

Sports

COLLEGE FOOTBALL BOWL SEASON

Arizona St. edges Florida St.

By John Erfort
Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas — With each team missing its stand-out rusher, defense dominated at Tuesday's Sun Bowl. Hardly pretty, but hardly a concern for Arizona State coach Herm Edwards.

"Obviously it was a game not pleasing to the eye," he said.

Willie Harts returned an interception 25 yards for a touchdown in the fourth quarter to lead Arizona State to a 20-14 victory against Florida State. Harts, a freshman cornerback, halted a 14-0 surge by Florida State (6-7) and helped the Sun Devils (8-5) hang on for their fourth Sun Bowl victory, despite not scoring an offensive touchdown.

"Our D was on fire tonight," Harts added. "It just

shows the potential for our defense."

James Blackman threw a 91-yard touchdown pass, the longest pass play in Sun Bowl history, to Tamorrion Terry to give Florida State its first lead, 14-9, in the third quarter. The Seminoles trailed 9-0 at halftime.

Cristian Zendejas kicked a Sun Bowl record-tying four field goals for Arizona State, including a 34-yarder in the fourth quarter to cut the FSU lead to 14-12.

Blackman's fourth interception of the game was returned by Harts to put the Sun Devils ahead for good with 10:06 left in the fourth.

"When you get six turnovers, you should probably win the game," Edwards said.

Jayden Daniels was named the game's MVP after going 12-for-28 passing for 198

yards to lead the Sun Devils. He also ran 36 yards and a 2-point conversion.

The first half was a comedy of errors for both offenses as the defenses stepped up in the absence of the teams' star rushers. Eno Benjamin of ASU and Cam Akers of FSU both sat out to protect their NFL draft stock.

Florida State turned the ball over three times (two interceptions and a fumble) and had a field goal blocked, while Arizona State lost two fumbles.

"The guys played hard," FSU interim coach Odell Haggins said. "We made a few mistakes. We've got to keep creating great habits. We turned the ball over ... we can play better. We are going to play better."

Cornerback Stanford Samuels also sat out for the

Seminoles,

Florida State played redshirt freshman Deonte Sheffield at running back, who finished with 87 yards on 18 carries. Arizona State had freshman Demetrious Flowers and sophomore A.J. Carter handle rushing duties.

Blackman finished 14 of 26 for 244 yards, with one TD. Terry had nine catches for 165 yards.

"I didn't perform at the level my teammates needed me to perform," Blackman said.

By the end of the game, Arizona State was down three defensive starters — safety Cam Phillips didn't dress, while cornerbacks Jack Jones and Chase Lucas suffered injuries during the game. Sun Devils defensive lineman Jermaine Lole also missed a chunk of second half.

ARIZONA BOWL

Cowboys gallop past Georgia St.

By John Marshall
AP Sports Writer

TUCSON, Ariz. — Wyoming wanted to make the most of its bowl game after being passed over in the postseason last year. Giving a freshman quarterback his first career start didn't seem like the best approach to accomplishing that goal.

Levi Williams handled it just fine and the Cowboys are riding off from the 2019 season with a bowl victory.

Williams accounted for four scores, Xazavian Valla-day ran for 204 yards and scored two touchdowns, and Wyoming rolled over Georgia State 38-17 in the Arizona Bowl on Saturday.

"He was composed, made a lot of big plays," Wyoming coach Craig Bohl said. "He had a couple things we wish he could have had back, but for a freshman, for any quarterback, he played with a lot of poise and composure."

The Cowboys won six games to become bowl eligible in 2018, yet found themselves at home watching TV after they weren't among the 78 teams to get bowl invites.

Once at the 2019 Arizona Bowl, the Cowboys turned to Williams over Tyler Vander Waal, who entered the transfer portal but remained with the team for bowl practices. Williams did not shy away from the spotlight, hurting the Panthers with his arm and legs.

He threw for 234 yards and three touchdowns, with 53 yards and a score on the ground for the Cowboys (8-5), who racked up 524 yards to end the season on a high note.

"He's a great leader, a freshman stepping up on the big stage like this," said Valladay, who had three catches for 91 yards and a touchdowns.

Georgia State (7-6) jumped to a 10-0 lead in the first quarter but had a hard time stopping the big-play Cowboys. The Panthers also turned the ball over twice on downs deep in Wyoming's end in the second half and had a crucial roughing the punter penalty that led to Wyoming touchdown just before halftime.

The miscues spoiled a gritty performance by Dan Ellington. Georgia State's senior quarterback accounted for 236 yards and two touchdowns despite playing with a torn right ACL.

"He ought write a book about Dan," Panthers coach Shawn Elliott said. "You talk about heart, you talk about courage, you talk about leadership, you talk about enthusiasm, you talk about putting a program on your back."

The Panthers got off to a fast start, marching quickly for Ellington's 4-yard TD run and going up 10-0 after a field goal.

The Cowboys took over from there, scoring two touchdowns in less than two minutes. Williams threw an 18-yard TD to Austin Conway and, following an interception thrown by Ellington, he found Valladay on an 8-yard score to put Wyoming up 17-7.

Early in the second quarter, Williams had an interception deep in Georgia State's end on an ill-advised back-foot throw. He made a similar throw just before halftime, but that one turned into a 51-yard touchdown when Ayden Eberhardt broke two tackles, weaved through Georgia State's secondary and broke another tackle diving into the end zone.

Garbers leads Cal past Illinois

By Michael Wagaman
Associated Press

SANTA CLARA, Calif. — As a freshman a year ago, Chase Garbers was benched at halftime for ineffectiveness during his first trip to a bowl game. The California quarterback made his second appearance in the postseason much more memorable for both himself and the Golden Bears.

Garbers threw four touchdown passes and ran for another score, leading California to a 35-20 win over Illinois on Monday in the Redbox Bowl.

"He's taken that next step and he's worked at it, whether it's the weight room, meetings, practice" Golden Bears coach Justin Wilcox said. "He has just continued to work at it and guys respect him because of how hard he works. It really showed today."

Garbers, who had been in and out of the lineup all season because of a shoulder injury, got going after being sacked on the first play from scrimmage and throwing an incomplete pass on the second. The offensive MVP of the game, Garbers completed 22 of 31 passes for 272 yards with TD passes of 4, 3, 2 and 6 yards. He also scored on quarterback sneak from the 1 early in

the second quarter while helping the Bears set a season-high for scoring.

It was significantly different than 2018, when Garbers threw three first-half interceptions against TCU in the Cheez-It Bowl and spent the remainder of the game on the sidelines.

"It went a lot better today than last year," Garbers said. "It just speaks to the guys in our offensive room and the team and how hard we work. We knew playing Illinois there would be shots we needed to take. You just have to execute those shot plays."

The Bears won all seven games this season when the oft-injured Garbers played more than one half.

Christopher Brown Jr. ran for 120 yards on 20 carries, and Makai Polk caught five passes for a season-high 105 yards as Cal (8-5) won its first bowl game since 2015.

Brandon Peters passed for 273 yards and one touchdown for Illinois (6-7) in his return after sitting out the regular-season finale with a concussion. Peters, who was shaken up again after diving out of bounds following a scramble late in the fourth quarter, completed 22 of 37 passes and added a team-high 68 rushing yards.

The Illini lost despite outgaining the Bears in total yards 450-395.

"We didn't play well enough. You have to give Cal credit for that," Illinois coach Lovie Smith said. "Sometimes yards can be a little misleading. They got in the end zone more than we did."

The strong showing by Garbers offset an uneven day by California's defense.

The Bears allowed a field goal and touchdown on the Fighting Illini's first two drives, then surrendered a late field goal before halftime.

Illinois' offense was mostly stagnant after that, while California pulled away.

The Bears had lost three of their previous four bowl games.

California led 14-10 late in the second quarter before the teams combined for 10 points in the final 25 seconds.

After Wilcox made the decision to go for it on a 4th-and-goal, Garbers threw a short swing pass to Brown, who stiff-armed Illinois linebacker Tolson Khalan before reaching the end zone.

Peters helped the Illini answer quickly. He completed three consecutive passes for 58 yards, setting up a 30-yard field goal by James McCourt.

PAC-12 MEN'S BASKETBALL PREVIEW

Pac-12 amasses impressive nonconference record

By John Marshall
AP Basketball Writer

PHOENIX — The Pac-12 has gone through a couple of rough seasons the past few years. The conference went 0 for 3 in the in 2018 NCAA Tournament and last year looked like it may have only one team in the bracket of 68 before the selection committee pushed three through.

This season, the Pac may be back.

Bolstered by loaded teams at the top and with depth nearly all the way through, the Pac-12 is poised to be among college basketball's elite conferences again as the season turns to league play this week.

"There are times when we've had a very good upper tier or couple of teams that really could challenge deep into the NCAA Tournament, but maybe the bottom team or a couple teams at the bottom almost acted as an anchor against all of us," Arizona coach Sean Miller said. "But this year, I don't believe that's the case. I think the middle has never been stronger. It's hard to differentiate maybe between the very top teams and maybe four through

eight, four through nine."

The Pac-12 has three ranked teams heading into conference play: No. 6 Oregon, No. 21 Washington and No. 24 Arizona. The conference has a combined winning percentage of .744 through Saturday's games and had three wins over top-15 teams in a span of a week in late December.

Every Pac-12 team has a winning record except 6-6 California and five teams have double-digit wins.

Pac-12 teams could end up beating up on one another during the conference season, as has happened in the past, but the league appears to be in good shape for a strong showing in March.

A few things to know as the Pac-12 gets ready to kick off its conference season:

SOARING DUCKS

Oregon was picked to win the Pac-12 in the preseason media poll and has lived up to expectations so far.

The Ducks (11-2) have three wins over ranked opponents, including a one-point road victory over then-No. 5 Michigan, and their only losses

are to top-ranked Gonzaga and North Carolina.

Payton Pritchard has been superb to start his senior season, averaging 19.6 points and 4.3 rebounds, and Oregon has four players averaging at least 10 points. The Ducks also got a huge boost in early December, when 6-foot-11 freshman NFaly Dante became eligible after reclassifying as a 2019 signee.

RANKED TEAMS

Washington generated plenty of preseason buzz after coach Mike Hopkins landed a stellar recruiting class, led by Isaiah Stewart and Jaden McDaniels.

The 6-foot-9 freshman duo has lived up to expectations. Stewart is averaging 19.2 points and 8.8 rebounds while shooting 61% percent. McDaniels is putting up 14.4 points and 5.6 rebounds for the Huskies (10-3).

Arizona (10-3) got off to a stellar start behind the freshman trio of Nico Mannion, Josh Green and Zeke Nnaji. The Wildcats stumbled with losses to Baylor, Gonzaga and St. John's but have the type of roster

that could make a deep March run.

Colorado (11-2) dropped out of the AP Top 25 after losses to No. 5 Kansas and Northern Iowa but has plenty of talent and a veteran roster. Point guard McKinley Wright and forward Tyler Bey are the type of players who could lead the Buffaloes back to the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 2016.

SURPRISING STANFORD

Stanford didn't have many outside expectations heading into the season. The Cardinal were young, struggling with injuries and picked to finish 10th in the preseason poll.

Heading into Sunday's game against Kansas, Stanford was the surprise of the Pac-12. The Cardinal (11-1) had more wins than any team in the conference and their only loss was by one to No. 12 Butler at a neutral site.

Junior big man Oscar da Silva has been terrific so far this season, averaging 17.6 points and 6.0 rebounds while shooting 61%.

INCONSISTENT TEAMS

UCLA may need a little time

to find its footing under first-year coach Mick Cronin.

The Bruins (7-6) lost at home to Hofstra, went 1-2 at the Maui Invitational and closed out the nonconference season with a home loss to Cal State Fullerton.

Arizona State (9-4) got off to a strong start with a win over St. John's in New York and shut down Georgia star freshman Anthony Edwards.

The Sun Devils followed with an ugly 40-point loss to Saint Mary's and a home loss to Creighton before beating Texas Southern to close out the nonconference schedule.

Oregon State (10-2) has one of the Pac-12's best players in Tres Tinkle and rolled through most of a relatively easy nonconference schedule. The Beavers followed with a clunker against Texas A&M, scoring 49 points in a 15-point loss.

Utah (9-3) has one of the Pac-12's best wins so far this season, knocking off then-No. 6 Kentucky in Las Vegas. The Utes also have losses to Coastal Carolina and Tulane and scored 52 points in a blowout loss to No. 15 San Diego State.

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