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Bailey's game-winning kick earns scholarship

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AUSTIN (AP) -- Temperatures were plummeting and the snow was swirling when the kicker nobody ever heard of trotted onto the field.

With one frozen swing of his right leg, Ryan Bailey became the unlikeliest of Texas heroes when the walk-on kicker booted a 22-yard field goal with 23 seconds left, sending the Longhorns to a tough 22-20 win at Nebraska last season.

"That was a money kick for him," Texas coach Mack Brown said this week as the No. 17 Longhorns (6-2, 2-2 Big 12) prepare to meet the Cornhuskers (4-4, 1-3) again on Saturday in Austin.

Brown's not kidding about the money. Bailey only got on the field because the starter pulled a groin muscle during the game, and the winning kick earned him a scholarship this season.

"It gave us a chance to stay in the conference and national championship hunt at that time last year on the road, that alone would be worth a scholarship at The University of Texas if he never kicked again," Brown said.

Bailey has made a lot more kicks since. He's 11 of 14 on field goals and had made all 34 extra point attempts this season. But nothing has even come close to the drama of the game winner at Nebraska.

"It's been a fun year," Bailey said. "I've just been trying to stay consistent and make sure to make all the kicks and take every kick as a new one and don't think about the past and just keep going."

Bailey remains so low-key about the kick that he doesn't have much to offer even when asked about it.

"It all happened really quickly on the field and I don't remember much that happened because I try not to think about the pressure or anything like that," he said. "Not that many people ask me about it anymore."

They may not ask, but there are a lot of Texas fans who will never forget it, mostly because of the feel-good story Bailey was that afternoon.

Texas only had a chance to win because of a late Nebraska turnover. With a 20-mph wind sending snow flurries swirling through the stadium, Texas drove to the Nebraska 5 when Bailey got the call for the kick.

He had never been through a live snap and kick in a college game and now, in front of more than 70,000 screaming Nebraska fans, was being asked to save the Longhorns' season.

Texas fans watching on TV at home were trying to figure out who he was. Bailey shared No. 39 with Longhorn defensive end Brian Robison, who was known for blocking field goals not kicking them. Even some of Bailey's teammates barely knew who he was.

"It was scary because I really didn't know him well at the time. We were shaking because we were cold and because of that situation," wide receiver Quan Cosby said.

One person who was keenly aware of what was happening was Bailey's mother. She was on a trip to New York, eating a hamburger and watching the game on TV when she saw her son talking to Brown before the kick.

"She was blown away, I'm sure," Bailey said. "I think she cried in New York and when she got back here she was really happy for me."

Brown gave Bailey a pep talk, comparing him to former Longhorns kicker Dusty Mangum, who booted the game-winner on the final play of the 2005 Rose Bowl to beat Michigan.

Mangum's kick couldn't earn him a scholarship. He was a senior and it was the last kick of his career. Brown rewarded Bailey with his scholarship before the start of this season.

"It's a great story," Brown said. "It's one of the best stories of our 10 years here."

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