

Papa Cass checks in on a Monday morning to give his thoughts on Saturday's Big Ten title game. It was the type of game none of us expected, and that's part of what makes this rivalry great. Cassano also gives his thoughts on whether or not there should be a rematch in Glendale, Arizona in January.



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This was the game none of us expected. But, then again, great games between great teams have a way of eluding your expectations.

Ohio State versus Michigan is an animal that can't be caged. It's too big. It doesn't conform to what you think it should be, what the players think it should be, or even what the coaches think it should be.

When the ball goes in the air on opening kickoff, the game is in control. The rivalry reigns, and the players and coaches become marionette puppets being manipulated by something greater.

Prognosticators from professional sportswriters down to barstool bantermakers looked into their crystal balls all week. If anyone predicted a 42-39 shootout, it was a shot in the dark. If anyone is saying they predicted it after the fact, they should immediately be subjected to a polygraph test.

Lest anyone think Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler were sitting on a sofa somewhere in the great beyond, manipulating this game on an all-powerful Playstation 3, the 28-14 halftime score should have killed that theory right there.

Forty-two first half points would be enough to make Woody and Bo gag on their Cheese Nips. This was a game reminiscent of the old American Football League in which the only cure for an opposing touchdown was to score one yourself.

Only one scoring drive ended in something other than a touchdown, when Michigan's Garrett Rivas converted a 39-yard field goal in the third quarter. The touchdown Michigan didn't score turned out to be the difference in the game.

This was a game peppered with mistakes on both sides. The teams combined for nine penalties, but they amounted to 95 yards thanks to a few 15-yarders. Michigan's Shawn Crable received a personal foul for a helmet-to-helmet hit on Troy Smith in the second half. Ohio State's Jamarion O'Neal was also flagged for pass interference on a fourth-quarter drive that led to a Michigan's final touchdown.

But the man most thankful for Saturday's win is probably Buckeyes center Doug Datish. He was certifiable goat material when he flubbed a pair of shotgun snaps in the second half, causing two of Ohio State's three turnovers.

One has to wonder how much more Ohio State would have been able to control this game if not for some sloppy ballhandling. Ohio State lost the turnover battle 3-0, but still managed to win. In games like this, that doesn't usually happen. In the book of OSU coach Jim Tressel, who preaches field position and ball possession as gospel, that is never supposed to happen.

It's a reason why any pensive feelings about a possible Ohio State-Michigan rematch in the BCS title game can be excused. Would it be realistic to expect Ohio State to defeat their bitter rivals twice in the span of seven weeks?

There are two schools of thought:

One says Ohio State played uncharacteristically bad for stretches against Michigan. They should have the time between now and January to iron out the wrinkles and take it to Michigan should the rivalry be renewed in Glendale, Ariz.

The other says Tressel showed his hand Saturday, and Michigan would know what to expect in a rematch, driving up the odds of a Michigan win.

Chances are better than even there won't be a rematch. If Southern California continues to take care of business against Notre Dame and UCLA, you'd have to think they'd be the favorite to face Ohio State for the national championship.

I, for one, don't want to see a rematch in Glendale. Ohio State-Michigan is a rivalry that keeps its mystique by being a once-a-year event. You win, you secure bragging rights for a year. You lose, you have to wait 52 weeks to redeem yourself. That's the way it's been for more than a century.

I think that's the way it will stay. Even if the numbers bear out an Ohio State-Michigan rematch, the fact remains that the Buckeyes are the outright Big Ten champions, Michigan gets no share of a conference title this year, and to pass over other one-loss conference champions (or potential conference champions) like USC and Florida to place Michigan in the BCS title game wouldn't make a lot of sense.

But, then again, when has the BCS ever been synonymous with common sense?