



BOISE STATE 43, OKLAHOMA 42

Playbook Full of Tricks Gives Boise State Dramatic and Defining Victory



Running back Ian Johnson's two-point conversion in overtime sealed a Fiesta Bowl victory over Oklahoma and gave Boise State a perfect 13-0 record.

By PETE THAMEL
Published: January 2, 2007

GLENDALE, Ariz., Monday, Jan. 2 — After a hook-and-lateral, a Statue of Liberty play and a halfback toss launched the Boise State football team to an upset that will long resonate in college football lore, the star tailback Ian Johnson might have saved the night's most memorable surprise for the postgame interview.

Division I-A
Scores: [Top 25](#) | [All Div. I-A Bowl Dates](#) | [Statistics Conferences and Teams](#)
[2006 B.C.S. Rankings](#)
[A.P. Poll](#) | [USA Today Discuss College Football](#)
Small Colleges
[Div. I-AA](#) | [Div. II](#) | [Div. III](#)

With the national television cameras focused on him after the chaos of Boise State's 43-42 overtime victory over Oklahoma in the Fiesta Bowl on Monday night, Johnson proposed to his girlfriend, the Boise State cheerleader Christine Barbara Popadics. Popadics was so stunned and thrilled that she could barely speak. Just like everyone else watching.

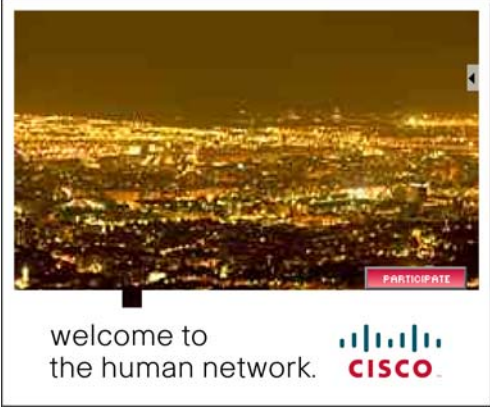
"She had no idea it was coming," Johnson said.
Neither did Oklahoma. Johnson's proposal capped a dizzying, riveting, back-and-forth game that will be remembered as one of the most exciting in college football history. Boise squandered an 18-point second-half lead, tied the score with seven seconds remaining on a hook-and-lateral play, then used two more trick plays in overtime to cap a perfect 13-0 season. (Ohio State is the only other undefeated team.)

"This probably goes down in the history of college football," Boise quarterback Jared Zabransky said. "It can be argued



Ross D. Franklin/Associated Press
Jerard Rabb's dive into the end zone completed a hook-and-lateral play by

Next Article in Sports (1 of 19) »



MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

1. [An Appreciation: From Father to Son, Last Words to Live By](#)
2. [Free Will: Now You Have It, Now You Don't](#)
3. [Music of the Hemispheres](#)
4. [Op-Ed Contributor: Folly's Antidote](#)
5. [Questions Couples Should Ask \(Or Wish They Had Before Marrying\)](#)
6. [The Energy Challenge: Power-Sipping Bulbs Get Backing From Wal-Mart](#)
7. [Editorial Observer: Middle School Girls Gone Wild](#)
8. [Op-Ed Contributor: Another Last Chance to Change Your Life](#)
9. [Lock the Library! Rowdy Students Are Taking Over](#)
10. [A Century Later, Los Angeles Atones for Water Sins](#)

[Go to Complete List »](#)



Travel
nytimes.com/travel

[An interactive map of the best places to go in 2007](#)

- Also in Travel:
- ➔ [2007 party destination of the year](#)
 - ➔ [2007 family destination of the year](#)
 - ➔ [2007 adventure destination of the year](#)

Boise State that sent the game into overtime.

as the best game ever.”

The lasting memory of the game will most likely be the combination of three crazy trick plays — called Statue, Toss Halfback Pass and Circus. But the lasting effect — with a team that plays on blue turf competing against one of college football’s bluebloods — may be the removal of doubt about whether teams from smaller conferences can beat champions of the six major conferences.

No one can doubt the daring of Boise’s play-calling.

On the final play, Broncos Coach Chris Petersen decided to leave his offense on the field for a 2-point conversion attempt after Boise matched Oklahoma’s touchdown to open overtime.

The call was for “Statue,” in which Boise lines up with three wide receivers stacked on the right side.

The real guts by Petersen and Bryan Harsin, Boise’s 30-year old offensive coordinator, may have come with sticking with the play after Oklahoma Coach Bob Stoops called a timeout. Boise went with the same look, with the stacked right side, showing a formation from which they often throw a wide receiver screen.

Instead, Zabransky faked a screen pass to Legedu Naanee on his right, then hid the ball behind his back with his left hand. Johnson never moved, staying frozen until the fake was properly sold. Johnson then broke left against the grain of play, grabbed the ball from behind Zabransky’s back and strolled untouched around the left side into the end zone. The final 2 yards of his 101-yard night will forever be remembered in Boise history.

The 2-point conversion made it 43-42 and set off a wild celebration on the Boise sideline and in the stands, where a majority of the 73,719 fans were decked out in Bronco blue and orange.

“We needed a play like that to get it over with,” Petersen said after the game with a smile.

But the two plays that got them there may have been even more creative. After Oklahoma tailback Adrian Peterson took the first play of overtime 25 yards for a touchdown, Boise needed to convert on a fourth-and-2 from the 5-yard line.

Things got crazy, though, when Zabransky left his usual spot under center and broke in motion to the left.

Vinny Perretta, a tailback who hadn’t thrown a pass all year, then lined up under center and threw a 5-yard touchdown pass to tight end Derek Schouman. That call was for “Toss Halfback Pass,” and it was the first time Boise had run it in a game this season.

“We’ve been practicing it for the past month or so, and it couldn’t have worked out any better,” said Schouman, who also caught a 10-yard pass on third-and-8 to extend the overtime drive.

Just to get to overtime, though, Boise pulled off perhaps the grandest of its three trick plays. On fourth-and-18 play from midfield, the Broncos called a hook-and-lateral play, “Circus.” They think so little of it that they hadn’t run it in a game or practice all season.

They only did it while goofing off during informal Friday walk-through sessions. And even then it didn’t really work.

“Usually we just run it when we’re joking around,” Schouman said. “I never thought that we’d actually run it, never mind for a touchdown.”

Boise lined up with three wide receivers to the right and Drisan James alone on the left. James caught the ball about 12 yards from the line of scrimmage, with the defense playing soft to prevent him from getting a first down.

The New York Times STORE



Football's Greatest Games Commemorative
[Buy Now](#)

The key to the play was James's ability to fake that he was going to try and run for a first down. He tucked the ball and ran about 4 yards, which drew all the Oklahoma defenders toward him. Then he pitched the ball 4 yards behind him to Jerard Rabb, who had run over from the cluster of receivers on the other side of the field.

"I didn't even want to look after I pitched it," James said.

But the pitch went seamlessly, and Rabb knew almost instantly that James had executed the perfect fake.

"When he caught it, he sucked the defensive backs, safeties and corners, they all came straight to him," Rabb said. "He held it just long enough for me to escape around the side.

"As soon as I got the ball and took about two steps, I was gone. Other than the time I was getting chased by a pit bull, it was the fastest I've run in my life."

Rabb's mad dash to force overtime with seven seconds left also chased away some of Boise's demons. Thanks to Paul Thompson's four turnovers, which included a pick-six by Boise defensive back Marty Tadman and a fumble deep in Oklahoma territory, Boise was able to build a 28-10 third-quarter lead.

But Oklahoma gutted its way back into the game, and scored two touchdowns in the final 90 seconds of regulation to go ahead. The first score came on a 5-yard pass from Thompson to Quentin Chaney to cut the Boise lead to 28-26. The drama came on the 2-point conversion; Oklahoma attempted it three times, thanks to a pass-interference call on Boise and a pre-snap motion penalty on the Sooners. On the third play, Thompson found Jauquin Iglesias in the end zone to tie the score at 28-28.

Oklahoma cornerback Marcus Walker then seemingly decided matters when he returned an interception 33 yards for a touchdown with 1:02 remaining.

"The game isn't over until the clock hits zero," Walker said in a stunned Oklahoma locker room. Many players wept openly. "But you would think the game is over then, right?"

By then, it had only just begun. And on a deeper level, the Broncos were able to legitimize the very game that they were permitted to play. For the first time this season, there are five B.C.S. games this season instead of four because the smaller conferences fought hard for access to the B.C.S. and won.

In one surreal night, the long battle spearheaded by Tulane's president, Scott Cowan, seemed worthwhile.

"The gap is decreasing fast," Johnson said. "The smaller schools are going to start getting recognition now. Just because we haven't been around forever doesn't mean we don't play great football."

Johnson and his teammates showed the college football establishment they have a few tricks up their sleeves. And if you don't believe him, just ask a certain Boise State cheerleader.

[Next Article in Sports \(1 of 19\) »](#)

[Need to know more? 50% off home delivery of The Times.](#)

Ads by Google

what's this?

[Free Boise State Jersey](#)

Get Your Broncos Football Jersey & Get Ready For The Game. Act Now!
Sports-Fitness-rewardpath.com

[Idaho Nursing Schools](#)

Complete directory of Idaho nursing schools.
www.allnursingschools.com





Get Ringtones Now

Download ringtones. Enter number and get tunes!
Ringtones.DownloadRings.com

Tips

To find reference information about the words used in this article, hold down the ALT key and click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

Related Articles

-  COLLEGE FOOTBALL; Longhorns' New Quarterback Leaves Own Mark on Rivalry (October 8, 2006)
-  COLLEGE FOOTBALL; RED RIVER REUNION (August 27, 2006)
-  COLLEGE FOOTBALL PREVIEW; Teams to Watch (August 27, 2006)
-  COLLEGE FOOTBALL; Oklahoma Coach Defends Decision to Cut 2 Players (August 4, 2006)

Related Searches

- Football
- University of Oklahoma
- Johnson, Ian
- Walker, Marcus

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



TimesSelect



Haberman: Always Time for a Change

TECHNOLOGY »

Risks Seen in Web Sites With No Rules

Live video chats with no restrictions are gaining popularity among young users.

HEALTH »



Medical Sleuths of Last Resort

WORLD »



French Join Sleep-In Over Homelessness

TimesSelect

Vecsey: Different Play-Callers Lead to the Same Place

MOVIES »



Moviegoers Say 'Enough' to Weighty Issues