**AUTO-MATICS**

**ASU KICKEER HITS GAME-WINNING FG IN CAMELLIA BOWL THRILLER**

**By Tim Gayle, Raycom Media Camellia Bowl Senior Staff Writer**

**MONTGOMERY –** Zach Matics still isn’t sure what happened on two missed field goal attempts in the first quarter. He just made sure history didn’t repeat itself on the game’s final play.

Matics drilled a 23-yarder through the middle of the uprights as time expired to lift Appalachian State to a 31-29 win over Ohio University in front of 21,395 fans at the second Camellia Bowl on Saturday night.

“The first two I missed, they were probably some of the better balls I’ve ever hit,” said Matics, a senior who came into the game perfect on all 57 extra-point attempts this season and 13 of 14 on field goals. “They went a little right. I couldn’t figure out what I was doing wrong. But my teammates were uplifting the entire game. I wasn’t going to miss that last ball left or right, I can tell you that right now.

“I still can’t tell you what I did wrong on those first two. Before I picked my head up, I could’ve sworn they were right down the middle. That last one, I was really focused on keeping my head down a little longer and just drive through it.”

The win topped the standard set in the inaugural game last year when MVP James Knapke threw a last-minute strike to Roger Lewis to lead Bowling Green to a 33-28 win over South Alabama in the annual matchup between the Sun Belt and Mid-American conferences.

This year, a 7.5-point favorite Appalachian State squad won its first-ever bowl game in its first year of Football Bowl Subdivision eligibility, dominating the first quarter before rallying twice in the final period to improve to 11-2, becoming the first-ever team in history to win 11 games in its first year of bowl eligibility.

“This is a new time and a new era for our program,” said Appalachian State coach Scott Satterfield, an assistant on the 2007 team that defeated No. 5 Michigan 34-32 in 2007. “We’re in FBS and we did all we could do this year. You win 11 games and you go to your first bowl game and you win that, we’re obviously going down in history at Appalachian State as one of the better teams that has ever played there.”

It didn’t look that way for a while. The Mountaineers (11-2) dominated Ohio in the opening quarter, but because of two misses by Matics, had only a 21-yard touchdown run by Taylor Lamb to show for it.

The Bobcats (8-5) relied on defense to grab a 17-7 halftime lead, scoring all of their points in a 71-second span. Ohio, which had managed just 43 yards on its first five possessions, drove 45 yards to a 36-yard field goal by Josiah Yazdani on its sixth possession of the first half, then got a little help from the Mountaineers.

On Appalachian State’s next play from scrimmage, middle linebacker Quentin Poling made his team-leading fourth interception count by returning Lamb’s pass 20 yards for a touchdown to give the Bobcats a 10-7 lead. Five plays later, center Jesse Chapman snapped the ball to Lamb as if the Appalachian State quarterback was under center when he was, in fact, in shotgun formation. Ohio defensive tackle Tony Porter recovered the fumble and two plays later A.J. Ouellette ran the final seven yards for a 17-7 halftime lead.

The Mountaineers saw the nightmare continue in the third quarter when Ohio linebacker Jovon Johnson pried the ball out of receiver Ike Lewis’ hands and ran 45 yards for a touchdown and a 24-7 lead.

“We were down 17 in the fourth? Wow. That’s unbelievable, to come back and win that,” Satterfield said. “Really, at halftime, we talked about how we can lay down now and we’ll get beat pretty bad or we can fight. Before I could even get the word ‘fight’ out, our kids were yelling ‘fight.’ So that’s what they did in the second half. No matter what circumstances that we faced in the second half, we never quit, we never panicked. In the game of football, momentum’s a funny thing. And I think we got that momentum and we just kept going.”

Appalachian State would rally quickly, scoring 21 points in less than two minutes as Lamb found tight end Barrett Burns on passes of 17 and 8 yards and Marcus Cox added a 26-yard touchdown run on the first play following an interception by Latrell Gibbs. Suddenly, the Mountaineers led 28-24.

But Jovon Johnson, who pried the ball from receiver Ike Lewis and ran 45 yards with the fumble recovery for a 24-7 lead, came up with the big play again for the Bobcats, stopping Marcus Cox for a 3-yard loss in the end zone for a safety. That, in turn, led to another Yazdani field goal with 1:47 left for a 29-28 Ohio lead.

It wouldn’t last. Lamb ran 32 yards to the Ohio 27 and five plays later at the Ohio 6, Matics took the field to atone for his earlier misses.

“Obviously, a tough game to lose,” Ohio coach Frank Solich said. “It would’ve been tough for either team. I thought it was two halves in terms of turnovers. They gave us a couple in the first half and we took advantage of those and we gave them a couple in the second half and they took advantage of those.”

Cox recorded his 22nd 100-yard game in the process, setting a bowl record with 162 yards on 24 carries. An injury kept the star on the sideline on the final drive, but his performance was enough to earn him the Bart Starr Most Valuable Player Trophy.

“The feeling is unreal,” Cox said. “It’s just an honor and a blessing to be able to win this (MVP) trophy, but without my teammates, my offensive line, my coaches, none of this is even possible.”

Satterfield admitted it would be difficult to top the Mountaineers’ inaugural bowl-eligible season in Football Bowl Subdivision after years of competing in Football Championship Subdivision. It may be just as difficult for his team to top its experience in the Capital City.

“Right from the start, on Tuesday when we got here, Johnny (Williams) and his (Camellia Bowl) staff did an outstanding job with this bowl game,” he said. “We don’t have a whole lot to compare it to, but if we’re fortunate to make it to another bowl, they’re going to have to really live up to the standards that they set here in Montgomery because it’s been phenomenal, not only for our staff but our players. I think everyone of our players would say the same.

“I told Johnny that on the (postgame) stage that, win or lose, it’s been a great week. It just so happens that we won so it’s been an unbelievable week for us.”