

The Magnificent Six: #3 The 1954 Ohio State Buckeyes

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Saturday, July 18 2009 7:00 PM -

Of the six greatest seasons of Ohio State football, three stand above all - perfect seasons, in which the Buckeyes went undefeated, untied, and won the Big Ten title as well as the National Championship. The first of these three, and the #3 season all-time, is 1954.



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[The Magnificent Six : #6 - The 1961 Ohio State Buckeyes](#)

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After several years of relative mediocrity, the 1954 Buckeyes broke through big-time, shocking the nation- and possibly saving Woody Hayes's job- with an undefeated season and a piece of the school's first National Championship since 1942, when Paul Brown was the coach.

3.) 1954

Record: 10-0 (7-0 Big Ten)

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Big Ten Conference Champions

National Champions

Indiana (3-6) W 28-0

California (5-5) W 21-13

@ Illinois (1-8) W 40-7

Iowa (5-4) W 20-14

Wisconsin (7-2) W 31-14

@ Northwestern (2-7) W 14-7

Pitt (4-5) W 26-0

@ Purdue (5-3-1) W 28-6

Michigan (6-3) W 21-7

Rose Bowl

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USC (8-4) W 20-7

Woody Hayes was in need of some breaks as he entered his fourth season as coach of the Buckeyes. Since taking over the job in 1951, the hot-tempered ex-Miami of Ohio coach was a middling 16-9-2, hadn't won a Big Ten title, and most importantly, was just 1-2 against Michigan, with both losses being shutouts. Woody was the third man to head up the program since the undefeated season of 1944, and with the Buckeyes picked to finish in the middle of the Big Ten pack, it looked as if there would soon be a fresh tombstone in what was then known as "the graveyard of coaches."

But Ohio State got off to a strong start, winning its first four, and was ranked fourth in the national polls when second-ranked Wisconsin rolled into Columbus on October 23, 1954. Late in the third quarter, the Badgers led 7-3 and were driving when halfback Howard "Hopalong" Cassady made perhaps the biggest play of Woody Hayes's coaching career, picking off a pass and weaving through the entire Wisconsin offense for an 88-yard touchdown that turned the game around. The Buckeyes went on to win in a rout, 31-14, and from then on, they were off and running to a historic season.

Like all of Woody's great teams, it all started in the backfield, with quarterback Dave Leggett and a brilliant troika of runners- Bobby Watkins, Hubert Bobo, and Hopalong Cassady, who would become the school's third Heisman Trophy winner in 1955. Up front the offensive line was anchored by guards Jim Parker and Jim Reichenbach and All-American end Dean Dugger. In addition to starring on offense, Parker, Bobo, and Cassady also spearheaded the Buckeyes' rugged defense.

Ohio State stood at #1 in the Associated Press poll and #2 in the United Press on November 20, 1954, when Bennie Oosterbaan brought his Michigan Wolverines into the Horseshoe, with a Big Ten title and a trip to the Rose Bowl on the line. Much like the 2002 version of the Game, Michigan dominated early, taking a 7-0 lead on its first possession and moving the ball almost at will throughout the first

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half. The Wolverines made two more trips inside Buckeye territory after its initial score, including a second-quarter penetration inside the ten, but were thwarted by a fumble and a missed field goal. Late in the first half the Buckeyes parlayed an interception into the tying touchdown and went to the dressing room tied 7-7, despite being out-gained 190-42 in the first thirty minutes.

Michigan picked up right where it left off in the third quarter. First the Wolverines drove inside the OSU 25, but again fumbled the ball away. Moments later the Maize and Blue blocked a punt, giving them possession at the Ohio State 14. Michigan drove to a first-and-goal on the four-yard line, but, in one of the greatest goal-line stands in Buckeye football history, the Wolverines were stuffed on four straight line plunges. Ohio State took over on its own one-yard line and marched 99 yards in twelve plays, with the big play a 52-yard dash by Hopalong Cassady. A nine-yard scoring pass from Leggett to Dick Brubaker ended the marathon drive and gave the Buckeyes a 14-7 lead midway through the fourth quarter. They would add an insurance touchdown in the closing moments to win, 21-7. The jubilant Buckeye players celebrated the win, the unbeaten season, and the Big Ten title by throwing Woody, fully clothed, into the showers. (One finds it hard to imagine Jim Tressel getting the same treatment nowadays.)

So it was off to Pasadena for the first time since the 1949 season. Unfortunately, due to one of the archaic bowl-participation rules of the day, the Buckeyes would not get a chance to meet their top competition for the national title on the field.

The UCLA Bruins, still running the old Single Wing under Harry "Red" Sanders, had rolled to an undefeated season, pitching five shutouts and winning their nine games by an average score of 41-4. Unfortunately, the old Pacific Coast Conference had a "no repeat" rule and that meant that the Bruins, the Rose Bowl representative in 1953, were ineligible for postseason play, despite their perfect record and number-one ranking in the United Press poll. Taking their place in the Rose Bowl was USC, which lost three games during the regular season, including a 34-0 wipeout at the hands of UCLA. Deprived of the national-championship showdown that climaxed the 1968 and 2002 seasons, the '54 Buckeyes had to content themselves with a prosaic 20-7 whipping of the overmatched Trojans on a rare rainy day in Pasadena. Ohio State and UCLA

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would split the National Championship, the Bucks taking the top spot in the Associated Press and the Bruins hanging on to the top spot in the UP.

Needless to say, Woody's job was now secure.