

No. 7 Buckeyes Hold Off No. 8 Kansas State, 35-28, For Fiesta Bowl Win

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January 2, 2004

TEMPE, Ariz.(AP) - Craig Krenzel carried the MVP trophy off the Fiesta Bowl field for the second year in a row.

His counterpart, Kansas State quarterback Ell Roberson, left knowing he might have cost his team dearly.

Krenzel, who finished his Ohio State career 24-3 as a starter, matched his career high with four touchdown passes - two apiece to Michael Jenkins and Santonio Holmes - and the No. 7 Buckeyes held off the eighth-ranked Wildcats 35-28 on Friday night.

Krenzel should love the Fiesta Bowl. He directed the Buckeyes' dramatic 31-24 double-overtime victory over Miami for the national championship a year ago.

"This group of seniors, we've been fielding questions all week about how are we emotionally going to get up for the game when it doesn't really mean anything," Krenzel said. "We found that to be a slap in the face. We didn't want to be a senior class that contributed to a national championship and lost our last two games."

Roberson got the start despite a sexual-assault accusation by a woman early Thursday. He was awful early in Kansas State's first Bowl Championship Series game, but nearly brought the Wildcats back from deficits of 21-0 and 35-14.

"I think his head wasn't in the game the first half," Ohio State defensive end Will Smith said. "I think they underestimated our speed on defense, but they made some good adjustments in the second half."

After a 3-for-13 start, Roberson completed 20 of 52 passes for 294 yards and one interception. He ran for 32 yards.

"How did he play? Not very well," Kansas State coach Bill Snyder said. "You saw in the second half he was a very competitive young man. Collectively, over the course of the ballgame, he probably didn't play too well."

Was Roberson affected by his off-the-field problems?

"I think that's probably the case," Snyder said. "But that's an excuse, and I don't mean it to be."

Roberson was not available for comment after the game.

Ohio State (11-2) led 35-14 entering the fourth quarter, but Kansas State scored twice. Maurice Mack's 37-yard kickoff return to the Ohio State 46 and Roberson's 19-yard pass to James Terry helped set up Ayo Saba's 3-yard run.

Roberson threw 24 yards to Davin Dennis to the Ohio State 15, and after a facemask penalty, Roberson sneaked over from the 1 to cut it to 35-28 with 2:47 left.

Kansas State (11-4) got the onside kick, but was called for a false start. Ohio State's Bobby Carpenter recovered the second onside kick and the Buckeyes held on.

The Wildcats had one more chance but Roberson's desperation pass from midfield was batted down at the 2. Kansas State started from its 8 with 1:12 to go, and Roberson's passing moved the Wildcats to the Ohio State 48.

Krenzel's four TD passes were his most in a non-overtime game. He had four in a triple-overtime victory over North Carolina State on Sept. 12, but three came in overtime. Krenzel - offensive MVP of last year's Fiesta Bowl national championship game - was 11-for-24 for 189 yards with two interceptions.

Jenkins had five catches for 96 yards to pass David Boston as Ohio State's career reception leader.

Ohio State, with the top-ranked rushing defense in the country, held All-American Darren Sproles to a season-low 38 yards on 13 carries.

Kansas State rolled into Arizona on a seven-game winning streak, the latest a 35-7 pounding of then-No. 1 and unbeaten Oklahoma in the Big 12 title game.

But the Roberson case was an ugly turn of events for Snyder, whose team appeared in its 11th consecutive bowl game.

A woman accused Roberson of sexual assault at the team hotel about 3:30 a.m. Thursday. Roberson acknowledged having sex, but said it was consensual. A police report was filed, and earlier Friday the university said its own investigation found no criminal wrongdoing.

Snyder allowed Roberson to start, but said the quarterback could face punishment for violating team rules. Whatever that punishment is will remain a mystery.

"Anything that happens within the confines of our program, it has been our policy to keep it in-house," Snyder said. "Indeed, I will always do that."

Krenzel became the second player to win consecutive MVP awards in the 33-year history of the Fiesta Bowl. Curt Warner of

Penn State did it in the 1980-81 seasons.

The Buckeyes gave up an average of 1.9 yards per carry this season, but were burned for 179 yards on the ground in their regular-season finale at Michigan.

They talked all week about regaining their reputation, then held Kansas State to 84 yards on the ground.

The Buckeyes' first score came when Harlen Jacobs blocked Jared Brite's punt and John Hollins returned it 7 yards for a touchdown.

"Any time you can have a big play in the punting game, it's probably the difference," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said. "I suppose if you look at the game and really analyze it, it was a tie game other than that."

Krenzel's 36-yard pass to Bam Childress set up his scrambling, 6-yard touchdown pass to Holmes that made it 14-0.

After Chris Gamble's interception at the Kansas State 17, Krenzel threw over the middle to Jenkins for a TD and it was 21-0 with 37 seconds left in the first quarter.

Kansas State's offense, which rolled up 519 yards against Oklahoma, finally showed some life with a 70-yard, 11-play touchdown drive, capped by Sproles' 6-yard run with 3:01 to play in the half.

Roberson threw 17 yards to Thomas Hill, then ran 14 yards for a score to slice the lead to 21-14 with 8:59 left in the third quarter.

But the Buckeyes took the kickoff and went 74 yards in nine plays to go up 28-14.