

Fields' 6 TDs Lead No. 3 Buckeyes To 49-28 Win Over No. 2 Clemson



Justin Fields answered his critics with a performance for the ages when he threw for 385 yards and six touchdowns as third-ranked Ohio State downed No. 2 Clemson 49-28 in the CFP semifinal at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans on Jan. 1.

The Buckeyes (7-0) will play Alabama on Jan. 11 for a shot at their second national title since 2014.

Clemson (10-2) led 7-0 and 14-7 before the Buckeyes reeled off 28 unanswered points for a 35-14 halftime lead and led 49-21 early in the fourth quarter.

Fields completed 22 of 28 passes with one interception and ran for 42 yards as the Buckeyes had 639 total yards. Trey Sermon ran 31 times for 193 yards, Chris Olave made six catches for 132 yards and two TDs, and Jeremy Ruckert had a pair of touchdown receptions for the Buckeyes.

Trevor Lawrence engineered an 82-yard, eight-play opening series in 2:50 for Clemson that culminated in his 2-yard TD run for the 7-0 lead.

He was 4 of 5 for 72 yards on the drive. He hit Travis Etienne for 26 yards on the third play from scrimmage and later, facing a third-and-5 from the OSU 32, Lawrence found Cornell Powell for 27 yards along the left sideline to the 5. Etienne then gained 3 yards on the ground before the Lawrence score.

After exchanging three-and-outs, on their second possession starting from their own 23, the Buckeyes responded in a hurry, needing only three plays that required 72 seconds.

Fields hit Olave for 11 on a slant, then Sermon caught a pass out of the backfield and went 34 yards to the Clemson 32. On the next play, he ran through a hole on the left side for a TD to make it 7-7 at 7:59 of the first quarter.

Back came Clemson when it got the ball. Braden Galloway had a 15-yard catch before Amari Rodgers and Etienne had 16-yard grabs. A 15-yard run by Lyn-J Dixon put the ball at the 3, and Etienne ran it in from there for a 14-7 lead with 5:01 left in the first.

OSU then moved 75 yards in six plays and 3:25 to tie the score at 14 with 1:36 left in the eventful first quarter when Fields tossed an 8-yard scoring strike to Luke Farrell for the tight end's first TD of the season.

A 47-yard diving catch by Garrett Wilson had given the Buckeyes the ball at the 8, but a 2-yard

loss on a run by Sermon and a false start left OSU facing second-and-goal from the 15. Fields used his legs for 7 yards before the score.

After a Clemson punt that put Ohio State at its own 16 to start the second quarter, the Buckeyes tore big chunks in the Tigers' defense beginning with a 11-yard pass to Olave. Sermon rushed for 14, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba caught a 12-yarder to the Clemson 36 when the Buckeyes needed 4 on third down.

Fields ran his way for 17 to the 19, and Sermon carried for 2 to set up a well-designed 17-yard touchdown to the tight end Ruckert to put OSU ahead 21-14 at the 10:35 mark. Fields rolled left then threw back to an open Ruckert to complete the nine-play, 84-yard, 4:16 series.

A targeting call reared its head again, but unlike in last year's 29-23 loss to the Tigers in the semifinal when OSU cornerback Shaun Wade was ejected late in the second quarter, the Buckeyes benefited this time.

Fields threw his third TD to extend the score to 28-14 with 5:12 left in the second, but how OSU got there was the story. Sermon had a 30-yard gain to the 27 but on third down from the 30 and looking at 13 yards to move the chains, Fields took off for 11 but was tackled hard in the midsection by linebacker James Skalski.

The play was reviewed and Skalski was ejected for targeting because he led with the crown of his helmet. The penalty placed the ball on the 9, but Fields was injured and C.J. Stroud came in to hand off to Sermon for no gain. Fields then returned and connected with Olave for the score on the ninth play of the 75-yard drive that consumed 4:25 off the clock.

Fields, Sermon and Co. took a 35-14 advantage into the locker room when Ruckert, who had the only three TDs this season by the tight ends coming into the game, made the catch on a second-and-10 from the 12 for the score. Ruckert earlier had a 26-yard reception on the 12-play drive that went 80 yards in 3:09. Sermon added 32 yards on six carries.

The Tigers were without safety Nolan Turner, whose interception of Fields in the waning seconds last year secured the win, for the first half after he was ejected for targeting vs. Notre Dame in the second half of the ACC championship game.

Fields in the first half was 16 of 18 for 220 yards and ran seven times for 53 as the Buckeyes amassed 394 total yards. Sermon rushed for 121 yards on 17 attempts. Clemson had 201 yards through two quarters.

The Buckeyes got the ball to start the second half and were in position to blow it wide open after a 36-yard catch by Olave to the Tiger 14. But on third-and-8 from the 12, Mike Jones intercepted a tipped Fields pass in the end zone.

It inspired Clemson to march 80 yards in nine plays and 3:49 to pull to within 35-21 on a 10-yard TD pass from Lawrence to Powell at 7:56. Powell had a 29-yard catch to the 10 two plays earlier.

With the momentum in Clemson's favor, the Buckeyes began their next series from the 9 after botching the kickoff.

On third down with 10 still to go, Fields tossed a pass out to Sermon and he rambled 14 yards to keep the drive alive. Freshman Miyan Williams relieved Sermon and had runs for 6 and 15 yards followed by no gain at the OSU 44. That's when Fields stepped back and lasered a 56-yard TD to Olave down the middle to up the count to 42-21 with 4:55 left in the third. It was a 91-yard sequence that used 3:00 and seven plays.

Clemson's next drive ended in a turnover at the OSU 43 when Tommy Togiai strip-sacked Lawrence for 3 yards and Justin Hilliard pounced on the fumble.

After an exchange of punts, Fields delivered another masterful ball to Jameson Williams for his sixth TD, a 45-yard strike with 14:03 left in the game to make it 49-21. It was the second play of the series. The first was Sermon's 14-yard gallop.

Lawrence threw a 26-yard TD pass to Powell to move the Tigers to within 49-28 with 10:42 to

play on a third-and-16. The big play was a third-down pass interference call on Wade at the OSU 20.

Clemson reached the OSU 35 midway through the fourth only to have Lawrence absorb a 13-yard sack by Tyreke Smith. Lawrence fumbled on the play, but the Tigers recovered. After a 15-yard pass to the 33 to Powell, two incompletions followed and the Buckeyes took over.

OSU punted and Clemson was headed for a cosmetic score when on fourth-and-6 from the 8 Sevyn Banks made an interception in the end zone and returned it 38 yards with 1:30 left. Ohio State then ran three plays to finish off the victory.

Ohio State was once again without several key players among the 16 listed as unavailable by the school. Included were starting guard Harry Miller, second-leading rusher Master Teague and defensive ends Zach Harrison and Tyler Friday.

It's unclear how many absences were COVID-19 related, although Teague was injured during the Big Ten title game vs. Northwestern.

Clemson offensive coordinator Tony Elliott missed the game because of the virus.