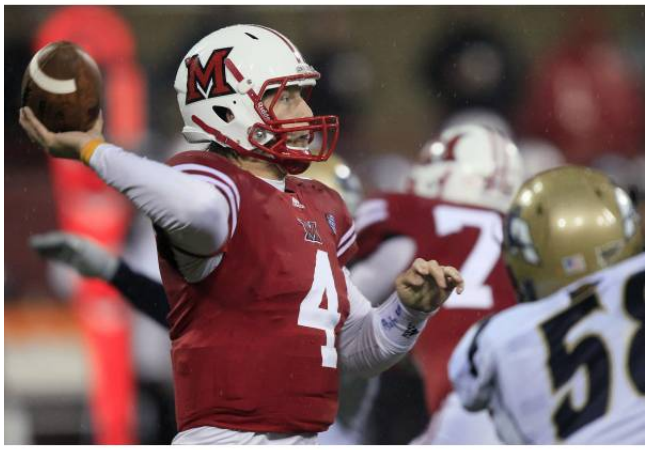

The Terry Bowden-led Zips came to play as they took the field against Miami, Ohio at Infocision Stadium Saturday afternoon. The twelfth player came to help. It turned out to be the most exciting, most infuriating game played at Info since it was built.

This week, with conference play starting in full force and I having several weeks of writing under my belt, we start with weekly game coverage. Our MAC Game of the Week will be covered in detail right here. The GOTW is selected among MAC games that can be seen in person nearby (Akron or Kent), or can be seen on regular cable. These are games that are expected to be close, and could have a bearing on the conference standings. Bonus coverage of MAC games is a possibility by other writers.

To get a real grasp on what took place Saturday, a short history lesson is in order. Unless you've been on the moon the last three years, you know the Zips football program has been a total loss. Last year these two teams met, and Akron threw 32 passes, only completing 7 for 90 yards. This is a team that allowed Buffalo to score 51 points. Buffalo. In the off-season Terry Bowden took charge and without much time for recruiting, added a few pieces here and there, but has not really begun any rebuilding process. Talent-wise. Coaching-wise, that’s a different subject. Class dismissed.

Miami won the toss and elected to receive the kickoff, and quickly drove the field on two pass plays to score the game’s first touchdown in 39 seconds, capped off with a 39 yard pass from Zac Dysert to Luke Swift. Akron’s first drive stalled with just one first down and they punted. Miami’s second drive started on the 19, and this time it took over six minutes to score, with Dysert hitting Andy Cruse on a 5 yarder. Kaleb Patterson missed the extra point.

Akron responded with a four play drive including three runs by Jawon Chisolm for 36 yards and a 56 yard Dalton Williams pass to Jerrod Dillard. The shootout was on!!! Chisholm ran all over the Red Hawks D, rushing for 156 yards averaging 7.4 yards per with two touchdowns. Miami's next drive stalled and Akron again drove the field, this time on three plays. As the first quarter closed, Akron was ahead 14-13. And the crowd was fully into the game.

In the second quarter it was more of the same, Dysert throwing for three more touchdowns, and Akron rushing for two. Miami's Kaleb Patterson hit Dawan Scott for a two point conversion. During the second quarter I quipped on FaceBook "I think I know where the replacement officials went." Except later in the game it wasn't funny anymore.

On the field, Akron started the second half with a quick drive to score 7 and tie the game. On one Akron pass play deep in the Hawk's territory, Miami was called for pass interference, but upon further review it was ruled Akron's receiver, Amani Davis, stepped out of bounds, resulting in an "illegal touching" penalty on Akron. This lead to loud disapproval from the crowd. This was just a precursor of things to come…

Miami countered with a 26 yard field goal and a 19 yard touchdown pass to Jamire Westbrook to put Miami up by 10.

Things got rally chippy as Akron was hit four times for personal fouls as they were trying to stall Miami drives on third down. Each time the crowd got louder and angrier at the referee. On midfield tackler was called for a late hit. A couple of times penalties were called on plays where receivers caught passes over the middle and were hit, snapping their head to the side. And one was a helmet-to-helmet call where the replay showed the tackler led with his shoulder pad. This became the story of the game as police were called to the sidelines, just in case. And to escort the officials off the field after the game. Miami fans also admitted Akron got screwed.

In the fourth, Jawon Chisholm ran it in from the one to bring Akron within three. Kaleb Peterson kicked a 43 yarder to make it 48-42. Then Dee Frieson caught an 18 yarder to put Akron up by one, 49-48.

Miami went on a six minute driver to score a three yard touchdown on a 3 yard Justin Semmes run. Akron coaching didn't help the Zips weak defense much, during key third down plays, the crowd made it almost impossible for Dysert to call audibles. Akron responded by calling time outs, effectively helping Dysert, and taking their own crowd out of the game. They used their last timeout late in the drive to have more clock to use on their last drive.

That drive began with 1:04 left on the clock. Williams hit Frieson on passes for 11, 8, 16, and 2 yards before throwing an incompletion. The passes were all completed in the middle of the field, while L.T. Smith was seemingly open on the east sideline. The drive and the game came to an end when Bryson Burris intercepted Williams on the Miami one yard line.

The positives? This team was vastly improved over last year, despite not having much of a recruiting period. The offense clicked, with Williams throwing for 446 yards and 4 touchdowns (and just the one INT). Chisholm ran for averaged 7.4 yards per carry and ran in two scores. Marquelo Suel continues to pace Zips receivers with 105 yards and a touch. Frieson added two more. And they converted on a fourth down play on a gutsy call.

The negatives? The defense gave up 705 yards and 56 points. That included Dysert's 516 yards in the air and 108 yards overland. They weren't helped by the officials, but also had spells where they couldn't tackle me. They wasted their timeouts and their two minute offense threw nothing but midfield passes.

For the Red Hawks, no other rusher had more than 23 yards (Westbrook). Dawan Scott had a 200 yard game, and Cruse caught for 111 more.

After the game Terry Bowden downplayed the bad calls best he could, and was encouraged by the team's conference opener. "When you rebuild a team like this, you go from big losses to small losses to small wins to big wins." The big loss was the season opener to UCF, and with the "small losses" to FIU and Miami, Akron seems to already be in the second stage. "Whatever we did wrong, we're going to have to teach them not to do it. I don't know how to teach them how to not do what they did. We're going to have to look at the film and teach them how not to make those flying tackles. … We just have to look at the film closely because we can't afford to have penalties like that at the end of the game and when we have a game won."

Akron falls to 1-4, 0-1 in the MAC and hosts Bowling Green next Saturday, their Homecoming Game.

Miami goes to 3-2, 2-0 in the MAC and travels to Cincinnati Saturday night, a game that will be on ESPN3.