# UCLA Tops Northwestern, 50-38

Contributed by Sun Bowl Web Admin
Thursday, 29 December 2005

UCLA Comes Back From Huge 22-Point Deficit To Top Northwestern, 50-38, at 72nd Annual Vitalis Sun Bowl

EL PASO, Texas - Brandon Breazell put the perfect wild finish on a wacky 72nd Annual Vitalis Sun Bowl.

Twice, in fact. Breazell returned two onside kicks for a pair of highlight-reel touchdowns and Drew Olson recovered from an awful first quarter by throwing three TD passes, leading BCS No. 16 UCLA to a 50-38 win over BCS No. 25 Northwestern at Sun Bowl Stadium.

"I won't be able to watch it on TV because we'll be on the plane going home," Breazell said. "I hope somebody records it for me."

This wasn't the first time Breazell had a hand in a thrilling victory. He caught a 21-yard touchdown pass in overtime after the Bruins (10-2) scored 21 points in the final seven minutes of regulation for a 30-27 win at Stanford on Oct. 29.

"The one against Stanford was fun, but this was really big, coming in the Sun Bowl," Breazell said. "At least I got something out of El Paso. It felt great."

The Wildcats (7-5) pulled within 36-31 with 2:29 remaining when Brett Basanez threw a 9-yard touchdown pass to Mark Philmore, but Breazell - a receiver lined up to make sure the Bruins kept the ball - returned the ensuing onside kick 43 yards.

After Basanez added a 5-yard TD pass to Shaun Herbert with 23 seconds remaining, Breazell struck again by taking the next onside kick for a 41-yard score, punctuating the highest-scoring Sun Bowl ever.

"The first one, I was kind of stunned," Breazell said. "When I got to the end zone, I saluted the troops I saw in the stands. The second one, I was real anxious. I wanted it so bad. My mind was going in 100 directions."

Nobody involved with this year's Sun Bowl had seen it happen twice in one game, let alone within such a short span.

"When they returned the first one, we said, ‘OK,'" Basanez said. "When they returned the second one, we said, ‘Well that's interesting. I've never seen that before.'"

It was a fitting ending to a crazy afternoon, where the teams combined to set 11 Sun Bowl records.

It figured to be a wild day, as both teams came in ranked among the national leaders in offense but among the nation's worst defenses. Sure enough, the Wildcats set a record with 584 total yards and the teams combined for another record with 1,037 yards.

But the kickoff returns? It seemed like too much, even in such a wacky setting.

"They were high-hoppers, and he's right there on the front of the line," said UCLA coach Karl Dorrell, who won his first bowl game on the third try. "The first touchdown looked easy. The second one, he had to think on his feet. It was just heads-up play."

Said Wildcats coach Randy Walker: "I can't explain it to you. We have a play for when that happens. That kick isn't easy to execute."

The Bruins also overcame three first-quarter interceptions by Olson, who threw three all season while setting a school record with 31 TD passes. They erased a 22-0 early deficit and survived an injury to star tailback Maurice Drew.

"I don't know if I've ever had a game quite like that one," Walker said, still looking for the school's first postseason win since beating Cal in the 1948 Rose Bowl. "We've played a lot of games like that, so I guess I should learn to expect things like that."

With Drew limited to punt returns after a first-half shoulder injury, Chris Markey finished with 150 yards rushing and Kahlil Bell added 136 yards -- career highs for both.

Olson had an ugly start, going 2-of-8 for 15 yards with three interceptions. He remembered hearing "almost laughter" after his third, which Nick Roach returned 34 yards to put the Wildcats ahead 22-0.

"It was almost a joke," said Olson, who finished 10-of-24 for 143 yards.

But Olson regrouped, guiding the Bruins to 29 unanswered points. He threw a 58-yard TD strike to Ryan Moya and Bell scored on runs of 5 and 6 yards. Then Olson added an 8-yard TD pass to Marcus Everett late in the first half as the Bruins took a 29-22 lead.

"We had no choice but to go out and battle back," Olson said. "The fact that we went down by 22 in the first quarter and were up by seven at the half ... it was one at a time."

With Drew sidelined much of the first half, Markey filled the void as UCLA established a ground attack. He opened one drive with runs of 24 and 51 yards, setting up Bell's 6-yard TD, and had 120 yards rushing by halftime.

Basanez was 38-of-70 for 416 yards passing with two TDs and two interceptions for Northwestern, while freshman Tyrell Sutton, who averaged 126 yards rushing per game this season, had 84 yards.

"We let so much get away from us early," Basanez said. "We didn't play well enough to win."