

WEEK FOUR
BALL ST at NC STATE

Thomas’ TD return helps NC State beats Ball State 34-23

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Thayer Thomas and North Carolina State’s special teams came up with big enough plays to offset the Wolfpack’s sputtering second-half offense Saturday night.

Thomas had a 76-yard punt return for a touchdown in the third quarter while Max Fisher blocked a fourth-quarter punt to set up another score, helping the Wolfpack beat Ball State 34-23. Malik Dunlap recovered Fisher’s block, putting the Wolfpack at the Cardinals’ 7-yard line. Matthew McKay scored on a keeper three plays later at the 8:41 mark to help the Wolfpack stay in control.

“I feel like the special teams the second half really won us the game,” Thomas said.

He wouldn’t find much argument from coach Dave Doeren or his teammates, either. Not with how little N.C. State’s offense managed in the final 30 minutes.

N.C. State completed only two passes and had 104 total yards after halftime. The good news, at least, was the Wolfpack (3-1) had pushed ahead for good in the second quarter to lead 20-7 at the break, then got Thomas’ run to the end zone to go up 20.

There wasn’t a lot to highlight beyond that, other than Fisher’s block.

“They definitely changed the momentum of the game,” McKay said of the special teams. “We just had to capitalize and go score” after the blocked punt.

McKay also ran for a second-quarter TD for N.C. State (3-1), which turned away the Cardinals’ last best push on Chris Ingram’s end-zone interception with 3:43 left.

Justin Hall and Caleb Huntley ran for scores for Ball State (1-3), which entered with one of the nation’s top passing attacks behind Drew Plitt. Plitt threw for 333 yards but failed to connect for a score for the first time this year.

“We had a couple of opportunities there that we needed to finish the deal, and we didn’t get that done,” Ball State coach Mike Neu said, “The effort is fantastic by our guys, the heart -- all that stuff is good. Each guy knows that we just have a few plays that obviously we need to make in order to have a chance to change that outcome.”

THE TAKEAWAY

Ball State: Plitt came into this game ranked fifth in the Bowl Subdivision ranks in passing yards per game (346.7) while ranking tied for third with 11 passing touchdowns. He had some good moments in this one yet couldn’t come up with some needed throws as Ball State settled for multiple field goals, while his late interception came after the Cardinals had recovered an onside kick with a chance to inch even closer late.

N.C. State: It was a big improvement for the special teams, which surrendered a blocked punt that set up a touchdown in last week’s loss at West Virginia. Thomas had the biggest play when he took a punt, weaved through midfield and broke into the open for the TD return -- N.C. State’s first since Nyheim Hines did it at Pittsburgh in 2017, a span of 22 games. Then there was Fisher’s block to give the Wolfpack a short field. N.C. State needed all of it, too, considering the offense managed just five first downs after halftime.

“They obviously let us down big time on that last week,” Doeren said, “and sparked us this time.”

NO KNIGHT

N.C. State played the second half without leading rusher Zonovan “Bam” Knight. Doeren said the freshman who came in with 233 yards (77.7 per game) had a hamstring issue.

BRIEF SWAP

N.C. State gave a first-half series to No. 2 quarterback Bailey Hockman, ending when his pass for Tabari Hines was bobbled and then intercepted. McKay returned and led a pair of touchdown drives, completing 7 of 8 passes for 88 yards on those drives.

Doeren said the Wolfpack had planned to do it all week to get Hockman something more than mop-up duty at the end of a game.

“Regardless of what happened on his drive, Matt was going to go back in,” Doeren said, adding: “I think it sparked Matt a little bit.”

Final	1	2	3	4	T
BALL	7	0	6	10	23
NCST	6	14	7	7	34

Scoring Summary -----

FIRST QUARTER	BALL	NCST
NCST FG 8:29 Christopher Dunn 39 Yd Field Goal		
9 plays, 23 yards, 3:18	0	3
BALL TD 5:28 Justin Hall 11 Yd Run (Ryan Rimmmler Kick)		
9 plays, 75 yards, 3:01	7	3
NCST FG 0:06 Christopher Dunn 34 Yd Field Goal		
12 plays, 62 yards, 5:14	7	6
SECOND QUARTER	BALL	NCST
NCST TD 6:18 Ricky Person Jr. 3 Yd Run (Christopher Dunn Kick)		
8 plays, 55 yards, 3:29	7	13
NCST TD 1:38 Matthew McKay 5 Yd Run (Christopher Dunn Kick)		
10 plays, 82 yards, 3:14	7	20
THIRD QUARTER	BALL	NCST
NCST TD 13:03 Thayer Thomas 76 Yd Punt Return (Christopher Dunn Kick)		
3 plays, 2 yards, 0:52	7	27
BALL FG 9:41 Ryan Rimmmler 43 Yd Field Goal		
11 plays, 49 yards, 3:22	10	27
BALL FG 0:41 Ryan Rimmmler 43 Yd Field Goal		
7 plays, 16 yards, 2:45	13	27
FOURTH QUARTER	BALL	NCST
BALL FG 12:21 Ryan Rimmmler 28 Yd Field Goal		
8 plays, 59 yards, 2:26	16	27
NCST TD 8:41 Matthew McKay 3 Yd Run (Christopher Dunn Kick)		
3 plays, 7 yards, 1:17	16	34
BALL TD 4:49 Caleb Huntley 2 Yd Run (Ryan Rimmmler Kick)		
11 plays, 75 yards, 3:51	23	34

Team Stats	BALL	NCST
First Downs	25	23
Passes for First	18	11
Rushes for First	5	10
Penalties for First	2	2
Third Down Efficiency	9-21	10-17
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-2	0-1
Total Yards	417	389
Total Plays	87	75
Avg Gain Per Play	4.8	5.2
Net Yards Rushing	84	204
Rushes	30	41
Yards Per Rush	2.8	5.0
Net Yards Passing	333	185
Comp-Att	35-57	19-34
Yards Per Pass	5.8	5.4
Times Sacked	2	0
Yds Lost To Sacks	-19	0
Interceptions	1	2
Punts	6	3
Punt Average	39.0	51.0
Penalties	7	9
Penalty Yards	55	62
Fumbles	2	1
Fumbles Lost	0	1
Time of Poss	30:00	30:00

Individual Stats

RUSHING						
BALL ST	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG	
Caleb Huntley	13	52	4.0	1	11	
Walter Fletcher	10	30	3.0	0	8	
Justin Hall	2	22	11.0	1	11	
Malik Dunner	1	14	14.0	0	14	
Drew Plitt	4	-34	-8.5	0	1	
NC STATE	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG	
Ricky Person Jr.	17	71	4.2	1	20	
Jordan Houston	6	55	9.2	0	25	
Zonovan Knight	8	36	4.5	0	16	
Matthew McKay	6	24	4.0	2	7	
Bailey Hockman	1	20	20.0	0	20	
Keyon Lesane	1	1	1.0	0	1	
Team	2	-3	-1.5	0	0	

PASSING						
BALL ST	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int
Drew Plitt	35	57	333	5.8	0	1
NC STATE	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int
Matthew McKay	17	30	175	5.8	0	1
Bailey Hockman	2	3	10	3.3	0	1
Thayer Thomas	0	1	0	0.0	0	0

RECEIVING						
BALL ST	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG	
Justin Hall	8	73	9.1	0	21	
Riley Miller	8	70	8.8	0	16	
Antwan Davis	5	61	12.2	0	17	
Yo’Heinz Tyler	3	58	19.3	0	35	
Hassan Littles	2	28	14.0	0	17	
Nolan Givan	3	23	7.7	0	11	
Walter Fletcher	4	19	4.8	0	16	
Drew Plitt	1	2	2.0	0	2	
Caleb Huntley	1	-1	-1.0	0	0	
NC STATE	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG	
Thayer Thomas	4	51	12.8	0	22	
Emeka Emezie	4	47	11.8	0	19	
Ricky Person Jr.	3	24	8.0	0	18	
Tabari Hines	2	22	11.0	0	19	
Keyon Lesane	2	18	9.0	0	19	
Jordan Houston	1	15	15.0	0	15	
Devin Carter	1	5	5.0	0	5	
Zonovan Knight	2	3	1.5	0	8	