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LONGHORNS FOOTBALL

Texas beats Oklahoma 28-21

Longhorns lament Charles' fumble

By Suzanne Halliburton AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

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DALLAS — Texas played its best game of the season Saturday, showing big-play sparks on offense and a swarming quality on defense against archrival and heavy favorite Oklahoma.

Yet by game's end, the Longhorns were left only with a bunch of what-ifs, as they quietly left the field and cleared the way so the Sooners could celebrate a 28-21 victory at the Cotton Bowl.



Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN

(enlarge photo)

UT's Quan Cosby is tackled by OU's Marcus Walker, left, and Nic Harris in the first quarter on Saturday at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas.



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(enlarge photo)

Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN Longhorns running back Jamaal Charles is tackled by OU's Reggie Smith, left, and Lendy Holmes in the fourth quarter. Charles' fumble earlier in the game was one of the key plays in UT's loss.



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(enlarge photo)

The game-winner: OU wide receiver Malcom Kelly gets by UT's Erick Jackson for a fourth-quarter touchdown, a score that proved to be the final margin.

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The winning touchdown came with 10 minutes, 42 seconds to play, upon the culmination of a 94-yard drive. That's when Texas cornerback Deon Beasley was a step too late in his blitz of Sam Bradford, and the Sooner quarterback noticed a breakdown in the Texas secondary and found Malcolm Kelly for an uncontested, 35-yard touchdown.

"It was a great football game," said Texas coach Mack Brown. "It is what you expect out of Texas and OU."

Meanwhile, Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops conceded that his Sooners felt "fortunate" to be on the winning side. "I thought it was a really well played game (for) both sides," he said.

A handful of plays separated the two teams, but at the end of the game, the difference in their fortunes couldn't have been more extreme.

Tenth-ranked Oklahoma (5-1, 1-1 Big 12), which was upset by Colorado a week ago, stayed in the Big 12 title picture, with its national title hopes still a flicker.

The 19th-ranked Longhorns suffered their fourth straight Big 12 Conference loss, dating to the close of 2006. It's the first time in a decade that Texas (4-2, 0-2) has experienced four straight league losses, and the first time in a half century that Texas has opened league play at 0-2.

Given the final result, it seemed odd that the Longhorns were dictating the momentum just after halftime, when the score was tied at 14.

Texas was running its ninth play of a 60-yard march downfield. Running back Jamaal Charles broke free on a zone play and was looking for the end zone when Sooner middle linebacker Curtis Lofton took a swat at Charles' arm.

Charles continued to run, momentarily unaware that the ball had dropped and that the Sooners had recovered at their own 4.

"I think I was trying to do too much," Charles said.

The fumble haunted the Longhorns long after the game. Said receiver Quan Cosby of the fumble: "It breaks our heart."

OU didn't convert the turnovers into points, but as UT quarterback Colt McCoy described it, the series represented a lost opportunity.

McCoy, who a week ago suffered a mild concussion, put together his best performance of the season, completing 19 of 26 passes for 324 yards and two touchdowns. He had two second-quarter touchdown passes — a 6-yarder to Jordan Shipley and a 22-yard strike to tight end Jermichael Finley.

McCoy recovered nicely from the Kansas State loss, a game in which he endured a mild concussion and threw four interceptions. Against Oklahoma, McCoy had one interception, which came when he scrambled free of a Sooner rush and threw for Charles in the flat during the fourth quarter.

"I thought Jamaal could have scored," McCoy said.

Instead, Charles tipped the ball, allowing Sooner cornerback Reggie Smith to pick off the pass at the OU 28. The timing could hardly have been worse, because at the time the Longhorns were trying to answer the Sooners' 94-yard drive.

Bradford, playing in his first game against Texas, was rarely flustered. He completed 21 of 32 passes for 244 yards and three touchdowns.

Perhaps the biggest stat of all was the zero turnovers for Oklahoma.

Bradford was well protected by his line, and he had the luxury of a consistent running game in the second half.

Allen Patrick, the Sooners' starting running back, was knocked from the game in the second half, but freshman DeMarco Murray, Patrick's replacement, ran for 128 yards.

He picked up more than half his yards on one play — a 65-yard touchdown run in the third quarter on which he avoided two Texas linebackers, then hurdled his own tight end. Murray's run gave OU a 21-14 lead.

Texas responded to Murray's touchdown with a nine-play scoring drive, punctuated by Vondrell McGee's 1-yard touchdown with 14:57 to go in the game.

But it was the last gasp for the underdog Longhorns, who in postgame interviews refrained from using the term "moral victory," although the game proved to be the most competitive in the series since OU beat Texas 12-0 in 2004.

Texas players said they hoped to regroup, to maintain this kind of play, to salvage something from the remainder of the season.

"It could have gone either way," said Texas defensive end Brian Orakpo. "Hats off to OU, they came ready to play. We did, too.

"Someone had to lose, and unfortunately, it was us."

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