



Photo by Kevin Kinder/Blue &amp; Gold News

The West Virginia defense suffered its first setback of the season against Oklahoma.

## Defense's pride, perseverance on the line vs. OSU

by Matt Keller  
BLUE & GOLD NEWS/FOR THE EXPONENT TELEGRAM

MORGANTOWN — West Virginia's defense has never questioned its high-stakes approach. The challenge now is whether it's willing to gamble on its own grit and guts.

It's easy to point out the primary pitfalls for West Virginia over the last few years. First, it was inept defense, then a popgun offense, then some depth issues followed by somewhat surprising late season collapses. Part of the latter balm is certainly scheduling, especially last season. But now, with added maturation, a more veteran and experienced upperclass and some increased savvy — more so on the defensive side — West Virginia should show its ability to bounce back from the defeat at Oklahoma and continue its formerly progressive path through No. 21 Oklahoma State and the rest of its October onslaught.

Truth told, Tony Gibson's unit didn't perform that poorly in any one facet. Oklahoma's big plays, of which there were 10 of greater than 15 yards, came via the pass. But those breakdowns were part poor communication, part lack of pressure, and part poor coverage.

"It's unbelievable," Gibson said. "If you were to take the score off of that stat sheet after the game and ask me what the outcome was, I would say we won by two or three touchdowns. They were 2-for-11 on third downs. We had two turnovers, four sacks and six tackles for loss. They ran the ball for 174 yards, and they completed 15 passes. Yes, 320 yards is a bad thing. That's too many big passing plays. Everyone wants to blame the defensive backs, but it's either a lack of pass rush or the linebackers doing their job. It's not always the defensive backs."

That can be viewed in two ways. The first is that there were minor problems in each area that can be rectified and allow the Mountaineers to again elevate to past form. The second is that if there are still problems across each area of the defense, ones exposed by a former walk-on quarterback and a team that frankly struggled more with the likes of Tulsa and Tennessee, perhaps this defense isn't quite what it was made out to be.

It reads here it's more likely the first, but certainly some of the second. West Virginia's defense was given too much credit at the start of the season. It was going to be good, maybe quite good, but the tag of greatness was applied a bit too early. What Saturday's contest, sold out, at home, at 7 p.m., in front of a national audience, will show is if the mindset off this entire team (especially the defense) is indeed more mature, more able to overcome the occasional disappointments which will

run rampant through all but the most elite collegiate seasons.

What will these Mountaineers show themselves to be? Ones who will again begin the slide, only this time a month earlier? Or ones able to grasp that must-have win — and it's not a major stretch to call this contest just that — in the midst of three top 15 foes to gain some traction in getting to the Big 12's upper echelon?

It won't be easy. Oklahoma State has experience at quarterback, a solid offensive front and good skill in the backfield and at receiver, where it will challenge West Virginia downfield with its passing game. After review of the film against Oklahoma, Gibson said that "it's football. We like our guys attacking and playing aggressive." Safeties coach Joe DeForest, himself a former coordinator, noted the Mountaineers weren't backing down from their aggressive approach, and that when a unit blitzes as much as do the Mountaineers, with their single high safety or not even that, on occasion it will get beat.

The hope is the flames of any burn will be snuffed and offset by forcing the quarterback to, as Gibson says, "chuck the ball in the stands." West Virginia has done it before, most famously to Baylor last season, when the idea that Petty Hates Pressure came to fruition. But there can't be the continued issues of communication breakdowns — KJ Dillon said the 71-yard busted coverage late in the third quarter against Oklahoma was just that, much like TCU a year ago — or other mistakes that, frankly, big-time defenses either don't commit, or have the raw skillset and talent to offset.

If this game is to prove anything, it will be how much backbone this team has, and what it can muster. All the advantages are there, the longer travel for the opposition, the venue, the time, the crowd.

West Virginia must prove itself adept to the challenges of this new conference, even if the league did it no favors with scheduling. Because the frank truth of a probable 3-4 record is staring the team in the face if it can't win here. Oklahoma State isn't just the most important game on the schedule because it's the next one, it's the most important game on the schedule because it provides another petri dish of a proving ground for this program, and its still-questionable intestinal fortitude.

And it'll be the defense that needs to anchor the effort. The offense is simply a bit above solid, the special teams still a question in certain areas. But this defense was to be the keystone of the resurgence, the most surefire side of Dana Holgorsen's triangle-shaped ovoid. It's time is now.



SATURDAY | 7 P.M. | MILAN PUSKAR STADIUM | ESPN2

### OFFENSE

285.5	PASSING	345
214.2	RUSHING	138.2
38.5	POINTS	38.2



West Virginia struggled with turnovers against Oklahoma, throwing three interceptions and losing two fumbles in the loss to the Sooners.

### DEFENSE

195.5	PASSING	177.8
141.8	RUSHING	132.2
16.8	POINTS	19.2



WVU allowed 320 passing yards in last week's loss to Oklahoma. The Mountaineers are 4-8 since 2012 when allowing more than 300 passing yards to a Big 12 team.

### KEY MATCHUP

WVU O-line  
vs.  
OSU pass rush



The Mountaineers allowed seven sacks in last week's loss to Oklahoma. If WVU wants to get back on track, the offensive line will need to give Skyler Howard time in the pocket to find his receivers.

### PREDICTION

31 24



Graphic by Michael Carvelli

## Bevo to miss Texas-OU with life-threatening illness

The Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The University of Texas says longhorn steer mascot Bevo XIV has a "life-threatening condition" and won't travel to Dallas for the team's rivalry game Saturday against No. 10 Oklahoma at the Cotton Bowl.

The Silver Spurs organization that takes care of the mascot did not detail Bevo's illness Wednesday and said his condition was still being explored by veterinarians.

Bevo XIV has been the school mas-

cot since 2004. The steer weighs 2,100 pounds and has a horn span of 82 inches.

Texas is 1-4 under second-year coach Charlie Strong, the Longhorns' worst start since 1956.

#### DISMISSED MICHIGAN FOOTBALL PLAYER CHARGED WITH

**3 FELONIES:** Former Michigan football player Logan Tuley-Tillman was charged with three felonies Wednesday, nearly a month after the junior offensive tackle was kicked off the team by coach Jim Harbaugh.

Tuley-Tillman stood silent as he was arraigned on one count of using a computer to commit a crime and two counts of capturing/distributing an image of an unclothed person, according to Ann Arbor District Court records. He potentially faces up to 10 years in prison and up to a \$5,000 fine for the charge of using a computer to commit a crime. He could be sentenced to up to two years in jail and as much as \$2,000 for each of the counts of capturing/distributing an image of an unclothed person.

**Chick-fil-A**  
310 EMILY DRIVE • CLARKSBURG • (304) 622-9797

**WVU Gameday Special**  
On WVU Gameday, buy any Medium or Large Chick-Fil-A tray and get a small tray of cookies FREE!