

Redemption of Faith in a Kicker:

Navy 24, Pitt 21--

As Time Expired, Navy's Nick Sloan Kicked a FG for the Win!

By Buddy Wellborn, N* USNA '59.

October 26, 2013. From Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium, Annapolis, Maryland, the Midshipmen of the U.S. Naval Academy were hosting the Panthers of the University of Pittsburgh for a football game, which was broadcasted by ***CBS College Sports***. Our USNAAA TGCC-gang gathered to cheer for Navy as we watched the game together on TV at the *Diablo Loco Sports Bar* in Houston, Texas.

This was Navy's ***Homecoming*** weekend, and there were 37,094 in attendance including the Brigade of Midshipmen-- in Service Dress Blue. It was a sunny 52-degree Saturday Fall-afternoon in Annapolis by the Bay. There was a light land-breeze of 5 knots out of the northwest, and the field was dry and fast.

Summary. This was anybody's game literally right up to the last tick of the clock when Navy's Placekicker, Nick Sloan, redeemed himself with a 30-yard FG attempt that split the uprights and won the game for Navy. [Yes ma'am, you could call it *faith* in his eye-to-toe connection.]

It was close: Pitt 3-0, Navy 7-3, Pitt 6-7, and Pitt 13-7 at the Half. After a scoreless 3rd Quarter, the clock ticked down in the 4th Quarter as Navy made it 14-13, but then Pitt scored making it 21-14 with a 2-point conversion. Navy came back to make it 21-21—with 04:15 left to play.

Now hear this, that's about time for 10 plays at the 25-second rate. Well, Navy's D stood to the fore and held them to a 3&out—and, to a TOP of 1'35". Pitt's punter hit the ball badly off the side of his foot-- and the ball went out of bounds after only 20 yards. It was Navy 1st&10 at midfield on the P-49-- there was 02:17 remaining.

Albeit there were some 37,000 fans with their hearts in their throat, there were 22 young men on that field giving their all with their hearts in their hand.

Drama? With a bunch of tired 20-year olds performing on stage? And, with Navy's ***Drive Pinion*** Keenan Reynolds [abbr. KR] operating about 50 %? Oh yeah, that's drama!

C'mon man, give it up-- what you got?

Whatever! Navy drove 36 yards to the P-13 in 12 plays at a hurried double rate of a little less than 12 seconds per play—TIMEOUT with 00:01 left on the clock.

Okay Nick, front and center-- it's ***Show Time!***

His 30-yard FG attempt was ***Dead Solid Perfect! Navy Wins! Navy Wins! Navy Wins!***

[Yes ma'am, nod your head, smile—and, walk away!]

Stats. Navy was 3 of 3 scoring in the Red Zone [2 TD's and 1 FG], having a total offense of 325 yards with 47 rushes for 220 yards with 2 TD's, and 8-18-1 passing for 105 yards with 1 TD, all in a TOP of 25:54. Navy was sacked 1 time for a -10-yard loss, and was penalized 4 times for 27 yards. Navy had 1 turnover having fumbled once, but recovered it, and was intercepted once with no return. Navy punted 5 times for a 36.8 ypp average

Pitt had a total offense of 338 yards [13 yards more than Navy] with 38 rushes for 135 yards and 20-27-0 passing for 203 yards all with a TOP of 34:06. Pitt was 3 of 3 in the Red Zone [2 TD's and 1 FG, as was Navy]. Pitt was sacked once for a -7-yard loss, and was penalized 7 times for 45 yards. They too had 1 turnover having lost 1 of 1 fumble, but no interceptions. Pitt punted 4 times for a 35.2 ypp average

Opinionated Critique. Should the Powers-That-Be at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium at the end of the game, before the singing of Navy Blue & Gold, have cued up and played Etta James singing *At Last*? [It was 28 years ago on 26OCT1985 that Navy last beat Pitt 21-7.]

As I sat there though after this unexpected [by me] upset victory, my mind was not hearing Dandy Don singing *Turn out the Lights, the Party's Over*, in that those lights were on bright until Nick Sloan's kicked-ball sailed true through the uprights as time expired. What I was imagining was Frank Sinatra solemnly singing *Bring in the Clowns* for Pitt's solace, in that either Murphy had plagued them more, or that Navy's D had held them to 21 points. It was a *solemn* thought

But, I recovered from the *Dreamscape* fantasy, pushed away my now-flat 4th Quarter beer, nodded my head, smiled, got up, and walked away. The realization was that a "W" is a "W" on which Navy (4-3) must now get at least two more, inclusive of one over Army for the CINC Trophy. And, Navy's next page turns to *Touchdown Jesus* in South Bend, and ND's record-setting QB. So, reef sail, Shipmates, and prepare to come about, knowing that:

Five Star Heart Trumps Five Star Talent.

Narrative. Kickoff was at 1300 ET. Navy had won the toss and deferred. Pitt received and Navy defended the South End Zone. [Note: The wind was out of the NW at 5 knots, so Navy would have the wind at their back in the 2nd and 4th Quarters.]

Navy's kickoff was to the P-0 for a touchback. Pitt opened the game with a 1st&10 on the P-25, and steadily drove 68 yards in 7'36" with 12 rushes for 55 yards and 2-3-0 passing for 13 yards before stalling out with a 4th&4 on the N-7. Pitt's 25-yard FG attempt was good, and with 07:28 remaining in the 1st quarter, it was:

Pitt 3, Navy 0.

Apparently Pitt's kickoff was miss-hit in that it only carried 34 yards and Navy returned it 6 yards to the N-37. Navy promptly went 3&out in 3 carries after netting only 3 yards in 3 rushes with a TOP of 1'58". After a penalty for a *False Start*, it was 4th&12 on the N-35 as Navy's Pablo Beltran boomed a punt for 47 yards to the P-18—**and no return**. [Check: Punt-game Okay.]

After 7 plays, and two back-to-back penalties, Pitt was 4th&3 on the P-39 and punted 37 yards back to Navy. The punt was downed on the N-24 where it would be Navy 1st&10.

Navy went 3&Out, and punted 33 yards to the P-34 where it was downed.

With a 1st&10, Pitt lost -1-yard and they were 2nd&11 on the P-33 as the Quarter ended:

End of the First Quarter: Pitt 3, Navy 0.

As it is said: *Time goes by fast when you are having a good time.* [WAFM: *Good Time-- Who?*]

Pitt relentlessly was driving the ball, until the most dreaded ***Drive Killer*** of them all came calling on their camp—***TURNOVER!*** One of Navy's *Big 's*, back-up NG, Travis Bridges, N**'14, 6-0/318, knocked the ball loose at the LOS and back-up ILB, Don Pearson, USNA'16, recovered it at the N-42. Way to go, Guys! That should be an ***igniter!***

By golly, Miss Molly, it hit the fan for Pitt. Talk about bad bounces and good bounces being *relative* to the beholder, consider that KR's pass on the first play after the turnover, was tipped—but then caught by Navy's streaking SB Marcus Thomas running full out and he scored on a 58-yard pass play. The PAT was good [hold that thought] and with 13:07 left in the Half, it was:

Pitt 3, Navy 7.

[My cousin O'Toole says that when ___ it misses you and hits the other guy, just smile and walk away—and, let them deal with their own s___ (a euphemism).]

Pitt returned Navy's kick-off 14 yards to the P-23. Pitt stepped up to the bar with a clean set of downs and said words to the effect, *Bartender, Bartender, save my soul.*

In 3'44" with 8 plays, 4 of which were rushes for 19 yards and 2 of 4 were passes for 32 yards, Pitt drove 51 yards before stalling out with a 4th&3 on the N-26. Pitt's 44-yard FG attempt was good, and with 09:23 remaining in the Half, it was:

Pitt 6, Navy 7.

Pitt's kickoff sailed into the End Zone for a touchback, and it was Navy 1st&10 on the N-25. Navy went 3&out and punted 34 yards to the P-26 where it was fair-caught.

[Yes ma'am, Pitt came to play, in that embarrassment by a failure can be an incentive to succeed; whereas, demonstrative punishment can dissuade reoccurrence of a wrongful act—I'm just saying.]

With forethought and fortitude, in 5'13" Pitt drove 74 yards with 5 rushes for 10 yards and 4 of 6 passes 64 yards. There were offsetting penalties by both teams for a net loss to Pitt of -2 yards, but with 3rd&goal they scored with one of those completed passes. The PAT was good, and with 01:41 left in the Half, it was:

Pitt 13, Navy 7.

Navy's Marcus Thomas returned the kickoff 24 yards to the N-27. KR's pass was incomplete, but SB Darius Staten turned the wide right-side corner for 13 yards. KR's pass to Brendan Dudeck was good for 8 yards, and it was 2nd&2 on the N-48-- TIMEOUT NAVY [Clock at 01:05].

Navy's SB Demond rushed for 6 yards and a Navy 1st down across midfield. KR's pass was complete to Casey Bolena for 6 yards, and then KR rushed for 7 yards off the edge-- an another Navy 1st down. After two incomplete passes, KR rushed for 10 yards, and it was Navy 1st&10 on the P-23. There was 00:28 left on the clock.

[Waxing: Pitt knows that Navy will pass to the back of the End Zone [no brainer], so they will play their DB's back, and have their DL's rushing hard with reckless abandon. Sooooooooooooo, why not have the off-side SB in motion to the left to run a swing as the SB and WR on that side run a post and a fly respectively into the end zone. The offside WR runs a shallow slant across the middle. This is a counter roll-out play-action pass that has to elude the off-side crashing OLB such that the ball is out of the QB's hand in less than 3 seconds. The outlet is the FB who has leaked out into the short off-side flat. If he is not open, then throw it at his feet. I'm just saying.]

In real life, KR's pass to his WR Casey Bolena [6-2/210] was hurried and went incomplete. With 2nd&10, and less than 20 ticks left on the clock, KR did it again, but the Pitt DB jumped the route and intercepted it on the P-1. Pitt had dodged a bullet, and let the clock run out.

End of the Second Quarter: Pitt 13, Navy 7.

Okay, there was a lot of football yet to be played in this game.

IMLO, Navy can stop Pitt's Offense, and can read their Defense. Adjustments should be made accordingly.

Be that as it may, I am still really concerned about KR's health. His drive to succeed is there but his speed and quickness are not 100%, and neither is his passing motion to step up and throw with a hip and chest turn. **[I'm just saying.]**

Pitt's kickoff to open the 2nd Half sailed into the End Zone for a touchback. Navy promptly went 3&out and punted 34 yards to the P-38 where it was fair caught.

In turn, Pitt promptly went 3&out and punted 41 yards back to Navy and Shawn Lynch returned it 4 yards to the N-19.

Navy went 3&out again, and punted 36 yards to the N-49 where it was fair caught.

Then, Pitt went 3&out again—replete with a *False Start* penalty—and, punted 43 yards to the N-11 for a 1-yard return, but then fumbled and recovered it on the N-9. **[Dodged a bullet, aye.]**

C'mon O, let's go! The clock is ticking with 07:43 remaining in the 3rd Quarter.

Okay, they got the memo! In 8"15" and 16 grinding plays, Navy tirelessly drove 91 yards to score. In that the drive carried over into the 4th Quarter, it was still at the

End of the Second Quarter: Pitt 13, Navy 7.

Navy completed 1 of 2 passes for 12 yards, and rushed 14 times for 79 yards, including a 9-yard counter sweep for the score by the back-up FB, Quinton Singleton, USNA'15, 6-0/204.

The PAT was good, and with 14:28 left to play, Navy took the lead:

Pitt 13, Navy 14.

Well, this was not a Shootout as I had predicted in that both Defenses are making it tough on the opposing Offense.

Navy's kick-off sailed into the End Zone for a touchback, and it was Pitt 1st&10 on the P-25.

Now, it was Pitt's turn, and they steadily drove 75 yards in 11 plays of which 5 were for 23 yards and 6 of 6 were completed passes for 52-yards including the 3-yard pass for the score. And, Pitt went for the 2-point conversion and made it. With 08:07 left in the game, it was:

Pitt 21, Navy 14.

Okay, okay, the first thing that Navy had to do was match that score—then worry about giving the Devil the hind-most. [This was *Crunch-Time* for *Cool-Hand Luke*.]

Pitt kicked off into the afternoon wind to the N-13 and Navy's Marcus Thomas returned it 16 yards to the N-29.

Hi-ho, hi-ho, it's off to work we go—as Navy's O took the field. Whatever they had, they would have to put it all out on the field—and not leave anything inside to rot.

[I so wanted to be able to look into their eyes to see it, that is that glint of *Determination*, as defined on a plaque in their locker room, to wit: *The Difference between the Impossible and the Possible is in a Man's Determination*.]

Okay, Navy's back-up FB Quinton Singleton rushed for 2 yards [where are Copeland and Swain?], then SB Darius Staten made 10 yards at the corner. KR passed incomplete, and then completed a 10-yarder to his WR Casey Bolena. KR completed a swing pass to his FB for 5 yards.

FB Chris Swain came back in, and made 6 tough yards through the beef in the phone-booth for another Navy 1st down. KR made 5-yards off the edge, and then threw an incomplete pass.

You know I labeled KR as Navy's ***Drive Pinion***. Well, I can tell you that he's hurting, but he has got ***True Grit*** in that there ain't no quit in him. He is the leader personified in every way for this Navy Team. He is not going to let down his teammates—and, they are not going to let him down. That's the way it works in a ***Brotherhood***.

Somehow, someway, hurting like hell, he ran and jibed 31 yards to the P-2. Then behind his beef, he wedged in for the score. The PAT was good, and with 03:52 on the clock, it was awash:

Pitt 21, Navy 21.

Now is this a game, or what?

Navy's kickoff sailed into the End Zone with wind [see why Coach Ken deferred]. It was Pitt 1st&10 on the P-25—with 232 ticks left on the clock. Go D, leave it on the field!

Pitt went 3&out. I had to stand up, and raise my glass—flat beer as it was. **Navy's D did it!**

Pitt's punter obviously miss-kicked and his punt went short [20 yards] and right out of bounds on the P-49. [A little *angst*, *aye*.] There was 02:17 left on the clock.

Doubtless, Pitt would be tackling the ball to strip it, so Navy should keep ball handling in sure-hands—and, safe. Navy should strive to get the ball at least into their placekicker's, Nick Sloan's, comfort zone, like inside the P-30. This next series of plays won the game for Navy, and therefore I'm going to post all 11 of them one at a time for your review:

- (1) KR rushed of 6 yards to the P-43.
- (2) KR rushed 1 yard to the P-42.
- (3) FB Quinton Singleton rushed 4 yards to the P-38 and a 1st down*
- (4) KR rushed 3 yards to the P-35. **TIMEOUT NAVY: 01:03.**
- (5) KR passed to SB Marcus Thomas for 6 yards, **out-of-bounds on the P-30.**
- (6) KR rushed for 4 yards to the P-26, **and a 1st Down.***
- (7) SB Marcus Thomas rushed 6 yards, out of bounds on the P-20.
- (8) KR rushed for 2 yards to the P-18.
- (9) FB Chris Swain rushed 3 yards to the P-15 and a 1st down*
- (10)KR spiked the ball to stop the clock. Navy 2nd&10.
- (11)KR rushed for 2 yards to the P-13. Navy 3rd&8. **TIMEOUT PITT: 00:01.**
[Meant to freeze the kicker.]
PK Nick Sloan's 30-yard FG attempt was good.

Game Over: Pitt 21, Navy 24.

*[Note: Albeit the clock stops when first downs are made, it stops just long enough to move the chains.]

Scouting Report. Navy (4-3) next plays Notre Dame (6-2), an Independent in the FBS, in South Bend, IN, at 1530 EDT, Saturday, 02NOV2013. The game will be televised nationally by NBC.

Currently the spread favors Notre Dame giving Navy +17.5, the largest spread of the year

ND won 45-10 over Air Force this past Saturday. ND won its opener 28-6 against Temple then lost 30-41 against Michigan. They won 31-24 against Purdue, won 17-13 against Michigan State, and then lost 21-35 to Oklahoma. They then bounced back to win a close one 37-34 against Arizona State, and another close one 14-10 against USC.

- **Albeit they won't be making a run this year for the BCS Championship, the preseason prediction is for them to have a 11-2 season, and get an invite to play in one of the four BCS bowl venues—BUT, they must win out.**
- **Revamping? Yes! Offense has replaced just about every key star of note— BUT, there is plenty of great young talent helped by a terrific recruiting class.**
- **QB controversy? No, QB development at ND is a given for Coach Kelly— for instance, when Everett Golson flunked out, Tommy Rees stepped right back up— again! And, he is now on a Notre Dame statistical record breaking run.**
- **The running game will be solid with George Atkinson III running behind a re-tooled OL. And, Ben Koyack has the look of the next great Irish TE to pair with #1 WR T. J. Jones— they will light up the End Zone!**
- **Defense once again is rock solid— despite the loss of Manti Te'o. Veterans all who know what they are doing— and, can do it as well as anyone.**

= L [4-4]

Epilogue. Air Force (1-7) lost 10-45 to Notre Dame (6-2) next play Army (3-5) in Colorado Springs at 1200 EDT [1000 MDT], this coming Saturday 02NOV2013.

Army was off this past Saturday for their mid-season bye-week, and the Black Knights next play Air Force in Colorado Springs at 1200 ET [1000 MDT], this Saturday 02NOV2013.

Navy Football a Proud Tradition!

GO NAVY!

