



The Buckeyes took their Spring Game show on the road to Cincinnati on Saturday, where 37,643 fans watched Braxton Miller lead his Scarlet team to a 31-14 win over the Gray squad at Paul Brown Stadium, in the final spring practice of the season.

With Ohio Stadium under repair this spring, the staff chose to travel a couple hours down I-71 to spread some Buckeye good will in the state's southwest corner, and the Queen City responded in kind. (In a similar game going on at the same time in Ann Arbor, OSU's rivals drew an estimated 18,000 in their home town.)

Much of the fan interest centered on Miller, the Buckeyes' junior quarterback. The coaches have been talking about the improvement evident this spring in the play of the 2012 Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, and Miller flashed some of it for them on Saturday. He connected on 16 of 25 passing for 217 yards and two touchdown passes, and [rushed for a third TD](#) , all while wearing the black, non-contact jersey.

The no-tackling-the-quarterback rule pretty much eliminated any run threat from Miller, since he could be ruled "down" just by being touched by a defender. That also contributed greatly to the seven (touch) sacks credited to the Gray defense against him. But Miller showed that his [blond fauxhawk](#) hair isn't the extent of his new look. Saturday he was also sporting an improved comfort level in the pocket, what appeared to be better decision-making in the passing game, and a nice touch on most of his throws.

In other words, it looked like he has spent a year-plus running Meyer's offense, and he knows what he's doing now. Afterwards Meyer said, "It was a pass-heavy game. I thought at times, Braxton Miller and a couple of the wide-outs, Corey Brown in particular, did very well". Brown had five receptions for 25 yards and a touchdown. Mike Thomas led all receivers with seven catches for 79 yards playing for the Gray team, including a 4-yard TD reception from Cardale Jones.

Airing it Out



Meyer had stressed the plan to throw the ball a lot in this exhibition, and despite the windy conditions, the OSU offense lived up to that promise. The teams rushed for just 106 yards combined all afternoon, and in a game played with 10-minute quarters instead of the regulation 15-minute periods, OSU quarterbacks attempted a total of 63 passes.

On the game's first play, Miller hit Evan Spencer on a 49-yard strike down the middle of the field, and a couple plays later, scrambled to his right and lofted a 20-yard scoring pass to Devin Smith in the back corner of the end zone. Later in the half, he executed a perfect back-shoulder TD throw to Corey Brown from the 3-yard line, and in the 3rd quarter, he scrambled in himself from the 3-yard line for his third TD of the day.

Backup Kenny Guiton looked sharp as well, completing 13 of 22 throws, for 151 yards and touchdown while taking snaps for both teams. Jones, the third-stringer from Glenville (via Fork

Union Military) was an imposing presence in his OSU debut, and at 6' 5", 240 lbs, he moved pretty well. Jones showed off some decent running skills on a few scrambles, and connected on 7 of 16, for 65 yards, and a touchdown throw to Thomas. He also turned the ball over twice on fumbles, and threw a late interception at the goal line. Jones has a big arm, but was erratic throwing the ball...forcing it into coverage at times, and in general just showing his inexperience.

Pass Rush - Pass Protection

In an intra-squad game like this one, you know the good guys are going to win, but you also know that for nearly every good play on one side of the ball, you can also take the view that a negative play was made on the opposing side. Such was the case Saturday with the pass rush.

Let's stipulate right now that OSU's starting defensive ends, sophomores Noah Spence and Adolphus Washington are hugely talented young football players. They both came to OSU as 5-star recruits, and they were dominant in this scrimmage...combining to sack (again, the one-touch variety) Braxton Miller five times in the first half alone, Spence getting three and Washington two. Washington added two more in the game's final minute against Guiton. They both more than lived up to the reports we've been hearing about them all spring.

On the other hand, the still unsettled situation at right tackle on the offensive line is a concern for Meyer and line coach Ed Warinner. In this game, the Buckeyes rested starting tackle Jack Mewhort and center Corey Linsley, so the two contenders at right tackle, sophomores Taylor Decker and Chase Farris, were manning both tackle spots for the Scarlet against the dynamic duo of Spence and Washington, and to put it kindly, they had a rough afternoon.

The ever candid Meyer commented after the game, "I feel good about four of the five starters, and unless we get that fixed, there goes the best offense in the Big Ten because you can't play with four linemen. So one of those young players have got to step up, and they haven't this spring."

Decker appears to have the edge over Farris to start the season at right tackle, and you can bet he's glad he won't have to face Spence and Washington on Saturdays in the fall.

Sitting Out

Several key players on both sides of the ball were held out of the game, either with minor injury situations, or simply because they had nothing to prove to the coaching staff. In addition to Mewhort and Linsley on offense, No. 1 tailback Carlos Hyde did not play, and Jordan Hall was limited to fair-catching punts. Running back Rod Smith was scratched with concussion symptoms. On defense, the two best OSU defenders, linebacker Ryan Shazier and cornerback Bradley Roby got the day off, and defensive backs Devan Bogard and Najee Murray(?) were held out as well.

Random Observations



- You'd think in a game like this that the play-calling on both offense and defense would be fairly vanilla. In this case, you'd be wrong. There were several gimmicky plays called in this one. Each team ran one throwback pass to the quarterback. Kenny Guiton dropped the throwback from Jones on a play that had been set up nicely for a potential big gain. Braxton caught a throwback off of his own pitchout, and gained 15-20 yards on it. They also ran an inside reverse to Chris Fields, who took it in for a TD on a play inside the 10-yard line.

- On defense there was a lot more blitzing than Ohio State normally calls. They were routinely

sending corners off the edge, and linebackers from all over the place. I thought both Miller and Guiton did a good job checking down to safety-valve receivers most of the time (although the quarterbacks were touch-sacked about a dozen times total).

- As a result of the blitzing, there was a lot more throwing to the running backs than we have been accustomed to seeing. Brionte Dunn in particular stood out catching the ball out of the backfield. Unofficial stats had Dunn with five catches for 61 receiving yards. Warren Ball can also catch the ball well, and both backup tailbacks looked good on a day when the running game was an afterthought.

- True freshman cornerback Eli Apple is a keeper. He showed excellent speed and good coverage skills, breaking up a pass in the end zone on one occasion, and then scored the defensive trifecta on another play, blitzing off the edge, getting a sack of Cardale Jones, causing a fumble, and recovering it himself. Sophomore corner Armani Reeves showed well too, as did projected starter Doran Grant.

- Chris Fields had a nice game at receiver, although he did have a drop or two, and Meyer says he has cemented his role as a starting receiver along with Devin Smith and Corey Brown. Smith looks much more self-assured, and will be a big-play threat to concern opposing teams on every play.

- Speaking of cementing, inside linebacker Curtis Grant also firmed up his position as the starter at the Mike spot, leading all tacklers in the game with 10 stops, including a couple of brutal shots on unsuspecting pass receivers coming over the middle. It's hard to overstate how important his progress is to the overall health of this OSU defense.

- Sophomores Jamal Marcus and Josh Perry were given opportunities to rush the passer from the outside, as well as to play in coverage in the flats, and both showed the versatility to do both things well, I thought.

- The second team offensive line (Daryl Baldwin, Ivan Blackman, Pat Elflein, Kyle Dodson, Tommy Brown, Jacoby Boren among them) held up fairly well...which is to say they weren't as hapless and hopeless as some people would have you believe they are. Dodson and Baldwin in particular, had some solid moments.

- Kicker Drew Basil, and his backup got some extended field goal kicking practice, as Meyer stopped the game two or three times to give the kickers some extra work. Basil had some good kicks, including one 52-yarder, but he also had some ugly misses, including one from 28 yards out that was wide by 20 yards.

- Walk-ons distinguishing themselves...or at least making me go to my roster to find out "Who's that?" ...linebacker Craig Fada, cornerback Nic Sarac, and safety Kevin Niehoff.

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