

Bison Repeat as FCS National Champions

Written by Jeff Schwartz

Sunday, 06 January 2013 00:04

The North Dakota State Bison have a second straight FCS championship in what's becoming their second home. Backed by more than 10,000 fans wearing green and gold in the same suburban Dallas stadium where they beat Sam Houston

State a year ago, the Bison outnumbered their Texas counterparts in the stands and outplayed them on the field - again.

Quarterback Brock Jensen ran for three touchdowns, including the go-ahead score in the third quarter not long after a holding penalty wiped out a touchdown that would have given Sam Houston the lead, and Sam Ojuri scored twice in a 39-13 victory Saturday.

The field turned into a Bison pep rally after the game as thousands of fans joined a trophy presentation on a stage that makes up one end of FC Dallas Stadium.

"Let's go Bison!" coach Craig Bohl shouted while holding up a Bison hand signal that could be mistaken for the Texas Longhorns' "Hook 'Em Horns" sign in the Lone Star State. "Best fans in America!"

The Bison, who won 17-6 a year ago, improved to 10-1 in the FCS playoffs with their eighth straight postseason win.

Jensen put North Dakota State (14-1) in front for good on a 1-yard sneak in the third quarter, and Ojuri had a 2-yard TD run on fourth-and-1 after the Bison got the ball with a fourth-down stop.

Ojuri had 92 yards rushing, and Jensen added 44 to go with 115 passing yards. The Bison rushed for 300 yards.

John Crockett had 80 yards rushing, 24 receiving and a 26-yard pass to set up a score on a trick play after taking a straight-ahead handoff.

Bell threw for 255 yards against the nation's best pass defense, but had three of Sam Houston's four interceptions. Flanders, the school's career rushing leader, was held to 53 yards on 19 carries, a 2.8 average.

It was tied at 10 when Flanders broke loose on an apparent 41-yard touchdown on the first possession of the second half. Instead, Sam Houston had a third long run deep into Bison territory wiped out by a holding penalty. None of the drives ended in points.

After the holding call on Flanders' run, Carlton Littlejohn intercepted Bell's pass while falling to his knees, and the turnover was upheld on review. Ojuri had 25 yards rushing on a drive that ended with Jensen's score for a 17-10 lead.

"That's a big turning point," said North Dakota State cornerback Marcus Williams, who had two interceptions to set the school career record with 18. "Whenever a team scores a TD and it gets taken off the board, it gives you momentum. In this game, you needed as much momentum as we could get."

The Bearkats were driving again when Bell had to throw the ball away before getting slammed to the turf on fourth-and-1. He stayed flat on his back and sat out parts of the fourth quarter.

"There were some opportunities there that could have gotten us back in the game, an answer or two to a score they had," Sam Houston coach Willie Fritz said. "But it didn't bounce that way."

Jensen's 31-yard pass to Zach Vraa set up Ojuri's fourth-down run, and the Bison further deflated the Bearkats when they turned a botched snap on the extra point into a 2-point

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conversion and a 25-10 lead on a desperation pass from kicker Adam Keller to Mike Hardie. "Sometimes there's plays that happen in the game when you think, 'You know what, this is probably going to be our day,'" Bohl said. "A play that we had never planned or designed turned out to work extremely well."

North Dakota State scored the first touchdown in the second quarter by covering 65 yards on three running plays. Jensen ran 21 yards on third down after the field opened when Sam Houston State's leading tackler, Darnell Taylor, crumpled to the ground in front of him with an apparently leg injury. Ryan Smith ran 24 yards, and Jensen, who accounted for both touchdowns in last year's game, scored from the 20.

Sam Houston ended a championship game touchdown drought just before it reached six quarters and tied the score at 10 when Bell threw a 1-yard pass to K.J. Williams with 33 seconds left in the first half. A 30-yard toss to Richard Sincere put the ball on the 1 three plays after an interception by Andre Martin Jr. was wiped out when he was called for defensive holding.

Crockett's career-long 57-yard run set up a 32-yard field goal by Keller to give North Dakota State a first-quarter lead. Miguel Antonio kicked a tying 38-yarder in the second quarter after missing from 32 yards in the first.