



Pittsburgh Defeats Kentucky 27-10 To Claim BBVA Compass Bowl Panthers become fifth straight Big East team to win bowl in Birmingham

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. ----- Pittsburgh scored a pair of touchdowns off Kentucky punting mistakes as the Panthers defeated the Wildcats 27-10 in the Fifth Annual BBVA Compass Bowl.

Pitt (8-5) kept the Big East Conference's record perfect in the bowl since its inception in 2007. The Big East is now 5-0 in the bowl game.

The Panthers' Andrew Taglianetti blocked a punt to set up Pittsburgh's first touchdown late in the first half of the game played before 41,207 at Legion Field. An incomplete pass on Kentucky's fake punt early in the second half set up Tino Sunseri's 13-yard touchdown pass to Brock DeCicco. Sunseri also ran for a touchdown.

The Panthers used an effective running game in the win that their players dedicated to former coach Dave Wannstedt, who was forced to resign after the regular season had concluded.

Dion Lewis, Pitt's sophomore running back, rushed for 105 yards and a touchdown and was named the recipient of the Fred Sington Most Valuable Player Award.

Defensive coordinator Phil Bennett, Pittsburgh's acting head coach for the bowl game, was hired a day earlier to be defensive coordinator at Baylor.

Bennett was soaked with a cooler with just more than a minute remaining on the clock.

"Obviously, I am very proud of the guys. I thought they handled a tough situation very well," Bennett said. "I am proud of the assistant coaches, the guys who were working a little bit short-handed. I thought in particular our offensive staff really did a fine job. We were able to control the front and run the ball, which helped us defensively. And I thought defensively, we were a little bit erratic at times, but we made plays when we needed to.

"We knew the University of Kentucky was very good offensively. We were excited about being able to have the lead and dictate the game. Just extremely, extremely proud of these players. I thought it was a game that, once we got going, we pretty much were in control."

Sunseri connected on 9-of-19 passes for 96 yards and a touchdown. Ray Graham added 90 rushing yards as the Panthers outgained Kentucky 261-104 on the ground.

Kentucky (6-7), playing without suspended quarterback Mike Hartline, fell far below its season average for points. Morgan Newton, making his first start of the season, was 21 of 36 passing for 211 yards.

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Pitt led 20-3 before the Wildcats' only touchdown of the game, a 1-yard run by Moncell Allen with 41 seconds remaining in the third quarter. The Panthers answered with a long drive and 2-yard touchdown run by Lewis.

Randall Cobb set a Southeastern Conference's single-season record for all-purpose yards, but the versatile junior wasn't enough for the Wildcats to overcome their special teams mistakes. Cobb broke the mark of former Arkansas running back Darren McFadden' who had 2,310 all-purpose yards in 2007.

Pittsburgh led 6-3 on two field goals by Dan Hutchins before Taglianetti blocked Ryan Tydlacka's punt late in the first half. Tydlacka appeared to take an extra step before attempting a rugby style punt.

Pitt's Kolby Gray recovered at the Kentucky 10, setting up Sunseri's 1-yard scoring run for a 13-3 lead with only 34 seconds remaining in the half.

Kentucky's first possession of the second half ended with another key mistake by its punting team. Matt Roark took the snap on the apparent punt but he didn't have time to make his planned pass. He was ruled down on the Kentucky 35 before throwing an incomplete pass.

Following a 21-yard run by Graham, Sunseri's touchdown pass to DeCicco gave the Panthers a 20-3 lead.

Kentucky head coach Joker Phillips agreed the Wildcat miscues were two of the most pivotal plays in the game.

"Our operation wasn't as clean as we needed it to be and (Pitt's) guy got a good jump," Phillips said. "Special teams definitely hurt us today. We didn't execute the fake the way we had in practice. I'll write those down as turnovers. We have not won games when we turn the ball over."

Craig McIntosh gave Kentucky a 3-0 lead with a 50-yard field goal, matching the longest of the sophomore's career, in the first quarter. The kick was the longest in the five-year history of the bowl.

McIntosh missed from 41 yards in the fourth quarter.

Pitt held a Kentucky offense to only 10 points after the Wildcats had entered the game averaging 33 points and 433 yards.

"You are going to win a lot of games when you hold a team to 10 points," Bennett said. "I thought our guys played well. I am just looking at things from the score perspective. I kid them I'm a perfectionist. I don't think they should have gotten anything, I don't care who we are playing. But I was proud of them."