

Sports

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFFS

LSU dominates Oklahoma

By Paul Newberry
AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA — Joe Burrow and the LSU Tigers turned in a first half for the ages, a breathtaking offensive display even as their coordinator grieved a horrific tragedy from his box high above the field.

This team from the bayou is truly something special.

With one more victory, it will be a national champion.

In his first game as a Heisman Trophy winner, Burrow threw for seven touchdowns and 493 yards as No. 1 LSU romped to a stunning 63-28 victory over No. 4 Oklahoma in the Peach Bowl semifinal game Saturday.

The Tigers (14-0) are headed to the title game against No. 3 Clemson — a 29-23 winner over No. 2 Ohio State in the second semifinal

in Arizona — clicking on all cylinders, having dismantled the Sooners (12-2) with a 30-minute outburst that will long be remembered in Cajun country.

“We go into every game thinking nobody can stop us,” Burrow said.

Certainly, the Sooners couldn’t.

Burrow tied the record for any college bowl game with his seven TD passes — which all came before the bands hit the field for the halftime show at Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Justin Jefferson was on the receiving end for four of those scoring plays, also tying a bowl record.

As if that wasn’t enough, Burrow scored an eighth TD himself on a 3-yard run in the third quarter, thoroughly dominating his expected

duel with Oklahoma quarterback Jalen Hurts, the Heisman runner-up.

Yet, the postgame celebration was weighed down by heavy hearts.

LSU offensive coordinator Steve Ensminger learned shortly before kickoff that his daughter-in-law, broadcaster Carley McCord, was among five people killed in a plane crash in Louisiana. The small plane went down shortly after takeoff for what was supposed to be a flight to Atlanta for the game.

Head coach Ed Orgeron delivered the news to Ensminger, who was seen with tears running down his cheeks but stuck to the task at hand.

“Coach, we’re going to get through this,” Emsminger told his boss.

Clemson rallies past Buckeyes

By Ralph D. Russo
AP College Football Writer

GLENDALE, Ariz. — Blaring from the Clemson locker room after yet another playoff victory was Aretha Franklin’s classic “Respect.”

The Tigers have won two of the last three national titles and become college football’s gold standard program, yet still often feel overlooked. Doubtful. Disrespected.

Sure, Clemson ran roughshod through the Atlantic Coast Conference. But was it too easy?

Facing a serious challenger for the first time in months, No. 3 Clemson and its perfect quarterback had to tap into their championship DNA to advance to the College Football Playoff title game for the fourth time in five years.

Trevor Lawrence connected with Travis Etienne on a 34-yard, go-ahead touchdown with 1:49 left in the fourth quarter, capping a 94-yard march, and the defending national champions beat No. 2 Ohio State 29-23 Saturday night in the Fiesta Bowl.

“We finish,” said Clemson coach Dabo Swinney, whose Tigers are 100-2 when leading going into the fourth quarter since

2011. “That’s not just who we are. That’s what we do.”

The Tigers (14-0) will play No. 1 LSU on Jan. 13 in New Orleans, looking for their third national title in the last four seasons.

Clemson played only one close game this season, a one-pointer way back in September against North Carolina. Otherwise the Tigers rarely needed to play a starter in the fourth quarter.

“Everybody kept saying we didn’t play nobody, that we blow out teams. Tonight showed what we can do,” Clemson receiver Tee Higgins said. “We showed everybody we got fight in us.”

Ohio State (13-1) proved to be every bit Clemson’s match, though the Buckeyes walked away frustrated by several close officiating calls. Especially two video reviews that could have gone either way and did not go theirs.

“One play can alter the game,” Ohio State coach Ryan Day said. “It didn’t seem like we got any of those plays.”

Ohio State jumped out to a 16-0 lead in the first half and then responded to a Clemson rally to retake the lead, 23-21 in the fourth quarter.

Ducks romp in nonleague finale

EUGENE (AP) — No. 6 Oregon sure looks ready for the Pac-12.

Chris Duarte scored a season-high 31 points and the Ducks pounded Alabama State 98-59 Sunday in their final tuneup before league play.

“We took a big step, a step in the right direction but going on the road for the conference opener ... we’re going to have to play a lot better,”

Oregon coach Dana Altman said.

The Ducks (11-2) are the Pac-12 favorites and play Thursday at Colorado riding a five-game winning streak. They shot 59% and forced 20 turnovers leading to 32 points against the road-weary Hornets (1-12).

Duarte led four Oregon players with at least 10 points. Anthony Mathis had 15, Addison Patterson

had 12 and Will Richardson added 10.

Brandon Battle had 14 points to lead Alabama State, which has played all 13 of its games away from home.

Duarte was 12 of 15 from the field, including making 6 of his 9 3-point attempts. He also had six assists as the Ducks recorded a season-high total of 28.

“I feel like I was more happy for

him than he was,” Mathis said. “He’s been down on himself since he hasn’t been shooting well.”

“Chris got it going, that was good to see for him,” Altman added. “He’s making progress ... he’s got to work a lot harder in practice to get that consistency that all players want (but) he’s continuing to get better and better.”

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