



The Buckeyes bolted to a 23-0 first quarter lead, and then battled a Buffalo Bulls' comeback and the oppressive heat on the way to a 40-20 win in their season opener Saturday at the Horseshoe. Braxton Miller threw touchdown passes on the first two OSU possessions, and senior tailback Jordan Hall rushed for two long TD's on his way to a career-best 159-yard day.

The Buckeyes apparently found the answer to the slow starts that plagued them last year. But two big OSU turnovers let Buffalo back into the game in the second quarter. "First quarter was script," said Urban Meyer in his postgame remarks. "You can't play much better than our guys did. We're pushing the ball down the field, guys making plays."

### Self-Inflicted Wounds

In the second quarter though, the crisp, efficient Buckeye offense that dominated the early action suddenly began making mistakes, as Meyer recounted, "And then we rough a punter. Then we have the fourth down, we don't make it. Then we throw a screen and it goes the other way."

OSU survived the failed 4th-down try without incident when Buckeye safety Ron Tanner promptly intercepted Bulls QB Joe Licata. But freshman Dontre Wilson fumbled the ball back to Buffalo on the first play following the pick, and Buffalo moved down for their first score to make it 23-7.

Five plays into the next OSU possession, Miller tried to get a quick screen out to Wilson, but the Bulls' standout linebacker Khalil Mack had it sniffed out, and he stepped in front of the receiver

and returned the interception 45 yards for the Buffalo score, making it a 23-13 game. Mack was the best defensive player on the field on this afternoon, tallying 9 tackles, including 2.5 TFL and 2 sacks, to go with the pick-6. He tormented the Bucks' right tackle Taylor Decker all afternoon, in the freshman lineman's first career game.

### Taking Control

Ohio State would stop the bleeding with a lightning quick touchdown drive before the half ended, as Dontre Wilson showed the assembled 103,980 flashes of his already fabled speed with a 52-yard kickoff return after the second Buffalo score. On the first play from scrimmage, Jordan Hall went off left guard, and dashed virtually untouched for a 37-yard touchdown. It was Hall's second long TD of the day, coming after the senior scored on a 49-yard run in the opening quarter.

On a blistering hot and humid day, the Buckeyes struggled with cramping problems, an issue that didn't appear to affect the Bulls to the same degree. An OSU defense already playing with only two returning starters lost its best player for more than a quarter when linebacker Ryan Shazier was carted off the field with leg cramps in the second quarter. Both Braxton Miller and receiver Evan Spencer had to be treated for cramps as well.

### Too Close

Down 30-13 at the half, the Bulls had another comeback in them. They forced a punt on the first OSU possession of the 3rd quarter, and then drove right down for their third TD of the game, a 10-yard touchdown pass from Licata to Alex Neutz that finished off a 7-play, 62-yard drive. With momentum wearing Bulls blue, Buffalo came close to another score, on a play that turned out to be a major turning point in the game.

On a 3rd and 8 for the Buckeyes at their own 22, Miller was sacked and fumbled the ball, and it was recovered by Buffalo at the OSU 1-yard line. But the Buckeye bacon was saved when the Bulls' Mack was called for a hands-to-the-face penalty, so instead of being a yard away from a 3-point game, OSU had a first down all the way out at their 37-yard line.

From there, with Kenny Guiton subbing on and off for a cramping Miller, the Buckeyes drove the remaining 63 yards for the clinching touchdown, a 21-yard strike from Guiton to Chris Fields. At 37-20, the suspense was over, and a 39-yard Drew Basil field goal closed out the scoring midway through the 4th quarter.

### Saving Braxton

Job One for the OSU coaches is to keep their Heisman candidate Braxton Miller healthy for 13 games, and his reduced rushing attempts in this game reflected that reality. Miller finished 15 of 22 passing for 178 yards, with the 2 TD's and the interception. He was sacked 4 times and finished with 77 net yards rushing, although 64 of those yards came on three 4th quarter scrambles, the highlight a 40-yard scamper out of his own end zone for a key first down. Miller had 17 rushing attempts in the game, but I'd guess less than half of those were designed run plays for the quarterback.

### First-timers

Meyer put several of his promising freshmen right into the thick of the action in the opener. Dontre Wilson was perhaps the most anticipated of the first-year Buckeyes, but defensive end Joey Bosa also played extensive minutes, and showed well why he's a 5-star kid.

Linebacker Trey Johnson was pressed into action when Shazier cramped up, and defensive backs Vonn Bell and Cam Burrows saw action on special teams, with Bell picking up three tackles in his Buckeye debut. Receiver James Clark, running back Ezekiel Elliott, defensive tackle Michael Hill, and punter Cameron Johnston were the other freshmen to see the field in the opener.

[Official Box Score](#)

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