

What a Brawl it was!

Unbelievable Pick 6 give Pitt the win 38-3

Coaching Decisions, Last Second Call contribute to loss

WVU to Host Kansas next Saturday Night

The Mountaineers gave it all they had against a very good Pitt Panthers football team but in the end came up 7 points short in the 106th edition of the Backyard Brawl. Another 4th quarter loss is a tough pill to swallow for Mountaineer Nation but in the end it was a very solid effort for WVU other than a couple of critical mistakes, some bad luck and what I believe to be disappointing coaching decisions by 4th year head coach Neal Brown.

When WVU hired coach Brown away from Troy University Trojans after 4 seasons as their head coach posting a 31-8 record the last 3 seasons with 3 bowl game victories. By all accounts Neal Brown was one of the hot names that was ready to take over a Power 5 program but after 3 seasons at WVU, including of course the shortened covid season his record at West Virginia stands at just 17-19 and has a lot of Mountaineer fans thinking perhaps the challenges of Big 12 completion and recruiting may be too much for the 42-year-old coach who still lacks the so-called signature victory as the leader of the WVU football program. He certainly could have had one this past Thursday and in my humble opinion let it get away from him.

Most of the National Football analysts felt that Pitt was brought too much back from last season ACC Championship team, especially on the offensive and defensive line and that the game could be close early but eventually the Panthers would pull away from the Mountaineers and win comfortably. That didn't happen and Coach Brown does need to be commended for having the team prepared

to play and even win this football game, however he also has to be held in question for some of the in-game decisions most notably the decision to punt late in the 4th quarter on 4th down and less than a yard at the Pitt 48-yard line with 6:17 to go in the game and the Mountaineers leading 31-24 when a first down in that situation would have most likely led to a WVU victory. The way that the big 240lb freshman tailback C.J. Donaldson had ran the ball all game long it seemed at least to this Mountaineer fan that he would be a good bet to pick up that 1st down and keep the Mountaineers drive alive. WVU could have easily run off another 3 or 4 minutes off the clock and at that point they would have only needed another 15 yards to get into field goal range and allow senior kicker Casey Legg to give WVU a 10-point lead and basically ice the game.

Even after the punt and the subsequent 7 play 92-yard TD drive by the Panthers to tie the game at 31-31 WVU got the football back with 2:29 to go in the game at their own 25 and C.J. Donaldson ran for 14 yards to the Mountaineer 39-yard line but on the next play J.T. Daniels threw a very safe pass to WVU star receiver Bryce Ford-Wheaton who was all alone but the pass bounced off his chest right into the arms of Pitt safety

M.J. Devonshire who returned it 56 yards for a pick six and just like that Pitt took the lead 38-31. Again, even though this was a safe pass to a wide-open receiver who already had 9 catches for 97 yards and 2 TDs

With what should have been his easiest catch of the night instead it was a mental error of trying to run before you catch the football. However, my thinking was Why pass at all? Again, the Mountaineers had nearly 200 yards rushing and Pitt had no real answers for the young freshman Donaldson and I believe they could have run the football into position for a game winning field goal as time expired. Another reason not to throw if you don't have to is that Mountaineer receivers had shown a tendency to drop the football in key situations. I believe there were 5 or 6 dropped passes in the game and in such a pressure situation of a game

winning drive and the Mountaineers ability to run all game long I believe they needed to make Pitt stop them on the ground.

Even after the pick six the Mountaineer offense got the ball back with 2:38 to play at their own 25 and drove 47 yards on 8 plays all the way down to the Pitt 28 and on 4th and 16 J.T. Daniels appeared to produce a miracle completion to sophomore Reese Smith at the goal line and for a second I thought we might see overtime in this classic battle but a review of the play it was ruled that Smith didn't control the football at the play was ruled an incomplection and that was the game. These things tend to happen to the Mountaineers late in high profile football games and I guess it is what it is. I will say that obviously if WVU continues to play that hard and run the football that well they will certainly win some football games and again go to a bowl.

I will be in Morgantown next Saturday evening for the Kansas game and I am really looking forward to seeing if the Mountaineers continue to progress. I cannot wait to see if the big freshman tailback C. J. Donaldson Jr is the real deal that he certainly appeared to be rushing for 125 yards on just 7 carries for an unbelievable 17+ yards per carry and a big 5-yard 3rd quarter touchdown where he pushed his way into the endzone the very first play after he blocked a punt to set up the score and give the Mountaineers a 17-10 lead. Tony Mathis also ran for 71 yards on 17 carries, many of which were tough yards. I also believe that despite average numbers (23 of 40 for 214 yards and two TDs) by the high-profile Georgia transfer quarterback J. T. Daniels the improved quarterback play was very apparent the entire game.

We all know the old adage that teams make their greatest improvement between game one and game two.