

Notre Dame 24 OT



Mike Warren/DN
Nebraska I-back Dan Alexander rushes through the Notre Dame defense for 28 yards for a touch down with 8:47 left in the third quarter, putting NU up by 21-7.

Crouch helped make game one for the record books

BY JOHN GASKINS

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — History, tradition, mystique ... those things don't really mean a thing when it comes to the outcome of most football games.

But most games aren't No. 1 Nebraska versus Notre Dame, at Notre Dame Stadium, with the whole world watching and waiting for something memorable to happen.

And when you're the No. 1 team in the country and playing against a proud but fallen program starving to resurrect itself, with a mammoth image of Jesus spreading his arms in the form of a touchdown signal lording over you, it's hard not to feel mystified.

"The atmosphere out there was just second to none," NU quarterback Eric Crouch said. "It was what college football was all about. It's the kind of things you dream up."

A dream game for the players, coaches and fans. A dream game for any Hollywood scriptwriter.

The Big Red faithful — including around 15,000 of the 80,232 fans — stomped on the grounds of college football's sacred shrine Saturday afternoon as if they owned the place.

But by the fourth quarter of the Huskers' one-for-the-ages 27-24 overtime

victory, the dream swiftly turned into a nightmare. The luck of the Irish — and history — seemed to have turned against Nebraska.

A kickoff and a punt return for touchdowns that tied the contest at 21 in the fourth quarter had not only awakened a crowd and nation full of Irish pride, it squandered what had been domination on both sides of the ball and the early path to a national title for NU.

In the end, Touchdown Jesus, the ghosts of Knute Rockne and the Gipper and the legends of the Four Horsemen and Rudy couldn't stop Crouch, and neither could the Notre Dame defense.

Down by three points in overtime, the junior Heisman Trophy hopeful rescued Nebraska from the grasp of history and wrote his own, completing a gutsy third-and-nine pass to Tracy Wistrom for a first down, and then scampering into the end zone two plays later to clinch the win, all with Touchdown Jesus hovering right above him.

"Those are the kind of games you dream of," Crouch said, "the kind of games you want all the time. You don't want them until you're done with them."

Eric Crouch

NU quarterback

there. It means so much more than I ever thought it would have."

The dream turned into a nightmare right after Crouch and Co. had seemingly started to put the game in check midway through the third quarter. The Huskers had just completed a crisp, four-play, 59-yard drive in less than two minutes with a 28-yard Dan Alexander touchdown.

Then Dan Hadenfeldt kicked off to Irish tailback Jarius Jones, who promptly went goal line to goal line almost unscathed, taking a tidal wave of Irish magic with him.

Two minutes into the fourth quarter, it struck again. Hadenfeldt punted this time, and Joey Getherall returned the boot up the middle — 83 yards for the score.

Two kicks, two returns, two scores, tie game.

And one very bewildered coach.

Please see GAME on 12

ND coach doesn't regret overtime call

BY JOSH CAMENZIND

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Notre Dame went toe-to-toe with the No. 1 team in the nation for 58 minutes and 53 seconds. And then came the decision by Irish Coach Bob Davie to sit on the ball in the last 1:07.

Tied at 21 with Nebraska, Davie opted to take his chances in overtime. And he paid for it.

"It was the right decision," said Davie, who said he would go for it again 10 out of 10 times. "We had a quarterback that had completed three passes up to this point. I don't think any magic was going to come down from the sky and all of the sudden we are going to throw the football up in the air."

"I would do that again and I didn't ask anyone's opinion on that. That was my call."

But nobody second-guessed the coach after the game — not even his own quarterback.

"I don't think they wanted to squander an opportunity to go ahead and take them into overtime and beat them," Arnaz Battle said. "We didn't want any turnovers on our side of the field to give them good field position and kick a field goal."

Cornerback Brock Williams backed his coach, even though it meant facing the Husker offense at least one more time.

"I guess I agree with that deci-

sion because he is my coach, and that is who I stick behind," he said. "If we would have stepped it up in overtime, we would have won the game."

Battle, Williams and ND had fought back from a 14-point deficit to knot the game at 21 after a Joey Getherall punt return with 12:48 left in the fourth quarter.

The punt return touchdown was the second special teams miscue for the Huskers after giving up a 100-yard kickoff return for a touchdown and taking a 21-7 lead at the 8:47 mark of the third quarter.

Davie said the two returns were huge for his team and the momentum of the game.

"From that point on, I don't think there was anybody on our sidelines that didn't think we would win that game," said Davie, whose team racked up 317 total yards on kick returns. "I never felt the whole time from that point on that we would not win that football game."

Instead of making the upset a reality for himself, the university and the fans, Davie's team failed to capitalize in the extra period.

After the Cornhuskers won the coin toss and elected to play defense, the Irish took the ball facing the north end zone and its own student body. ND was able to gain a first-and-goal on the NU



Notre Dame tailback Julius Jones returns a Nebraska kickoff past kicker Dan Hadenfeldt for 100 yards in the third quarter, making the score 21-13.

eight-yard-line after a 15-yard run by Battle. Julius Jones rushed twice, gaining three and one yards, respectively, and Davie was faced with third and goal from NU's four-yard-line.

"It was a boot action," Battle said. "They had two defenders that were free, and I didn't have time to set up. It was just one of those plays where they had a great call."

Battle was sacked for a seven-yard-loss on the play, and ND was forced to take a three-point lead with a Nick Setta 29-yard field goal.

Please see NOTRE DAME on 12

Gameday Notebook

With the win, Nebraska raised its record in overtime to 3-0. Nebraska defeated Missouri in 1997 and beat Colorado last season, but Notre Dame was the only ranked opponent (No. 25) of the three. ND fell to 0-3 in overtime games, losing previously to Air Force and USC in 1996.

NU quarterback Eric Crouch rushed for three touchdowns for the third straight game. His 62-yard TD run in the first quarter tied his longest rush of his career and was the longest TD rush of his career.

"Right when they called it I said it was going to the end zone. I didn't question Coach Solich's call one bit. They (ND) were going to try to plug the middle up and we ran right outside of them," said Dominic Raiola of Crouch's game-winning score.

Joey Getherall's 83-yard punt return touchdown was the

first against the Huskers since 1988, when UCLA's Darryl Hennley took one back 75 yards.

The Irish had won their previous two contests versus No. 1 teams. It beat Miami 31-30 in 1988 and Florida State 31-24 in 1993.

ND Coach Bob Davie on the amount of Husker fans in Notre Dame Stadium: "I think that red must be a pretty bright color because the 4,000 that were there really stood out."

When asked to name one crucial play that kept the Irish in the game, Arnaz Battle pointed to Getherall's punt return and Julius Jones's 100-yard kickoff return TD. "The offense was struggling, and the defense was playing hard and special teams came through. They gave us the opportunity to win."

Compiled by Josh Camenzind

"I guess I agree with that deci-

ND then gave the ball to Nebraska for an ending that will go down in history. Huskers quarterback Eric Crouch converted a crucial third-and-nine when he passed over the middle to tight end Tracey Wistrom for exactly nine yards.

NU's Dan Alexander would take his team down to the seven with an eight-yard run. Crouch then sealed the win and broke Irish hearts with a touchdown scamper of seven yards around the left side.