

Ward helps Houston knock off Florida State

THE SPORTS XCHANGE

ATLANTA — Houston won 12 games and the American Athletic Conference championship in coach Tom Herman's first season, but the Cougars didn't have a signature win. They do now.

PEACH BOWL

Quarterback Greg Ward Jr. accounted for three touchdowns, and senior Trevon Stewart picked off two passes and recovered a fumble, leading the 18th-ranked Cougars to a 38-24 upset of No. 9 Florida State in the Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl on Thursday at the Georgia Dome.

Ward scored on runs of 7 and 6 yards and threw a touchdown pass to receiver Chance Allen that put the Cougars ahead 31-17 with six minutes to play.

Florida State quarterback Sean Maguire threw touchdown passes to Travis Rudolph and Jesus Wilson in the fourth quarter, twice cutting the Houston lead seven. But the Cougars answered each challenge.

Ward completed 25 of 41 passes for 238 yards. He also

rushed for 63 yards, but went down with a lower leg injury late in the fourth quarter. He limped off the field before a critical third-down play with Houston leading 31-24 with four minutes to play. Backup quarterback Kyle Postma replaced Ward, picked up two key first downs on runs, and running back Ryan Jackson sealed the win with a short touchdown run with two minutes to play.

The clinching score sent Seminoles fans to the exits and generated a mocking Tomahawk Chop chant from the large contingent of Cougar faithful that made the trip to Atlanta.

The statement win for the Cougars (13-1) should carry over into 2016. In December, Herman, coveted by many teams looking for a new head coach, signed a new deal to stay at Houston, and Ward also is expected to return for his senior season.

Houston may begin next season ranked in the top 10. The Cougars open the 2016 season against Oklahoma in Houston.

Two years after winning the national championship, Florida State (10-3) heads into the



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Florida State Seminoles running back Dalvin Cook (center) carries the ball as Houston Cougars defensive lineman Nick Thurman (91), defensive end Jerard Carter (52), and line-backer Elandon Roberts (44) tackle him in the third quarter in the 2015 Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl at the Georgia Dome. The Cougars won 38-24.

offseason having lost bowl games in back-to-back seasons. The Seminoles never recovered from a disastrous first half against Houston.

Florida State turned it over twice in the first half and saw Maguire injure his left ankle

late in the first quarter and leave the game for a few series. Maguire returned with his ankle heavily taped in the second quarter, but couldn't generate any offense for the Seminoles, who were outgained 247-132 in the first half.

Houston wide receiver Demarcus Ayers took a pitch on a reverse and threw a touchdown pass to Allen that put the Cougars up 14-3 with six minutes left in the second quarter.

On Florida State's next pos-

session, Stewart recovered a fumble by running back Dalvin Cook at the Seminoles' 23-yard line. Three plays later, Ward ran around right end for a 6-yard touchdown that put Houston up 21-3 at halftime. Cook had 16 yards on 10 carries in the first half.

Cook scored on a 1-yard run on the Seminoles' opening possession of the second half, and Florida State had the momentum after stopping Houston on fourth down on the Cougars' following possession. But Stewart picked of Maguire at midfield, and the Cougars closed out the upset in the fourth quarter.

Maguire completed 22 of 43 passes for 392 yards with two touchdowns and four interceptions. Cook finished with 33 yards on 18 carries.

NOTES: The Chick-fil-A Peach Bowl will host a College Football Playoff semifinal in 2016, before moving into the Mercedes-Benz Stadium in 2017, the future home of the Atlanta Falcons. The Peach Bowl will host the 2018 national championship game. ... In December, Houston coach Tom Herman signed a five-year deal reportedly worth \$2.8 million annually.

Hockey

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fense, it's a function of our puck management, and it's a function of our goaltending," said UMaine coach Red Gendron. "The bottom line is we have to work on those things."

Swavely said it has been a "whole bunch of things" that have contributed to their defensive woes.

"The biggest thing [Wednesday night] was the turnovers. We didn't control the puck very well. We have to tighten up defensively," said Swavely.

"None of us got the job done Wednesday night," said Gendron. "We're not going to run and hide from that. We're not going to make excuses."

UMaine won't play again

until it hosts ECAC team Colgate on Jan. 8 and 9. The Raiders (5-13-1) have lost six of their last seven, allowing 33 goals in the seven games.

"We'll move on from this. We're not going to be stuck on [the UNH loss]," said Swavely. "It's a new year, and we're looking forward to having Colgate come in. We're looking to get back on the winning path."

Both have confidence in the team's ability to bounce back.

"I'll never lose confidence in our team," said Swavely.

"I have big-time faith in this team. I believe in these kids," said Gendron.

The goaltending situation could be up in the air as freshman Rob McGovern allowed nine goals in two starts against UNH and

junior Matt Morris surrendered eight in his two.

Sophomore Sean Romeo relieved Morris in the second period on Wednesday and stopped 21 of 23 shots. Morris allowed five goals on 16 shots.

Gendron said "we'll see" when asked if the goaltending job is up in the air.

The freshmen have produced two goals, placing them among the lowest scoring first-year classes in the country.

"We need more production from everybody, [not just our freshmen]," said Gendron.

Second-leading scorer Blaine Byron (five goals, six assists) suffered an upper-body injury Wednesday and wasn't able to practice Thursday.

But he said it wasn't serious and listed himself as "day-to-day."

Women

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Jamie Cherry had five assists to go with five points.

Junior guard Koizar wound up with 21 points and seven assists, both game-highs, and she also hauled down eight rebounds to lead the Black Bears.

"(Koizar) was tough, she was really tough," said Hatchell, who called Maine a "very good team."

Sophie Weckstrom had 18 points on a career-high six 3-pointers.

Mikaela Gustafsson had 10 points and 10 rebounds for her first career double-double and added four assists. Liz Wood chipped in with seven points and six rebounds. Bella Swan corralled seven rebounds.

The Black Bears trailed 45-32 early in the second half but rallied behind Koizar and

Weckstrom, who each had six points during a 15-2 run spanning the third and fourth quarters to tie it 47-47 with 5:26 left.

The teams swapped points until Koizar's conventional three-point play gave Maine a 54-53 lead with 49 seconds remaining. She then hit two free throws 30 seconds later to expand the lead to 56-53.

Watts' 3-pointer tied it with 15 seconds left but Koizar drove the lane to give Maine its 58-56 lead.

Barron and Weckstrom said Watts' buzzer-beater wasn't the only decisive moment in the game.

"We played well to get the lead but not well enough to have a bigger lead," said Barron. "We missed a lot of easy shots. We missed six uncontested layups."

"If we hadn't missed those layups early in the game, we wouldn't have been in that situation at the

end," said Weckstrom.

Barron said his team didn't play well in the first and third quarters, managing just 18 points combined.

"We weren't aggressive. We didn't move the ball quick enough. When we stand around dribbling the ball and taking the air out of it, we're easy to guard," said Barron.

But Barron and Weckstrom noted that there were plenty of positives as they move into America East play on Wednesday night at Vermont.

"This will give us a lot of confidence going into our conference games," Weckstrom said.

"Maybe a heart-breaking loss like this will have a big impact on our team and they'll learn a lesson from it," said Barron. "Our kids are very good at analyzing a game so the next step for our program is to (play well) from the beginning of the game."

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