

No. 17 Cincinnati escapes with 46-43 victory over ECU

GREENVILLE, N.C. -- Trailing by double figures in the final minutes, No. 17 Cincinnati proved something to coach Luke Fickell -- and maybe to everyone else, too.

The Bearcats rallied to beat East Carolina 46-43 on Saturday night when Sam Crosa kicked a 32-yard field goal as time expired.

Desmond Ridder threw for 161 yards and a touchdown, rushed for 146 more and led two scoring drives in the fourth quarter, including the winning drive in the final 1:10 for the East Division-leading Bearcats (7-1, 4-0 American Athletic Conference). The 24 1/2-point favorites trailed by 12 points with less than 9 minutes left before escaping with their sixth win in a row.

"We showed a lot of heart," Fickell said. "This team, they've got something more than I even thought. We're going to be a lot better because of this game. We're going to be a lot tighter because of this game. This is going to give us a lot more opportunities."

Ahmad Gardner returned an interception 62 yards for a touchdown with 4:38 remaining to give Cincinnati a short-lived 43-40 lead after Ridder's 3-yard TD to Josiah Deguara started the comeback. Michael Warren II rushed for 141 yards and matched a career high with three touchdown runs.

"We've got to make as many plays as we could," Gardner said. "My team was telling me to go get one. They knew it was coming, though. I did, too."

Holton Ahlers threw for a school-record 535 yards, matched a career high with four touchdown passes and rushed for a score for the Pirates (3-6, 0-5). They were trying to beat a Top 25 team for the first time since 2014.

Jake Verity tied it at 43 with his third field goal, a 27-yarder with 1:14 remaining.

That left plenty of time for Ridder and the Bearcats to rally: Ridder started the go-ahead drive with a 30-yard scramble into East Carolina territory and hit Malick Mbodj with three passes to get the Bearcats to the 15 with 4 seconds left. After three timeouts, Crosa's kick at the buzzer was perfect.

"Our defense was scrambling a little bit and had we tried to match throwing the ball as much and maybe even scored even quicker, I don't know that would have been the best thing for our team, to give us an opportunity to have a chance to win it at the end," Fickell said.

THE TAKEAWAY

Cincinnati: The Bearcats' five-game winning streak appeared over in a wave of 12 penalties and a season-worst 117 penalty yards and an inability to stop Ahlers. The team came to life just in time to preserve their highest national ranking since 2009 and keep their league title and Cotton Bowl hopes alive.

"The great thing is, hopefully we got a wake-up call," Fickell said. "Obviously, this league is really good and we've got to be prepared and we've got to do a better job and we've got to grow if we want to be at the top if this league at some point in time. We've got a ways to go."

East Carolina: This one is going to sting the Pirates, who had their first victory over a ranked opponent since 2014 in their hands and appeared headed for the cornerstone victory of first-year coach Mike Houston's rebuilding project. But they couldn't find a way to stop Ridder and the Bearcats in the final 70 seconds.

"You're playing a team like that and you have the opportunity -- we just couldn't make the plays at the right time," Houston said. "You're going to look tomorrow at 20 different plays that, if you make any one of them, you win the game."

RECORD BOOK

Ahlers shattered the old school record of 480 yards passing, set six years ago by Shane Carden against Tulane. ... C.J. Johnson set the school and conference records with 283 yards receiving, breaking the ECU record of 270 yards set two years ago by Trevon Brown against Cincinnati.

BIG PLAYS

Gardner has two pick-sixes in less than a month after bringing an interception 11 yards for a score in the 27-24 victory over Central Florida. This one came in man-to-man coverage whereas against UCF, he said "I did it in cover-three, so it wasn't a risk."

STAT SHEET

The Pirates scored one more point against Cincinnati than No. 3 Ohio State (42) did. The Buckeyes were the only team to score more than 24 points against the Bearcats and both ECU and Ohio State had put up 28 points in the first half against them.

Final	1	2	3	4	T
CIN	21	0	7	18	46
ECU	14	17	9	3	43

Scoring Summary -----

	CIN	ECU
FIRST QUARTER		
CIN TD 9:20 Michael Warren II 1 Yd Run (Sam Crosa Kick)	7	0
5 plays, 50 yards, 2:07		
ECU TD 9:09 C.J. Johnson 75 Yd pass from Holton Ahlers (Jake Verity Kick)	7	7
1 play, 75 yards, 0:11		
CIN TD 8:19 Gerrid Doaks 2 Yd Run (Sam Crosa Kick)	14	7
3 plays, 75 yards, 0:50		
ECU TD 3:22 Holton Ahlers 6 Yd Run (Jake Verity Kick)	14	14
14 plays, 75 yards, 4:57		
CIN TD 0:19 Michael Warren II 1 Yd Run (Sam Crosa Kick)	21	14
8 plays, 75 yards, 3:03		
SECOND QUARTER		
ECU TD 5:57 Zech Byrd 3 Yd pass from Holton Ahlers (Jake Verity Kick)	21	21
6 plays, 75 yards, 2:42		
ECU TD 3:10 Jsi Hatfield 3 Yd pass from Holton Ahlers (Jake Verity Kick)	21	28
7 plays, 71 yards, 1:56		
ECU FG 0:01 Jake Verity 27 Yd Field Goal		31
4 plays, 38 yards, 0:22		
THIRD QUARTER		
CIN TD 10:45 Michael Warren II 3 Yd Run (Sam Crosa Kick)	28	31
9 plays, 75 yards, 4:15		
ECU FG 4:20 Jake Verity 20 Yd Field Goal		34
15 plays, 80 yards, 6:25		
ECU TD 0:14 Tyler Snead 9 Yd pass from Holton Ahlers (Two-Point Pass Conversion Failed)	28	40
7 plays, 81 yards, 2:32		
FOURTH QUARTER		
CIN TD 8:37 Josiah Deguara 3 Yd pass from Desmond Ridder (Sam Crosa Kick)	35	40
13 plays, 75 yards, 6:37		
CIN TD 4:38 Ahmad Gardner 62 Yd Interception Return (Desmond Ridder Pass to Josiah Deguara for Two-Point Conversion)	43	40
8 plays, 38 yards, 3:59		
ECU FG 1:10 Jake Verity 27 Yd Field Goal	43	43
9 plays, 65 yards, 3:28		
CIN FG 0:00 Sam Crosa 32 Yd Field Goal	46	43
7 plays, 50 yards, 1:10		

Team Stats	CIN	ECU
First Downs	20	35
Passes for First	6	25
Rushes for First	13	4
Penalties for First	1	6
Third Down Efficiency	7-10	10-17
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	0-0
Total Yards	487	638
Total Plays	63	87
Avg Gain Per Play	7.7	7.3
Net Yards Rushing	326	103
Rushes	39	35
Yards Per Rush	8.4	2.9
Net Yards Passing	161	535
Comp-Att	12-24	32-52
Yards Per Pass	6.7	10.3
Times Sacked	1	0
Yds Lost To Sacks	-2	0
Interceptions	2	1
Punts	4	4
Punt Average	45.0	35.3
Penalties	12	8
Penalty Yards	117	65
Fumbles	0	0
Fumbles Lost	0	0
Time of Poss	25:55	34:05

Individual Stats

RUSHING

CINCINNATI	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Michael Warren II	18	141	7.8	3	40
Desmond Ridder	12	121	10.1	0	32
Gerrid Doaks	9	39	4.3	1	9

EAST CAROLINA	Rush	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Trace Christian	9	43	4.8	0	12
Demetrius Mauney	18	22	1.2	0	9
Holton Ahlers	7	21	3.0	1	6
Jsi Hatfield	1	17	17.0	0	17

PASSING

CINCINNATI	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Desmond Ridder	12	24	161	6.7	1	2	89.7

EAST CAROLINA	Comp	Att	Yds	Y/A	TD	Int	QBRat
Holton Ahlers	32	52	535	10.3	4	1	86.4

RECEIVING

CINCINNATI	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
Josiah Deguara	2	76	38.0	1	73
Malick Mbodj	5	37	7.4	0	12
Alec Pierce	3	31	10.3	0	13
Michael Warren II	1	11	11.0	0	11
Tre Tucker	1	6	6.0	0	6

EAST CAROLINA	Rec	Yds	Avg	TD	LONG
C.J. Johnson	12	283	23.6	1	75
Blake Proehl	8	105	13.1	0	30
Jsi Hatfield	6	96	16.0	1	36
Tyler Snead	2	29	14.5	1	20
Deondre Farrier	1	12	12.0	0	12
Zech Byrd	2	9	4.5	1	6
Jeremy Lewis	1	1	1.0	0	1