



January 1, 1998

UCLA 29, Texas A&M 23

Attendance - 59,215

The 62nd Southwestern Bell Cotton Bowl had so many twists and turns, the script played like a Hollywood movie. At the center of the plot were two coaches who once walked the same sideline together, but now found themselves on opposite sides of the field.

Next came a variety of scoring plays, ranging from an 83-yard pass interception return that involved two players, a quarterback sack that resulted in a safety, an end-around reverse that fooled everyone in the stadium, and an assortment of long passes and electrifying runs. Name it and this game had it.

The pre-game hoopla centered upon UCLA's Bob Toledo and Texas A&M's R.C. Slocum. For five seasons, Toledo served as Slocum's offensive coordinator at A&M, helping the Aggies earn three consecutive trips to the Cotton Bowl. However, each visit ended with a loss, and after the 1994 Classic the two coaches parted company. The following season, Toledo resurfaced as a UCLA assistant, and within two years he was elevated to the top job as head coach.

Toledo's Bruins ended the 1997 campaign as the hottest team in college football. After opening with an 0-2 mark, the Bruins reeled off nine consecutive victories to climb steadily up the polls to a No. 5 national ranking. Texas A&M carried the title as the youngest team in the Big 12 Conference, but despite its youth, was ranked 20th by the Associated Press. The Aggies finished the year 9-3 to earn the championship of the Big 12's Southern Division. After a decisive defeat to Nebraska in the conference championship game at the close of the season, redemption seemed to rank foremost on the Aggies' minds against UCLA. Bruin quarterback Cade McNown hadn't suffered a sack all season long. But, in the first half of play, the Aggies' Wrecking Crew defense had thrown McNown for a loss five times and clearly had the Bruin offense totally confused.

The first of the game's memorable plays came at the end of UCLA's second possession. McNown, the nation's leader in passing efficiency, methodically drove the Bruins through the Aggie defense and inside the 10-yard line. But, just when it seemed that UCLA would score first, in stepped A&M linebacker Dat Nguyen to steal the momentum for A&M. Throwing off balance, McNown floated a screen pass directly into Nguyen's hands at the A&M 17. Nguyen hauled in the interception and started to run. After 19 yards, he turned to his left and lateraled to Brandon Jennings, the Aggies' speedy free safety. Jennings took the pitch and flew down the sideline for the final 64 yards and the A&M touchdown.

The 83-yard play, the second longest interception return in Classic history, was the start of a remarkable day for Nguyen. The junior linebacker recorded 15 solo tackles to establish a Classic defensive record. Overall, he contributed 20 stops, seven of them resulting in 20 yards in losses, and was named the game's outstanding defensive player.

Fueled by Nguyen, the Aggie defense soon added a safety to jump the lead to 9-0. Pinned at the three-yard line after an A&M punt, McNown was chased down in the end zone by defensive end Zerek Rollins.

Everything was going A&M's way and UCLA's string of bad luck was far from over. McNown, bottled up and unable to move the ball on his next possession, called for a quick kick on third down. His surprise punt covered 76 yards, but the trick didn't work. Two plays later, A&M halfback Dante Hall broke loose up the middle and dashed 74 yards for yet another score to stretch the lead to 16-0.

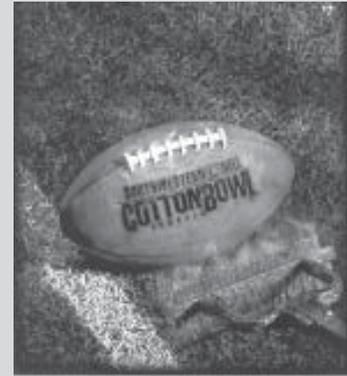
Desperate to get something going, UCLA's break finally came with 42 seconds on the clock. A long, 33-yard punt return gave the Bruins field position at the A&M 47. With no time to waste, McNown connected with split end Danny Farmer on a crossing pattern over the middle for a 20-yard gain. Two plays later, McNown found flanker Jim McElroy streaking down the sideline for a 22-yard scoring strike. The touchdown came with just two seconds to play in the half, and at last, UCLA was on the board, cutting the deficit to nine, 16-7.

The tide finally began to turn toward UCLA at the start of the third quarter, and it was

McNown, the game's offensive MVP, who served as the undisputed leader of the Bruin comeback. Three plays into the second half, he connected with tailback Skip Hicks on a 41-yard scoring pass to trim the A&M lead to two, 16-14. The Aggies answered on their next possession when receiver Chris Cole took a reverse pitch 44-yards for a touchdown to push A&M's lead back to nine, 23-14. But, it was only a momentary setback for the Bruins.

McNown got the Bruins back on the scoreboard less than six minutes later by running 20 yards for the touchdown that pulled UCLA within two. Then, Hicks took over. The native Texan rushed for 50 of his team's 71 yards on the game-winning drive to set up Ryan Neufeld's five-yard touchdown run with 7:05 left to play. It was a long climb back, 16 points to be exact, but UCLA had grabbed the lead, and for Toledo, a gratifying 29-23 victory.

GAME SUMMARY



TEXAS A&M vs. UCLA
TUESDAY, JANUARY 1, 1998 • DALLAS, TEXAS

UCLA	0	7	14	8	-	29
Texas A&M	7	9	7	0	-	23

First Quarter:

Texas A&M - Brandon Jennings 64 interception return after 19 return and lateral from Dat Nguyen (Kyle Bryant kick), 4:35 (83 total return yards)

Second Quarter:

Texas A&M - Cade McNown tackled in end zone for safety by Zerek Rollins, 10:18
Texas A&M - Dante Hall 74 run (Bryant kick), 5:54, 90 yards in 3 plays following quick kick
UCLA - Jim McElroy 22 pass from McNown (Chris Sailer kick), 0:02, 47 yards in 5 plays following punt

Third Quarter:

UCLA - Skip Hicks 41 pass from McNown (Sailer kick), 12:34, 45 yards in 3 plays following punt
Texas A&M - Chris Cole 43 run (Bryant kick), 8:37, 65 yards in 8 plays following kickoff
UCLA - McNown 20 run (Sailer kick), 2:44, 65 yards in 8 plays following punt

Fourth Quarter:

UCLA - Ryan Neufeld 5 run (McNown run), 7:05, 71 yards in 8 plays following punt

OUTSTANDING PLAYERS

Cade McNown, UCLA
Dat Nguyen, Texas A&M

COACHES

Bob Toledo, UCLA
R.C. Slocum, Texas A&M

WEATHER

Partly cloudy, 53 degrees

GAME STATISTICS

TEAM STATS	UCLA	A&M
First Downs	23	10
Rushing	8	8
Passing	13	2
Penalty	2	0
Rushes-Net Yards	48-154	40-192
Net Yards Passing	239	55
Passes	16-30-1	7-14-1
Total Plays	78	54
Total Net Yards	393	247
Fumbles-Lost	3-0	1-0
Penalties-Yards	7-73	4-38
Punts-Average	8-43.6	9-45.3

INDIVIDUAL STATS

PUNTING

UCLA - Sailer 7-39.0, McNown 1-76.0.
Texas A&M - Lechler 9-45.3.

RUSHING

UCLA - Hicks 31-140, Lewis 1-6, Neufeld 1-5, McElroy 1-2, McNown 14-1.

Texas A&M - Hall 7-93, Cole 1-43, Parker 11-40, Hardeman 10-36, Broyles 1-4, McCown 7-(-11), Stewart 3-(-13).

PASSING

UCLA - McNown 16-29-1, 239 yards; Farmer 0-1-0, 0 yards.

Texas A&M - Stewart 4-8-0, 30 yards; McCown 3-6-1, 25 yards.

RECEIVING

UCLA - McElroy 5-84, Farmer 4-40, Hicks 3-53, Grieb 2-31, Poli-Dixon 2-31.

Texas A&M - Cole 4-32, Oliver 4-23.