

OUTBACK BOWL: PENN STATE 20, TENNESSEE 10

Fumble, stumble



MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL

Penn State defensive back Tony Davis spots the fumble by Tennessee running back Arian Foster during the fourth quarter of the Outback Bowl on Monday in Tampa, Fla. Davis returned the fumble 88 yards for a touchdown. The Nittany Lions won, 20-10.

In the end, Vols were simply overrated

TAMPA, Fla. — The Tennessee football season ended as it began. The crowd was chanting

“overrated.” Only this time, the chant was aimed at the Vols, not their opponent. And this time, it came from Penn State fans, as they counted down the seconds on their team’s 20-10 upset victory over the 17th-ranked Vols in the Outback Bowl on Monday.

The first game and the last couldn’t have been more different. In the season opener, UT knocked off ninth-ranked Cal to

the delight of the Neyland Stadium crowd, which shouted “overrated” at the Golden Bears. The Vols made big plays on both sides of the ball in routing Cal 35-18. They didn’t make enough big or little plays against the unranked Nittany Lions.

Last week, UT coach Phillip Fulmer said the season had been a success regardless of what happened in the bowl game. Based on last season, he’s right.

Once you go 5-6 at a program with UT’s tradition, even if you fall on your face, you can’t help but fall forward. So compared to the 2005 season, this was a step in the right direction.

But when you compare the last third of the season to the first

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BOWL SCOREBOARD

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Auburn 17, Nebraska 14

CAPITAL ONE BOWL

Wisconsin 17, Arkansas 14

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W. Virginia 38, Georgia Tech 35

ROSE BOWL

Southern Cal 32, Michigan 18

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Boise State vs. Oklahoma, late

MORE

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- Receivers missed Smith. **VR5**
- Hunt was tough on defense. **VR5**
- Report Card. **VR5**
- Penn State drill works. **VR6**

ON GOVOLSXTRA

- Outback Bowl slideshow.

UT its ‘worst enemy’ as turnovers turn into points

BY MIKE STRANGE
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TAMPA, Fla. — In the world’s only football stadium with a life-sized pirate ship, Penn State made Tennessee walk the plank Monday.

The Vols didn’t need a shove off the end, either. They leaped into the briny deep on their own.

“We were our own worst enemy,” UT coach Phillip Fulmer proclaimed after a mistake-riddled 20-10 loss to the Nittany Lions in the Outback Bowl before an announced crowd of 65,601 at Raymond James Stadium.

The 17th-ranked Vols finished the season at 9-4 and bore little resemblance to the crisp, big-play outfit that dazzled California on opening day.

“Not only did we not score points,” said offensive coordinator David Cutcliffe, “we

gave Penn State points.

“I’m not disappointed. I’m mad. And I’m going to be mad for a while.”

Tennessee gave up three turnovers, two of them fumbles by tailback Arian Foster that led to 10 Penn State points — the victory margin, it turned out.

The killer was Foster’s fumble that Penn State defensive back Tony Davis returned 88 yards for a touchdown to break a 10-10 tie with 10:01 to play.

Kevin Kelly’s 23-yard field goal made it 20-10 with 3:29 to play and the Vols were done.

The Nittany Lions (9-4) were a four-point underdog, but physically punished Tennessee just as they had in previous New Year’s Day dates after the 1991 and ’93 seasons.

The Vols reached the end zone just once, on LaMarcus Coker’s 42-yard run that tied the score 10-10 with 1:15 to play in the first half.

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LaMarcus Coker sprints past Penn State cornerback Justin King, right, to score Tennessee's only touchdown in a 20-10 loss to Penn State in the Outback Bowl. The play covered 42 yards and came on Coker's initial carry.

AMY SMOTHERMAN-BURGESS/NEWS SENTINEL

VOLS

from VR1

The only other scoring was James Wilhoit's 44-yard field goal in the first quarter.

Penn State's only offensive touchdown was a 2-yard pass from Anthony Morelli to tight end Andrew Quarless in the second quarter.

The watchword in the Tennessee postmortem was "fundamentals," as in lack thereof.

"I didn't think we were rusty on offense," said quarterback Erik Ainge. "We were just being stupid."

Turnovers, penalties, miscommunications, poor decision-making. Offensively, at least, the Vols looked like they had a New Year's hangover.

"You can't do that against anybody," said Cutcliffe, "but you certainly can't do that against a team like Penn State that takes care of the ball and does all the little things well."

"The whole day was just fundamentally not right."

The Nittany Lions played turnover-free, outgained UT by 100 yards on the ground and won the time-of-possession battle, 33:02 to 26:58.

Signs that the Vols would struggle appeared early. On UT's opening series, Robert Meachem dropped a pass that would have converted a third down.

On the second possession, Ainge and receiver Jayson Swain miscommunicated on a route that would have converted another third down deep in Penn State territory.

On the third possession, it got worse.

Foster mishandled a pitch to Swain on a reverse that UT's coaches had ticketed for a big play.

Penn State recovered at the UT 24 and kicked a field goal.

"That was a great call," said Fulmer of the bungled play. "Not a good call, a great call."

"We ran that Tuesday in our scrimmage and it went for a touchdown."

The second turnover was an Ainge pass that was intercepted by Anthony Scirrotto in the third quarter.

"Meachem ran a good route

and I just stared at him too long," said Ainge, who was 25-of-37 for 267 yards passing.

The final turnover was the coup de grace.

The Vols had made virtually no penetration into Penn State territory in the second half until Ainge hit tight end Chris Brown for a 53-yard pass to the Nittany Lions' 14.

On the next play, however, Foster was stripped of the ball by Penn State's Sean Lee. Davis scooped it up and raced 88 yards to the end zone.

Just like that, Penn State led 17-10.

"That really changed the whole thing around," said coach Joe Paterno, who directed his 363rd career win from the press box because of a broken leg.

"I don't know what would have happened if they'd have scored. It was obviously a big factor in the game. How big or in what way, I can't tell you."

It shouldn't have been a fatal factor. Tennessee had plenty of time to respond and a track record of doing just that.

"There was a lot of energy on our sideline," said Fulmer. "We've been a very good fourth-quarter team."

But there wasn't much energy in the huddle when UT's offense went back on the field.

A 2-yard gain, two incomplete passes and Britton Colquitt was punting the ball away. All in 30-something seconds.

"That was the nail in the coffin," said Cutcliffe.

Penn State got field position with a 20-yard punt return, then handed the ball to tailback Tony Hunt (158 rushing yards) six consecutive times to reach first-and-goal at the Tennessee 3.

The Vols dug in and forced a field goal, but still needed two scores in the final 3:29, a tall order in a drizzle against a top-notch defense.

"We just stayed in too many long-yardage situations against a very good defensive team," said Fulmer.

"If we take care of the football, it's at least a more interesting game."

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ADAMS

from VR1

eight games, the step doesn't seem nearly as significant.

After beating South Carolina on Oct. 28, the Vols were 7-1 and in contention for both the SEC championship and a BCS berth. Since then, they're 2-3 with losses to nationally ranked LSU and Arkansas. Moreover, the Vols were outplayed in the last regular-season game by unranked Kentucky and again by Penn State.

Not only did they lose. They were beset with off-the-field problems.

Three players were suspended after they were arrested for under-age drinking and disorderly conduct in early November. Star running back LaMarcus Coker missed the last five bowl practices in Knoxville and was in Fulmer's doghouse for

undisclosed reasons. Then, wide receiver Bret Smith was ruled academically ineligible for the bowl game.

Yes, this team got the program turned in the right direction. But no, it didn't finish the way it started.

As good as a much-improved offense was for most of the season, it faded down the stretch. In three of its last four games, the Vols scored 17 points or fewer.

And its defense was hanging by a jersey thread at the end.

Penn State running back Tony Hunt hammered the Vols for 158 yards on 31 carries. And there was nothing mysterious about it. Even when the Vols knew Hunt was coming, they couldn't stop him. With Penn State leading 17-10 in the last nine minutes, Hunt carried seven consecutive times for 39 yards.

Making runners look good is nothing new for this defense. Kentucky's Rafael Little rushed

for 122 yards on 23 carries in the last game.

Two games before that, Arkansas' Darren McFadden rushed for 181 yards on 30 carries. And the week before that, LSU amassed 231 yards rushing.

Despite its defensive shortcomings, UT found ways to prevail against inferior opponents during the regular season. That changed against Penn State.

The Nittany Lions were unranked for a reason. They lost four games and only beat one Division I-A team with a winning record in the regular season.

But they were better prepared and more resourceful than the Vols, who proved to be underrated at the beginning of the season and overrated at the end.

Sports editor John Adams may be reached at 865-342-6284 or adamsj@knews.com.



Tight end Andrew Quarless, left, of Penn State scores on a 2-yard pass over Tennessee defensive back Demetric Morley in the Nittany Lions' 20-10 victory Monday at Tampa, Fla.

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OUTBACK BOWL FRAME-BY-FRAME



Eight-year-old Cole Hamilton of Wesley, Fla., had his face painted orange and white at the Outback Bowl.

MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL



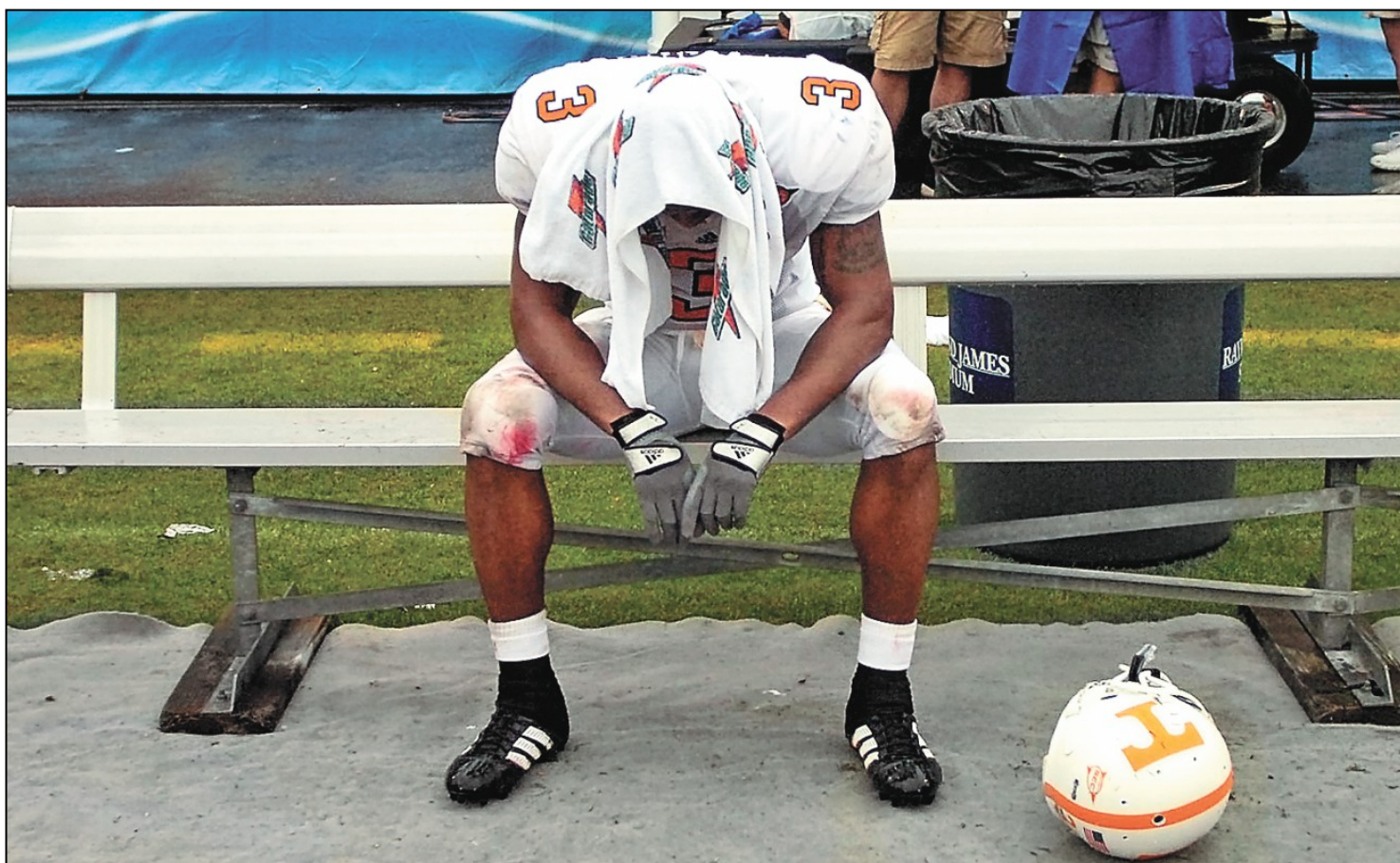
Penn State coach Joe Paterno, right, talks with Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer before the start of the Outback Bowl on Monday.

MIKE CARLSON/ASSOCIATED PRESS



This hat trick wasn't exactly planned by Tennessee running back LaMarcus Coker, middle, as his helmet is knocked off by a host of Penn State defenders. Coker had a 42-yard touchdown run on his first carry of the game, but ended up with a net of 36 yards.

MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL



Tennessee wide receiver Robert Meachem sits on the bench following the Vols' 20-10 loss to Penn State in the Outback Bowl at Tampa, Fla., on Monday. He caught four passes for 33 yards, well below his season's average.

MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL



Quarterback Erik Ainge of Tennessee gets off a pass despite a rush by Penn State tackle Jay Alford in the Outback Bowl on Monday.

MICHAEL PATRICK/NEWS SENTINEL



Scoop-score drill pays off for Penn State

Lee forces fumble, Davis gets game-turning TD

BY JOHN ADAMS
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TAMPA, Fla. — At the end of Penn State's last practice, defensive coordinator Tom Bradley called for the "scoop-and-score" drill.

Cornerback Tony Davis couldn't help but laugh. "Like that's going to happen," he said.

Bradley then dropped the footballs on the ground, and his defensive backs went to work, "scooping and scoring" so to speak.

The drill went even better Monday afternoon at Raymond James Stadium. But Bradley had nothing to do with it.

This time, Tennessee running back Arian Foster dropped the ball. Davis scooped it up and ran 88 yards for a game-changing, fourth-quarter touchdown in the Nittany Lions' 20-10 upset victory.

While the Nittany Lions celebrated, officials called for a review. Davis wasn't worried.

"I saw the ball come out before his (Foster's) knee hit the ground," Davis said. "I just started running. I knew it was going to count."

Davis got the six points, but he shouldn't get all the credit. Linebacker Sean Lee had a huge hand in the turnover, which occurred just as the Vols were threatening to break a 10-10 tie. When Lee knocked the ball loose, Davis was in perfect position to make the play.

That wasn't the only time Penn State's linebackers and defensive backs teamed

up. They all played a role in holding UT All-American wide receiver Robert Meachem to four catches for 33 yards.

With the Lions playing mainly zone coverage, the linebackers repeatedly dropped back into the secondary to help sophomore cornerback Justin King, who was the primary defender against Meachem.

"Our coaches had a really good scheme for them," linebacker Dan Connor said. "We knew Justin was going to have his hands full with Meachem. But we gave him a lot of help."

Meachem was the focal point of King's video preparation. But the real thing was more impressive than the preview.

"I was surprised he was that fast," King said. "He's so big and strong, you don't expect him to be that fast."

Neither Meachem's speed nor size was much of a factor against the Nittany Lions. His longest play covered a measly 12 yards. During the regular season, he averaged 18.9 yards on 67 receptions, 11 of which went for touchdowns.

Meachem dropped two passes in his worst performance of the season. One of the drops was nullified by an offensive pass-interference call against him.

Not all of the problems were on the receiving end of UT's passing attack. Quarterback Erik Ainge completed 25 of 37 passes, but only hit on two of his last seven. He also threw a crucial, third-quarter interception.

Hard-hitting safety Anthony Scirrotto, who made the interception, was another one of Penn State's secondary stars. In addition to the interception, he had eight tackles and broke



J. MERIC/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Cornerback Tony Davis races 88 yards for a fourth-quarter touchdown after scooping up a fumble by UT's Arian Foster in the Outback Bowl on Monday in Tampa, Fla.

up two passes.

Scirrotto also had the hit of the game. On the second play of the third quarter, Ainge threw deep to an open Jayson Swain. But the ball hung in the air just long enough for Scirrotto to come across the field and jolt Swain as he tried to make the catch.

Swain was down for several minutes

before finally jogging off the field.

Coaches Box: Penn State coach Joe Paterno, who suffered a broken leg in a sideline collision in November spent the game in the press box.

"Before the game, I went out on the field, and it was getting a little muddy," said the 80-year-old Paterno. "I was wor-

ried whether I could stay on the field for three hours."

After conferring with his orthopedist, Paterno decided to coach from the press box, as he did against Michigan State. He thought about going down on the field for the second half but decided to stay where he was.

"We've got a great staff," he said. "They needed me down there like a hole in the head."

MVP Performance: Paterno and UT coach Phillip Fulmer each said last week how underrated Penn State running back Tony Hunt was. He played up to their compliments Monday.

Hunt, who was named the game's MVP, carried 31 times for 158 yards. He was never better than on Penn State's last meaningful possession, which ended with Kevin Kelly's 22-yard field goal with 3:29 to play.

Hunt carried seven consecutive times for 39 yards against a weary-looking UT defensive front.

Growing Up: Junior quarterback Anthony Morelli, a lightning rod for criticism this Penn State season, was at his best against the Vols. He completed 14 of 25 passes for 197 yards, a touchdown and no interceptions.

"I thought he was a big-time quarterback," Paterno said. "He played with a lot of poise."

"He grew up in a lot of different ways today. He showed people what kind of quarterback he is."

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Two carries, two touchdowns for Stewart

Ex-Maryville star in right spot to 'win ugly'

Associated Press

DALLAS — Even though only Auburn managed to beat two teams playing in the BCS, Tommy Tuberville never thought he had a great team this season.

Imagine how good the No. 10 Tigers might be if they can find some consistent big playmakers.

Auburn took advantage of Nebraska mistakes, got two short touchdowns from former Maryville High School star Carl

Stewart on his only touches of the game and beat the No. 22 Cornhuskers 17-14 in the Cotton Bowl on Monday despite only 178 total yards.

"That was typical Auburn, win and win ugly," Tuberville said. "That's how this team has done it all year. They scrap and claw."

Even without any superstar players, Auburn (11-2) made its seventh consecutive bowl game — and third in a row in January. Its 33-5 record the past three seasons is bettered only by Southern California and Texas, the last two national champions.

"These guys have overcome a lot of things. It's hard to imagine what we've done," said Tuberville, 71-29 after coaching his 100th Auburn game.

The Tigers can even wonder what might have been had they not lost to Georgia and Arkansas, the latter which instead won the SEC West. Auburn beat LSU and No. 2 Florida, which plays Ohio State in the Bowl Championship Series title game. The Gators' only loss was at Auburn in mid-October.

"We're grungy. Whatever it takes to win, that's what we do," defensive end Quentin Groves said. "The main thing people are going to say is they're a grungy bunch, but they still have 11 wins."

John Vaughn's 42-yard field goal midway through the third quarter accounted for the only points after half-time. And it was enough to make Auburn the fourth consecutive SEC team to win the Cotton Bowl.

Nebraska (9-5), trying to return to national prominence under coach Bill Callahan, opened with a dominating 15-play, 80-yard drive capped by Zac Taylor's 13-yard touchdown pass to Nate Swift. But the Cornhuskers couldn't do much else right.

"It hurts," Taylor said. "But I don't think it sets our program back at all. I think we're headed in the right direction."

Nebraska didn't even make a bowl two years ago, when it ended Callahan's first season with a losing record that snapped Nebraska's NCAA-record streak of 35 straight bowl appearances. The Cornhuskers won



TONY GUTIERREZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Former Maryville High School star Carl Stewart, top, is hit by Nebraska linebacker Lance Brandenburg, right, but not before he crosses the goal line in the second quarter of the Cotton Bowl on Monday at Dallas.

the Big 12 North this season.

Nebraska still had a chance for a 10-win season with 5:24 left when Stewart Bradley sacked Brandon Cox, stripped the ball and recovered at the Auburn 42.

The Cornhuskers got to the 30, after converting a third down for the first time since their opening drive. But Taylor was under heavy pressure on fourth down when he threw the ball well over the head of his intended receiver and out of bounds.

Callahan said the Cornhuskers went for the first down because they were out of Jordan Congdon's range to try to kick a tying field goal. The sophomore kicker's career long is 41 yards.

"Everybody was on the same page, and that's a decision that we live

with," Callahan said.

Auburn couldn't run the clock out because Kenny Irons was stopped a foot short on third-and-2. After initially being ruled a first down, officials reviewed the play and changed the spot.

The Tigers were forced to punt, and Taylor had one more chance — a long desperation pass that dropped incomplete in a group of players near the 25.

Nebraska's opening drive took more than half of the first quarter. Marlon Lucky touched the ball on 11 of the 15 plays, converting a third-and-19 from midfield when he caught a shuffle pass and got just enough yards for a first down.

The Cornhuskers had four third-down conversions on the opening

drive, and only one more the rest of the game. They had only 63 total yards after half-time.

After the opening TD, Taylor's next pass was thrown behind Terrence Nunn. It bounced into the air and was intercepted by Karibi Dede, who rambled 52 yards to the 9. From there, Stewart caught a pass out of the backfield and scored untouched.

Then on fourth-and-1 from their 29, the Cornhuskers tried a fake punt. They instead fumbled on an attempted reverse and lost 15 yards.

Courtney Taylor, who became Auburn's career receiving leader, had a leaping 12-yard catch to set up Stewart's 1-yard leap into the end zone. Stewart had only two TDs in the regular season, one of those in the opener.

Wisconsin able to bottle up McFadden

QB Stocco is MVP but defense does job for Wisconsin

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Darren McFadden broke free on his first carry and raced into the Wisconsin secondary. Defensive back Jack Ikegwuonu did what few players have — he ran down the Arkansas star.

McFadden's 45-yard run gave the Razorbacks the ball at the Wisconsin 9-yard line, but Arkansas (10-4) came away with no points when Jeremy Davis missed a 30-yard field goal.

"I know that McFadden is a very fast football player," Badgers coach Bret Bielema said. "For us to be able to track him down and pull him down ... may have changed the entire landscape of the game."

With its running game stifled and its quarterback under constant pressure, the sixth-ranked Badgers did just enough to hold off No. 12 Arkansas 17-14 Monday in the Capital One Bowl.

John Stocco threw two first-half touchdown passes, and Wisconsin (12-1) survived despite being held to minus-5 yards rushing.

McFadden, the Heisman Trophy runner-up, suffered an ankle injury in the SEC championship game Dec. 2, and it appeared to be bothering him still.

"If Darren is 100 percent, I don't think anyone would have caught him on that play," Arkansas coach Houston Nutt said. "Usually he's pretty good at 90 percent, too ... the fact that we weren't able to come out of that with any points was pretty big."

McFadden rushed for 89 yards to finish the season with 1,647, the fifth-highest total in SEC history.

Wisconsin won 12 games in a season for the first time and has a chance to finish in the top five nationally — quite a reward for a team overshadowed by Big Ten rivals Ohio State and Michigan.

This was the Badgers' first win over a ranked team. Their only loss was to Michigan, and Ohio State wasn't on their conference schedule.

"One of the biggest things we did at one of our team meetings this week was that we played some news clips from some of the news stations back in Arkansas," Bielema said. "Once again, they pointed out that we hadn't played anybody this year ... we certainly used that as a motivational factor."

Wisconsin won nine in a row to finish the season and can now boast of a second consecutive Capital One Bowl win over the SEC. The Badgers beat Auburn 24-10 last year.

"We didn't need to beat this team to validate that we're a great team," Stocco said.

Taylor Mehlhaff opened the scoring for the Badgers with a 52-yard field goal, a career long and a Capital One Bowl record. Felix Jones answered quickly for Arkansas with a 76-yard touchdown run.

Stocco threw touchdown passes of 22 yards to Paul Hubbard and 13 yards to Travis Beckum, giving the Badgers a 17-7 halftime lead. Jones, who quietly surpassed 1,000 yards this season alongside McFadden, made it 17-14 on a 12-yard run in the fourth.

Jones finished with a career-high 150 yards on 14 carries.

Stocco, the game's most valuable player, went 14-of-34 for 206 yards with two interceptions. He was also sacked six times.

But the Badgers passed the ball better than Arkansas. The Razorbacks stuck with their plan to start Casey Dick at quarterback.

Dick went 9-of-21 for 98 yards with an interception. Mitch Mustain was 5-of-10 for 41 yards with an interception.

CAPITAL ONE BOWL

Wisconsin	17
Arkansas	14

Southern Cal starts campaigning for '07

Jarrett sensational
(11 catches, 205 yards)
to quiet Michigan

Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Even before his uniform had come off, Dwayne Jarrett's teammates were lobbying him to wear it one more year.

After the day he had in the Rose Bowl, it was easy to see why.

Jarrett, the sensational Southern California junior, caught 11 passes for 205 yards and two touchdowns to help the eighth-ranked Trojans finish their season with a statement Monday in a 32-18 romp over Michigan.

ROSE BOWL
Southern Cal 32
Michigan 18

It was an all-encompassing blowout over a solid, third-ranked Michigan squad that positioned USC (11-2) as maybe The Team to watch next season.

And that's even if Jarrett takes the bucks and heads to the NFL.

"I said to him, 'One more year, man. We've got to do this again next year,'" quarterback John David Booty said. "He's got to do what's best for him and his family, but he definitely knows that I want him back here. After a performance like this tonight, it's going to be tough to keep him out of the league."

Booty was no slouch, either. He threw for 391 yards and four scores to land himself on the early short list of next season's Heisman favorites. Jarrett would be there if he decides to return. Meanwhile, linebacker Brian Cushing had 2½ sacks and defensive end Lawrence Jackson came up with two turnovers on a day when the Trojans must have been thinking about next season, to say nothing of the opportunity it squandered in the one that just ended.

This convincing victory came a month after a 13-9 loss to UCLA in this stadium wrecked their chances for another shot at the national title.

"Our guys know that wasn't us," coach Pete Carroll said. "That was the single game out of the last 65 that stood out because it was so different and unusual. So we put it behind us. This was an opportunity to kickstart what's going on for this football team for the future. I think we captured the night. We captured the opportunity."

With most of USC's star underclassmen coming back, Jarrett said he'll sit down with his family to discuss his future. If this was his last college game, it was quite a finale.

His 62-yard touchdown behind All-American cornerback Leon Hall put USC ahead 25-11 early in the fourth and showed just how good the 6-foot-5 pass



MARK J. TERRILL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Southern Cal's Dwayne Jarrett scores one of his two touchdowns against Michigan in the Rose Bowl on Monday in Pasadena, Calif. Jarrett caught 11 passes for 205 yards.

catcher can be.

For icing, Jarrett outjumped a pair of Michigan defenders for a 29-yard gain midway through the fourth quarter. A few plays later, Booty threw his fourth touchdown pass — this one to senior Steve Smith, who finished with seven catches for 108 yards.

"He was as advertised," Hall said, referring to Jarrett. "He's a playmaker. We saw it on film, and we saw it today."

Joining Hall on the losing end were Chad Henne, Mike Hart and big group of Michigan juniors who also should be

a force next season.

They came in wondering if maybe they hadn't gotten a raw deal by being left out of the national title game after a back-and-forth 42-39 loss to Ohio State in the wake of Bo Schembechler's death.

But these Wolverines didn't look as good as the ones who lost that heartbreaker in November. And they hardly looked like champions.

"I don't want to compare teams," coach Lloyd Carr said when asked how USC looked next to Ohio State. "I said going into this game, USC is the best de-

fensive team we've played, and there's no doubt in my mind that they are."

Henne didn't get the Wolverines past the USC 20 until they had fallen behind 19-3. When Michigan finally did reach the end zone to cut its deficit to 19-11, the Trojans came right back with Jarrett's long touchdown.

Henne finished with good numbers — 26-for-41 for 309 yards — but most of them came after the game was out of hand. He also got sacked six times. Hart finished with 47 yards, the first time he's been held under 90 all year.

Carr's team lost its fourth straight bowl game and ended the season on a two-game losing streak for the third consecutive year. Granted, there was nothing riding on this game between arguably the two best teams that weren't playing for the BCS championship. Then again, getting stomped like that can make for a tough offseason.

"I think it mattered a lot," Carr said. "They're tremendously disappointed because they wanted to win. Anybody that thinks this game doesn't mean a lot doesn't know much about this game."

Battered White rallies West Virginia

Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — Patrick White was bruised and determined with the Gator Bowl hanging in the balance.

The quarterback played through ankle, hand and neck injuries to lead West Virginia back from an 18-point deficit in the second half for a 38-35 win over Georgia Tech on Monday.

"He kind of willed us to victory," Mountaineers coach Rich Rodriguez said.

White was 9-of-15 for 131 yards and two touchdowns and rushed

GATOR BOWL
West Virginia 38
Georgia Tech 35

22 times for 145 yards and a score. He handled the bulk of the carries with tailback Steve Slaton, the country's third-leading rusher at 144 yards a game, limited with a badly bruised left thigh. Slaton's status was uncertain before kickoff, and the sophomore managed just 11 yards on three carries — all in the first half. Owen Schmitt also ran 13 times for 109 yards and two TDs.

"I was hurting a lot, but I had to block it out. I had to play ball," White said. "It makes me want to play harder — when I'm injured I get a little angry."

The teams set a Gator Bowl record for scoring, breaking the previous mark set in Tennessee's 45-23 win over Virginia Tech in 1994, and records for total yardage (928), most plays (121) and most first downs (40).

Georgia Tech (9-5) tried a 54-yard field goal on fourth-and-9 with 5 minutes left that could have tied the score, but Travis Bell's kick fell well short. West Virginia then ran out the clock.

It was an astonishing turnaround from the first half, in

which Georgia Tech's sophomore quarterback Taylor Bennett and All-America wideout Calvin Johnson picked apart West Virginia's secondary.

It was Georgia Tech's third loss in a row by three points, including the regular season closer at Georgia and the Atlantic Coast Conference championship against Wake Forest.

"That's been our story, this season with all three losses at the end," Yellow Jackets linebacker KaMichael Hall said. "You've got to learn how to finish."

The Mountaineers (11-2) also couldn't stop Tashard Choice, who ran 27 times for 169 yards and two touchdowns. Johnson finished with 186 yards receiving and two TDs.

Bennett, starting for the second time in his career, was 19-of-29 for 326 yards. He was playing in place of Reggie Ball, a four-year starter ruled academically ineligible a week-and-a-half ago.

Tech opened the second half by recovering an onside kick at its 46-yard line. Choice had a 17-yard run and Johnson jumped between two defenders for a 32-yard pass before Choice ran it in from 5 yards out to put the Yellow Jackets up 35-17.

White then caught Georgia Tech off-guard in the third quarter for a 57-yard touchdown pass.

Following an apparent offside by the Yellow Jackets, West Virginia snapped it but the offensive line didn't move. The play wasn't dead, and White rolled out and found Tito Gonzales racing down the field for the score. The Mountaineers declined the defensive penalty.

"It was a freeze play to get the defense offside," White said, adding that it was the first time all year it had worked that well.



PHIL COALE/ASSOCIATED PRESS

West Virginia's Brandy Myles makes a third-quarter touchdown catch Monday against Georgia Tech in the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Fla. West Virginia won, 38-35.

Draft will wait, Quinn wants win

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Brady Quinn has one more college game to impress the NFL scouts, one more chance to show he's worthy of being the top pick in the draft.

That's not exactly what he's focused on, though.

Notre Dame's star quarterback merely wants a win in Wednesday night's Sugar Bowl, not another batch of eye-catching stats. If he throws three interceptions and the Fighting Irish still come out on top, that's fine with him.

The draft? That's for another day. The head-to-head matchup with LSU quarterback JaMarcus Russell? Let the media have fun with that one.

"I just want to play a good game for my team," Quinn said. "I'm not worried about putting up numbers and silly little things like that. If he has a better game than me and we win, that's fine, that's great, that's all that matters."

Besides, Quinn already has put up enough numbers to show the NFL what he's capable of doing in a pro-style offense. Over the past two seasons, he's thrown for nearly 7,200 yards, with an astonishing touchdown-to-interception ratio (67 TDs, only 12 picks).

More important to Quinn, he's been a major part of helping Notre Dame reclaim its status as a college football powerhouse. While the No. 11 Fighting Irish (10-2) fell a bit short of expectations this season, they still earned a spot in the Sugar Bowl against No. 4 LSU (10-2).

"A win in this game would be a great way to cap off the career for me and the rest of the seniors," Quinn said. "We overcame a lot of tough times."

