

Second Half Comeback Gives Ohio 20-14 Win

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Trailing 14-0 at halftime, a suddenly inspired Ohio team came to life after intermission to snap West Virginia's five-game winning streak in the annual Ohio Valley Athletic Conference All-Star football classic Saturday night at rain-swept Wheeling Stadium.

A disappointing turnout, estimated at 5,000 fans, saw the revived Buckeyes grab a 20-14 decision via their exciting comeback against the Mountaineers, who went flat after taking command in the first half as Wheeling Park speedster Rico Cox tallied touchdowns on runs of 47 and six yards.

The decisive Buckeye TD was set up by a spectacular 32-yard punt return by Buckeye North's Dennis "Boo Boo" Johnson, who was one of the heroes of the evening for the elated Ohioans.

The Bucks bounced into contention by capitalizing on two costly West Virginia fumbles in the third quarter as Greg Bonar, quarterback from Shadyside, threw TD passes to Johnson and Cambridge's Rich Vance following the changes of possession.

However, Marietta Coach Rich Hahn, piloting the Bucks, sent his charges after two-point conversions following both third-period scores. Since the two-point efforts failed, West Virginia carried a 14-12 edge into the final frame.

But the elusive Johnson struck again in the fourth period when he returned a punt by Weir's John Canei 32 yards to the Mountaineer 16. It was a beautiful broken-field run, with Johnson keeping his balance though hit by three different tacklers to carry the ball deep into enemy territory.

It took Ohio six plays to cover the final 16 yards, with Anthony Orsini, quarterback from Steubenville Catholic, sneaking over from the one for the TD. St. Clairsville's Mike Brown made 14 yards in four carries during the foray.

The winning TD came with just 4:14 remaining in the game. Faking a kick by Winterville's Steve Brown, the Ohioans went for two again on the conversion try, and Beallsville's Wade Lucas, the apparent holder, passed to Johnson for the final markers.

West Virginia, coached by Brooke's Vincent "Sonny" Rea, battled desperately to regain control. Two pass interference calls against Ohio helped the Mountaineers penetrate to

the Ohio 28 with just 1:23 to go. But the always dangerous Cox was dropped for a six-yard loss on a sweep by Meadowbrook's Steve Miles. Two plays later, with just 44 seconds on the clock, Weir High quarterback Tim Lescallete looped a pass downfield, but Marietta's Joe Weber intercepted at the 10 and returned to the 28 to pound the final nail into the Mountaineer coffin.

Ohio was hurt severely by penalties during the evening as the Buckeyes lost 114 yards on 10 violations, three of them for pass interference. The Mountaineers were penalized six times for 46 yards but lost the ball three times on fumbles and Ohio twice took advantage of the bobbles to score.

The Mountaineers completed just two of seven passes for 18 yards and suffered one interception. Ohio made 157 yards by passing with 12 completions in 17 attempts. But the Buckeyes were intercepted three times by West Virginia's Kevin Sikora, from Weir High. Neither side was particularly impressive with its ground game, though footing was surprisingly good considering the weather conditions. West Virginia netted 101 yards by rushing compared to Ohio's 47. Each side finished with 10 first downs.

Ohio had two golden scoring opportunities in the first half, but both, in the early minutes of the contest and in the final seconds of the second period, were thwarted by alert Mountaineer defensive play.

Meantime, the West Virginians turned Cox loose for both of their TDs.

Ohio claimed possession on the West Virginia 38 when Lucas recovered a fumble by Magnolia's Mike Dawson on the opening kickoff.

With the help of a 10-yard gain on a pass from Bonar to wide receiver Weber, the Bucks penetrated to the 15. However, on Bonar's next aerial effort, Sikora made a stretching interception at the two.

The Mountaineers hung together three first downs on a march that carried past midfield before running out of steam. Canei then kicked dead at the Buck 11.

On the punt exchange, River's Barry Kriechbaun booted the oval to Dawson who was downed at the Ohio 47 by Brown and Steubenville's Greg Taylor.

On the very next play, Lescallete pitched out to the fleet Cox, who skirted right end on a sweep and raced down the near sideline on the west side of the stadium for a 47-yard

TD run. Canei converted for a 7-0 count with 1:30 left in the initial stanza.

The Mountaineers traveled 60 yards for another TD early in the second quarter. After a 20-yard gain on a pass down the middle from Lescallete to Linsly Institute's rangy Jim Maurer, the blue-shirted West Virginians picked up 25 more yards the easy way as Ohio was penalized twice for unsportsmanlike conduct. The second penalty, half the distance to the goal, left the pigskin at the Buckeye 11. Cox then swept the left side to the six and on the next play he zoomed off right tackle into the end zone. Linsly's Randy Austin converted to make it 14-0 with 8:23 left in the half.

Late in the second quarter, Ohio mounted a threat behind the passing of Orsini, who hit Kriechbaun for 13 yards, Johnson for 17 and Weber for 32. The pass to Weber put the ball at the W.Va. 20 with 1:42 left before intermission.

One thrust by Brown and two by Orsini resulted in a rushing first down at the seven. But the Ohioans were battling the clock as well as the Mountaineers. Orsini fired a pass to Weber who was knocked out of bounds at the two with 26 seconds left. G.J. Walley, John Marshall stalwart, and Brooke's Bill Almasy stopped Brown for no gain on a pitchout. Orsini's next pass fell incomplete in the end zone, but West Virginia was offside and the ball was advanced to the one.

On third down, Walley stopped Cambridge's Allen Neff cold at the line of scrimmage and time expired before the Bucks could get off a fourth-down try.

Ohio found its momentum in the third quarter after Winterville's Marvin Mantos gobbled up a West Virginia fumble at the Mountaineer 19. On the very next play, Bonar found Johnson open for the TD, which came with 7:16 left in the third frame.

On the ensuing series of downs, Steubenville Catholic's George Zrnyi confiscated a Mountaineer bobble at the West Virginia 38. Three plays later, Bonar rolled out and hit Vance for the score.

Thus the stage was set for Johnson's fourth-quarter punt return which was a decisive factor in the streak-breaking Buckeye win.

Ohio 20-14 20
W.Va. 14-0 14
W.Va.—Cox, 47, run (Canei kick).
W.Va.—Cox, 4, run (Austin kick).
Ohio—Johnson, 19, pass from Bonar (run failed).
Ohio—Vance, 13, pass from Bonar (pass failed).
Ohio—Orsini, 1, run (Johnson pass from Lucas).