



Pirates lose by a foot

By Nathan Summers

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MEMPHIS, Tenn. — East Carolina booted itself out of the Liberty Bowl.

Three times ECU kicker Ben Hartman tried and failed to crack a late 17-17 tie with Arkansas Saturday night inside Liberty Bowl Memorial Stadium.

On the Razorbacks' first and only possession of overtime, kicker Alex Tejada sliced a perfect 37-yard field goal through the 20-degree Memphis night and the uprights for a thrilling 20-17 win in front of 62,742 spectators mostly clad in red.

The Pirates finished the season 9-5 for the second year in a row and lost their second straight Liberty Bowl.

"This football team wanted this, they wanted this one bad and that's what makes it hurt so bad," ECU head coach Skip Holtz said.

After leading 10-0 at the halftime intermission, the Pirates faltered.

Quarterback Patrick Pinkney, one of 28 ECU seniors playing their final game, threw two interceptions on consecutive third quarter drives, and the Razorbacks (8-5) cashed in both times.

The first pick gave Arkansas a first down on the ECU 20-yard line and ended with Tejada's first field goal of the night.

The second went into the hands of streaking strong safety Tramain Thomas, who barreled straight into the end zone to tie the game at 10-10.

The Pirates responded immediately with an eight-play scoring drive that ended with Pinkney (209 pass yards, TD) zipping a 13-yard touchdown pass over the middle to Dwayne Harris (four catches, 64 yards) to vault the Pirates back in front, 17-10.

A stroke of bad luck and a perfect throw from Arkansas QB Ryan Mallett tied the game again, and achieved the score that stood through the fourth quarter and into overtime.

With 5:16 left in the third, Mallett (202 yards, TD) heaved a 41-yard pass over the middle to the end zone to Jarius Wright, who was left wide open after senior safety Van Eskridge (team-high nine tackles) slipped near the goal line.

The game then rested on the right foot of Hartman, the Pirates' all-time leading scorer who converted some memorable kicks during his career, including game-winners over Southern Miss, North Carolina and Boise State at the 2007 Hawaii Bowl.

He missed twice from 39 yards on the final two ECU drives of the fourth quarter, then again from 35 on ECU's OT drive. Holtz said he never considered putting in another kicker.

"Ben's a senior, he's our all-time leading scorer and he's kicked a bunch of pressure winners for us over his time here," Holtz said. "He missed the first one, and it was like, 'We'll be alright. We'll get it again.' Then on the third

one, I didn't even consider replacing him."

As has always been the case, Holtz and Hartman traded jokes in attempt to keep things loose on the sideline in the seconds leading up to the overtime attempt.

Even after Hartman's pair of fourth quarter miscues, Holtz said he had faith Hartman would deliver like usual.

"I brought him over and said, 'Ben, we're going to need you to win this before it's all over. We're going to need you to win it, so don't hang your head. Those are over. The next kick is a new kick. Go through your routine and we'll be fine,'" Holtz said.

The Pirates outgained the Razorbacks in total offense, 393 yards to 283, and had 24 first downs to Arkansas' 10. A game-best 151 of those yards came in a typically gritty performance from senior running back Dominique Lindsay. In the pass game, sophomore Darryl Freeneey was electric, making six grabs for 94 yards.

The Pirates charged out to a 10-0 lead at halftime thanks to a balance of solid defense and some deft ball control on offense.

Lindsay's touchdown broke a scoreless tie in the second quarter and ended a 99-yard drive, and Hartman kicked a 33-yard field goal late in the second to make it a two-score game.

On the other side, ECU stifled Mallett and the Razorback attack, including stalling the offense twice on fourth down tries and surviving a fumbled punt by Travis Simmons deep in ECU territory to keep Arkansas off the scoreboard.

A booming punt by Dylan Breeding pinned the Pirates on their own 1-yard line early in the second quarter, and they began a long, steady march to the opposing end zone.

Along the way, Lindsay and Giovanni Ruffin moved the sticks on the ground while Pinkney zipped three passes to Freeneey.

The third, a screen to the right side, created the touchdown when Freeneey found a wide open alley down the sideline thanks to a vicious block from Harris.

The 38-yard gain carried ECU to the Arkansas 3-yard line, where Lindsay's second effort allowed him to scamper into the end zone untouched for a 7-0 Pirate lead. The drive tied a 1962 Liberty Bowl record.

The ECU lead grew to 10-0 after another big play by Harris late in the half.

Pinkney lofted a high pass toward Harris on a fade route along the left sideline, and the junior receiver snared the ball with his left hand before cradling it in bounds for a 31-yard gain, setting up Hartman's kick.

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