

Deseret News, Sunday, January 26, 2003

Toledo QB Jones leads Midwest to Paradise win

By Jay Hinton

Deseret News sports writer

ST. GEORGE — University of Toledo coach Tom Amstutz called it.

Amstutz, who was a spectator and not a coach at Saturday's 2nd Annual Paradise Bowl, said the Midwest team — quarterbacked by his own Brian Jones — would win.

With his team trailing by a point with 2:38 left, Jones proved him right.

Jones engineered an eight-play, 81-yard drive and hit former Millard High and Kentucky star Aaron Boone with a 39-yard strike to lead the Midwest to the 36-31 victory.

"He saw Will (Bratton) and me in the backfield, and he knows what we are capable of doing. He knows we were crunch-time players for him," said Jones, who was named the game's Most Valuable Player. "He has a lot of faith in us."

On the game-winning drive Jones completed 6 of 8 passes. He also made up for a fumble on the previous drive that led to a West touchdown, which gave it a short-lived lead.

"I ran a good ol' out and up, and he (the cornerback) bit on it. He jumped hard on it and it was over from then," Boone said of the game-winning play.

"It was one of those balls you just want to come down as soon as possible."

Boone pulled his quad muscle a week ago, and he wasn't certain how much he would play Saturday, but he made the best of his time. He finished with three catches for 68 yards.

"It was awesome. The Utah boy finishing it off with the game-winning touchdown," Jones said. "It can't get any better than that."

David Kircus, of Division II champion Grand Valley State (Michigan), led the Midwest receivers with five catches for 140 yards and two scores.

Jones split time with Eastern Illinois' Tony Romo and both had outstanding games. Jones completed 12 of 18 passes for 192 yards and three TDs, while Romo connected on 9-of-14 passes for 218 yards and two scores.

The West team, led by Utah State's Jose Fuentes, mounted a furious comeback by scoring 21 unanswered points in the fourth quarter to take a one-point lead before Jones' heroics.

Fuentes completed 4-of-12 passes in the West's final drive and has three shots to win the game in the last 14 seconds, but all three passes to the end zone from the 14-yard line fell incomplete.

Fuentes finished 24-of-46 for 324 yards and one score, while Weber State's Tyler Gladwell completed just 2-of-8 passes for 52 yards.

The West team won the inaugural Paradise Bowl 33-30 in overtime last year.

TEAM USA 20, TEAM FLORIDA 17: In Orlando, Cincinnati's **Jonathan Ruffin** kicked a Gridiron Classic-record 49-yard field goal with 13 seconds left Saturday to give Team USA a 20-17 win over Team Florida.

Ruffin, who was chosen the game's most valuable player, beat the old mark of 39 yards set by West Virginia's **Jay Taylor** in 2000. Ruffin also had a 34-yard field goal late in the third quarter that put Team USA ahead 17-3.

The winning kick was set up by **Curt Anes'** 28-yard pass to Buffalo tight end **Chad Bartoszek** down to the Team Florida 40. Anes, from Grand Valley State, then scrambled for 7 yards before a clock-stopping spike and an incompletion in the end zone.

Anes was 9-for-14 for 116 yards. Bartoszek had three catches for 43 yards and a touchdown.

Ruffin, an All-American who kicks wearing a converted jazz dance slipper, made the field goal with just a few feet to spare, as it sailed through near the left upright.

The Gridiron Classic matches college seniors with Florida roots against players from the rest of the nation.

E-mail: jhinton@desnews.com

© 2003 Deseret News Publishing Company