

Vols Send Seniors Out With Win Over Kentucky

Written by Cameron Harris

Saturday, 24 November 2012 22:36

Tennessee said goodbye to its seniors with a 37-17 victory over Kentucky on Saturday afternoon. Its offense, the brightest spot in an otherwise difficult season, again led the way

behind quarterback Tyler Bray and a slew of skill players. Tight end Mychal Rivera, and receivers Cordarrelle Patterson, Justin Hunter and Zach Rogers all caught touchdown passes in the final game of Tennessee's 5-7 season. Rivera and Patterson helped break the game open with third-quarter touchdowns, turning a 3-point lead into a comfortable margin down the stretch. Rivera's 29-yard grab ended a 61-yard drive that gave UT a 27-17 lead after the Wildcats (2-10, 0-8 SEC) began the second half with 7 1/2-minute drive that ended in a field goal.

Patterson's 21-yard catch gave the Vols a 34-17 lead, and Kentucky never got any closer the rest of the way. The Vols (5-7, 1-7) now wait to see who will be back for 2013. Besides players like Bray, Hunter and Patterson, who will choose between another season at UT and entering the NFL Draft, Tennessee will also have a new head coach next season. Vice Chancellor and Director of Athletics Dave Hart announced last Sunday that Derek Dooley would not return next season. Offensive coordinator Jim Chaney led the Vols on Saturday as interim head coach. Shortly after Chaney greeted each of UT's seniors on their final trip through the 'T,' the Vols opened with an 80-yard touchdown drive that ended with a 21-yard pass from Bray to Rogers barely more than 2 minutes into the game.

Kentucky answered right back, converting twice on third down, including a 29-yard pass to Jonathan George on third-and-1 that set up a 1-yard touchdown pass to D.J. Warren three plays later. Kentucky tried to catch the Vols off guard on the ensuing kickoff, but Jacob Carter fielded a short kick and returned it 15 yards to the Kentucky 38. Four plays later, linebacker A.J. Johnson scored his team-leading sixth rushing touchdown to give UT a 14-7 lead 6:01 to go in the first quarter.

The Vols added to that lead on a 42-yard catch and run by Hunter, who finished with three catches for 65 yards on Saturday. Those three receptions left him four short of Marcus Nash's single-season record of 76, set in 1997. Kentucky's offense came to life in the second quarter -- and had a chance to take a lead just before halftime. After Hunter's touchdown catch, the Wildcats marched to midfield before George broke a career-long 45-yard touchdown run to cut UT's lead to 20-14 with 10:18 left before halftime.

After forcing the Vols to punt on back-to-back possessions, Kentucky moved the ball all the way to the UT 14-yard line with a little more than a minute to go. But Johnson, the Vols' leading tackler, recorded his first career sack on first down to back UK up to the 24-yard line with 29 seconds to go. Craig McIntosh missed a 36-yard field goal attempt with 16 seconds to go before halftime, allowing the Vols to hold onto a six-point lead.