

## The Week That Was - Live Action Scrimmage

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
Monday, November 02 2009 7:00 PM -

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Let's be honest: there wasn't an actual game played at the Horseshoe on Saturday afternoon. More like a live-action scrimmage in which the stats and scores count. The New Mexico State Aggies weren't supposed to provide quality competition for Ohio State and, sure enough, they didn't. The Buckeyes held the nation's worst offense to 62 total yards, piled up 558 themselves and had their way in a 45-0 whitewash that wasn't even that close. Jesse looks back at the shutout win as well as all the rest of this past weekend's college football action in The Week That Was.



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The New Mexico State Aggies weren't supposed to provide quality competition for Ohio State and, sure enough, they didn't. The Buckeyes held the nation's worst offense to 62 total yards, piled up 558 themselves and had their way in a 45-0 whitewash that wasn't even that close. For New Mexico State, the only consolation is that John Cooper isn't still the coach in Columbus. If he was, the final score would be more like 80-0.

With the outcome never in doubt, the only mandate was improvement. As usual for this Ohio State team, that improvement was easy to find in some areas, frustratingly elusive in others.

**A Lateral Step:** Terrelle Pryor's career at Ohio State continues to resemble the

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refrain from [that old Paula Abdul song](#) - one step forward, two steps back. He followed up his impressive performance against Minnesota with a decidedly mediocre outing against New Mexico State, completing 11-of-23 for 135 yards and a touchdown. He threw at least two balls in the first quarter that should have been intercepted, including one that, had the Aggie defender hung on to it, would have been a 60-or-70-yard touchdown the other way. The decision-making and accuracy still aren't there on a consistent basis, regardless of the level of the opponent.

Pryor did run for 83 yards on nine carries and a touchdown on Saturday, giving him 187 yards on 24 carries (7.8 YPC) the last two games. He still has a problem with getting the tough yards up the middle- on one play against New Mexico State he turned a probable four-or-five-yard gain into a four-yard loss by trying to bounce it outside. As I've said before, I'm not sure if that annoying facet of Pryor's running game is ever going to change. He just doesn't want to deal with the physical contact that comes with going up the gut.

**Trick Plays:** With the opponent offering little resistance, the Vest felt free to let his hair down and inject some zaniness into his staid, conservative attack. First he sent in a surprise on-side kick, which Aaron Pettrey easily recovered himself to set up Ohio State's second touchdown of the afternoon. Later in the second period he called for the reverse pass and DeVier Posey, showing his versatility, [hit Dane Sanzenbacher in the back of the end zone](#) to make it 21-0 in favor of the Buckeyes.

Here the benefits of scheduling New Mexico State were clearly evident. Tressel probably isn't going to run those trick plays against the likes of Penn State or Iowa. Still, they at least give upcoming coaches something to think about and be aware of. Ohio State's players also had the opportunity to execute those plays against live, albeit low-caliber, ammunition. Plus, it was fun to see a little razzle-dazzle, even against one of the most hapless opponents I've ever seen on an Ohio State schedule.

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**Speaking of DeVier Posey:** He had his third consecutive standout game, catching five passes for 79 yards and throwing a touchdown pass. His counterpart Dane Sanzenbacher chipped in with four grabs for 72 yards and two scores. Once again the receivers are doing their jobs, regardless of the inconsistency in the other aspects of the passing game.

**The Kicking Game:** Was spotty, at best. Between Aaron Pettrey and his backup Devin Barclay, Buckeye kickers were a dismal 1-of-5 on field-goal attempts. That can't make the Vest happy. What makes the Vest even unhappier is that he probably won't have his number-one kicker on hand in Happy Valley next weekend. Late in the first half a New Mexico State return-team player took out Aaron Pettrey with a dirty chop block. Pettrey was carried from the field and doesn't look as if he'll be ready to kick any time soon. So it falls on Barclay, a former walk-on who looked shaky on Saturday.

**The Defense:** It's hard to get a read on exactly how well Ohio State's defense really performed on Saturday, given their level of competition, but the numbers certainly speak well of their effort. New Mexico State ran 45 plays for a total of 62 yards, picked up two first downs, and turned the ball over three times; including a fumble that Brian Rolle recovered for a touchdown late in the third quarter. The Aggies never came close to scoring. Really, anything less than a shutout would have been a disappointment- but the Buckeyes did get the shutout, their third of the season. It's about to get a lot tougher against a Penn State team that looks to be hitting its stride offensively, especially up front.

**Like a David Lean Epic:** Ohio State's running game Saturday consisted of a cast of thousands. Ten players toted the rock for the Buckeyes as they rolled up 310 yards rushing on New Mexico State's defense. Despite the gaudy numbers, the run-blocking still didn't look all that good: starter Brandon Saine had just 13 yards on seven carries, a barometer of how relatively ineffective the Buckeye offensive line was at moving bodies up front.

**Where We Stand:** Ohio State goes into the grueling final stretch with a 7-2

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record, 4-1 in the Big Ten. On one hand, it's very simple: win out, and the Buckeyes go to the Rose Bowl. If they lose any one of the last three it gets a little more complicated. To wit:

*If the Buckeyes lose to Penn State and beat Iowa and Michigan:* They would need Penn State to lose their last two to Indiana and Michigan State and Iowa to lose to either Northwestern or Minnesota.

*If they beat Penn State and Michigan but lose to Iowa:* They're out of title contention. Iowa is assured the Big Ten title under this scenario.

*If they beat Penn State and Iowa but lose to Michigan:* They would need Iowa to lose to either Northwestern or Minnesota. Alarming as it sounds, a loss to Michigan is less damaging than losses to Iowa or Penn State when it comes to the Big Ten title race. Not that I think Ohio State is going to lose to Michigan anyway. Seeing the way Iowa and Penn State's remaining schedules shape up, the Buckeyes probably can't afford a loss to anyone if they want to make a New Year's date for Pasadena.

### ***Around the Nation***

**Game of the Week- [Miami/Wake Forest](#)** : For the second consecutive week the Hurricanes played a thriller, this time with a happy ending. Miami scored two touchdowns in the fourth quarter to erase a 27-14 deficit, top the Demon Deacons 28-27, and keep their flagging ACC title and BCS at-large hopes alive. Man of the hour was Miami quarterback Jacory Harris, who directed a clutch nine-play, 82-yard game-winning drive, including a 29-yard strike to Aldarius Johnson on a 4<sup>th</sup>

-and-16 play. The Hurricanes still trail Coastal Division frontrunner Georgia Tech by one game in the loss column and own the tiebreaker over the Yellow Jackets.

**Not a Bad Year:** Name a passing category and the chances are Case Keenum leads the nation in it. The Houston quarterback is at the top of the heap in pass attempts, completions, yards and touchdown passes, is third in completion percentage, fourth in passer rating and has been intercepted only five times in 395 attempts. He threw for 559 yards in Houston's 50-43 conquest of Southern Miss, the seventh win in eight games for the Cougars this year.

**Congratulations!** I'm not sure how this slipped by me, but Indiana State's 33-game losing streak- the fourth-longest in college football history- is over. The Sycamores [came from behind to defeat Western Illinois](#)

17-14 on October 24

th

, the first win for the program since October 21

st

, 2006. Having ended one losing streak, they then kicked off another with a 33-0 loss to Southern Illinois last Saturday.

**While One Streak Ends:** Another one keeps right on rolling. The Tulane Green Wave suffered their 18

th

consecutive loss to cross-state rival Louisiana State in Baton Rouge on Saturday night, 42-0. Tulane hasn't beaten LSU

[since 1982](#)

and hasn't come within single digits of beating the Tigers since 1990.

***State of the Races:*** As we swing into the regular season's last full month, let's take a look at the various non-Big Ten conference and divisional races involving college football's BCS set.

**Big East:** Cincinnati and Pittsburgh are tied for first with 4-0 conference records. Their meeting at Heinz Field on December 5<sup>th</sup> will likely decide the title. Brian Kelly's team has gotten the national buzz, but Pitt has very quietly put together a 7-1 record and a 13<sup>th</sup>

-place standing in the polls. Only a blown two-touchdown lead at N.C. State separates the Panthers from an undefeated record.

*Predicted Winner: Cincinnati*

**ACC Coastal:** Georgia Tech is in front with a 5-1 record, a game up in the loss column on Virginia Tech (3-2), Miami (3-2) and Virginia (2-2) and tied in the loss column with surprising Duke (3-1.) A win at

Duke on November 14<sup>th</sup> would likely clinch the division for the Yellow Jackets.

*Predicted Winner: Georgia Tech*

**ACC Atlantic:** Clemson and Boston College are tied at the top of the division with 3-2 records, with the Tigers holding the tiebreaker by virtue of their 25-7 victory over the Eagles in September. Florida State and Wake Forest are a game off the pace at 2-3. Clemson has already beaten Wake and hosts FSU this Saturday with a chance to put a hammerlock on the division with a win.

*Predicted Winner: Clemson*

**SEC East:** Florida has already clinched the division and a spot in the SEC Championship Game on December 5<sup>th</sup>.

*Predicted Winner: Florida*

**SEC West:** Alabama (5-0) and LSU (4-1) are the only legitimate contenders left. They will meet this Saturday in Tuscaloosa; if the Tide wins, they will clinch the division.

*Predicted Winner: Alabama*

**Big 12 North:** This division is as messy as

a child's bedroom. Kansas State currently leads with a 3-2 record, but the Wildcats still face games against Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. The Cornhuskers (2-2) are the only other team in the division with fewer than three conference losses. Everyone else has three. God only knows who will be left standing in this thing at the end.

*Predicted Winner: Nebraska*

**Big 12 South:** Ah, clarity. Texas is in complete control, with a 5-0 record and wins in their hip pocket over Oklahoma (3-1) and Oklahoma State (3-1.) Wins in two of their last three conference games against Baylor, Kansas and Texas A&M will send the

# Longhorns to the Big 12 Championship Game at Cowboys Stadium December 5 th

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*Predicted Winner: Texas*

**Pac-10:** It's Oregon's race to lose. The Ducks are 5-0, a game up in the loss column on Arizona (3-1) and two up on everyone else. Wins in three of the last four at Stanford, at home against Arizona State, at Arizona and at home in the Civil War against Oregon State will probably be enough to send the Ducks to Pasadena and, hopefully, a match-up

with Ohio State. Arizona's closing schedule is monstrous: road games at California, at Arizona State and at USC, plus the November 21<sup>st</sup> game in Tucson against Oregon.

*Predicted Winner: Oregon*

## ***Winners of the Week***

**Oregon:** Amazing at how much a season can change. The Ducks- and rookie head coach Chip Kelly- were

left for dead after their devastating opening-night loss in Boise. Two months later they're in the driver's seat for the Rose Bowl after handing USC its worst loss since Pete Carroll took over in 2001. The formula for the turnaround has been three-fold: a defense that ranks 19<sup>th</sup> nationally in total yardage, the continued health and effectiveness of dual-threat quarterback Jeremiah Masoli, and LeMichael James, the 5'9" freshman dynamo who has seamlessly replaced LeGarrett Blount as the team's workhorse back. There are no gimme's on Oregon's remaining schedule, but if the Ducks keep playing like this, you'll find them

in Pasadena on January 1  
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**Iowa:** The Hawkeyes have been pulling off hair-raising escapes all season, but they took their Houdini act to a new level in Saturday's [42-24 victory over Indiana](#)

. Early in the third quarter the Hoosiers had a 21-7 lead and the ball at the Iowa two-yard line following the third of five Ricky Stanzi interceptions. A touchdown, even a field goal, might have

broken the backs of the Hawkeyes.

Instead,

[Tyler Sash picked off a deflected Ben Chappell pass and raced 86 yards for a touchdown](#)

. Still trailing 24-14 in the fourth, Stanzi suddenly began throwing the ball to players in black jerseys. The junior from Lake Catholic was 3-of-3 for 177 yards in the final period, including 92-and-66-yard touchdown passes, as he dragged his team back from the precipice where he had almost single-handedly placed them. Somehow, some way, the Hawkeyes are 9-0 and still in the

race for the BCS Championship.

**Texas:** It may still be premature to say so, but it appears that with its 41-14 manhandling of Oklahoma State in Stillwater, Texas has leapt its last hurdle on the way to an undefeated season. Only road games at Baylor and Texas Tech and home games against Central Florida and Kansas remain, and none of those contests should be particularly taxing for a Longhorns team that might be playing the best football in America at the moment.

**Duke:** Somewhat quietly, David Cutcliffe is doing a very, very nice coaching job with the Blue Devils, who are 5-3 (3-1 in the ACC) after a 28-17 road win over Virginia. A noted quarterback guru, Cutcliffe has a good one in senior [Thaddeus Lewis](#) (63.5 completion percentage, 15 touchdowns, four interceptions) and behind Lewis the Blue Devils have three straight wins for the first time since 1994. If Cutcliffe, Lewis and Co. can get one win out of a demanding closing stretch of North Carolina, Georgia Tech, Miami and Wake Forest, they'll have Duke's

first bowl bid in fifteen years.

**SMU:** The Mustangs haven't played in a bowl game since 1984, a couple of years before the program was given [the death penalty](#). That streak might end this season under second-year coach June Jones. The Ponies are 4-4 (3-1 in Conference USA) after their 27-13 road upset of Tulsa and the combined record of their last four opponents is 10-27. Likely wins over Tulane and Rice would almost guarantee that elusive bowl bid, lost

from the times when SMU was one of the first names in Southwest Conference football and *the* first name in athletic malfeasance.

## ***Losers of the Week***

**Virginia Tech:** Two weeks ago the Hokies were in line for an ACC Championship and, barring that, a possible at-large BCS berth. Not anymore: back-to-back losses,

including [Thursday night's shocker at the hands of North Carolina](#)

, have dropped them out of both races altogether. Chances are, we're going to see some fresh blood in the ACC title game this year, which is a good thing unless you or your heart resides in Blacksburg and Chestnut Hill. (To be fair, Boston College is still very much in the Coastal race.)

**Michigan:** The revival in Ann Arbor is officially on hiatus. Michigan

suffered its second consecutive lopsided defeat on Saturday; this time the perpetrator was hapless Illinois, which dropped an even 500 yards on the Wolverine defense in a 38-13 shellacking. All of a sudden a bowl bid isn't a certainty, especially if Michigan loses to Purdue next week. Rich Rodriguez really can't afford to stay home with his team this December, especially following the great September.

**Indiana:** Two weeks ago the Hoosiers blew a 28-3 lead at

Northwestern. That loss, however, was merely a prelude to what befell them in Iowa City on Saturday, when a 24-14 lead was transformed into a 42-24 loss in a catastrophic fourth quarter. After dominating Iowa and building a ten-point in the first 45 minutes, Indiana was out-gained 265-30 and outscored 28-0 in the last fifteen. What started out promising has gotten awfully sour for Bill Lynch's team, and with Wisconsin and Penn State coming up, keeping the wheels from falling off entirely is now the main priority.

**USC:** The Trojans aren't supposed to look like this- exposed, overmatched and overwhelmed. That's how they looked Saturday night in Eugene, giving up 613 total yards in a 47-20 rout, the most lopsided loss for the program since 1997. The Trojans aren't supposed to be locked in a three-way tie for fourth place in the Pac-10. That's where they sit currently as November begins, looking up at the likes of Arizona and Stanford. The Trojans aren't supposed to play late-December postseason football. That's exactly what they're going to do this season.

**Western Kentucky:** Might want to stick to basketball, guys. The Hilltoppers dropped to 0-8 on the season with their 68-49 loss to North Texas, which went into Saturday's game with a pristine 1-6 record. It's the second consecutive week and the third time this season Western's free-handed defense has given up more than 60 points. When you can't handle the competition in the Sun Belt Conference, you're in trouble.

**Next Week:** Ohio State takes on

Penn State at 3:30 PM Saturday in Happy Valley. Dan Wismar and Yours Truly will talk at length about the big game on the Buckeye Friday podcast.