

Relentless Clemson Tigers overcome adversity; achieve come-from-behind win opposite LSU

Written by Levi Johnson, Sports Editor
Thursday, 03 January 2013 08:44 -



ATLANTA-With a chance to make meaningful change from the way it all ended for it in a lopsided loss to West Virginia in the 2012 Orange Bowl, Clemson entered the recently played Chick-Fil-A Bowl with apparent renewed spirit and a strong belief that it was still possible to compete and win versus the elite college teams of the nation.

And although stymied by early adversity when wide receiver Sammy Watkins took a hand off on Clemson's first play from scrimmage and fumbled the ball on a vicious hit by a LSU defender, the play didn't take away the resolve of Dabo Swinney's 14th rank Tigers. The early turnover set up the No.8 Bayou Bengals at the Clemson 23 yard line and just two plays later the Tigers faced a seven point (0-7) deficit but refused to let the negative circumstance shape the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC)-Southeastern Conference (SEC) showdown.

Due to a severe ankle sprain, Watkins was pulled from the game and didn't return. However, the Palmetto State-based Tigers (11-2) "circled the wagons" for what would be a strong fight to the finish against Les Mile's (10-3) charges.

The mostly in your face skirmish Mon. night (Dec. 31), at the Georgia Dome, which went right down to 00:00 seconds on the clock was finally settled when Clemson junior placekicker Chandler Cantanzaro kicked true a 37 yard field goal to give Swinney's Tigers a thrilling come-from-behind 25-24 win over the Louisiana-based felines, who were favored by six points in pre-game polling by the pundits.

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Reflecting on what they had practiced so many times in the past, the scenario in the Chick-Fil-A Bowl was all too familiar to Tajh Boyd.

"All I had to think about was what we had to do with 1:19 on the clock, 80 yards away (actually the victorious Tigers began the winning drive 77 yards away); and needing a field goal to win," said the Clemson junior signal caller, whose fourth and 16 pass to wide receiver DeAndre Hopkins set the Tigers up for the tell-tale boot that sent them and their fans into a frenzy, as the clock ticked to no time left to play. Boyd, who put the winning Tigers on his back, when the early trouble came, was 30-52-0, for 346 yards through the air including three TD tosses. Tabbed the Most Valuable Player (MVP) in a contest that Clemson realized its first 11-game winning campaign in 31 years, Boyd also ran the ball 29 times for 63 drive-saving yards.

"I'm just so happy for us as a team. We worked so hard to prove that we could play and win against the best of them. Tonight was our big chance and we went out and got the job done (in spite of what happened to us early)," continued the Clemson No.1 signal caller. "This is big for us and I'm so glad we were able to send the seniors out with this great win."

Kneeling as an avalanche of Clemson players, coaches and support personnel stormed the field, an emotional Dabo Swinney moments later talked about what the win meant.

"I'm just so proud of my players, coaches and the Clemson fans everywhere," said the Clemson coach, on the heels of his 40th triumph as leader of the Tigers grid program. "This is the first time 31 years that a Clemson program has won 11 games in a season; and it feels great.

"This all came about because we've been working so hard to move this program in the right direction. Tonight, I thought we made strides to getting us where we want to go."

DeAndre Hopkins, whose clutch catching all game long kept Clemson on target for the win it subsequently achieved, paid homage to the Tiger stop troopers who forced the LSU "O" players into eight three and outs, highlighted by the last one that put Clemson in position to do what many people believed it couldn't accomplish.

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"We fought as a team all night long; and never gave up," said the Clemson junior receiver, who had 13 catches for 191 yards, including two for six-pointers. "This was a game we believed we could win (if we fought hard enough). On both sides of the ball we did and got this big win."

Added Chandler Cantanzaro, "I knew all alone it was something special about this team. Tonight what I knew showed. This was a big win and it should help us as we try to improve as a team.

As we look toward next season, we'll do so with a lot of confidence and belief we can get the job done if we play well as a team."