

West Virginia drubs Clemson 70-33 in Orange Bowl

Written by Administrator
Thursday, 05 January 2012 09:16

MIAMI (AP) — As the West Virginia Mountaineers celebrated their first Orange Bowl victory, safety Darwin Cook shared a hug with the game's mascot, Obie.

They had run into each other earlier in the end zone when Cook scored the night's pivotal touchdown, then leaped on the smiling orange. Only after the game did he learn a woman was wearing the Obie outfit.

"I didn't know you were a girl," he told her. "I apologize."

The Mountaineers ran over everything in their path Wednesday night, including the Clemson Tigers. Geno Smith tied the record for any bowl game with six touchdown passes, and the No. 23-ranked Mountaineers set a bowl scoring record with their high-powered offense by routing No. 14 Clemson 70-33.

But it was a defensive player — Cook — who made the most memorable play by returning a fumble 99 yards for a touchdown to break the game open.

Standing in the sideline, Smith watched a video replay of Cook's touchdown in disbelief.

"Crazy, man," Smith said. "When I saw that, I knew things were breaking our way."

Cook collided comically with mascot Obie after scoring one of the Mountaineers' five TDs in the second quarter, including three in the final 2:29 for a 49-20 lead. It was the highest-scoring half by a team in a bowl game.

"I always envisioned making great plays," Cook said. "If you think it will happen, it will happen."

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Tavon Austin tied a record for any bowl game with four touchdown catches. Smith went 31 for 42 and had 401 yards passing to break Tom Brady's Orange Bowl record. Smith also ran for a score, helping West Virginia break the bowl record for points established six nights earlier when Baylor beat Washington 67-56 in the Alamo Bowl.

"Never could we imagine we'd put up 70 points," Smith said.

"It was like a virus," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said.

The Mountaineers (10-3) won in their first Orange Bowl appearance and improved to 3-0 in Bowl Championship Series games.

"Our guys felt like they weren't getting too much credit," West Virginia coach Dana Holgorsen said. "And they wanted to make a statement in this game.

Clemson (10-4) lost playing in its first major bowl in 30 years. Despite the drubbing, Swinney said, the wait for a return trip won't be so long.

"It won't be 30 years," Swinney said. "We'll be back."

The offensive showcase was the latest in a succession this bowl season, and perhaps the last. Defense is expected to dominate in the final BCS game Monday night, when Louisiana State faces Alabama for the national title.

West Virginia totaled 589 yards and 31 first downs. Smith was chosen the game's outstanding player but gave Austin an assist.

"He won me an MVP," Smith said. "He's one of the quickest guys I've ever seen, and it's just a

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blessing to have a guy like him on my team."

Austin had 11 receptions, scoring on passes of 8, 27, 3 and 37 yards.

"I do know who the fastest kid on the field was," Holgorsen said. "We made a conscious effort to get him the ball a bunch, and whenever we got him the ball, he made things happen."

Clemson couldn't keep up with the Big East Conference co-champions, although Andre Ellington did score the game's first points on a 68-yard run. First-team All-Americans Sammy Watkins and Dwayne Allen combined for only seven catches for 87 yards.

"We didn't play too good," Watkins said. "We've got the whole next year to get right."

Amid the flurry of points, defensive back Cook came up with second-longest play in Orange Bowl history.

Clemson was on the verge of taking the lead in the second quarter when Ellington ran up the middle and disappeared into a heap at the 1. A teammate signaled touchdown, but the ball came loose and Cook grabbed it, then took off with nothing but the end zone in front of him.

"Cook was the only one in the stadium who knew the ball was out," teammate Bruce Irvin said. "That was a heads-up play."

The potential 14-point swing seemed to deflate the Tigers, who had moved the ball almost at will to that point.

"They hadn't really stopped us," Swinney said. "That was huge. Then it snowballed quickly."

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The Tigers were doomed when quarterback Tajh Boyd committed turnovers on consecutive Clemson plays.

After Smith ran 7 yards on a keeper for a 35-20 lead, Pat Miller intercepted Boyd's pass. Smith flipped a 1-yard touchdown pass to Austin and, on the next play a call was overturned, with the replay official determining Boyd had lost a fumble.

Alston then ran for a 1-yard touchdown with 4 seconds left in the half.

"Momentum swung not in our favor, and it was hard to recapture," Boyd said. "West Virginia is a great offense. You can't really get behind them. We couldn't stop them. Guys were gassed. Their legs were going. It was a tough loss — pretty embarrassing."