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UNT shuts down SMU

Mustangs frustrated as Safeway Bowl goes to Mean Green

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DENTON — SMU coach Phil Bennett said the offense was going to open up this week against North Texas. It opened up a world of problems for Bennett and offensive coordinator Rusty Burns.

North Texas ended a seven-game losing streak with a 24-6 victory over SMU in front of 25,231 — the third-largest crowd in Fouts Field history — on Saturday night. North Texas’ (1-1) offense made all the plays, while SMU’s (0-2) did not.

It was the first meeting between the schools since 1992 and after they meet again next year, the Safeway Bowl might never happen again.

“We’re frustrated in there,” SMU quarterback Justin Willis said. “And people will see and know that we care.”

It was a long night for Bennett, who lost his starting running back DeMyron Martin (sprained right foot) in the first half, benched Willis, who later returned, and saw his team commit numerous mental mistakes.

For the game, SMU had three unsportsmanlike penalties, one roughing the passer, a blocked punt, and a missed point-after attempt.

“Oh, obviously we have to be more consistent [on offense],” Bennett said. “The penalties were inexcusable. It’s all of us. We lost our composure. We let a situation affect us.”

SMU is 0-2 to start the season for the fifth time in the last six seasons. This year’s schedule was designed to give the Mustangs an opportunity to reach a bowl for the first time since 1984.

SMU’s coaches were hopeful the offense would provide them with some success.

But after gaining only 189 yards of total offense in the season-opening loss at Texas Tech, there was some concern.

Against UNT, SMU gained 270 yards and turned the ball over three times, twice on interceptions and once on a fumble by receiver Bobby Chase. There was also a dropped pass from receiver Emmanuel Sanders at the UNT 5.

After his benching, Willis threw his first career touchdown pass, a 12-yarder to Columbus Gibbs with 9:04 to play.

Thomas Morstead’s point-after attempt to tie was wide right. The offense got inside the UNT 20 only once.

There were also special teams problems. Morstead had a punt blocked in the first quarter that led to the first UNT touchdown.

“It’s just disappointment,” said linebacker Wilton McCray, who had eight tackles. “We should have just played better, but they made the plays they needed to make and we didn’t.”

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