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Opelt leads Toledo to win

Ross grad says win in Big House is dream come true

By *MATTHEW HORN*
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ANN ARBOR, Mich. -- Toledo quarterback Aaron Opelt had never competed on a larger stage. The junior from Fremont Ross responded admirably by doing something no Mid-American Conference quarterback had done against Michigan.

Opelt completed 33-of-50 passes for 257 yards to help the Rockets defeat the Wolverines, the winningest program in college football history, 13-10 on Saturday in front of 107,267 fans. Toledo (2-4), playing the Wolverines (2-4) for the first time, is the only MAC team to top Michigan in 25 tries.

Opelt said the victory is a dream come true.

"Ever since I was a little kid I wanted to play at the Big House," he said. "It was exciting going out there and seeing all the fans. It feels great. It's an awesome accomplishment for us."

Opelt completed 3-of-3 passes after Toledo's Tyrrell Herbert intercepted Nick Sheridan's pass at the Michigan 40 on the first play of the fourth quarter. Alex Steigerwald's 48-yard field goal later bounced off the crossbar and through for the decisive points after holder Opelt steadied a low snap.

Opelt, who demonstrated a strong arm executing all kinds of short and intermediate throws, established a career best with his 33 completions.

Herbert opened the scoring with a 100-yard interception return for a score in the first quarter. It's the longest Pick 6 in Michigan Stadium and Toledo history.

"I just read it," said Herbert, who ducked in front of the intended receiver at the goal line.

"It's a good feeling to score in the Big House.

"When you get a play like that it fuels the fire. We knew there we could play with them."

Michigan quarterback Steve Threet connected with Brandon Minor over the middle for a 27-yard touchdown to knot the game at 7-7 late in the first quarter. Sam McGuffie ran for a first down on fourth-and-1 to the Rockets' 45 on the Wolverines next possession and a hit-out-of-bounds penalty later moved the ball from the 31 to the 16 before K.C. Lopata ultimately put Michigan ahead 10-7 with a 26-yard field goal.

Opelt completed 7-of-11 passes as Toledo capped the first possession of the third quarter with a 29-yard field goal from Steigerwald. Opelt hooked up with Stephen Williams in the middle of the field on a third-and-13 play for 23 yards to Toledo's 40.

Opelt later threw for 12 yards to Nick Moore for another first down at Michigan's 44. Moore snatched a Toledo and Michigan-opponent record 20 passes for 162 yards in the game.

"I never thought I'd have that many catches," Moore said.

Opelt said Moore consistently found windows in the defense.

"He's got great hands," Opelt said. "He's out there making big plays. He's an excellent receiver for us and I love throwing to him.

"I feel good with Nick going against anybody."

Opelt completed a pass to DaJuane Collins for 5 yards with two defenders in his face before finding Moore for 9 yards to the Wolverines' 30 on third-and-5 to extend the first series of the third quarter. Opelt, who completed most of his passes while rolling toward either sideline, hooked up with Williams for 6 yards and later 8 yards to the 24 on third-and-4.

Moore hauled in a 5-yard pass to set up Steigerwald's first field goal.

McGuffie caught a 29-yard pass from Sheridan to Toledo's 18 with 33 seconds remaining in the game. Lopata, however, missed a 26-yard field goal wide left before Opelt took a knee on the final play of the game.

Michigan was shut out in the second half.

Rockets linebacker Beau Brudzinski had three tackles, including a stop of Greg Mathews for a loss of 4 yards after a catch late in the fourth quarter. Mark Singer intercepted a pass from Sheridan on the next play.

Brudzinski is the son of Bob Brudzinski, a member of the Ross Hall of Fame who played 13 years in the NFL.

"We knew we could do this on defense," Herbert said. "Run to the ball and hit."

Opelt completed 5-of-9 passes on the Rockets' first possession and 7-of-9 attempts in helping Toledo drive to Michigan's 3 midway through the second quarter. Steigerwald missed a 21-yard field goal.

Opelt, who is equally comfortable in the shotgun or under center, was not intercepted and completed at least 50 percent of his passes on every series. The mobile and athletic quarterback completed passes throwing across his body to the left and even jumped to throw back to the right side of the field.

Opelt was sacked only once. Toledo had 22 carries for 70 yards on the ground.

The Rockets, a 16.5-point underdog, were coming off three consecutive home losses.

"This will be something I always remember," Herbert said.

"We're back on track as a team."

Opelt and Toledo did just enough to win and doing so in an environment like Saturday's could go a long way in Opelt's development at quarterback.

"Aaron ran the offense -- execution and timing mixing the ball up -- we ask a lot of our quarterback," Rockets coach Tom Amstutz said. "We ask him to distribute the ball and keep the defense off balance.

"This can take him to the next step. As a quarterback, he's capable of special things."

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