

= 1984 Independence Bowl =

The 1984 Independence Bowl was a post @-@ season American college football bowl game between the Virginia Tech Hokies and the Air Force Falcons at Independence Stadium in Shreveport , Louisiana on December 15 , 1984 . The game was the final contest of the 1984 NCAA Division I @-@ A football season for both teams , and ended in a 23 ? 7 victory for the Air Force Academy .

The Virginia Tech Hokies earned a bid to the Independence Bowl following an 8 ? 3 record during the 1984 @-@ 1985 football season . Tech was the No. 3 team in the country in terms of overall defense and No. 2 in terms of rushing defense , due to the efforts of Tech defender Bruce Smith , an All @-@ American and Outland Trophy winner who would later go on to be the first @-@ overall selection in the 1985 NFL Draft . Smith became the centerpiece of an eligibility debate during the weeks prior to the game , as he was at first prohibited from participating in the game by the NCAA , which had placed him under probation for accepting illegal gifts . Smith contested this probation in Virginia and Louisiana courts , and was allowed to play in the game by virtue of two court actions .

Facing the Hokies were the Falcons of the United States Air Force Academy , who had gone 7 ? 4 during the regular season , including a 5 ? 3 record in the Western Athletic Conference . The Falcons were led by first @-@ year head coach Fisher DeBerry and had the No. 1 ranked rushing offense in the country , using their wishbone offense to great effect .

The game kicked off under comfortable temperatures and moderate wind . An estimated 41 @,@ 100 people came out to watch the Falcons take on the Hokies . Air Force scored first with a 35 @-@ yard field goal , but the Hokies struck back with a touchdown off a 10 @-@ play , 72 @-@ yard drive , putting Virginia Tech ahead 7 ? 3 . That score would remain until halfway through the second quarter , when Virginia Tech fumbled the ball at its own three @-@ yard line . Air Force recovered the ball and scored a touchdown on the next play , regaining a 10 ? 7 lead . After halftime , Virginia Tech 's defense began to break down under Air Force 's rushing offense . The Hokies and Air Force battled defensively throughout the third quarter , but in the fourth quarter , Air Force 's offense broke free for 13 unanswered points , clinching the victory . Air Force quarterback Bart Weiss was named the game 's most valuable player on offense , while Virginia Tech linebacker Vince Daniels was named the game 's most valuable player on defense .

= = Team selection = =

= = = Air Force = = =

The United States Air Force Academy Falcons began the 1984 college football season with a new head coach , Fisher DeBerry , who replaced the successful Ken Hatfield . Hatfield and the Falcons had gone 10 ? 2 during 1983 , including a win in the 1983 Independence Bowl . Following that win , Hatfield accepted the head @-@ coaching position at the University of Arkansas and DeBerry was hired to replace him , being promoted from the offensive coordinator position .

In the first two games of his Air Force career , DeBerry 's Falcons jumped to an excellent start . In the team 's 1984 opener , the Falcons defeated San Diego State , 34 ? 17 . The following week , the Falcons blew out Northern Colorado , 75 ? 7 . But after those two victories , things became more difficult for the Falcons . Air Force lost its next two games (at Utah and Wyoming) before defeating Colorado State , Navy , and traditional football powerhouse Notre Dame .

The Falcons ' final four games were split evenly ? two wins , two losses ? and Air Force finished the regular season with a record of 7 ? 4 and a Western Athletic Conference record of 4 ? 3 . In late November , in exchange for their regular @-@ season success , the Falcons were invited to participate in the Independence Bowl , becoming the second team in the nine @-@ year history of the game to be invited in two consecutive years .

= = = Virginia Tech = = =

Virginia Tech began the 1984 season under head coach Bill Dooley , who at the time was the winningest coach in Tech history . In 1983 , the Hokies had gone 9 ? 2 , with one of the two losses coming at the hands of No. 9 West Virginia in a nationally televised game . Tech began the 1984 season with a win against Wake Forest , but followed that by a loss against West Virginia in one of the most contentious college football rivalries in the country at that time . In the two weeks that followed , Tech continued to alternate wins and losses , reaching an overall record of 2 ? 2 by the end of the fourth week of the season . Tech 's fortunes took a turn for the better during the latter portion of the season , however , as the Hokies proceeded to win six of their final seven games before earning a bid to the 1984 Independence Bowl .

= = Pregame buildup = =

In the weeks leading up to the Independence Bowl , the game received as much or more coverage than the incipient national championship game due to the controversial status of Tech star Bruce Smith , who was embroiled in a legal battle with the NCAA about his participation in the game . Spread bettors favored Air Force to win the game by four points . Ticket sales were slow in the weeks leading up to the bowl , and Virginia Tech was faulted for failing to sell its entire allotment of 12 @, @ 000 tickets . Tech representatives said they might have to return as many as 8 @, @ 000 tickets due to the difficulty of selling tickets for a game more than 20 hours away by car .

= = = Offensive matchups = = =

During the 1984 season , Virginia Tech 's rushing offense was led by running back Maurice Williams , who had 149 carries for 574 yards and six touchdowns during the regular season . At quarterback , the Hokies featured Mark Cox , who completed 86 passes for 983 yards , five touchdowns , and eight interceptions during the season . Cox 's favorite target was tight end Joe Jones , who caught 39 passes for 452 yards and one touchdown during the season .

On the other side of the field , Air Force had the No. 2 rushing offense in the country during the 1984 regular season . Air Force fullback Pat Evans led the team with 159 carries for 1 @, @ 015 rushing yards . Air Force quarterback Bart Weiss also was known more for his running than his passing . Weiss finished the regular season with just 41 completions for 668 yards and three touchdowns . He carried the ball 126 times for 540 yards and 10 touchdowns . Wide receiver Ken Carpenter benefited the most from the few passes that were thrown . He had 15 catches for 258 yards and two touchdowns during the regular season .

= = = Defensive matchups = = =

On defense , the Falcons were led by Terry Maki , who had a total of 137 tackles , including assists . Dwan Wilson had five interceptions for the Falcons , and safety Scott Thomas had four . Altogether , the Falcons allowed an average of 148 rushing yards and 167 passing yards per game . In scoring defense , the Falcons allowed an average of just 21 points per game while averaging 44 points per game themselves .

Virginia Tech 's defense , meanwhile , was No. 2 nationally in rushing defense and No. 3 in total defense . During the 11 games of the regular season , Tech allowed an average of just 3 @. @ 34 yards per play , the second @-@ lowest total allowed in Tech football history . The most important player on that defense was Tech lineman Bruce Smith , who accumulated 52 tackles and 16 sacks during the regular season . On December 6 , Smith received the Outland Trophy , an award given to the top interior defensive lineman as voted by American sportswriters . Among defensive backs , the Hokies were led by Ashley Lee , who caught seven interceptions during the season .

= = = Bruce Smith controversy = = =

In the spring of 1983 , Virginia Tech was placed on probation by the NCAA for violations stemming from illegal benefits given to players and potential recruits . The probation 's main effect was to ban the players who received the benefits from participating in any postseason game following the 1984 season . Seven of the eight players involved in the scandal either left Virginia Tech or had the probation lifted as a result of appeals to the NCAA . The eighth , Bruce Smith , did not .

Because the names of the eight players had been kept secret , the general public was not informed that Bruce Smith , who had developed into one of the best defensive players in the country , would not be able to participate in the 1984 Independence Bowl . Only when Smith filed suit to force Virginia Tech and the NCAA to allow him to play in the game was the situation revealed . Dr. Cecil Lloyd , chairman of the Independence Bowl , announced at the time of the lawsuit that had he known about the restrictions on Smith , he likely would not have invited Tech to play in the game .

Smith nevertheless obtained an injunction from a Virginia court to allow him to participate in the game , which was being held in Louisiana . In response , the NCAA threatened to remove the Independence Bowl 's certification if Smith was allowed to play . When the bowl forbade Smith from participating , he obtained a restraining order from a Louisiana court to force the Independence Bowl to allow him to play . On the day of the game , the NCAA attempted to appeal the decision to the Louisiana Second Circuit Court of Appeals , but a three @-@ judge panel denied the appeal . By this time , the game was about to begin , and Smith was allowed to play .

= = Game summary = =

The 1984 Independence Bowl kicked off on December 15 , 1984 in Shreveport , Louisiana . The game was televised in the United States on ESPN , and Howard David , Paul Maguire , and Steve Grad were the broadcasters . Weather at kickoff was a comfortable 74 ° F (23 ° C) and the wind was from the southwest at approximately 15 miles per hour (24 km / h) . More than 41 @, @ 000 tickets were sold for the game , but attendance was somewhat less , as many seats were empty .

= = = First quarter = = =

Virginia Tech kicked off to begin the game , and Air Force began the first drive of the game at its 20 @-@ yard line after a touchback . The Falcons began the game with three consecutive short rushes that failed to gain a first down and punted the ball away to Virginia Tech . The Hokies began their first drive of the game after a short return to their 35 @-@ yard line . As had Air Force before them , Tech was unable to gain a first down and punted . Air Force began its second drive at its 34 @-@ yard line and had more success on its second drive . Aided by an offside penalty against Virginia Tech , the Falcons picked up a first down with a big run by Bart Weiss that penetrated the Tech side of the field . That run was followed by several others from the Falcons , who drove inside the Tech red zone before being stopped by the Tech defense . Facing fourth down , Air Force attempted a 35 @-@ yard field goal , which was successful . With 6 : 35 remaining in the first quarter , Air Force took a 3 ? 0 lead .

Following Air Force 's post @-@ score kickoff and a short return by the Hokies , Virginia Tech 's offense began a drive at its 28 @-@ yard line . A five @-@ yard false @-@ start penalty pushed the Tech offense back five yards , but a long run by quarterback Mark Cox made up the penalty and earned Tech a first down . Another first down followed , and Tech penetrated into the Air Force side of the field . Once there , Eddie Hunter evaded Falcon defenders for a 33 @-@ yard run that took the Hokies inside Air Force 's 20 @-@ yard line . Three more plays pushed Tech forward , inside Air Force 's five @-@ yard line , for a first down . On the next play , Maurice Williams ran forward , into the end zone . The touchdown and extra point gave Virginia Tech a 7 ? 3 lead with 1 : 42 left in the quarter .

Air Force returned the Virginia Tech kickoff to its 21 @-@ yard line and was aided by a 15 @-@ yard personal foul penalty against Virginia Tech after the return . The Falcons thus began their drive at their 36 @-@ yard line . They continued moving the ball forward on short rushes , but almost had a severe setback when Weiss fumbled during a carry . He recovered his own drop , however , and

the Falcons retained possession . With the Falcons facing fourth down on their half of the field , time ran out in the quarter . At the end of the first quarter , Virginia Tech held a 7 ? 3 lead .

= = = Second quarter = = =

Still facing fourth down , Air Force punted to begin the second quarter . Virginia Tech recovered successfully and began a drive at its 32 @-@ yard line . The Hokies ran the ball successfully at first , gaining a first down and driving into the Falcons ' half of the field . Facing a third down , Tech was aided by a pass interference penalty against Air Force , which gave Tech a first down inside the Air Force 25 @-@ yard line . The Hokies advanced to the 20 @-@ yard line , but Cox was sacked by Air Force defender Larry Nicklas , pushing Tech back to the 27 @-@ yard line . Tech head coach Bill Dooley sent in kicker Don Wade to attempt a 43 @-@ yard field goal . The kick fell short , and the margin remained at 7 ? 3 with 11 : 03 remaining before halftime .

Due to the missed field goal , Air Force took over from the point at which the kick was missed , the 27 @-@ yard line . Despite gaining a bit of momentum when they kept Virginia Tech from scoring , the Falcons were unable to gain a first down and went three and out , punting the ball away . Tech declined to return the ball , which rolled to the Virginia Tech three @-@ yard line , where the Hokies ' offense took over . On the first play after the punt , Tech 's Nigel Bowe fumbled the ball , which was leapt upon by several Air Force defenders , who recovered it . After the fumble recovery , it took the Falcons just one play to score a touchdown and gain a 10 ? 7 lead .

With 8 : 50 before halftime , Tech now trailed for the first time since the beginning of the quarter . Needing to regain the lead , the Hokies returned Air Force 's kickoff to near the 20 @-@ yard line but committed a 15 @-@ yard personal foul penalty that pushed Tech back to its 12 @-@ yard line and forced the Hokies to gain 22 yards for a first down . Tech was unable to do this due to strong defense from Air Force and punted after going three and out . The kick was short , and Air Force began its drive at its 44 @-@ yard line . The Falcons likewise went three and out and punted back to Tech .

The Hokies recovered the punt at their 14 @-@ yard line . The Hokies gained one first down with three rushes , then another on a pass from Cox , advancing the ball to their 35 @-@ yard line . A facemask penalty against Air Force aided Tech as the Hokies drove inside Air Force territory . Time remaining in the half quickly became a factor for Virginia Tech , as the Hokies penetrated the Falcons ' 45 @-@ yard line with just 1 : 10 remaining in the half . As the Hokies rushed the ball , they were forced to call timeouts in order to stop the clock ? which counts down following rushing plays that do not gain a first down or end out of bounds . Cox threw occasional passes , gaining short yardage , but most of the Hokies ' work during the drive was done on the ground . Tech penetrated the Air Force red zone , driving to the Falcons ' 12 @-@ yard line with 25 seconds remaining . As Cox attempted to throw a pass into the end zone in an effort to get a touchdown before time expired , Air Force 's Mike Chandler intercepted the ball , denying the Hokies a scoring chance .

At halftime , Air Force had a 10 ? 7 lead .

= = = Third quarter = = =

Air Force received the ball to begin the second half and started at its 20 @-@ yard line after a touchback . The Falcons drove into Tech territory , but the Hokies ' defense forced the Falcons to punt near midfield , and Tech took over at 12 : 23 in the quarter at its 24 @-@ yard line after a short return . As had Air Force , Tech picked up a couple of first downs . But like Air Force , the opposition 's defense forced a punt near midfield . Following the punt , Air Force took over at its 20 @-@ yard line with 9 : 09 remaining in the quarter .

The Falcons had trouble moving the ball at first , but were helped by a 15 @-@ yard personal foul penalty against Virginia Tech that gave them a first down . Weiss completed a pass that gave the Falcons another first down and drove Air Force inside Tech territory . On the first play within Hokie territory , Weiss fumbled the ball , but fell on it for a loss , and Air Force retained possession . Weiss

made up for his fumble two plays later when he scrambled for a first down that kept the drive going . Despite that effort , Tech was able to force a stop and Air Force punted with 3 : 10 remaining in the quarter .

Tech took over at its 13 @-@ yard line following the 63 @-@ yard punt but went three and out and was itself forced to punt . Air Force 's offense returned to the field at its 47 @-@ yard line after the kick . The Falcons picked up one first down , but the Tech defense stiffened and forced a fourth down . Needing just inches to gain a first down , Air Force elected to attempt to gain the needed yardage rather than punt the ball away . But before the Falcons could start the play , time ran out in the third quarter . With one quarter remaining , the Falcons still held a 10 ? 7 lead .

= = = Fourth quarter = = =

The fourth quarter began with Air Force in possession of the ball , facing fourth down , and needing to advance mere inches to gain a first down . During the Falcons ' attempt to gain those inches , however , Tech 's Bruce Smith broke through the Air Force offensive line and sacked Bart Weiss for a loss . Having failed to gain a first down , Air Force turned the ball over to Virginia Tech , which began a drive at its 42 @-@ yard line . Tech 's Eddie Hunter moved the ball forward on three consecutive rushes , earning a first down and driving into Air Force territory . Seeking to tie the game or gain a lead with a trick play ; Tech head coach Bill Dooley ordered a play involving a pass by Hunter instead of quarterback Mark Cox . The pass was intercepted by Air Force defender Scott Thomas , and the Falcons took over on offense at their 38 @-@ yard line with 12 : 58 remaining in the game .

As had Virginia Tech , Air Force began moving the ball on the ground . The Falcons were aided by two offside penalties against the Hokies and drove into Tech territory . Once there , Weiss completed a 16 @-@ yard pass to Tom Coleman for a first down . Weiss picked up another first down by running the ball , pushing the Falcons inside the Tech red zone with 10 : 10 remaining . The Tech defense stiffened , forcing a fourth down at the two @-@ yard line . Rather than kick a field goal , Fisher DeBerry elected to attempt the touchdown , and Mike Brown ran the needed two yards . The score and following extra point gave Air Force a 17 ? 7 lead with 6 : 00 remaining in the game .

Virginia Tech 's offense began work at its 20 @-@ yard line needing to score quickly in order to have a chance at making up the 10 @-@ point deficit , which would require two separate scores to make good . Mike Cox completed a seven @-@ yard pass , then Maurice Williams broke free for a 15 @-@ yard rush that gave Tech a first down and drove the Hokies to the 42 @-@ yard line . Cox completed a long pass into the Air Force red zone , but the completion was negated by an offensive pass interference penalty against Tech that cost the Hokies the long completion , a loss of down , and an additional 15 yards . While scrambling for extra time in which to throw the ball , Cox was sacked by Air Force defender Chris Funk and fumbled the ball . Air Force recovered the loose football , and the Falcons ' offense returned to the field with just over four minutes left to play .

The Falcons began their drive at the Tech 30 @-@ yard line after the fumble , which effectively eliminated any chance Tech had to earn the two scores needed to regain the lead . The Falcons moved the ball effectively down the field , running out the clock as they did so . Bart Weiss finally broke through the Tech defense for a 12 @-@ yard gain and the Falcons ' final touchdown of the game . Though the extra point kick was missed , Air Force had taken an insurmountable 23 ? 7 lead with 2 : 08 remaining in the game . Following Air Force 's post @-@ touchdown kickoff , Tech 's offense returned to the field at its 20 @-@ yard line . The first play of the Hokies ' drive resulted in a 10 @-@ yard holding penalty against Tech . With time winding down , Tech advanced the ball successfully via several passes , but time ran out shortly after Tech crossed the 50 @-@ yard line . Air Force clinched a 23 ? 7 victory .

= = Statistical summary = =

The 23 points Tech allowed in the game marked just the third time that season Virginia Tech

allowed more than 20 points in a game . For his performance in the game , Air Force quarterback Bart Weiss was named the game 's most valuable player on offense . Virginia Tech linebacker Vince Daniels was named the game 's most valuable defensive player . Daniels had a game @-@ leading 15 tackles , tying a Tech bowl @-@ game record set by Ashley Lee in the 1981 Peach Bowl . The record still stands today . Meanwhile , Weiss completed six of his seven passes for 49 yards . His main success came rushing the ball , as he carried it 29 times for 93 yards and a touchdown .

Virginia Tech 's leading rusher was Eddie Hunter , who carried the ball 12 times for 75 yards . Tech quarterback Mark Cox finished the game having completed just six of his 17 passes for 50 passing yards and one interception . In total , Tech turned the ball over four times ? twice via interceptions and twice via lost fumbles .

Bruce Smith finished the game with a single sack and eight tackles , and cited his poor performance on the time spent away from practice and in court . Other Virginia Tech players cited the court battle as a distraction during game preparations , and it was also thought that many Air Force players were inspired by the increased media coverage given Virginia Tech . Air Force coach Fisher DeBerry said he thought the storm of pre @-@ game publicity about Smith helped his team . " It seemed like everybody forgot the Air Force was in town , " he said . " The thing that motivated the team was the challenge of playing against them with him in the lineup . "

Virginia Tech set several bowl game records in the Independence Bowl that still stand today . Tech allowed just two passing first downs , seven pass attempts and 49 passing yards on defense . Conversely , the Hokies allowed 55 rushing attempts by Air Force , a record for the most against Tech in a bowl game . Bart Weiss set a bowl @-@ game record for most carries by a single player against Tech , and Falcons punter Mark Simon kicked a 63 @-@ yard punt that is the longest ever kicked by a Tech opponent in a bowl game .

= = Postgame effects = =

Virginia Tech 's loss and Air Force 's win brought both teams to final 1984 records of 8 ? 4 . The loss left Virginia Tech winless in five bowl appearances to that date . The win was Air Force 's third bowl victory in as many years , and the Falcons became the first team to repeat as Independence Bowl champions . The Hokies won their next bowl appearance , the 1986 Peach Bowl . Air Force appeared in a bowl the following year , against Texas .

Despite the uncomplimentary media coverage given him and his poor performance during the Independence Bowl , Bruce Smith was selected with the first overall pick in the 1985 NFL Draft . Smith was subsequently signed to a \$ 2 @.@ 6 million contract by the Buffalo Bills . During the 1985 college football season , Virginia Tech struggled to rebuild from losing 20 starters (10 on offense , 10 on defense) from the 1984 team , and finished with a 6 ? 5 record . Air Force , meanwhile , performed extremely well , finishing with an 11 ? 1 record , including a bowl @-@ game win over the Texas Longhorns . Fisher DeBerry remained the coach of Air Force for another 22 years , eventually retiring after the conclusion of the 2006 season .

Nine years after appearing in the 1984 Independence Bowl , Tech invited to participate in the 1993 game against Indiana . By that time , memories of the legal troubles that had surrounded the game were gone . Independence Bowl president Cecil Lloyd said of the controversy in 1993 , " It was the best thing that ever could have happened to the Independence Bowl It got us international publicity . It put us on the map . "