

= 2002 San Francisco Bowl =

The 2002 San Francisco Bowl was the inaugural edition of the post @-@ season college football bowl game between the Virginia Tech Hokies and the Air Force Falcons at Pacific Bell Park in San Francisco , California on December 31 , 2002 . The game was the final contest of the 2002 NCAA Division I @-@ A football season for both teams , and ended in a 20 ? 13 victory for Virginia Tech .

Virginia Tech was selected for the inaugural edition of the San Francisco Bowl (now the Fight Hunger Bowl) after a 9 ? 4 record during the 2002 college football season . Tech defeated several nationally ranked teams , including No. 14 LSU and No. 19 Texas A & M. Tech 's opponent , Air Force , received its bid following an 8 ? 4 regular season . Air Force faced several BCS @-@ conference opponents during the regular season , including California and Northwestern .

The 2002 San Francisco Bowl kicked off in clear , 69 ° F (21 ° C) weather , but the field was soggy after several days of rain . In the first seven minutes of the game , Air Force scored 10 consecutive unanswered points . The Tech defense eventually clamped down on the Falcons ' offense , however , and only allowed three points for the remainder of the game . The Virginia Tech offense slowly climbed back from the initial 10 @-@ point deficit , scoring a touchdown in the first quarter and a field goal in the second . By halftime , the Hokies had equalized the score at 10 ? 10 .

In the second half , defense continued to dominate as Tech gradually built a lead . The Hokies scored the only points of a third quarter as running back Lee Suggs ran into the end zone from one yard out , allowing Tech to take a 17 ? 10 lead into the fourth quarter . The Falcons didn 't give up easily , however . Air Force kicker Joey Ashcroft cut into the Tech lead with a 21 @-@ yard field goal . Tech matched the score later in the quarter to restore the one @-@ touchdown lead . As time ran down , Air Force had one final chance to tie the game and send it into overtime . Beginning at its own 18 @-@ yard line with 4 : 11 left to play , the Falcons drove deep into Tech territory . With seven seconds remaining , Air Force quarterback Chance Harridge tried to scramble into the end zone , but was stopped before the goal line by Tech cornerback Ronyell Whitaker . The defensive stop preserved the 20 ? 13 Hokie victory , and Tech quarterback Bryan Randall was named the game 's most valuable player .

= = Team selection = =

= = = Air Force = = =

The Air Force Falcons began the 2002 season having gone 6 ? 6 during the previous season , and hoping to put that disappointing showing behind them . On August 31 , 2002 , the Falcons did just that , defeating Northwestern in a blowout 52 ? 3 victory . Following that win , the Falcons added five more in successive weeks , racing out to a 6 ? 0 undefeated start . On October 19 , the Falcons faced No. 19 Notre Dame , and in a close @-@ fought game , suffered their first loss . In the five games that followed the loss to Notre Dame , the Falcons suffered three additional losses , culminating in a close regular @-@ season defeat by the San Diego State Aztecs .

After starting with six straight wins , the Falcons finished with an overall regular @-@ season record of 8 ? 4 and a Mountain West Conference record of 4 ? 3 , putting them third in the conference . Air Force was one of three bowl @-@ eligible teams in the Mountain West during the 2002 season . MWC champion Colorado State earned an automatic bid to the Liberty Bowl , and the Las Vegas Bowl , which had second pick of MWC teams , selected New Mexico . By default , this left Air Force to the San Francisco Bowl .

= = = Virginia Tech = = =

The Virginia Tech Hokies football team began the 2002 season having gone 8 ? 4 the previous season and having suffered a season @-@ ending defeat to Florida State in the 2002 Gator Bowl . The Hokies began the season against the Arkansas State Indians , hoping to rebuild after the loss of

11 starters from the previous season's team . Against the Indians , Tech started the season with a record performance , scoring 56 first @-@ half points en route to a 63 ? 7 rout .

That overwhelming start was just the beginning for the Hokies , who won their next seven games , racing to an 8 ? 0 start and a No. 3 ranking in the national polls . In their ninth game of the season , however , the Hokies suffered their first loss , falling 21 ? 28 to the Pittsburgh Panthers . The next week , Tech suffered an even closer loss , losing to Syracuse in triple overtime despite a record performance from Tech quarterback Bryan Randall , who accumulated 504 passing yards and five touchdown passes .

In the three games following the loss to Syracuse , Tech lost two , taking it to a final regular @-@ season record of 9 ? 4 overall and a Big East conference record of 3 ? 4 , meaning Tech was the fourth ranked team in the Big East that season . Prior to the season , the Big East had signed an agreement with the new San Francisco Bowl , giving that bowl the fifth pick of bowl @-@ eligible teams in the Big East . But with the Gator Bowl (second pick of Big East teams) selecting Notre Dame instead of a Big East team , all the Big East 's selections were pushed back one slot . Second @-@ place West Virginia University was pushed to the Continental Tire Bowl (third pick) and third @-@ place Pittsburgh was selected by the Insight Bowl (fourth pick) , leaving Virginia Tech to be selected by the San Francisco Bowl with the fifth pick .

= = Pregame buildup = =

On the day prior to the game , spread bettors favored Virginia Tech to win by 11 @.@ 5 points . Despite that advantage , Tech head coach Frank Beamer warned his team and the public about the threat underdog Air Force posed to the Hokies ' chances of winning . Both Beamer and Air Force head coach Fisher DeBerry were among the longest @-@ tenured coaches in college football at the time . DeBerry had been a college coach for 19 years , while Beamer had coached for 16 years . The game would be an opportunity for DeBerry to gain his 150th career win and defeat a ranked team for the first time since 1999 . Ticket sales prior to the game were sluggish , as both teams failed to sell out their assigned allotments , and local sales registered fewer than 8 @,@ 000 tickets sold . In addition , local media coverage of the game was very sparse .

= = = Offensive matchups = = =

= = = = Air Force = = = =

Prior to the San Francisco Bowl , Air Force 's offense was the No. 1 @-@ ranked rushing offense in the country , accumulating 314 @.@ 5 rushing yards on average per game . Air Force quarterback Chance Harridge had 1 @,@ 159 rushing yards and 22 rushing touchdowns , setting what was then an NCAA record for most rushing touchdowns in a single season by a quarterback . Through the air , he completed 60 of 125 passes during the regular season for 971 passing yards and 10 touchdowns . Heading into the San Francisco Bowl , he needed just 29 passing yards to become the 16th player in NCAA Division I @-@ A history to run for 1 @,@ 000 yards and pass for 1 @,@ 000 yards in a single season .

Air Force running back Leotis Palmer was having the best season of his career heading into the San Francisco Bowl . During the regular season , he accumulated 537 rushing yards , four rushing touchdowns and 113 passing yards for two touchdowns . Palmer and the Falcons had already clinched the season 's rushing title , cementing their status as the No. 1 rushing team in the country after West Virginia ? the second @-@ place team ? failed to gain sufficient yardage in its final game to pass the Falcons . Despite finishing with the top @-@ ranked rushing offense , none of Air Force 's offensive linemen received postseason honors . " It should give our players a lot of incentive for next year . Hopefully , if we repeat next year , maybe we 'll get two or three on there . You certainly don 't accumulate the number of yards we do unless you have people up front doing their job , " DeBerry said at the time .

Prior to the game , offensive tackle Blane Neufeld was pronounced unable to play due to a broken foot suffered two weeks prior to the San Francisco Bowl .

===== Virginia Tech =====

The Virginia Tech offense averaged 31 @. @ 5 points per game during the regular season . In the weeks before the San Francisco Bowl , Virginia Tech running back Lee Suggs was cast as the key for that offense in the game . Suggs , for whom the game would be his last as a collegiate player , rushed for 1 @, @ 255 yards and 20 touchdowns during the regular season . He needed just 149 more rushing yards to set the team 's record for single @-@ season rushing yards , which stood at 1 @, @ 403 . Even without the record , Suggs was predicted to be a high pick in that year 's NFL Draft . Suggs was supported by Virginia Tech center Jake Grove , who anchored a strong Tech offensive line . Though criticized as being too " nasty , " Grove led the team in knockdown blocks and was graded as the team 's most efficient lineman . About Grove , Suggs said , " He gets the blocking scheme straight He gets us ready to go . "

Also benefiting from the offensive line 's strength was Tech quarterback Bryan Randall . Randall finished the regular season with 1 @, @ 957 passing yards and 12 passing touchdowns , completing 140 of his 225 passes during the process . He also was successful running the ball , carrying it for 527 yards and three touchdowns during the regular season .

===== Defensive matchups =====

===== Air Force =====

During the 2002 season , Air Force allowed an average of 360 @. @ 7 yards per game , fourth in the Mountain West and 57th nationally . This was an improvement over the 2001 season , when the Falcons allowed 452 @. @ 7 yards per game on average . Air Force also was allowing far fewer points per game . In 2002 , the Falcons allowed an average of 23 @. @ 6 points per game , down from more than 32 per game in the 2001 season . Air Force was successful in its kicking defense as well . Between 1990 and 2002 , Air Force ranked second in terms of blocked kicks with 79 . Virginia Tech was first , with 85 . Air Force strong safety Mark Marsh , replaced by converted quarterback Joel Kurzdorfer , was pronounced doubtful for the game due to a lower leg injury he suffered in the days leading up to the San Francisco Bowl .

===== Virginia Tech =====

The Virginia Tech defense looked to recover from its slide during the last five games of the regular season . During the Hokies ' first eight games (all wins) , Tech gave up averages of 10 @. @ 5 points , 267 @. @ 5 total yards and 40 @. @ 8 rushing yards per game . In the final five games (in which Tech went 1 ? 4) , the Hokie defense allowed averages of 32 @. @ 8 points , 446 @. @ 7 total yards and 229 @. @ 4 rushing yards per game . This led to doubts about Tech 's ability to stop the Falcons ' top @-@ ranked rushing attack . Head defensive coach Bud foster said , " ... right now you just kind of have a question mark : Are we going to do what we 're taught to do ? " That late @-@ season falter still saw Tech ranked as the No. 20 rushing defense in the country heading into the San Francisco Bowl , allowing an average of just 113 @. @ 31 yards per game .

One of the keys for the Hokie defense would be linebacker Brandon Manning , who attended the Air Force Academy 's preparatory school before deciding to walk on to Virginia Tech 's football team instead of attending the Academy . Manning was Tech 's No. 3 tackler in terms of statistics , accumulating 70 tackles during the course of the regular season . Virginia Tech defensive tackle Jimmy Williams injured his ankle two days prior to the game , causing him to be unable to play . Tech 's Richard Johnson was also listed as injured and unlikely to play .

= = Game summary = =

The 2002 San Francisco Bowl kicked off at 7 : 30 p.m. PST on December 31 , 2002 , in San Francisco , California . The weather at kickoff was clear and cool , with an air temperature of 69 ° F (21 ° C) . Rain showers had fallen earlier in the day and throughout the week leading up to the game , causing the field to become slippery for players . The game was broadcast on ESPN2 , and Pam Ward , Chris Spielman , and Rob Stone were the sportscasters . The broadcast earned a television rating of 1 @. @ 6 , meaning an estimated 1 @. @ 69 million people watched the game on television . The game 's attendance was given as 25 @, @ 966 , but the actual attendance was far lower than that figure .

= = = First quarter = = =

Virginia Tech kicked off to Air Force to begin the game . The Falcons returned the kickoff to their 20 @- @ yard line , where the game began . On the game 's first play , running back Leotis Palmer ran for a short gain out of the Falcons ' triple option offense , which Air Force used throughout the game . After the short gain , Falcons quarterback Chance Harridge completed a 47 @- @ yard pass to wide receiver Anthony Park . This was a surprise because the Falcons had been ranked among the least @- @ proficient teams in the country in terms of passing offense . The pass drove the Falcons offense deep into Virginia Tech territory , and Air Force continued to advance the ball with a series of short rushes that resulted in a first down . Then , on the sixth play of the Air Force drive , running back Matt Ward ran a reverse for 15 yards and the game 's first touchdown . Air Force kicker Joey Ashcroft successfully completed the extra point , and Air Force took a 7 ? 0 lead with 12 minutes remaining in the first quarter .

Virginia Tech received the post @- @ touchdown kickoff and returned it to their 31 @- @ yard line , where the Tech offense took over on its first possession of the game . Tech running back Lee Suggs ran for a three @- @ yard gain , and quarterback Bryan Randall completed a 15 @- @ yard pass to take the Hokies to near midfield , earning Virginia Tech a first down in the process . But on the third play after taking possession , the Hokies turned the ball over as Tech running back Lee Suggs fumbled the ball . Air Force recovered the turnover and returned it to the Tech 35 @- @ yard line , where the Falcons offense returned to the field . Despite gaining possession of the ball deep inside Virginia Tech 's side of the field , Air Force was unable to move the ball forward with much success . After a quick first down provided by a penalty against Virginia Tech , the Hokie defense stiffened and denied the Falcons another . Air Force was forced to attempt a 45 @- @ yard field goal , which Ashcroft converted with 7 : 36 left in the quarter to give the Falcons a 10 ? 0 .

Air Force 's post @- @ score kickoff went out of bounds , resulting in a penalty that allowed Tech to automatically start its second offensive possession of the game at its 35 @- @ yard line . On his first play , Randall completed a 19 @- @ yard pass that drove the Hokie offense into Air Force territory for the first time and gained Tech another first down . Two plays later , Randall completed another pass , this time a 16 @- @ yard toss that pushed Tech to the Air Force 30 @- @ yard line . Though the Hokies gained several more yards on short plays , they were unable to earn another first down . Tech kicker Carter Warley was sent into the game to attempt a 41 @- @ yard field goal , but the kick bounced off the right upright and Tech was denied three points . With 4 : 59 remaining in the first quarter , Air Force still held a 10 ? 0 lead .

Following the missed field goal , Air Force 's offense began operations at its 24 @- @ yard line . Running back Anthony Butler broke free for an 18 @- @ yard gain on the third play of the drive , giving Air Force a first down . Two plays later , however , Harridge threw a pass that was intercepted by Tech linebacker Vegas Robinson . At the end of the play , Air Force committed a 15 @- @ yard personal foul penalty , which allowed the Tech offense to take over at the Air Force 15 @- @ yard line . Tech needed just two plays to drive the 15 yards and earn a touchdown , its first of the game . With 2 : 26 remaining in the quarter , Air Force 's lead had been cut to 10 ? 7 .

After Tech 's kickoff , Air Force went three and out and was forced to punt . The Hokies took over at their 34 @- @ yard line after the kick . Bryan Randall completed two quick passes to wide receiver

Shawn Witten for a total of 26 yards before time in the quarter ran out . At the end of the first quarter , Air Force had a 10 ? 7 lead , but Virginia Tech was in possession of the ball and driving deeper into Air Force territory .

= = = Second quarter = = =

The Hokies began the second quarter in possession of the ball and facing a second down and one yard . After the Tech offense picked up one first down , it was unable to gain another . Facing a fourth down and needing five yards for a first down at the Air Force 29 @-@ yard line , Tech head coach Frank Beamer elected to try to gain the first down instead of trying a long field goal . Bryan Randall was sacked for a loss of 10 yards , however , and the Hokies turned the ball over to Air Force after failing to gain the first down .

Air Force began its offensive possession at its 39 @-@ yard line , and like Virginia Tech , soon found itself facing a fourth down . Like Virginia Tech , it elected to try to convert the down , but unlike Virginia Tech , the Falcons were successful in gaining the needed yardage . Two plays later , however , Harridge threw his second interception of the game to the Tech defense . Tech 's offense took the field , and gained a first down , but was forced to punt after failing to gain a second . Air Force likewise gained a first down on offense and did gain a second , but could not gain a third .

After another Falcon punt , the Hokies took over on offense at their 49 @-@ yard line with 4 : 12 remaining before halftime . Tech began advancing the ball , and was aided by a 15 @-@ yard penalty against Air Force that pushed the Hokies deep into Falcons territory . Running backs Kevin Jones and Lee Suggs advanced the ball on the ground with short rushes , and Randall contributed short passes at times , gaining needed first downs when required . Tech advanced the ball inside the Air Force 10 @-@ yard line , gaining a first down at the nine @-@ yard line . There , the Air Force defense stiffened . Tech gained four yards on three plays , but was unable to cross the goal line for another touchdown . Tech kicker Warley entered the game to attempt his second field goal try of the game . The 23 @-@ yard kick was more successful than his first try , and with 25 seconds remaining in the first half , tied the game at 10 ? 10 .

Air Force received the kickoff and ran one quick rushing play to allow the first half to come to an end with the score tied at 10 .

= = = Third quarter = = =

Because Air Force received the ball to begin the game , Virginia Tech received the ball to begin the second half . Tech returned the kickoff to its 25 @-@ yard line , where the Hokie offense began the first drive of the second half . The Tech offense used rushes by Lee Suggs and passes by Bryan Randall to pick up several first downs and drive into Air Force territory . But once on the Falcons ' side of the field , Tech proved unable to gain another first down and was even pushed back into its own territory by a penalty . Tech was forced to punt , and Air Force began its first offensive possession of the second half at its 20 @-@ yard line after a touchback .

On the first Air Force play of the second half , quarterback Chance Harridge ran up the middle of the field for a 21 @-@ yard gain . The Falcons followed that first @-@ down play with a series of rushes that resulted in another first down , this time in Virginia Tech territory . But as the Hokies had done before them , the Falcons faltered inside opposition territory . Instead of punting the ball , however , Air Force head coach Fisher DeBerry kept his offense on the field to attempt to gain the needed two yards on fourth down . The attempt was unsuccessful , and Tech 's offense returned to the field with 7 : 40 remaining in the quarter .

The Hokies took over at their 39 @-@ yard line , and immediately found success . Randall connected on two 10 @-@ yard passes to take the Hokies into Air Force territory . The two passes were followed by a 16 @-@ yard run by Tech fullback Doug Easlick for another first down at the Air Force 24 @-@ yard line . From there , the Tech ground game continued to eat up yards and result in first downs . Kevin Jones ran the ball twice for 11 yards , then Lee Suggs ran the ball three times for 13 yards , the last carry also resulting in a touchdown . The score and subsequent extra point

gave Tech its first lead of the game , 17 ? 10 , with 4 : 45 remaining .

Following the post @-@ touchdown kickoff , the two teams traded punts . Air Force gained a first down before punting , Tech was forced into a three and out , and as the quarter came to an end , Air Force was facing a third down and seven yards at the Tech 29 @-@ yard line . Tech still held a 17 ? 10 lead , but the Falcons appeared to be in striking distance .

= = = Fourth quarter = = =

Air Force began the final quarter of play in possession of the ball and facing a third down at the Virginia Tech 29 @-@ yard line . Needing seven yards for a first down , the Falcons picked up six . Instead of attempting a field goal on fourth down , DeBerry ordered another fourth @-@ down conversion , which was successful . Three plays later , Tech 's defense again forced a fourth down , and again DeBerry ordered a fourth @-@ down conversion . The try was again successful , and Air Force earned another first down . Virginia Tech 's defense continued to prevent Air Force from gaining a big play or a touchdown , however , and forced another fourth down . Considering his third fourth @-@ down conversion in the same drive , coach DeBerry instead sent in kicker Joey Ashcroft , who kicked a 21 @-@ yard field goal to cut Virginia Tech 's lead to 17 ? 13 with 9 : 50 to go in the quarter .

Tech returned the post @-@ touchdown kickoff to its 34 @-@ yard line , where the Hokies began their first offensive drive of the fourth quarter . Randall ran for nine yards , Suggs for three , then Randall completed two passes for 16 yards to push the Hokies into Air Force territory . Once there , Tech continued to grind forward as Suggs ran the ball on five consecutive plays for 15 yards and a first down . After Randall was sacked for a loss of eight yards , however , Tech sent in Warley , who kicked a 37 @-@ yard line to restore Tech 's seven @-@ point lead , 20 ? 13 , with 4 : 03 to go in the game .

With time running out , Air Force seemingly had one last opportunity to drive down the field and send the game into overtime with a touchdown and extra point or to win it outright with a touchdown and two @-@ point conversion . The Falcons began their drive at their 18 @-@ yard line after Tech 's kickoff . At the start , Air Force was aided by a 15 @-@ yard penalty against Virginia Tech . From there , the going was less easy , as Air Force used short rushes by Anthony Butler , Harridge , and Steve Massie to gain two first downs and advance the ball into Virginia Tech territory . Then , facing third down at the Virginia Tech 47 @-@ yard line , Harridge completed an 18 @-@ yard pass to tight end Adam Strecker . It was just Harridge 's second completion of the game ? the first having taken place in the second play of the game . Following the pass , the Falcons were hampered by a 10 @-@ yard illegal blocking penalty , but a 19 @-@ yard pass to James Walker erased that deficit and gave Air Force a first down at the Virginia Tech 10 @-@ yard line . Time was rapidly running out , but there was still time for Air Force to attempt a few plays . Harridge threw two passes that fell incomplete , then attempted a desperation run towards the end zone . He was tackled five yards short of the goal line , however , and time expired .

Virginia Tech escaped with the 20 ? 13 victory thanks to the defensive stop .

= = Statistical summary = =

Thanks to his performance during the game , Air Force quarterback Chance Harridge became just the fifth player in Air Force history and the 16th player in NCAA Division I @-@ A history to rush for 1 @,@ 000 yards and pass for 1 @,@ 000 yards in the same season . Despite that performance , Virginia Tech quarterback Bryan Randall was named the game 's most valuable player for his winning effort . Randall finished the game having completed 18 of his 23 passes for 177 yards . Harridge completed four of his 19 passes for 91 yards and two interceptions . After completing a pass on the second play of the game , Harridge did not complete another pass until there were less than five minutes remaining in the game , throwing 11 consecutive incomplete passes in the intervening period .

The 2002 San Francisco Bowl was the final collegiate game of Tech running back Lee Suggs ,

whose two touchdowns allowed him to finish his collegiate career with 336 points , the second @-@ most career points scored by a player in the Big East . Suggs also extended his NCAA @-@ record streak of consecutive games with a rushing touchdown to 27 . That record still stands today . Suggs finished the game with 19 carries for 70 rushing yards and two touchdowns . Tech wide receiver Ernest Wilford , who caught five passes for 50 yards , set what was then a school record for receptions in a season with 51 . This broke the record of 46 , set by Mike Burnop in 1971 .

Air Force finished the game with 227 rushing yards and 318 total yards on offense . The Falcons also committed four 15 @-@ yard personal foul penalties in addition to other , more minor , penalties accumulated during the game . Air Force 's leading rusher was Anthony Butler , who carried the ball 17 times for 75 yards . Anthony Park was the Falcons ' leading receiver , catching Harridge 's second @-@ play 47 @-@ yard throw for his only reception of the game .

= = Postgame effects = =

Virginia Tech 's win took it to a final 2002 record of 10 ? 4 , while Air Force 's loss dropped it to a final record of 8 ? 5 . Tech finished with its third 10 @-@ win @-@ or @-@ more season in four years , and secured a spot in the final Associated Press Top 25 poll of the season for the fifth consecutive season .

Attendance was low , in part due to Tech fans ' reluctance to travel across the country and pay high prices for the chance to do so . Travel agents indicated low business in the weeks leading up to the game , and Tech sold approximately 5 @,@ 000 tickets ? a far lower total than the Hokies ' two previous bowl games , when 25 @,@ 000 tickets each were sold to games in Florida and Louisiana .