A magician in cleats

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If you missed Heisman Trophy winner Johnny “Football’’ Manziel’s performance in the Cotton Bowl, you missed a treat.

If you missed THE PLAY that South Carolina defensive end Jadeveon Clowney made in the Outback Bowl, it was one for the ages.

While the college football world anxiously awaited the BCS National Championship Game Monday night, there were some outstanding games and individual performances in some of the 34 other bowl games.

Manziel and Clowney’s individual impact topped my personal list.

Manziel is amazing. He is a redshirt freshman quarterback for Texas A&M. The Aggies have a long history dating back to the old Southwest Conference of opponents making fun of their school and their football teams.

Aggie jokes permeate the Longhorn state. They were always seated at the children’s table at holidays while Texas ruled the roost.

They joined the SEC and the shackles were taken off. Texas A&M is no joke. Neither is Aggie Coach Kevin Sumlin. Manziel? That cat has turned defensive coordinators into insomniacs, as they pull all-nighters trying to find ways to slow him down.

Unlike Clowney, Manziel is anything but an imposing physical specimen. He is listed at 6-foot-1,

200 pounds, but looks shorter and lighter than that.

Put a football in his hands and Manziel morphs into a magician. Blitz him and he will have players chasing their tails.

How many Heisman trophies can Manziel win before he leaves? It largely depends on the cast around him, the schedule and whether he can avoid injuries that rob him of playing time. But the first impression has been a lasting one.

He became the first SEC player to record a 200/200 game, running for 200 yards, passing for 200 yards. He rang up 516 yards in the Cotton Bowl, 219 yards on the ground, another 287 through the air. It was his third 500-yard game this season.

Manziel mauled Oklahoma in a 41-13 rout. I consider Sooners Coach Bob Stoops to be an expert when it comes to defense. Stoops had a month to prepare for Manziel and the Aggies. It didn't matter.

"Johnny Manziel is everything he is billed to be and expected to be. Even when guys are in position, he is so quick and strong running," Stoops said of Manziel. "He's just hard to get to."

Manziel finished with 1,410 yards rushing, 3,706 yards passing. He accounted for 47 touchdowns. The Cotton Bowl Offensive Most Valuable Player brushed off pre-game suggestions the layoff would slow down the Aggies.

"There wasn't anything holding us back. No rust. There was nothing," Manziel said.

While Manziel's game is built on fleet feet and a strong arm, Clowney is a physical freak of nature.

The South Carolina sophomore will play one more season before he leaves to play on Sundays. He is part Reggie White, part Albert Haynesworth, part Jevon Kearse.

But the play he made that turned the Outback Bowl around was one we'll never forget.

He arrived in the Michigan backfield the same time Vincent Smith took the handoff. His hit knocked Smith's helmet off his head. It went flying through the air. With one motion, Clowney reached over and wrapped his massive left hand around the ball. Smith got Clowneyed.

It's players such as Manziel and Clowney that make the SEC what it is.

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