

No.7 AUBURN TOPS VOLS, 55-23

Written by Betsy Devine

Saturday, 09 November 2013 17:16

Tennessee's difficult schedule continued on Saturday as the Vols faced their fifth Top-10 opponent of the season and third in as many games. In front of a sellout crowd of 102,455, Tennessee suffered a 55-23 defeat at the hands of #7/10 Auburn.

The Tigers' explosive attack on offense and special teams was on display all afternoon. Auburn piled up 479 yards of total offense and 312 return yards. The Tigers also ran for 444 yards, the most against the Vols since Alabama had an opponent record of 457 in 1986. Auburn scored touchdowns on both kickoff and punt returns.

The Vols offense under the direction of freshman signal caller Joshua Dobbs had 354 yards on offense. Dobbs combined for 178 yards of total offense with 128 passing yards and 50 rushing yards.

Senior tailback Rajion Neal had his sixth career 100-yard rushing game finishing the game with 124 yards.

The Vols' Ray Guy Award semifinalist Michael Palardy was a weapon all day as he has been for the Orange & White all season. The senior tied his career-high with three made field goals (39, 42, 40) while punting 5 times for a 46.6 average.

Freshman receiver Marquez North had five catches for 58 yards while Pig Howard had four catches for 13 yards.

Auburn quarterback Nick Marshall ran for two TDs (7, 38 yards) and threw for another score. He accounted for 249 total yards with 214 on the ground and 35 through the air. His 214 rushing yards are the fourth-most by an opposing player in the history of Tennessee football. The record of 217 is shared by Mike Pritchard (Colorado, 1990) and Bobby Humphrey (Alabama, 1986).

Tailback Tre Mason ran for three touchdowns (13, 4, and 1 yards) as he galloped for 117 yards in the game, the first time the Vols have let up two 100-yard rushers in a game this season.

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Auburn's quick strike offense was in full effect in the first half as the Tigers held the ball for just 7:51, but built a 34-20 halftime lead as Auburn scored five times, with the longest possession lasting just 1:43.

With the game tied at 13, Chris Davis returned a punt 85 yards to put the Tigers ahead, 20-13 with 9:51 left in the first half. It was the longest punt return in Auburn history since 1970. Less than four minutes later Marshall finished off a 6-play drive (all of which were rushes) for 85 yards with his own 7-yard rush, putting the Tigers ahead, 27-13.

Senior Jacques Smith got the Vols back within one score with his first-career interception, which returned 18 yards for a touchdown. That cut the UT deficit to 27-20 with 1:28 left in the half.

But 37 seconds later Marshall ran for his second TD of the day from 38 yards out to put the Tigers up 34-20.

Tennessee opened the game with a scoring drive for just the second time all season and first since the opener vs. Austin Peay (Aug. 31) as Dobbs guided the Vols into Auburn territory. Palardy finished the drive with a 39-yard field goal, 4:03 into the game giving UT a 3-0 lead.

Auburn took a 6-3 lead on 25-yard pass from Marshall to C.J. Uzomah. Daniel McCullers blocked the second PAT of his career to keep the Tigers at six points. Auburn's Cody Parkey missed a PAT for just the second time in 111 career PAT attempts.

Palardy finished an 11-play drive with a 42-yard field to tie the game at 6-6 with 3:26 left in the first quarter.

The Vols took a 13-6 lead on the first play of the second quarter as Rajion Neal tip-toed and then high-stepped into the end zone for a 17-yard score. But Auburn answered two plays later as Tre Mason ran in from 13 yards on the heels of a 62-yard rush by Marshall. The Tigers needed only 32 seconds to tie the game, 13-13.

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The second half began with Corey Grant returning the opening kickoff 90 yards to put Auburn ahead 41-20. After Palardy added his third field goal of the game from 40 yards, Auburn answered with Mason's second score of a day on a 4-yard rush. That put the Tigers ahead, 48-23.

Mason's third score of the day gave Auburn a 55-23 lead. The Tigers finished the game at the UT five-yard line on fourth and goal when time expired.

The Vols will have an open date next Saturday before hosting Vanderbilt in the home finale on Nov. 23. The time and TV for that game will be announced on Monday.

Photo Courtesy: JaRon Toney, UT Athletics