

COMMENTARY: COLLEGE FOOTBALL



JACOB HAMILTON / ANN ARBOR NEWS VIA AP

Michigan wide receiver JJ Buchanan (8) makes the game-winning catch against Western Michigan.

Hail Mary a bad sign for Michigan

Bob Wojnowski
The Detroit News

On tick, one, two, one moment of instant insanity. Michigan was about to suffer perhaps the ugliest home loss in program history, until replay officials found one more second, and the Wolverines got one more shot.

Bryce Underwood heaved a perfect pass and JJ Buchanan leapt as if climbing on air to grab the ball, and Michigan secured its most conflicted victory ever. The 47-yard touchdown with 00 on the clock lifted the Wolverines past Western Michigan 13-12 Saturday night, and the scene inside Michigan Stadium was unlike anything ever witnessed.

Michigan players celebrated, but later admitted they were disgusted by their overall play. WMU players who had celebrated moments earlier knelt on the ground and sobbed. Fans swarmed the turf, which was historic in itself — a field-storming after beating a four-touchdown underdog.

The ending was unfathomable, almost as unfathomable as Michigan's sloppy performance in Kyle Whittingham's coaching debut. It's fair to say Michigan won a game it should have lost, and the scene inside Michigan Stadium was unlike anything ever witnessed.

"The Hail Mary, yeah, I had a great view," Whittingham said, speaking softly. "A perfect throw. I backed in and bawled out perfectly and went up and got it. And my reaction was just, thank goodness. But I didn't move. I was mad. I'm still pissed."

So was much of the college football world, fanning fresh flames of controversy. Commentators and rival fans bombarded social media with cries of injustice, with Michigan again the handy target. In this case, the Wolverines did nothing wrong — other than blocking poorly, committing egregious penalties and getting run over by a smaller opponent. The Big Ten insisted the officials did nothing wrong, either, and late Saturday the conference issued a release, accompanied by video evidence, that the final replay review was correct.

The previous play began with nine seconds left, when Underwood dropped back, bought a little space, then fired a

pass that sailed through the back of the end zone. The clock hit zero. The broadcasters declared shockwaves across the country and WMU coach Lance Taylor rejoiced with his team.

Even NBC rules expert Terry McLaughlin said the game was over. "The ball is clearly still in the air when the clock goes to zero, on our screens. The Big Ten is going to have to tell a lot of us how did they get to one second on this play?"

Well past midnight, the Big Ten did just that. Upon further review, the conference released a frame-by-frame video showing WMU's Mink Davis leaping from out of bounds and tipping the ball, which rendered the play over. Synced up with the official clock, there was one second left. Taylor handled the crushing disappointment admirably, and the MAC later issued a statement thanking the Big Ten for its prompt response.

It might not satisfy everyone, but it would've just been a crazy footnote if the Wolverines hadn't cashed in their second chance. If they play the way they did against the spirited Broncos, they're gonna run out of chances in a hurry, starting with a visit from Oklahoma next Saturday.

"If we don't play a lot better, it's not going to be pretty," Whittingham said. And the positive thing is, (the players) all agreed. There was not one guy in the locker room that wasn't thinking anything different, and they're as upset and as disappointed as I am. ... We were flirting with disaster. That would have been the epic loss, and they talk about this game for years."

They still might talk about it for years, perhaps as a sign of more trouble ahead for the Wolverines, or maybe as a gutsy escape that averts a complete disaster. It certainly was a strange, tedious exercise, with Whittingham's offensive coordinator Jason Beck calling a conservative game, then calling for a risky pass late in the first half that linebacker Dillon Moore intercepted, and would've returned for a touchdown if not for a step out of bounds.

The Broncos won most of the important inches, gaining key first downs barely upheld on video review. They were earning those yards all night, after the Wolverines came out like they planned to roll.

They started sharply on their first possession, taking a 7-0 lead on a 1-yard Underwood run. But that was it, almost

quite literally. They moved 75 yards on that drive, and 75 yards on the final drive in the closing 35 seconds. In between, they had five three-and-outs and couldn't run the ball behind an offensive line that didn't show any of the expected improvement.

Underwood was erratic, displaying some of his same poor habits, locking onto intended receivers and lapsing into sloppy footwork. He finished 12-for-22 for 170 yards and an interception, although he made the defining clutch plays at the end. It is 28-yard pass to Buchanan on third down with 12 seconds left gave UM the ball at the fielded 47.

"I'm not saying that Bryce played a bad game," Whittingham said. "This isn't on Bryce Underwood. It's on me, and I got to figure out a way to have these guys better prepared and be able to get into a rhythm offensively. We always found a way to screw it up. We're very fortunate to win, obviously."

They won with their defense, holding the experienced Broncos to 221 total yards and mostly containing quarterback Brock Lowry, a Canfield native, and star running back Jalen Buckley. But they couldn't contain anything on WMU's punishing, 20-play drive that gobbled up 13:40 and ended with Dieter Kelly's 30-yard field goal to take a 7-17 lead in the fourth quarter.

Whittingham was brought here to restore discipline, but on the field, nothing is restored yet. Michigan committed nine penalties for 80 yards, turned the ball over three times and collected 12 first downs all game. And while the defense held the Broncos without a touchdown, it derived no satisfaction from the effort.

"Six to my stomach is the way I explain my feelings about that game," Michigan defensive end Dom Nichols said.

There were no smiles, only pointed words to get better. In that brief period when the clock first hit zeroes and players figured they'd lost, they stood motionless and dazed, while the Broncos erupted. Right up until the moment their second chance arrived.

"That wasn't a moment we really wanted to be living in, to be honest," Nichols said. "That's not what we wanted out of the game, but this will bring us together, make guys realize their focus wasn't where I was supposed to be."

and after practices.

Parker, at 34, is considered young as a defensive coordinator. Sometimes he comes across as an old soul. Downs, 21, has a similar vibe.

"That's how he's been," said By, who spoke to Parker during the draft process about Caleb. "He's settled. We have a super spiritual family and I like to tell you, (Caleb) is our from the old school, man. That's what you guys see. His work ethic, his snarls, his dedication, but it's kind of how he was raised and that's what you guys are starting to see, which is a little different than how most football players are wired."

The Cowboys hope Parker and Downs mesh against the regular season starts against the Giants.

"I'm very willing, he's very curious," Parker said. "I think that curiosity is one thing for young players that you really look for. They want to know the why behind everything. We give them that upfront. They're behind everything that we're trying to do. So I think with him, he has that natural spirit about him for sure."

ATHLETES OF THE WEEK

Football

Colton Wadde, Highland: Sophomore quarterback accounted for six touchdowns as Hornets defeated Avon Lake 56-20 in non-league play. ... Completed 11-of-11 passes for 270 yards and touchdowns to Ben Radgim (80, 45 yards) and Evan Fourt (80). ... Rushed 11 times for 39 yards, including scores of 8 and 7 yards.

Volleyball

Hailey Mendrea, Medina Christian: Sophomores outside hitter collected match-best 13 kills, nine digs and three aces in sweep of Maple Heights. ... Top all-around talent and six-rotation player for second straight season. ... Ripped career-high 15 kills against Christian Community on Sept. 30, 2025. ... Also plays flag football.

Boys soccer

Maddox Towles, Medina Christian: Senior tallied three goals and one assist in Knights' 3-2 non-conference win over Lake Ridge. ... Led Medina Christian with one goal and one assist in 2-2 non-league draw with Cleveland Benedictine. ... Leads Medina County in scoring with five goals and three assists (15 points). ... Also plays basketball.

Girls soccer

Tenley Winter, Buckeye: Sophomore led Bucks to 2-2 non-league tie against North Royalton, ranked seventh in state by MaxPreps. ... Scored one goal in 3-0 Cleveland West Conference victory over Lakewood. ... Has three goals and four assists this season. ... Helped Buckeye to first district championship in program history last season.

Boys cross country

Connor Rhein, Black River: Senior won Division III race at Ashland Invitational in 16:37.20. ... Three-time state qualifier. ... Two-time All-Gazette runner in cross country. ... Honorable mention All-Gazette in track and field last season after running Medina County's second fastest time in 3,200-meter run (9:31.69).

Girls cross country

Maggie Gerschultz, Wadsworth: Senior won Division III race at Ashland Invitational in 18:56.50. ... Three-time state qualifier. ... Tied 10th at last season's state meet in 18:25.53. ... Two-time All-Gazette MVP in cross country. ... Honorable mention All-Gazette in track and field last season.

Boys golf

Liam Cooney, Brunswick: Sophomore led Blue Devils to 163-166 non-league victory over Clark. ... Finished 20th at last season's state meet in 18:25.53. ... Two-time All-Gazette MVP in cross country. ... Honorable mention All-Gazette in track and field last season.

Girls golf

Jillian Jones, Wadsworth: Junior shot 18-over-par 90 at third Suburban League tournament at Seneca Golf Course. ... Led Wadsworth with 4-over 40 on front nine of Pine Valley Golf Course in 199-191 loss to Copley. ... Her 1-over 38 on back nine of Pine Valley guided Copley (188) to sweep triangler against Wooster (189) and Cleveland (191).

Girls tennis

Juliana Ulin, Brunswick: Junior recorded key victory at first singles as Blue Devils edged Shaker Heights 3-2 in Greater Cleveland Conference. ... Downed Caroline Collier 6-4, 6-0 at top spot. ... Named first-team All-Gazette after finishing 14-14 as sophomore. ... Earned honorable mention All-Gazette as freshman.

FOOTBALL

CLEVELAND WEST CONFERENCE									
Team	W	L	T	PF	PA	Diff	Strk	Streak	Notes
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
CLEVELAND EAST CONFERENCE									
Team	W	L	T	PF	PA	Diff	Strk	Streak	Notes
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
CLEVELAND SOUTH CONFERENCE									
Team	W	L	T	PF	PA	Diff	Strk	Streak	Notes
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
CLEVELAND NORTH CONFERENCE									
Team	W	L	T	PF	PA	Diff	Strk	Streak	Notes
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth
Shaker	1-0	0	0	21	20	1	W	1	at Wadsworth