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## Tulane Green Wave falls short against SMU Mustangs 26-21

**By The Times-Picayune**

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UNIVERSITY PARK, TEXAS -- Tulane needed a big defensive stop late and a last-minute miracle.

It got neither Saturday, as SMU rallied from a one-point deficit for a 26-21 win over the Green Wave at breezy Ford Stadium.

Tulane closed the season 3-9, 1-7 in Conference USA.

"They made a few more plays than us at the end, and that's what got us," Tulane Coach Bob Toledo said after his team's eighth consecutive conference road loss.

Tulane scored the go-ahead touchdown with 10:06 to play on Andre Anderson's 1-yard sprint off left tackle before the Mustangs began their winning drive.

SMU's Shawnbrey McNeal scored his second touchdown of the day on a 4-yard run to make the Mustangs (7-5, 6-2) eligible for their first bowl game since 1984.

It was the third consecutive defeat for the Green Wave, which lost six of seven to close the season.

"I never thought it would be November, and we'd still be looking for our fourth win," Tulane linebacker Travis Burks said.

After taking a 21-20 lead, Burks and the Green Wave defense allowed a nine-play, 68-yard drive, with McNeal doing the bulk of the damage. The transfer running back from Miami had five carries in a row, including a 21-yard run to the Tulane 20.

McNeal's 4-yard touchdown run with 5:23 remaining four plays later turned out to be the difference. Tulane committed three penalties on its next possession after driving to the SMU 47-yard line.

The biggest flag came after Jeremy Williams caught a pass on third-and-8 for an apparent first down. But Williams was penalized for offensive pass interference, and the Green Wave drive stalled when Ryan Griffin's deep pass for Williams on fourth-and-22 from his 34-yard line fell incomplete with 11 seconds to play.

"We had more than enough time to go down and score," said Griffin, who threw for 216 yards and a pair of touchdowns on 18-of-26 passing. "That was totally on me."

Griffin played the second half with a sore thumb, injured when he hit his hand on an SMU helmet on a first-half pass.

It was the theme of the day for the Green Wave, which lost starting cornerback Phillip Davis to a leg injury on the first play, and fullback Anthony Duplessis, who left midway through the second quarter with an ankle



John F. Rhodes / The Dallas Morning News

Tulane's Jeremy Williams scores on a 46-yard reception on the second play of the third quarter, beating SMU's Rock Dennis. The touch 'down cut the Mustangs' lead to 17-14, but they eventually prevailed 26-21 on Saturday.

injury and did not return.

"We had a bunch of guys get hurt, " said Toledo, who brought 19 freshmen on the trip. "We were playing with four freshmen DBs and two freshmen linebackers most of the second half."

After tying the score at 7 on its opening possession, Tulane fell behind 17-7 at the half.

SMU took the opening kickoff and drove 80 yards in 11 plays, taking a 7-0 lead on McNeal's 2-yard run. The score came one play after quarterback Kyle Padron found Emmanuel Sanders behind the Tulane secondary for a 30-yard gain on fourth-and-4.

The Green Wave answered, driving 68 yards and tying the score with a 5-yard toss from Griffin to Williams. Griffin came out sharp, hitting all four passes on the drive, and Tulane got a key 7-yard run from Anderson out of the Wildcat formation at the SMU 23-yard line.

Matt Szymanski's 31-yard field goal gave SMU a 10-7 lead, and Tulane punted on its next three possessions. In between, Padron hit Sanders for a 75-yard pass to set up a 3-yard plunge by fullback Zach Line for a 17-7 lead with 2:57 remaining before the half.

SMU could have had more, but Szymanski pushed a 31-yard field-goal attempt wide right as the first-half clock expired.

Tulane came out firing in the second half. Griffin and Williams connected on a 46-yard touchdown pass on the second play of the third quarter to pull the Green Wave to 17-14. Williams ended the day with five catches for 74 yards and two touchdowns.

Szymanski kicked a 37-yard field goal late in the third quarter to make the score 20-14 before the momentum swung in Tulane's favor. SMU Coach June Jones opted for a 58-yard field-goal attempt with a stiff breeze at Szymanski's back. The kick was long enough, but was wide to the left.

"It was a gutsy call by their coach, " Griffin explained. "It gave us great field position, because we didn't have good field position all day."

Tulane began the drive at its 41 and Griffin hit tight end Brock Sanders for 41 yards on first down. Seven plays later, Anderson scored from the 1 to give the Green Wave its first lead of the day at 21-20.

"After we scored we felt like we could get the ball back and run the clock out, " said Anderson, who carried 27 times for 105 yards, giving him 1,016 yards on the season. He is the fourth player in Tulane history to rush for 1,000 yards. "But they went down and scored, and we had to come back out and score."

SMU's turnaround from 1-11 to 7-5 is the biggest improvement in college football this season.

"Coming in when we were at the bottom and being a part of the rise is a great feeling, " said McNeal, who led all rushers with 147 yards on 26 carries. "It's been a great road and it's not over yet."

For Tulane, the loss ended its seventh straight losing season since going 8-5 in 2002.

"I'm disappointed we didn't win more football games, " Toledo said. "I'm disappointed we didn't win for the seniors. I think we made some inroads."

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