

## Northwestern defense stuns No. 20 Utah 31-20 in Holiday Bowl

Escrito por Administrator

Lunes, 31 de Diciembre de 2018 22:48

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SAN DIEGO (AP) Northwestern converted three Utah turnovers into 21 points in a dizzying nine-minute stretch in the pouring rain in the third quarter of the Holiday Bowl on Monday night, including Jared McGee's 82-yard fumble return for a touchdown, to stun the No. 20 Utes 31-20 Monday night.

The Wildcats (9-5) scored 28 points in the third quarter to win their third straight bowl game under coach Pat Fitzgerald. The Green Bay Packers reportedly want to interview Fitzpatrick for their head coaching job.

Senior Clayton Thorson became the all-time leading passer for Northwestern, going 21 of 30 for 241 yards for 10,731 career yards. He broke Brett Basanez's school record of 10,580. Thorson threw for two touchdowns and was intercepted once in making his 53rd straight start for the Wildcats, the most by a quarterback in Big Ten history. He is the program's all-time winningest quarterback at 36-17. He was replaced after taking a hard shot midway through the fourth quarter.

Utah (9-5) cruised to a 20-3 halftime lead behind redshirt freshman quarterback Jason Shelley before it all fell apart in the third quarter. Shelley had two interceptions and a fumble.

On the opening drive of the second half, Shelley threw the ball right to Northwestern's Blake Gallagher. Thorson's 52-yard pass to Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman set up his 4-yard scoring toss to Riley Lees.

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The Utes had the ball first-and-goal at the 6 when Shelley rolled right, was hit from behind by Joe Gaziano and fumbled. McGee picked it up on the third bounce and ran down the sideline untouched for an 82-yard return that pulled the Wildcats to 20-17.

The Utes advanced to the 30 and looked like they had enough for a first down on a catch by Jaylen Dixon, but he was stripped by Trae Williams. JR Pace recovered and returned it 34 yards. Two plays later, Northwestern took a 24-20 lead when Thorson threw a 20-yard touchdown pass to senior offensive lineman Trey Klock, a key player in goal line and short-yardage situations.

Northwestern added another touchdown in the third quarter when Lees scored from 8 yards out for a 31-20 lead.

Pace had a second interception in the third quarter, on a deflected pass.

Shelley was making his fourth start in place of Tyler Huntley, who broke his collarbone against Arizona State on Nov. 3. He resumed practicing before the bowl but coach Kyle Whittingham said it would have taken a miracle for him to have played. Also out were leading rusher Zack Moss, leading receiver Britain Covey and leading tackler Chase Hansen, a senior.

Shelley threw a 27-yard touchdown pass to Jaylen Dixon and a 4-yarder to tight end Jake Jackson, both in the first quarter.

Utah lost for the just the second time in their last 16 bowls dating to 1999. Coach Kyle Whittingham's bowl record dropped to 11-2. He was trying to become the first to win the Holiday Bowl as a player and coach. He played in the first four Holiday Bowls with BYU, going 2-2. He was inducted into the Holiday Bowl Hall of Fame in 2009.

THE TAKEAWAY

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Northwestern: The Wildcats had minus-6 yards rushing at halftime and didn't get into positive until late in the third quarter.

Utah: Shelley was impressive with his passing and his scrambling until running into trouble in the third quarter.

### UP NEXT

Northwestern: The Wildcats will wait to see if Fitzpatrick does indeed get an interview with the Packers. And they'll have to replace Thorson, who leaves with a legacy as the the most productive quarterback in program history. The Wildcats will be back on the West Coast to open the 2019 season at Stanford on Aug. 31.

Utah: After winning their first Pac-12 South title, the Utes could be poised for a run at the league championship, if they can stay healthy. They'll get Moss and Covey back, and there could be a spirited QB competition between Huntley and Shelley. The Utes open the 2019 season with their rivalry game against BYU, at Provo on Aug. 29.