



**The Experience Ends:** Citadel players walk to their dank locker rooms after the game. The team will have another "guarantee" game against a top-tier program next year, and maybe in 2007 as well.

Tonight was the co-captain's chance, on national TV, in front of NFL scouts. Maybe one would be smart enough, the uncle said, to realize that what mattered was "the size of his heart."

As for winning, "all we need is five smooth rocks and a slingshot and God on our side." Yes, he said, with a smile: God, be a Bulldog tonight.

### The First Half

Mayan priests thanked their victims before sacrificing them. At Florida State, the band plays your school song. The Citadel mascot, a bulldog, did not have to be polite about it. He broke away from his minder and nipped a referee on the ankle.

If the Seminoles were werewolves, they were bewitchingly coiffed. Some were close-cropped, but others had layered blond hair, long dreadlocks, sheeny braids, Billy Ray Cyrus mullets, vertical cornrows, horizontal cornrows, crop-circle cornrows and orange-tinted, gravity-defying spikes. They headed into their air-conditioned locker room, with its lounge of plush couches and a big-screen TV, for a last few words before kickoff.

The Bulldogs, for their part, retired to the visitors' hovel. As they emerged, an ESPN camera focused on their offensive line coach and misidentified him as Coach Higgins.

Somehow, the kickoff seemed merciful.

At first, the Seminoles cruised 80 yards in just seven plays, and the Bulldog defense seemed slow and tentative -- but that was deceptive. On first and goal to go for Florida State, a Citadel defensive back blitzed and knocked the ball out of the Seminole quarterback's hands, then snapped it up and raced 30 yards.

Now the Bulldogs had the ball. But their offense could do nothing. The Seminoles overpowered them on three straight plays, forcing a punt.

Then the Bulldog defense forced a Seminole

punt, and the ball came to rest inside The Citadel five-yard line. The Citadel coaches called for a short-yardage offense, which needed a blocking back. At nine minutes and two seconds into the first quarter, Shrek, Zach Bryant, the kid who could overcome anything, entered his first game for The Citadel.

His job was to throw his 5-foot-10, 210-pound frame into a 6-foot-2, 235-pound linebacker destined for the NFL. Shrek could not stop him, and the linebacker tackled the runner for no gain.

On the next play, though, Shrek stuck a solid block. The Seminole linebacker shook him loose. But he needn't have bothered. Florida State's defensive line had tossed aside The Citadel linemen like bags of leaves and smothered the runner.

And so the game settled into a pattern. Both defenses outplayed both offenses.

For The Citadel, that was a surprise. Its handful of fans in the temple of the Seminoles leaped to their feet. On television, an announcer declared: "The Citadel is saying, 'Hey, we didn't come here just to earn a paycheck. We came here to play some football.'"

Florida State finally managed to kick a field goal.

But The Citadel offense could not make a first down. Each time the offensive unit left the field, Higgins and his assistants talked to the quarterback and the receivers. Quickly, mathematically, they tried to find some advantage.

The offensive linemen sat quietly. They seemed perplexed. Their line coach worked feverishly with a wipe-off board, asking what was wrong, adjusting blocking assignments to overcome gaps in size and speed.

Then came the first injury. A Bulldog defender made a tackle but couldn't get up. Play stopped. Trainers helped him to his feet. He took two steps, and his knees buckled. The trainers caught

him and helped him to the sideline.

On the next play, another Bulldog made a tackle. He got up, but slowly, in a daze.

Nonetheless, the first quarter ended with Florida State ahead by only 3-0. The Seminole crowd had ceased its war warble. Some booed.

The Citadel sideline, though, was a mixture of awe and joy. The Bulldog coaches glanced at each other with raised eyebrows. Players shouted and pounded each other's shoulder pads.

Early in the second quarter, Champ and the co-captain took over. Shawn Grant, the kid who wanted to be a leader, blew into the Seminole backfield and made a tackle for no gain. "Biggest hitter in the Southern Conference," the TV announcer declared. Florida State tried a pass. Now it was Champ's turn. Porter Johnson hit the Seminole quarterback as he released the ball.

A starter on the Bulldog defensive secondary leaped for an interception.

The offense stalled, but the ball was close enough for a field goal.

The Bulldogs tied the game, 3-3.

Discreetly, Coach Higgins asked for a photo of the scoreboard. The Citadel had tied Florida State.

Then, however, the mismatch took another toll. A defensive back lay on the grass, the second Bulldog who could not get up. The trainers ran to him, sat him up, then stood him and helped him off the field.

In The Citadel tradition of, "Yes, sir, would you like that face first or cross body?" the team persisted. The Seminoles tried a pass to the end zone, but a Bulldog stepped in front of it and intercepted.

Again, the Florida State crowd fell silent, except for scattered booing.

But still the Bulldog offense could not move the ball, and the Seminoles took over. Champ and the co-captain got boxed in, and Florida State's star running back went 51 yards to The Citadel 18. The Seminole war warble picked up again.

The injured Bulldog defensive back had reentered the game, and now he went down once more -- seriously enough this time for the team doctor to join trainers on the field. Together, they helped him up and off.

On the next play, the co-captain leveled a Seminole runner juggling a badly pitched ball. It bounced to the turf. A Bulldog scooped it up and ran to the Florida State goal line, 70 yards away. Touchdown.

"The Citadel leads Florida State," the TV announcer said. "What a stunner!"

Two of The Citadel coaches allowed themselves tight smiles. Four turnovers by Florida State in the first half, and ESPN replayed all of them.

Still, the mismatch exacted a growing price. The Bulldog who had made the 70-yard run, one of the smaller players on the team, knelt on the sideline, head down, throwing up with exhaustion.

Now the Seminoles grew visibly angry -- at themselves. Coach Bobby Bowden harnessed the anger, and they began to play like gifted and disciplined athletes, covering 71 yards in less