



Turns out the Navy never quits...and their resilience came close to costing Ohio State a victory Saturday, when a late lapse by the Buckeyes let the Midshipmen back in the game in Ohio State's season opener in Columbus.

Jim Tressel admitted he made a mistake passing up a field goal on 4th and 2 with just over six minutes to go in the game, with his team holding a 15-point lead at 29-14. After the Bucks failed to convert, Navy capitalized immediately with an 85-yard TD pass and then scored again with just over two minutes remaining, making the game closer than it should have been.

But OSU linebacker Brian Rolle bailed his coach out with an interception on the two-point conversion attempt that would have tied the game, returning it 100 yards for two points the other way, and the Buckeyes survived a scare to win their 31st straight season opener, 31-27.

"I certainly should have kicked the field goal on fourth and one...", said the coach after the game, "...which was a huge mistake in my mind, and of course we didn't make the fourth and one, and made it a bigger mistake." Even more than he knew at the time.

Tressel admitted to getting caught up in the emotion of the moment, as his team was on a bit of a roll, and had the ball at the Navy 15-yard line, poised to deliver the knockout blow to the Midshipmen. Dan Herron had scored from six yards out for Ohio State with just 12 minutes to go in the game to make the score 29-14, and on Navy's next possession, Kurt Coleman made a diving interception of a Ricky Dobbs pass, and it looked like the Buckeyes would coast home to a relatively easy victory.

They drove from their own 48 to the Navy 15, but the Middies blew up a Herron run on the 4th down play, and on Navy's first play from scrimmage, wide receiver Marcus Curry beat OSU safety Anderson Russell on a deep post and outraced the trailing defenders to the end zone to make it a 29-21 game.

On the ensuing OSU possession, Pryor picked up one first down at the 4:53 mark, but on third and 9 on the next series, he threw high and slightly behind Dane Sanzenbacher, and the pass was picked off and returned all the way to the Ohio State 33-yard line by Navy's Emmet Merchant. That's when the Buckeye faithful broke into a full sweat.

Three plays later, Navy quarterback Ricky Dobbs was in the end zone on a keeper up the middle from 24 yards out, bringing the Mids to within two points at 29-27 with 2:23 left, setting the stage for Rolle's heroics. An onside kick attempt by Navy went out of bounds, and the Buckeyes ran out the clock to wrap up a win that left just about everyone on both sides unsatisfied.

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Noting the missed extra point after Herron's TD run, and the Pryor interception in the final minutes, Tressel allowed that "it wasn't a dazzling fourth quarter for us, by any means". Actually, it was pretty good until that four-minute stretch from 6:27 till 2:23. Ohio State had scored the first nine points of the period and the defense had forced two turnovers. But Tressel had gone on to say that despite the OSU mistakes, "that does not take away from the play of Navy." And boy, was he right about that.

### Anchors Aweigh

The Midshipmen played an inspired game throughout, scoring the first time they had the ball on an 80-yard drive that tied the game at 7-7 after the Buckeyes had scored on their first possession. Dobbs triggered the vaunted Navy triple-option to near perfection, and had a hand in all four Navy touchdowns. He rushed for 83 (net) yards on 18 carries, with touchdown runs of 16 and 24 yards, and he also showed the assembled 105,092 in the Horseshoe that he's got a nice arm to go with the rushing ability.

Dobbs added 156 yards on 9 of 13 passing, and two more touchdowns, both coming at crucial times, and both landing in the arms of Marcus Curry, who had a pretty good line himself, with 2 catches for 101 yards and two scores. Curry's first TD connection with Dobbs was almost as important as the later 85-yard connection.

With OSU up 20-7 in the third quarter, the OSU defense had forced Navy into a 3rd and 14 at the OSU 16-yard line after the Middies had methodically driven from their own 1. The triple option isn't supposed to have an answer for 3rd and 14, let alone in the red zone, but Dobbs did a half-roll to the left and zipped a perfect pass to Curry, who again victimized OSU's Russell on the play, and brought Navy to within one score as the 3rd quarter wound down.

As feisty, well-coached and tough as the Middies were, the Buckeyes continued to answer every Navy push, and the outcome was never seriously in doubt until Pryor got picked off with four minutes to go in the game. The OSU offense rolled up 363 yards of total offense (to Navy's 342) and the Buckeyes had their share of stellar offensive performers as well.

### Earning Buckeye Leaves

Terrelle Pryor's game might best be described as under control. He completed 14 of 21 pass

attempts for 174 yards and one touchdown, and he spread the ball around to seven different receivers. He seemed comfortable in the pocket, and when feeling the pressure, he stepped up and kept plays alive. It was on just such a play that he hit Sanzenbacher for a 38-yard touchdown on the first OSU possession of the day.

Sanzenbacher had another 19-yard catch on a deep sideline route, and looked good on two punt returns, one a 19-yarder, and the other a 13-yard return that was negated by a penalty. The tight ends caught four balls on the day, one less than the starter Jake Ballard had all last season. Ballard showed great hands on two of his three catches, going up to snag balls that were delivered a bit high by Pryor, and redshirt freshman Jake Stoneburner had one catch in his OSU debut.

DeVier Posey had an important third-down conversion of the first OSU TD drive, finishing with two receptions on the day, and freshman Duron Carter had an excellent first game with three catches for 21 yards. The OSU coaches chose to throw to the backs more than in recent years too, as Dan Herron had four receptions and Brandon Saine two.

In the rushing game, Herron and Saine combined for 125 yards, with Herron getting 72 on 17 carries, and Saine rushing for 53 yards on 9 carries, for a nice 5.9 yard average. The inside rushing attack was less effective than what the coaches had hoped to deliver, as the Navy linemen often got good penetration and the OSU offensive line looked more tentative than tenacious. Much of the tailbacks' rushing yardage was picked up on pitchout's from Pryor on option plays, a play that worked repeatedly as the Navy defenders crashed off the edge on nearly every play in an attempt to control Pryor's mobility and disrupt his timing.

Pryor rushed for 31 yards on just six attempts, and was not sacked, with just one negative yardage play on a fumbled snap from center. He was hurried repeatedly by the blitzing and edge rush of the Midshipmen, and did not even attempt to throw the ball deep one time in the entire game. Whether that was in the game plan or just a function of the consistent harassment is unclear.

Kicker Aaron Pettrey was impressive, hitting all three of his field goal attempts, including a 52-yarder that would have been good from 62 yards.

Offensive stars of the game: Pryor, Ballard, Sanzenbacher.

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On defense, the Bucks gave up 186 (net) yards rushing to the Mids, but mostly avoided giving up any long gainers against the run, (Dobbs' 24-yard TD in the last three minutes being the longest). As you'd expect against the triple option, the defensive linemen and the inside linebackers got the most action, and Dexter Larimore (7 tackles) and Cam Heyward (5 tackles) had strong games, as did Thad Gibson, who caused a fumble and chipped in with three tackles. Chimdi Chekwa also has a nice game in run support from the cornerback position with five total stops.

Ironically, it was two pass completions (as described above) that hurt the OSU defense as much as anything else. But the Middies went to the pass at least twice too often, and the two Buckeye defensive stars of the game each made them pay by intercepting Dobbs on big plays.

Safety Kurt Coleman was everywhere Saturday afternoon, leading the team with six solo tackles (9 total) and forcing two Navy turnovers. He stripped a pass receiver of the ball after a completed pass, and the fumble was recovered by OSU's Doug Worthington. He then made a spectacular interception late in the game to give the Buckeye offense the chance to put the game on ice. It's not his fault they didn't try the field goal.

And then there was Brian Rolle, who was flying around the field the whole game, tying Coleman for the team lead in tackles with nine, and of course making the big play (there is such a thing as a "pick-two") that saved the day for Ohio State.

Defensive stars of the game: Rolle, Coleman.

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There's no time to lament lost opportunities, or what should have been. Navy played a game they can be proud of, and as for the Bucks....it's a win...and hey, it's a lot better than feeling like Oklahoma, who [lost a game](#) and a quarterback.

USC is coming to town Saturday. And every Buckeye coach, player and fan knows exactly what's at stake.

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Links:

[OSU Athletic Communications - Game Stats](#)

[ESPN Game Story and Box score](#)