



2009 Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl - An Overall View

By Troy Phillips, www.armedforcesbowl.com

Fort Worth, Texas, December 31, 2009 - Considering a cold front, frigid light rain and overcast skies moved into the North Texas region early Thursday afternoon, the seventh **Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl** could have been awash in empty seats.

That didn't happen, as Air Force (8-5) picked up its first bowl victory since 2000 with a 47-20 victory over Houston (10-4) in a rematch of last year's BHAFB. Air Force avenged last year's loss to the Cougars and pushed the Mountain West Conference to 4-0 in bowls with TCU waiting to finish the league's postseason in next week's Fiesta Bowl.

"As well as those guys played today, the best stuff they're going to do is what they'll do after they graduate from the United States Air Force Academy," said drink-tub drenched Air Force coach Troy Calhoun, pointing at his team as it hoisted the BHAFB championship trophy.

A crowd of 41,414 fans saw Air Force's No. 1-ranked pass defense intercept Houston quarterback Case Keenum six times and the Falcons roll up 563 total yards, including 420 rushing. The day's notable guest, Admiral Michael Mullen, U.S. Navy, swore new active-duty recruits into all branches of the military at midfield at halftime and reminded everyone why the BHAFB's mission is unique.

"It went great," BHAFB executive director Brant Ringler said. "The weather was a little unkind to us as far as cloud cover. We weren't able to get the flyovers in that we wanted, but as far as game, it was fantastic. Air Force obviously came ready to play and gave us a good game."

For the third time in seven BHAFB's, Houston brought a sea of red-clad fans and helped give the game – along with Air Force's blue-clad fans – one of its best crowds ever. Of the college football postseason's first 16 games played (not including three remaining or in progress on Thursday), the BHAFB had the sixth-highest attendance.

"Weather always plays a part," Ringler said. "You can't control it. We're happy with what we had today and expect it'll continue to grow."

Ringler pointed out that considering the bowl matched two teams from the previous year, the weather and the current economy, the crowd was a good one.

"You can look at other bowls our size that have the same size stadium, and their numbers are down," he said. "It's good to show that the community is out there supporting what we're doing."

Houston broke a long bowl-victory drought by beating Air Force in last year's BHAFB. Air Force's last bowl victory had come in the 2000 Silicon Valley Classic.

"I'm neutral, even though Air Force has been here so many times," Ringler said. "Air Force finally got its win. Keenum didn't have a great day with six interceptions, but got its bowl win last year. Everybody always says defense wins championships, and it looks like the No. 1 pass defense prevailed over (Houston's) No. 1 offense today."

Troy Phillips - Now a freelance writer based in the Fort Worth area, Troy covered various teams and beats for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* for 17 years, including Texas Tech, Baylor, TCU, North Texas and small colleges. Among several bowls Troy covered (Rose, Holiday, Cotton, Texas, and Galleryfurniture.com) were the last three Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowls. He covered high schools at two smaller papers and the S-T after graduating from TCU in 1990, and covered the debut of Major League Soccer in North Texas when FC Dallas (then the Dallas Burn) arrived on the scene. For more than a decade, Troy was part of coverage teams at the region's two PGA Tour events, the HP Byron Nelson Championship and the Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial and for years was one of the S-T's backup golf writers. In 2009, he was named Sportswriter of the Year by the Lone Star Conference. He has a master's degree (1995) from the University of North Texas.





Warzeka misses command but still delivers for AFA

By Jim Benton, www.armedforcesbowl.com

Fort Worth, Texas, December 31, 2009 - Jonathan Warzeka disobeyed an order of sorts Thursday but nobody at the Air Force Academy minded one bit.

Warzeka returned a kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown early in the third quarter to enable Air Force to maintain its momentum that led to a 47-20 upset victory over Houston in the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl.

Air Force saw its 18-point halftime lead cut to 24-13 when Houston's Tyron Carrier returned the opening kickoff of the second half 79 yards for a touchdown which had fans at Amon G. Carter Stadium anticipating a Cougars comeback.

Warzeka, however, had a different idea.

The 5-foot-9 sophomore from Lake Elsinore, Ca. didn't see teammate Asher Clark tell him to down the kickoff in the end zone. Instead he broke three tackles and got loose for the first Air Force touchdown on a kickoff return in 297 games since Scott Thomas' scoring return against Utah in 1985.

"It was one of those things, we were up a little bit because of the wind and the next thing I know it's (kickoff) over my head," Warzeka explained.

"Asher, the other returner, told me to stay but I didn't get the call so I turned and tried to make something out of nothing. The next thing I know is there was open space and I just took it."

Warzeka's return was the longest ever in a Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl game and the first special team touchdown in a bowl game in Air Force history.

Air Force outscored the Cougars 20-7 the rest of the game to notch its first bowl victory since a 37-34 win over Fresno State in the 2000 Silicon Valley Bowl.

The Falcons, playing in its third consecutive Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl, notched its first win over at Amon G. Carter Stadium after four losses to TCU and two bowl setbacks in Fort Worth.

"We were ready," Air Force coach Troy Calhoun said. "When we got here Saturday, you could just sense something about our guys. I thought two years ago, we were extraordinarily giddy to be here."

"Last year we were a little bit wide-eyed at some spots. This week we were good at practice. These guys, there's nothing they wanted to do more than a win."

Calhoun could look at all phases of the Air Force game to find heroes.

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Air Force, the nation's fourth leading rushing team with a average of 273.3 yards per game, ran for an Armed Forces Bowl record 402 yards and threw for another 161 yards to finish with 563 yards total offense, a new Armed Forces Bowl standard.

Warzeka carried the ball six times for 35 yards, caught three passes for 45 yards and returned five kickoffs for an Armed Forces Bowl best of 175 yards.

Fullback Jared Tew set an Armed Forces Bowl record with 173 yards rushing and two touchdowns on 26 carries. Asher Clark, voted Air Force's Most Valuable Player, added 129 yards on 17 carries and scored twice.

Quarterback Tim Jefferson outdueled Houston's heralded signal caller Case Keenum.

Jefferson rushed 16 times for 37 yards and one touchdown and completed 10 of 14 passes for 161 yards and didn't throw an interception.

"Ever since last year when we lost the game here (34-28 to Houston), I felt I didn't throw the ball well enough in that last drive to get us down the field to score points," Jefferson said. "I committed over the summer and during the season to work on my passing. I think it finally paid off.

"I know everybody was talking about Houston's offense, how potent they are, and I was flying under the radar. That's what I wanted to do. I didn't want my name out there because then I would have felt a lot more pressure on my shoulders. My performance today, I think I played pretty well."

Air Force's defense play very well, limiting Houston's nation total offense attack to 331 yards, 250.2 yards below its season average.

Keenum, the NCAA leader with an average of 419.2 passing yards per game, completed 24 of 41 passes for 222 yards and was intercepted six times by the Falcons.

Senior defensive back Chris Thomas led the Falcons with 10.5 tackles and also had two interceptions. Anthony Wright wound up with an Armed Forces Bowl record three interceptions and Jon Davis had one pick.

"It all goes into the preparation," Thomas said. "Coach did a great job of putting us in the right spots to make plays."

Air Force finished the season with an 8-5 record and Thursday's win could set the tone for next season.

"We're going to be a much better team in the future," Jefferson said. "Other teams in our conference (Mountain West Conference) who were watching this game know what they will be going against next year."



Jim Benton - Jim Benton was a sportswriter for the Rocky Mountain News in Denver for 41 years until the paper folded last February. He started as a high school beat writer four decades ago. Since then, he has covered a variety of sports including college football, basketball and hockey, professional hockey, football, baseball and basketball, tennis, golf, bowling, soccer, horse racing and NASCAR. Benton is a Denver native and a graduate of the University of Denver.



Cougars never find offensive form against Air Force

By Brian Hilderbrand, www.armedforcesbowl.com

Fort Worth, Texas, December 31, 2009 - There was no mistaking the look in the eyes of the Houston Cougars following their 47-20 loss to Air Force on Thursday in the Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl.

It was a look of shock. Or, considering the theme of the bowl, perhaps shell-shocked is a better term.

Houston, which led the nation in total offense with a high-octane passing attack, never got on track against the Falcons. The Cougars' offense appeared flat from the outset as Houston fell behind early in the second quarter as Air Force intercepted quarterback Case Keenum twice on passes that were tipped.

By halftime, Houston had failed to post a touchdown and trailed 24-6. It proved to be a hole out of which the Cougars never would climb.

Keenum finished with a career-high six interceptions and shouldered the blame for the loss in his brief post-game remarks.

"We've got to give Air Force all the credit," Keenum said. "I'll take all the blame. It's not the way I want to send the seniors out and I apologize to all of those guys. They played their hearts out and they deserved better than that.

"I apologize that it wasn't ended the right way. Things didn't roll our way today. We made a few mistakes and they capitalized. But it's over and that's the best part of that game."

Houston head coach Kevin Sumlin refused to place the blame on his quarterback, who completed 24 of 41 passes for 222 yards and one touchdown.

"Obviously we were a little off," Sumlin said. "But (Air Force) had a lot to do with that, too. Without reviewing it, they played very, very well and took advantage of the opportunities they had and created some opportunities on their own. You know, we turn the ball over like that, you can't ever expect to win any game.

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"No, (Keenum) wasn't sharp today. We weren't sharp today at all; I think that's pretty obvious. It takes more than one or two guys. To win games like this, to win **all** games, it takes a team effort. Don't get me wrong – we were outplayed today, I don't think there's any doubt about that."

Linebacker Marcus McGraw, who led Houston with 10 solo tackles, was at a loss to explain why the Cougars came out so flat in the game and could never fight their way back.

"We weren't ready to play," McGraw said flatly. "They came out ready to win and we didn't bring our A game and they did. They did everything to the 'T,' from their defense to their offense. They did everything we expected, we just didn't do our job. They ran the ball like we (knew they would) on offense and we just had to stop them and we didn't do that."

Houston cornerback Brandon Brinkley, who set a team record by playing in his 53rd consecutive game, also said the Cougars weren't focused from the time they took the field.

"Air Force was making the plays and we weren't and they were capitalizing off of them," he said. " (That was a result of us) not being focused, not going into the game ready to play, I guess. We just let them do whatever they wanted to. They run the ball, that's the whole key to their game: run, run, run and then go deep. It was real hard to try and stop **all** of it."

The Falcons' top-rated pass defense held Houston to 22 yards passing and 331 total yards while their offense, led by quarterback Tim Jefferson and running backs Jared Tew and Asher Clark, racked up 563 yards.

In the end, it was Houston's six turnovers that cost the Cougars a shot at an 11-win season.

"The tempo in their favor came from the turnovers," Sumlin said. "If you look back at **all** of our losses this year, it's been directly turnover-related, (and our) inability to get off the field on third down. There were some critical third downs defensively that we didn't get any stops, had a chance to get off the field, turned the ball over.

"You add those two things up in any college football game right now, any football game, and it's a recipe for non-success."



Brian Hilderbrand (bgh5959@aol.com) - Brian Hilderbrand, who will be covering the **Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl** for www.armedforcesbowl.com currently is a media consultant and freelance writer in Las Vegas after spending more than 30 years as a sports writer covering high school, collegiate and professional sports in Southern California and Nevada. He began his journalism career in 1974 -- while still in high school -- covering local sports for his hometown Placentia (Calif.) Courier. A Cal State Fullerton alumnus, in 1979 he joined the sports staff of the Anaheim Bulletin, where his beats included the California Angels and Los Angeles Rams. After a brief stint at the Orange County edition of the Los Angeles Times, he moved to Las Vegas in 1986. He covered minor-league baseball, golf, motorsports and UNLV football during a 22-year career with the Las Vegas Sun.

BOWL NEWS

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Quotes from Admiral Michael Mullen Chairman of U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff

"It truly is great to be here. It is even greater to have two service academies playing bowl games the same day. These games are watched worldwide. These are great institutions, and there is outstanding interest from football fans everywhere in these bowls.

"I just came back from a week overseas, and the personnel over there have been following football closely. From the Pentagon throughout all bases, we are very proud of the Air Force and Naval Academies - and the athletics teams. When we speak to the academies' student-athletes, we try to remind them whom they represent. We remind them how proud we are of them. That was my recollection of the advice our superiors gave us at the Naval Academy - be aware of what you represent. Most of the time in college athletics, our service academy teams come in routinely as underdogs, but they realize how hard they need to work to be successful.

"While I was in Afghanistan recently, I spoke with a captain who had played center for the Air Force football squad. We talked about the **Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl** and my trip to Fort Worth. Our academy teams know that their mission is serving the country, and the people who surround them, their teammates and classmates are making a difference in the world.

"I had a chance to speak with Air Force's 15 seniors who will be graduating from the Academy in six months and reminded them they need to grow where they are planted. They will be figuring what they need to do next, and they will have a great future. We tell our graduates to keep their options open and make life decisions based on that.

"I have had a great time with the people in Fort Worth and am looking forward to a fine football game."

Admiral Michael G. 'Mike' Mullen, the 17th Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, accepted the **2009 Great American Patriot Award** on behalf of the men and women of U. S. Armed Forces. Armed Forces Insurance Chairman Col. Tom Dials (U. S. Army, Ret., www.afi.org), the sponsor of the award and the Official Insurance Partner of the **Bell Helicopter Armed Forces Bowl**, presented the award for the U. S. Armed Forces to Admiral Mullen.

