



Ohio State got a calm and composed performance from Terrelle Pryor while their defense was intercepting Miami's Jacory Harris four times, and the Buckeyes survived two long kick returns for touchdowns by Miami to turn back the Hurricanes 36-24 Saturday at the Horseshoe. Devin Barclay tied an OSU record with five field goals and Ohio State converted all four Miami turnovers to points while building a 19-point second half lead...and the defense did the rest.

The Hurricanes leave town with a little less of their signature swagger, and zero talk of revenge.

When Miami scored on the first play of the fourth quarter, it was the first touchdown surrendered by the OSU defense this season. It wasn't the fault of the Buckeye defenders that two special teams scores by the Canes in the first half were keeping Miami in a game that would otherwise have been an early blowout. Ohio State is now plus-7 in turnover margin through two games (7-0), but the problems with their special teams play going back to last season were apparent again in this contest.

Despite the wrinkles, for Ohio State (2-0) this was a highly satisfying double-digit win over a ranked non-conference opponent, made more so by the knowledge this was a game that had been circled on the Hurricanes' calendar for half a decade, and that they attached great significance to it as a stepping stone to their return to college football's elite. After a week off, Miami (1-1) continues their brutal stretch of road games, at Pittsburgh and at Clemson. That elite status may be farther off than they thought, but they must surely consider themselves a better team going into conference play for having gone toe-to-toe with Ohio State on the road.

This Isn't in the Tresselball Playbook

The Bucks scored first following Nate Williams' interception off a pass deflected by safety C.J. Barnett. But after the first of Barclay's field goals gave OSU a 3-0 lead, they gave the lead right back on an 88-yard Miami TD on the ensuing kickoff return, giving the Hurricanes the momentum shift and the early confidence they desperately needed.

Miami would make it 10-3 on a 51-yard Matt Bosher field goal early in the 2nd quarter, but the Buckeyes answered quickly with a two-play, 37-second drive featuring a 62-yard completion to DeVier Posey and an 18-yard TD pass to Brandon Saine on a wheel route, to tie it at 10-10.

A 10-play drive led to a go-ahead field goal by Barclay, and then the first of Chekwa's interceptions resulted in a 4-yard TD run by Dan Herron. Very quickly the Buckeyes had scored 17 unanswered points and looked poised to take command of the game. But that's when "the most important play in football" betrayed The Vest's designs, as Miami's Travis Benjamin took advantage of some shoddy OSU coverage and tackling, dashing 79 yards to the house with a Ben Buchanan punt, and the Hurricanes were back in it, down just 20-17 with under three minutes to go in the half.

Settling For Three's

The other factor conspiring to keep Miami in the game was the Buckeyes' repeated failure to convert red-zone possessions into touchdowns. Leading by three late in the half, they failed to take advantage of Jordan Hall's 47-yard kickoff return to the Miami 28, when they stalled at the 4-yard line and settled for a Barclay field goal. 23-17 Bucks.

Moments later, after the second of Chekwa's interceptions set them up at the Miami 27, Pryor and the Buckeyes failed to score a TD after having a first-and-goal at the Hurricanes' 7-yard line. Barclay's fourth field goal made it 26-17 at the half, but it really should have been all over but the shoutin' by then.

In one instance, poor clock management by Tressel cost OSU at least one shot at a pass into the end zone at the end of the half. He left a timeout on the board with the clock running at 15 seconds, opting instead to use all but two seconds on a running play by Pryor before kicking the field goal. Another shot at seven went by the boards when Williams' 1st quarter interception return put the Buckeyes inside the Miami 10-yard line, but a (completely bogus) chop block penalty on Ross Homan set them back 15 yards.

(Given the history of this series, I realize it may be bad form to whine about the officiating, especially in victory, but my observations are my observations. The ACC crew gifted Miami their initial first down with a very generous spot...declined to call obvious violations by Miami offensive linemen holding Heyward and Simon more than a few times, including picking up one flag...left at least two Miami false starts go uncalled...and made the phantom call on Homan. On the other side of the ledger, Chekwa was arguably guilty of pass interference in the end zone early in the game.)

Pryor Dominates on an Off Day

"Today was the most calm I've ever been," said Pryor, after the junior decisively won the battle of quarterbacks over his friend Harris. Pryor threw for 227 yards with one TD pass, and rushed for 113 more yards, including a 13-yard touchdown run. For the second game in a row, Pryor did not throw an interception, which on this day would more than make up for his somewhat pedestrian 12 of 27 passing numbers.

Pryor was hurried and harassed much of the game by a fast and aggressive Miami defense, resulting in several ill-advised throws and numerous others that were off target. This was by no means his best game as a Buckeye....yet he still was the dominant offensive player on the field. He repeatedly picked up first downs on the ground, on designed runs, rollouts or scrambles, including three first down runs as the Buckeyes controlled the ball for the last 7:31 of the game to ice the victory.

Harris showed flashes of why he is considered one of the up-and-coming quarterbacks in the college game with a 22 for 39 passing effort, for 233 yards and one TD pass, but the four interceptions doomed his Hurricanes' chances in this one, although two of the picks appeared to be more the fault of his receivers. On balance, you'd have to say OSU's cornerbacks rose to the challenge posed by Harris and his strong stable of receivers, especially Chimdi Chekwa, who came away with two of the four interceptions.

Like a box of chocolates...

You never know what you're going to get in a college football game (*I'm told that's why they play the games*), and the two OSU interceptions by defensive linemen were just a couple examples of the strangeness of this one. No play was more of a game-changer on Saturday than the interception by Buckeye captain Cam Heyward.

Coming out of the half, Miami took the kickoff and after two Harris completions, they got tailback Damien Berry outside the OSU containment and he dashed 42 yards to the OSU 6-yard line. About to cut into the nine-point OSU lead, Harris tried to flip a quick slant pass over the middle, when the 6' 6", 300 lb. Heyward, who had dropped into a short zone coverage from his inside spot on the defensive line, cut in front of the receiver, grabbed Harris' pass, and rambled 80 yards with it before exhaustion and an ill-advised cut inside brought him down at the Miami 15.

Another two-play OSU touchdown drive ensued, with Pryor running it in from 13-yards out, and instead of possibly facing a 26-24 ball game, it was now 33-17 Ohio State, and the Buckeyes were back in control. Having scored after all four Harris interceptions, Ohio State would then capitalize after a Miami field goal attempt was blocked by Devon Torrence, adding Barclay's final field goal to make it 36-17.

The Canes mounted a 60-yard touchdown drive as the 3rd quarter was winding down, with Harris completing four passes along the way, including the 9-yard TD pass over a leaping Brian Rolle early in the 4th. But their last attempt to get the OSU lead back into single digits died near midfield when they gave the ball up on downs with 7:31 remaining. A tired OSU defensive line summoned some pass rush, with Nate Williams standing out on that final series, to hurry Harris into incompletions on 3rd and 4th down, and Miami would not see the ball again.

Pryor took over with his legs on that final 14-play drive, picking up three key first downs, all on designed running plays, to wrap up a very long (3:28) and very intense, physical football game. The Buckeyes ended it in typically classy Tressel fashion, by declining to try to score from the five yard line with over a minute left on the clock. Uh...no hard feelings, guys. See you next year in Florida.

This and That

I thought the OSU defensive line did a great job, especially early in the game, completely bottling up the Miami running game for most of the first half. Somewhat surprising was seeing the two Buckeye sacks coming from the inside (Simon and Larimore) instead of from the defensive ends or from blitzing linebackers.

I thought the Bucks would blitz a lot more than they did. Instead they chose to rush the passer with four guys most of the time, and the Miami line did a pretty good job of giving Harris time to throw. Nate Williams had a very solid game, although I thought the whole OSU front seven looked tired in the second half, after going up against so much no-huddle all day.

Both teams' offensive lines did a better job of pass protection than they did in run-blocking. Brandon Saine (12 carries, 7 yds) had a very forgettable day running the football for OSU. He looked tentative, and for a while there it looked like their standard play call was for a two-yard loss on every first down play. Boom Herron looked better (14 carries, 66 yds), but Pryor was the team's leading rusher with 113 yards.

The play calling got very conservative and predictable once Tressel got the double-digit lead, which can account in part for the Buckeye troubles running the ball. And Miami has a very good front seven that did a good job of penetrating, especially from the inside. But after seeing Jaamal Berry and Jordan Hall do so well on kickoff returns this week, and in limited duty from scrimmage against Marshall, you couldn't blame Buckeye fans for wanting to see the running back depth chart shaken up a bit...just to see how the kids would do with more of an opportunity...

Part of the credit has to go to the Miami defense for holding the OSU offense in check in this game, but it's hard to look at the Buckeyes' offensive showing and point out things they did well...outside of Terrelle Pryor taking off with the football in his hands.

It was close, but the OSU defense extended their streak of not allowing a 100-yd. rusher to 25

games, the 2nd longest current streak in the nation. Damien Berry had 94 yards (including a 42 yard run) on 16 carries.

Ross Homan led the Bucks with 10 total tackles, and Devon Torrence was next with eight. Torrence was picked on by Harris and his receivers, and they made several catches in his area, but he tackled well for the most part, and played well in run support...and he blocked a field goal. Chekwa had one of his better games in a while.

The knee injury to C.J. Barnett looked fairly serious....too bad, because he was making plays out there.

Links:

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