



Jim Tressel's dominance of Michigan continued Saturday in Ann Arbor as the Buckeye defense forced five turnovers by Wolverine quarterback Tate Forcier on the way to a methodical 21-10 victory, and Ohio State ran their streak over the Wolverines to six in a row. Tressel won his fifth consecutive Big Ten championship outright, and improved his career record in The Game to 8-1.

Ohio State (10-2, 7-1) stuck to the formula that has now resulted in five straight wins to close the regular season: rushing for over 200 yards, passing when necessary, and smothering the opponent with a fast, tough defense. When an early touchdown by that defense gave the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead, the game set up perfectly for the guy in the sweater-vest. By the time it was over you could include the game film in the Tresselball textbook.

Michigan (5-7, 1-7) was supposed to be the team with more to play for in this year's game, and they competed hard all the way, but there was [no apparent lack of intensity](#) by the Buckeyes in this one either. By beating their arch-rival for the sixth straight time, Ohio State not only won the outright conference championship, but they ended Michigan's season without a bowl game...assured them of last place in the conference...extended their Big Ten losing streak to seven games...and permitted another OSU senior class to graduate having never lost to the Ugly Hats.

What do you mean nothing to play for? How sweet is that?

Meanwhile, that sound you hear coming out of the north is the gnashing of teeth at the University of Michigan. Head coach Rich Rodriguez has another year on his contract, and all the official rhetoric from the school insists they're behind him 100%...but that might be just to give him a push. The football turnaround in Ann Arbor is beginning to look like more of a long term project than anyone anticipated, and the powers that be will have to decide soon if they think Rodriguez is capable of bringing it about.

Had a Bad Day

It didn't take long for Ohio State's defense to ruin Tate Forcier's day. The Wolverines started their first possession at their own 7-yard line, and Forcier fumbled the ball trying to scramble out

of his own endzone on third-and-long. Thad Gibson creamed Forcier with a vicious hit after the fumble as Cam Heyward fell on the ball for an OSU touchdown, and the Buckeyes had a 7-0 lead before the game was five minutes old.

With a 7-point lead, and facing the league's worst rush defense, the Buckeyes went to work grinding out yardage on the ground. Dan Herron (96 yards), Brandon Saine (84 yards) and Terrelle Pryor (74 yards) would combine for 251 rushing yards on 53 carries against the undersized Michigan defenders. Pryor's runs seemed to spark the OSU offense, as the coaches called his number on designed runs or options more than they have in recent weeks. The ankle sprain that had limited his rushing game appears to be healed, and he was able to keep the Michigan defenders guessing after gashing them a couple of times in the second quarter.

Meanwhile Forcier was gamely trying to keep the Michigan offense moving without a lot of help from the rushing attack. He was pressured repeatedly, though only sacked once, and his passing (23 of 38 for 226 yards, 1 TD) was the only thing going for the Wolverines on offense in the first half. OSU safety Kurt Coleman picked him off on a deep throw shortly before halftime, but Forcier came back after the break to drive Michigan for their only TD early in the third quarter. It was in the fourth quarter though, when his inexperience would get the better of him, and Ohio State defenders capitalized.

With the Buckeyes ahead 21-10 starting the final quarter, Forcier threw interceptions on three consecutive Michigan possessions, including one to Devon Torrence in the OSU end zone on a play from the Buckeye 6-yard line with 8:09 to play in the game. The Buckeyes were able to kill some clock with one first down after the pick, but when Michigan got the ball back after a punt, Forcier threw one right to OSU defensive end Thad Gibson on the third play of the drive, and Wolverine hopes of a comeback melted away with just 3:34 left on the clock.

Pryor and Saine Spark the Offense

Thanks to the score by the Buckeye defense, the first quarter ended 7-0, and when Michigan took possession with 11 minutes to go in the half, Ohio State had as many punts in the game as they did first downs. They had been outgained in total yards by the Wolverines to that point, and the Buckeye offense had been anything but impressive. Forcier then began a 10-play Michigan drive to the OSU 28, passing for four first down completions along the way. A 46-yard field goal by Jason Olesnavage made it a 7-3 game, and the Bucks seemed to get the idea that the Maize and Blue weren't going away.

After the kickoff, Brandon Saine and Terrelle Pryor had a statement to make to the Big Ten's worst team. Saine rushed for first downs on runs of 14 and 3 yards, sandwiched around a 9-yard run by Pryor, and the Bucks had moved the ball out to the Ohio State 46. Then Pryor and Saine ran the read-option to perfection, with Pryor keeping and taking it over the left side, gliding 25 yards down to the Michigan 29. On the next play, the flow went right...and Saine took a counter hand-off and ran left. The misdirection worked just like they drew it up, and Saine sprinted untouched to the end zone and a 14-3 OSU lead at the 5:22 mark.

Six plays...80 yards...no forward passes...one touchdown. The lead was 14-3 at the half.

Three things can happen...two of them are bad...

The Buckeyes did throw the ball a little bit. Pryor completed 9 of 17 throws for a mere 67 yards passing, and he was able to open things up early for the offense with a couple of sideline completions on the first possession. But after he threw an interception off a tipped ball on the first Buckeye drive of the second half, the passing game was pretty much put away for the day. Seven of Pryor's nine completions would come in the first half.

With his coach sitting on a lead and relying on his defense, Pryor would complete just one pass in the third quarter, and one in the fourth, but the first of those was a thing of beauty, and went for six points. And again it was Pryor and his offensive teammates responding immediately after Michigan had cut into the OSU lead.

The Buckeyes had forced a Michigan punt after the second half kickoff, but on the first offensive series for OSU, Pryor broke a string of 10 turnover-free quarters when a 3rd and 5 pass intended for Posey glanced off his hands as he was hit by the defender, and was intercepted by UM linebacker Jonas Mouton near midfield. The short field was just what the feeble Wolverine offense needed, and they tightened things up by driving for their only touchdown of the game, an 18-yard cross-field throw by Forcier to tailback Vincent Smith off a scramble.

Staying in Control

There proved to be no quit at all in these talent-challenged Wolverines, and it was 14-10 Ohio State, still early in the third quarter. It was time for another statement by the Buckeyes and their rushing attack.

Nine straight running plays followed the kickoff...Pryor runs of 12 and 13 yards... three carries by Saine for 6, 4 and 17 yards....four more by Herron for 13, 1, 23, and minus-2 yards...and the Buckeyes had 2nd and goal on the Michigan 4-yard line. Pryor got sacked by Brandon Graham for an 8-yard loss on the next play, and kicker Devin Barclay was flexing the leg on the sidelines. But the OSU coaches had the right play called on 3rd and goal, and Barclay would be able to take the rest of the day off.

The Buckeye offense caught Michigan in an all-out blitz on the 3rd down play, as seven Wolverine defenders came after Pryor. But Herron released out of the backfield as Pryor floated a perfect screen pass over the onrushing linemen, and Herron walked in untouched for what would prove to be the last points of the game, and a 21-10 Ohio State lead.

Snuffing Out the Hope

That's when Tressel and the Buckeyes turned the game over to their defense, and young Tate

Forcier started throwing the ball to the wrong-colored jerseys in earnest. Kurt Coleman made his second interception of the day on a leaping grab barely inside the sideline at the OSU 6-yard line to spoil an early 4th quarter Michigan drive that had reached the Ohio State 35. The picks by Torrence and Gibson then followed on the next two Wolverine possessions and the Buckeyes were able to avoid any late-game drama as they wrapped up the outright Big Ten title and a 10-2 regular season.

The defense rushed only four, and played a soft zone for the better part of the game, and as a result, they gave up some passing yardage underneath, while largely preventing big gainers. Ray Roundtree had one 43-yard reception, and Greg Matthews one for 23-yards, but the defense obviously forced the freshman Michigan QB into numerous mistakes as well.

Ross Homan had another stellar performance at linebacker for the Bucks, leading all defenders in the game with 12 total tackles, and dishing out a lot of hurt in the process. Brian Rolle has been nursing a calf injury, but he showed up for The Game and made nine total stops, including three tackles for loss. Jermale Hines was on his game too, racking up nine tackles, including two behind the line of scrimmage.

Their Problem, Not Ours

If the Michigan program was in disarray at the start of the day, it's a little bit more so after this game, which calls into question the capability of Forcier to be the quarterback of the future for this team, after he had been one of the few bright spots in a sorry season in Ann Arbor.

Buckeye fans at the game mocked the Michigan coach with a banner that read "We Love You, Rich Rodriguez". Love for Rodriguez has been in short supply ever since he got to Michigan, and this kind won't help. These are the same Buckeye fans, after all, who were crazy in love with Lloyd Carr a few short years ago, and we know how that worked out for him.

What Buckeye fans think is the least of their worries at U of M these days. Let them scratch their heads for another year or so trying to figure out a way to beat the guy in the sweater-vest at that school down south. These Buckeyes have a Rose Bowl Game to play.

Links:

[OSU Box Score and Stats](#)

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