of the season (had a 66-yard punt against Army on Nov. 27).