

# Missouri football defeats Oklahoma State 41-31 in Cotton Bowl

By [Alexander Smith](#) January 4, 2014 | 1:04 a.m. CST

ARLINGTON, Texas — There were quarterback issues. Defensive issues. Referee issues.

Then, there was Michael Sam.

With one fell swoop, he knocked away creeping doubts, growing dread, and, most importantly, the ball out of Oklahoma State quarterback Clint Chelf's right hand.

With 1:09 left in Missouri's eventual 41-31 Cotton Bowl victory, Sam had not picked up a sack in almost two full games. The Cowboys were in the red zone down four points, and the defense had already given up 24 points in the second half.

The SEC Defensive Player of the Year received the call from defensive coordinator Dave Steckel: "Straight."

Translation: Forget the run. Get the quarterback.

So Sam went into All-American mode and burned the right tackle. As Chelf looked downfield to throw a dagger into Tigers fans' hearts, Sam launched himself into the quarterback and stripped the ball, which rolled free on the AT&T Stadium turf.

Fellow defensive lineman Shane Ray scooped up the ball and brought it 73 yards to the end zone as the sections of Missouri fans in a sell-out crowd exploded.

"We knew the team needed us," Ray said. "I can't even tell you what was going through my mind. When I grabbed that ball, the only thing I could think of was 'Just go.'"

The play sealed a win that seemed to slip out of Missouri's hands several times. Much of the discord stemmed from James Franklin's issues at the quarterback position. The senior from Corinth, Texas, was inaccurate throughout the contest, and finished with an ugly line (15-for-40, 174 yards, one interception, two lost fumbles).

Coach Gary Pinkel seemed to have a quarterback controversy on his hands when redshirt freshman Maty Mauk — taking his customary second-quarter series — tallied 105 total yards (thanks to a couple of penalties) on an electric touchdown drive to put Missouri up 14-7.

The young quarterback had been mostly dormant since Franklin returned to health in late November, but he quickly made the most of the opportunity.

After a personal foul on Max Copeland, Missouri faced second-and-18 from its own 12-yard-line. Mauk dropped back to pass but quickly escaped the pocket and made a couple of nice moves for a 35-yard gain.

The next play, offensive coordinator Josh Henson called an "All-Go" play that sent every Tigers receiver deep. Oklahoma State countered with an ineffective blitz and strict man coverage, which opened up the field for another 34-yard scamper by Mauk. Four plays later, he unleashed a

perfect pass to senior Marcus Lucas that barely floated over two Cowboys.

“With Maty, it’s obvious that we have a really good young player,” Pinkel said. “We thought it was good to get him in the game.”

But after that game-changing drive, Mauk was nowhere to be found. As Franklin continued to struggle with his accuracy, it was fair to wonder: “Will Mauk get another shot?”

Two Franklin fumbles later — one on an attempted handoff to Henry Josey, another on an attempted option pitch to Josey — fans got their answer. Mauk trotted back onto the field to try and spark the stagnant offense. But when he went three-and-out, he was pulled again in favor of Franklin.

“I thought James kept his composure,” Pinkel said. “You look at the quarterback, and you can point at him, but there’s blocking, protection, routes. There’s lots of things that most of you can’t see all the time.”

Pinkel was right. While Franklin had one of his worst games as a Tiger, his receivers did little to help. There were not many obvious drops, but the passing game was miserable with missed opportunities that glanced off Tigers’ hands.

“He’s won a lot of clutch games,” Pinkel said. “You generally go with experience.”

Just when the offense’s productivity hit a low, Franklin threw a bad interception to the middle of the field. Fortunately for Missouri, the back judge threw a controversial pass interference flag, which negated the turnover. Oklahoma State fans, who sat through a nearly 4½-hour loss, suffered through several overturned calls and penalties that — fair or not — did not go in their favor.

The huge extra chance turned Henry Josey into the team’s savior.

He rushed for 92 yards and three touchdowns on the day, including the final go-ahead score. The redshirt junior, who has left open the possibility he could leave early for the NFL, couldn’t have asked for a better send-off.

“I have the best support ever,” said Josey, who missed all of the 2012 season with a devastating knee injury. “It’s never me. You’ve got to have faith in God, and then I have so many people that have taken me to the next level.”

In a redemptive moment, Franklin connected with Dorial Green-Beckham for 27 yards down the left sideline to set up the final Josey score.

“You never doubt James,” Josey said. “Everything that happened with the fumbles and everything, you let it go. I’ve got your back.”