



Russell Athletic Bowl: Clemson, Oklahoma try for upbeat finish

By Kyle Hightower, Associated Press Last Updated: Monday, December 29, 2014, 11:06 AM

ORLANDO (AP) -- Clemson and Oklahoma expected this season to end much differently.

After handing Alabama a double-digit loss in the Sugar Bowl, the Sooners figured to be in the chase for the inaugural College Football Playoff after starting the season with a No. 4 ranking. Those hopes were quickly extinguished thanks to three losses to ranked opponents.

Clemson entered to season looking to challenge national champion Florida State in the ACC. That, too, was dashed after a 1-2 stumble out of the gate that included losses at Georgia and in overtime against the Seminoles.

Monday's Russell Athletic Bowl is a chance to at least end on an upbeat note.

The No. 18 Tigers (9-3) will be trying for their fourth straight season with at least 10 victories. Only Alabama, Oregon and Northern Illinois have achieved that the past four seasons.

"That's the kind of consistency that we want to be known for — especially this year," Clemson coach Dabo Swinney said. "With a lot of transition and adversity, and some things that we dealt with this season, it'd be a great way to finish the year."

For the Sooners (8-4), junior linebacker Eric Striker said the mood of the team is strong despite the setbacks this season.

"It is what it is," Striker said. "We're excited about it. We made it to a bowl game. . It's not like a chill, bad mood. We're excited to play another game of football."

Some things to watch in the Sooners-Tigers matchup.

STOUDT AT QB: Clemson will start senior quarterback Cole Stoudt this week after freshman standout Deshaun Watson had season-ending surgery on his torn left ACL this month. Stoudt has shown himself to be capable at times, throwing for 1,573 yards and six touchdowns in six appearances in 2014.

TIGERS DEFENSE vs. SOONERS OFFENSE: This game could turn on the Tigers' defense and the Sooners' offense. Clemson comes in with a defensive unit ranked No. 1 in total defense, giving up only 259.6 yards per game. In addition, Clemson is allowing just 97.7 yards per game on the ground, seventh best in the nation. In terms of scoring, Oklahoma averages 38.9 points per game, 10th in the nation, and is averaging 480.5 yards per game in total offense (ranked 19th nationally).

THE RUNNING MAN: As good as Clemson's defense has been, stopping Oklahoma sophomore RB Samaje Perine is the priority. He ranked fifth in the nation with 21 rushing touchdowns and eight with 1,579 rushing yards. That includes an FBS-record 427 rushing yards against Kansas.

MILESTONE WATCH: The senior classes for Clemson and Oklahoma have a combined 80 victories over the last four years, 41 by Clemson and 39 by Oklahoma. Clemson's 41-11 record is tied for the seventh most wins among FBS teams the last four years, and Oklahoma's 39-12 record is tied for the 12th most wins.

SOME BOWL HISTORY: It's been a while, but the Tigers and Sooners have met before during bowl season. Oklahoma is making its second appearance in the Orlando Citrus Bowl stadium, having fallen to Clemson in coach Barry Switzer's last game in the 1989 edition of the bowl.



Hours before kickoff, the Orlando Citrus Bowl is ready to host the Russell Athletic Bowl between Clemson and Oklahoma, Monday, Dec. 29, 2014. (PHOTO/Work Zone Cam)



Russell Athletic Bowl capsule

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Clemson is looking for its fourth consecutive season with double-digit victories. The Tigers were 10-4 in 2011, 11-2 in 2012 and 11-2 in 2013. A win this year would give the Sooners double-digit wins for the 13th time in 15 seasons. The game is a rematch of the 1989 Florida Citrus Bowl, which the Tigers won 13-6

KEY MATCHUP

This game looks to be a matchup of the Tigers' defense and the Sooners' offense. Clemson comes in with a defensive unit ranked No. 1 in total defense, giving up only 259.6 yards per game. In addition, Clemson is allowing just 97.7 yards a game on the ground, seventh best in the nation. Oklahoma averages 38.9 points a game, 10th in the nation, and is averaging 480.5 yards in total offense (ranked 19th nationally). Clemson allows just 17.6 points a game, the seventh-best scoring defense nationally.

PLAYERS TO WATCH

Clemson: After losing freshman standout QB Deshaun Watson for the season with a torn left ACL, the Tigers will need a solid game from Cole Stoudt. The senior is more than capable, throwing for 1,573 yards and six touchdowns in six appearances in 2014.

Oklahoma: Sophomore RB Samaje Perine is ranked fifth in the nation with 21 rushing touchdowns and eight with 1,579 rushing yards. That includes an FBS-record 427 rushing yards against Kansas.

FACTS & FIGURES

The senior classes for Clemson and Oklahoma have a combined 80 victories over the last four years, 41 by Clemson and 39 by Oklahoma. Clemson's 41-11 record is tied for the seventh most wins among FBS teams the last four years, and Oklahoma's 39-12 record is tied for the 12th most wins. ... Oklahoma is making its second appearance in the Orlando Citrus Bowl stadium, having fallen to Clemson in coach Barry Switzer's last game in the 1989 edition of the bowl. . This is the 16th straight bowl appearance for the Sooners, who are 28-18-1 in bowls.