

### **Auburn Wins SEC Championship Over Missouri, 59-42**

#### **Sports**

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Atlanta, GA (SportsNetwork.com) - The Southeastern Conference's streak of sending teams to the BCS Championship Game appears to live on, and the Auburn Tigers showed themselves to be plenty worthy of the honor.



Riding a 46-carry, 304-yard, four-touchdown effort from Tre Mason, Auburn sewed up the SEC title and likely earned itself a chance to play for a national crown with an emphatic 59-42 victory over Missouri at the Georgia Dome.

Auburn (12-1) racked up a whopping 536 yards on the ground in all en route to its third-ever SEC Championship Game victory and first since 2010, when it won the national title later that season behind Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Cam Newton.

The Tigers entered Saturday's play behind both Florida State and Ohio State for the all-important top two spots in the BCS standings, but the Buckeyes' 34-24 loss to Michigan State in the Big Ten Championship all but assures Auburn a matchup with the Seminoles in Pasadena on Jan. 6.

"We're the SEC champ. I believe [the conference has] won it the last seven years," said Auburn head coach Gus Malzahn. "We play the toughest schedule of any of the teams there, and we're playing our best football. A lot of teams aren't getting better each week. This team is"

Auburn didn't win a single game in SEC play a season ago before undergoing the biggest turnaround in league history in Malzahn's first year.

Nick Marshall added 101 rushing yards and a touchdown for Auburn, while adding 132 yards and a touchdown through the air while completing a crisp 9-of-11 passes.

Fifth-ranked Missouri (11-2) received 301 passing yards and three touchdowns from quarterback James Franklin, who rushed for a score as well, but its usually stingy defense met its match in an Auburn spread attack that ran at will all throughout the afternoon.

"They didn't do anything different than we expected, nothing," said Missouri head coach Gary Pinkel afterward. "I think you give them credit, but certainly we made a lot of errors. I think as their tempo kept cranking up, I think we probably didn't handle that very well, either."

Dorial Green-Beckham had 143 yards and two touchdowns on six catches for Missouri, with Henry Josey rushing for 123 yards on nine totes in the loss. Franklin completed 21-of-37 attempts and was intercepted once.

Mason obliterated the previous SEC Championship record for rushing yards en route to earning game Most Valuable Player honors, with his total the second- highest single-game output in Auburn history.

"You're looking at one of the top running backs in college football, and he proved it again today,"

said Malzahn.

Trailing 34-31 late in the third quarter, Auburn unleashed its prolific ground attack to produce three straight touchdown drives that put the Western Division champions in front to stay.

Marshall had arguably the most important run of them all, a 42-yard jaunt on 3rd-and-3 in which he faked out a defender near the line of scrimmage and scampered all the way down to the Missouri two. Corey Grant took it on a shotgun draw on the next play to put Auburn ahead 38-34 with 3:21 to go in the period.

Auburn's defense then came up with a huge three-and-out before Malzahn's offense put together another gashing drive, churning out 54 yards in just five snaps without a pass attempt. A 21-yard scamper from Cameron Artis-Payne placed the ball back in the red zone, where Artis-Payne found an opening from 15 yards out to extend the margin further.

Missouri needed only three plays -- the first a 65-yard Josey run with a late- hit penalty by Auburn's Ryan White tacked on -- to pull closer on Franklin's 3-yard read-option keep with nine seconds left in the third quarter. The senior quarterback ran in the subsequent 2-point try as well to get within 45-42 entering the final 15 minutes.

Once again, Missouri's defense couldn't hold, though. Grant broke through for a 43-yard run and Marshall later found Trovon Reed for a 23-yard gain to bring on a 1st-and-goal. Missouri was able to force fourth down, but Mason wasn't denied on a 1-yard plunge that gave Auburn some breathing room with 11:09 left.

Missouri's next two drives generated little, with the second stopped on downs to give Auburn the ball at the opposing 13-yard line. Mason promptly scored his fourth TD of the day to seal the outcome with 4:22 remaining.

"When we needed it and the game was on the line, our defense stepped up in the fourth quarter, got us the ball back, stopped them on fourth down when they went for it, and helped us win," said Malzahn. "That's kind of been their M.O."

Auburn owned a 28-20 advantage near the end of an offensively dominated first half, but Missouri entered the break with some momentum after a blown coverage resulted in Franklin's 55-yard touchdown strike to Green-Beckham.

Cody Parkey knocked through a 52-yard field goal to put Auburn up 31-27 midway through the third quarter, before Franklin completed four passes in orchestrating a 7-play, 75-yard sequence he capped with a 10-yard delivery to Marcus Murphy that brought about the sixth lead change of the contest.

Marshall's fumble, caused by a strip-sack by Kony Ealy on Auburn's opening drive, led to Andrew Baggett's 42-yard field goal that started the scoring, but the dual-threat quarterback atoned for the miscue with a 38-yard touchdown connection with Sammie Coates on the following possession.

Franklin in turn led Missouri down the field, with Green-Beckham's leaping grab on a 28-yard deep post giving the East Division winners a 10-7 lead. Auburn answered under a minute later, though, as a 54-yard catch-and-run by Coates got the offense in position for Marshall's 9-yard run with 4:09 left in the first quarter.

Missouri's defense then came up with another big turnover, as Ealy knocked the ball loose from Marshall on a quarterback draw and E.J. Gaines scooped it up on a bounce before sprinting 11 yards for at touchdown early in the second quarter.

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Auburn countered by marching 75 yards in eight plays -- all but one of which were runs -- on the ensuing drive, with Mason following a 16-yard scramble by Marshall with a determined 7-yard effort into the end zone for a 21-17 Auburn edge.

A 24-yard pass from Franklin to Murphy helped set up Baggett's 36-yard field goal that cut the lead to one, but Mason ripped off a 52-yard run on the next snap from scrimmage to get Missouri deep in Auburn territory once again. He had all four touches on the brief series, the last a 3-yard burst up the middle that put Auburn up 28-20 with 6:26 left in the half.