

Raynor earns team MVP honors as USA falls to Mexico in Aztec Bowl

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CANCUN, MEXICO -- Mexico rallied from an 18-point fourth-quarter deficit to stun the United States, 34-31, in the Aztec Bowl, played Saturday evening in Cancun, Mexico. Alfred University's Jesse Raynor (Weedsport, NY/Weedsport) was named the United States' Most Valuable Player. The senior tailback rushed for 45 yards and a touchdown, kicked a field goal and made all four extra point attempts. Raynor's 13 points were third most ever by an American player in the history of the Aztec Bowl, which pits a team of Division III football all-stars from the United States against the Mexican National Team. The accolades were bittersweet for Raynor, who recently wrapped up a stellar playing career at Alfred. "I'd give up this trophy for a bigger one," he commented after the game. "I love football and it's more important for the team to win than to win individual honors." Raynor gave the United States a 3-0 lead when he kicked a 30-yard field goal with 38 seconds left in the opening quarter. Mexico responded with two touchdowns to take a 13-3 lead before the USA scored a touchdown with 22 seconds left in the half to make it 13-10. The United States scored three straight touchdowns in the third quarter, the second one coming on a 42-yard run by Raynor, to give the USA a seemingly insurmountable 31-13 lead entering the fourth. The Mexican team rallied midway through the fourth, however, scoring three touchdowns in less than three minutes (the second two following USA fumbles) to pull out the win. Three turnovers and an Aztec Bowl-record 180 yards in penalties hurt the U.S. team. The United States was also unable to contain a potent Mexican passing game, which totaled 326 yards through the air. "When you turn the ball over twice in the fourth quarter, you aren't going to win many games," said United States head coach Ron Schipper. "I hate to lose the way we lost, but Mexico did a super job in the fourth quarter. We didn't put them away." The Aztec Bowl serves as the traditional season-ending game for Mexico's college football season. The game has now been played 33 times since 1947, with the last seven contests matching the Mexican National Team against Division III all-stars from the United States. The United States had won each of the six meetings before Saturday's contest. Raynor is the second Alfred University player to participate in the game. Former Saxon strong safety Brian Keefer, a 2001 AU graduate, played in the 2000 Aztec Bowl in Merida, Mexico, which the United States won, 27-26. Aztec Bowl alumni include three current NFL players: London Fletcher (John Carroll University, 1997, now a linebacker with the Buffalo Bills), Clint Kriewaldt (Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 1998, now a linebacker with the Pittsburgh Steelers) and Josh Warner (SUNY Brockport, 2000, now an offensive lineman with the Chicago Bears).