

Tennessee upsets FSU to claim first title since 1951

By Richard Rosenblatt
The Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Tennessee is undefeated, and almost certainly undisputed.

Quarterback Tee Martin and the top-ranked Volunteers claimed one piece of the national championship Monday night, capping a perfect season with a very imperfect 23-16 victory over No. 2 Florida State in the Fiesta Bowl.

It was rusty and rocky, but under the new Bowl Championship Series format, the Volunteers were crowned national champions in the USA Today/ESPN coaches' poll.

The Associated Press media poll will be released early Tuesday, and although third-ranked Ohio State may plead for consideration, the Vols pulled together and held off the Seminoles.

Their last national championship was in 1951.

But it wasn't easy. Martin threw two touchdown passes, including a 79-yarder to Peerless Price with 9:17 to go to put the Vols ahead 20-9. But the Seminoles, despite their own turnover and penalty problems, kept coming back.

Florida State cut the lead to 23-16 on Marcus Outzen's 7-yard TD run with 3:42 left. The play was set up by his 39-yard pass to Ron Dugans on a third-and-seven.

And just when it looked like the Vols would score again to put the game out of reach, linebacker Brian Allen recovered Travis Henry's fumble at the 10 to give Florida State one more chance.

Outzen, though, was over-matched in just his third start. On Florida State's first play after the recovery, his long pass intended

for Peter Warrick was tipped by Deon Grant and intercepted by Steve Johnson, who returned it 20 yards to the Florida State 45.

The Vols ran out the clock and the sideline emptied as coach Phillip Fulmer ran to midfield with his daughters in tow.

"It was not one or two guys," Tennessee coach Phillip Fulmer said. "It was a whole football team believing they could get it done, working hard and finally getting it done."

The Vols (13-0) completed their best season in school history, while the Seminoles (11-2) fell to 1-2 in national championship deciding games.

Martin made the most of his opportunity to do what Peyton Manning couldn't — get a national title. The 6-foot-2, 220-pounder from Mobile, Ala., was 11-of-18 for 278 and two TDs, while Price

caught four passes for 199 yards.

"We knew as a football team that we had to come out and prove we were the No. 1 team in the nation," Martin said.

Florida State clearly lacked offensive punch with Outzen at quarterback. He may have been able to beat Florida two months ago, but he was no match for the linebacker Al Wilson and the Vols' defense. He was 9-of-22 for 145 yards with two interceptions and was sacked four times. He also ran 18 times for minus 1 yard.

Florida State was penalized 12 times for 110 yards, while Tennessee was penalized nine times for 55 yards.

It took 15 minutes of sloppy play by both teams before the Volunteers warmed up briefly in Sun Devil Stadium.

After a scoreless first quarter

that featured two fumbles, shanked punts, a missed field goal by the Vols' Jeff Hall and 59 yards in penalties, Tennessee struck for two touchdowns in 25 seconds.

First, the Vols took three points off the board after the Seminoles' Dexter Jackson was penalized for roughing the kicker on Hall's 24-yard field goal. That put the Vols on the Florida State 4, and two plays later Martin hit fullback Shawn Bryson on a 4-yard touchdown pass.

On Florida State's second play after the kickoff, cornerback Dwayne Goodrich stepped in front of Outzen's pass intended for Warrick and ran 54 yards for a touchdown with 13:40 left in the half.

Outzen made his third start after Chris Weinke was lost for the season with a neck injury.

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