

The Week That Was: Bobcats Spayed

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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Yours Truly didn't actually watch Ohio State's game on Saturday- more on that in a minute- but the result wasn't exactly a shock, regardless of how ill-served I was by the Big Ten Network, or whoever was responsible for inserting Maize and Blue in place of Scarlet and Gray on my television set. The Buckeyes routed their in-state little brothers from Ohio University, 43-7, to move to 3-0 on the season. A quick glance at the statistical line reveals Ohio State's dominance: the Buckeyes out-gained the Bobcats 439-158, piled up 22 first downs to Ohio's seven, held the ball for nearly 38 minutes, forced five turnovers, scored a safety and at the midway point of the second quarter already led, 34-0. If one was to miss a Buckeye game, it might as well have been this one.

Thanks a Pant-load, BTN: So at noon sharp I sat down, beverage strategically positioned by my left hand, remote in my right, and got set to watch the Ohio State game on the Big Ten Network. Only the Big Ten Network wasn't showing the Ohio State game. They were showing the Michigan game.

Hmm.

Now, call me dense. But seeing as I live in *Ohio*, and there was a game between *Ohio State* and *Ohio* University, wouldn't it make sense for the Big Ten Network to show

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that

game instead of the game involving

Michigan

?

Just kind of throwing it out there. Actually, this snafu might be more the fault of Yours Truly's local cable provider (WOW) than the Big Ten Network. Either way, *someone* is to blame. Don't these cretins know I have a column to write?

It was over when... they scheduled this game several years ago. Ohio State hasn't lost to an in-state opponent since 1921 and wasn't going to lose this one, even to an Ohio team that is supposedly one of the stronger outfits in the Mid-American Conference.

Terrelle Pryor's Line: 22-of-29 for 235 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions; eight carries for 35 yards and a touchdown. At one point Pryor completed 16 consecutive pass attempts. He was at his best in the early going, completing 17 of his first 18 attempts for 180 yards and two scores and adding 44 yards on four carries with another score as the Buckeyes sprinted out to that 34-0 lead. Although he didn't finish as strongly, completing 4-of-11 and throwing two interceptions in garbage time, it didn't really matter. By then the game was long decided.

Committee Meeting: The days of Maurice Clarett and Beanie Wells are, sadly, over. Ohio State's four main running backs- Brandon Saine, Dan Herron, Jamaal Berry and Jordan Hall- combined for a pedestrian 120 yards on 29 carries. The Buckeyes still don't have that bell-cow running back that can carry this offense for 30 or 35 carries. The lack of a go-to guy has already contributed to Ohio State's red-zone struggles this season and it could be a big problem if, and when, the Buckeyes play a top-flight opponent, particularly on the road.

Special-Teams Woes: Ohio State's myriad of special-teams problems once again raised its ugly head on Saturday. The Buckeyes gave up a 99-yard kick return for a touchdown- nullified by an illegal block, thankfully- and had a punt blocked. The defects are all-encompassing: Ohio State has given up three kick returns for scores (albeit, only two which counted) and have had two kicks blocked. There doesn't seem to be much improvement, either. It's troubling that a team coached by a man that places such a priority on good special-teams play should have these kinds of issues.

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Tenacious D: If lousy special-teams play has been a hallmark of the 2010 Ohio State Buckeyes, so too has been a ferocious, hard-hitting defense. The Buckeye stop-troops were once again superb on Saturday, holding the Bobcats to 158 total yards, forcing five turnovers and picking up a safety courtesy of Cam Heyward's end-zone trap of Ohio running back Vince Davidson. The Bobcats averaged a meager 3.3 yards per play. The judicious ballhandling of Pryor and the ferocious ball-hawking of the Silver Bullets have combined to give Ohio State the nation's best turnover margin at +10.

And with that, I'll refer you to Dan Wismar's [authoritative recap](#) of Ohio State's victory, seeing as he, you know, actually watched the game.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- Michigan State/Notre Dame: There was no shortage of drama on Saturday- particularly on Saturday night- but the annual Church vs. State showdown took the cake, right down to its thrilling ending. After playing to a prosaic 7-7 halftime tie the Spartans and Irish unlimbered their big guns and shot it out in a furious second half and overtime period, combining for 51 points, 375 yards and seven touchdowns in the final two quarters and change. There were four touchdown drives of over 73 yards in the third period alone.

And [the ending](#) made the fireworks that came before seem blasé. Trailing 31-28 in overtime the Spartans lined up as if to attempt a game-tying 46-yard field goal. Instead holder and backup quarterback Aaron Bates took the snap, stood up and found tight end Charlie Gantt wide-open for the winning 29-yard touchdown pass. Spartan kicker Dan Conroy had been a perfect 4-of-4 on the season going into the trick play, including 2-of-2 on attempts of over 40 yards, so Brian Kelly could be forgiven if he didn't see the maneuver coming.

Either way, the Irish continued a trend that began last season under Charlie Weis- close losses. Since getting off to a 6-2 start in 2009 they've lost six times by a touchdown or less and are 1-6 in that span. The names and faces on the sideline change, but the one constant of

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Notre Dame football- a defense that can't get stops at crucial times- remains the same. Remember when guys like Chris Zorich, Todd Lyght, Bryant Young and Michael Stonebreaker were making big plays for the Irish on D? Yeah, it's been a while.

Last but certainly not least, well-wishes go out to Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio, who [suffered a heart attack](#) early Sunday morning, a few hours after his team's big victory. Hopefully he'll be back on the sideline soon. Offensive coordinator Don Treadwell will take the reins for the Spartans this coming Saturday against Northern Colorado.

The Wolverine Three-Step: It's becoming an annual ritual, a waltz that is pleasing to some (mainly residents of Columbus and associated environs) and not so much to others. It's the Wolverine Three-Step which consists of, in order:

Step One: Michigan generates national buzz with a couple of early wins.

Step Two: Michigan's defense is exposed in a too-close home victory over an inferior opponent.

Step Three: Michigan's season goes into the toilet.

Step One came in the first two weeks when, led by the wizardry of Denard "Shoeless" Robinson, the Wolverines defeated Connecticut and Notre Dame. The Maize and Blue poked their heads into the rankings amid loud whispers that perhaps Rich Rodriguez's funeral in Ann Arbor might need to be put on hold for a while.

Step Two came last Saturday against FCS member Massachusetts. The Minutemen, who at one point led 17-7, racked up 439 yards of total offense and scared the hell out of the Big House with a fourth-quarter rally before falling, 42-37. The shootout was eerily reminiscent of [Michigan's 36-33 squeaker over Indiana last season](#) - a game that served as a precursor to the Wolverines' collapse in the Big Ten portion of the schedule.

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Now, one *would* expect UMass to put up a fight against Michigan... if this was the NCAA Tournament in 1992 (that [Harper Williams](#) -Chris Webber match-up might have been a doozy.) Granted, the Minutemen are one of the better outfits in the FCS- they got to the title game in 2006 before losing to Michigan's old buddies from Appalachian State- but barely surviving even a formidable FCS opponent isn't exactly the benchmark for greatness in Ann Arbor.

Thus, Steps One and Two. Will Step Three follow? Maybe not- not to the extent, at least, of the Wolverines missing out on postseason play. Denard Robinson is probably too great of a talent to let that happen. But without a complimentary defense, Shoeless and Company probably won't be any more than an entertaining sideshow in Big Ten play. And that shouldn't be good enough for the folks up in Ann Arbor.

Just Like Old Times: Remember when Nebraska was winning big with its ferocious Blackshirt defense and a quicksilver running quarterback? You don't have to remember, because it's happening again in Lincoln. The Cornhuskers are now 3-0 with a rushing offense that ranks fourth in the FBS at 344 yards per game. Leading the way is freshman quarterback Taylor Martinez. The 6'1" speedster from California hasn't thrown much so far- just 43 times in three games- but he already has amassed 421 yards and a national-best eight touchdowns on the ground. [The Huskers trampled Washington](#) with 383 rushing yards in their 56-21 rout of the Huskies on Saturday, getting 100-yard games from Martinez, Roy Helu Jr. and Rex Burkhead.

Cowboy Up: While we're on the subject of explosive Big 12 players, how about Oklahoma State's entire offense? After a 65-28 blowout of Tulsa the Cowboys are second in the nation in scoring offense (to Oregon) at 57 points per game, second in total offense (again, to Oregon) at 596 yards per game and have standout performers at almost every skill position. Quarterback Brandon Weeden leads the nation in touchdown passes with 11 and is second in yards per game; tailback Kendall Hunter is third in the nation in rushing and second in all-purpose yards, and wide receiver Justin Blackmon is tops in both receiving yards and touchdown catches. Apparently replacing Zac Robinson, Keith Toston and Dez Bryant hasn't been too much of a challenge in Stillwater.

Winners of the Week

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The Pac-10: Other than Cal (run off the field by Nevada on Friday night) and Washington (crushed by Nebraska) the conference acquitted itself admirably last weekend. The Pac-10 came within a botched extra point of perhaps going 3-0 against the Big Ten, with Arizona knocking off Iowa in the headliner, while Stanford destroyed ACC foe Wake Forest and Oregon State outlasted Big East opponent Louisville. Oregon did its usual thing, running up 668 total yards- 528 on the ground- in a 69-0 annihilation of Portland State. And Washington State lost at SMU by only two touchdowns, which is practically a victory in itself for the Cougars.

Temple: Maybe the Big East should re-consider its six-year old decision to expel Temple from the conference. The Owls moved to 3-0 for the first time since 1979 by outlasting Connecticut, scoring 16 unanswered fourth-quarter points to vanquish the Huskies, 30-16. Sophomore sensation Bernard Pierce was, as usual, the hero, rushing for 169 yards and two touchdowns and adding a 27-yard scoring reception. Temple takes its perfect mark to Happy Valley this Saturday, with hopes of knocking off the Nittanys for the first time since 1943. The Owls have lost 26 straight to their in-state rival since a 7-7 tie in 1950 (Joe Pa's first year as a Penn State assistant.)

Mark Ingram: It didn't take long for the 2009 Heisman winner to get back in the swing of things after missing the first two weeks of the season. Ingram racked up 101 yards on his first four carries, including a 48-yard gain on his first touch, as Alabama rolled over Duke, 62-13. The Devils are a pretty good team against which to get healthy: they've yielded 116 points in their last two games.

Virginia Tech: The Hokies were trailing 27-21 and staring an 0-3 start in the face midway through the third quarter against East Carolina last Saturday. Then, in the nick of time, Frank Beamer's team finally awoke from its slumber. In a matter of eleven-and-a-half minutes the Hokies racked up 187 yards (while holding the Pirates to 57), intercepted two passes- returning one for a touchdown- and scored 28 unanswered points. Virginia Tech cruised to a 49-27 victory, its first of the season, and dignity has been restored in Blacksburg.

Alabama-Birmingham: Not much has gone right for the Blazers since moving up to Division I-A in 1997, but they certainly had a feel-good moment last Saturday against in-state rival Troy. After falling behind 23-0 in the second period UAB fought back to stun the Trojans 34-33, scoring the winning touchdown on a 44-yard Hail Mary from Bryan Ellis to Jackie Williams with no time left.

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Losers of the Week

Houston: It's hard to imagine anyone having a worse week than the Cougars, whose stay in the polls proved a brief one. Not only were they ripped for 365 yards and 31 points in a lopsided loss to previously winless (and offensively inept) UCLA, they lost record-shattering quarterback Case Keenum and backup Cotton Turner to season-ending injuries.

Georgia: After fighting back with two fourth-quarter touchdowns to tie Arkansas at 24-24, the Bulldog defense offered only token resistance as Ryan Mallett led the Hogs on a 3-play, 73-yard, 39-second drive to the [winning touchdown](#) with 15 seconds left. The Dawgs are 0-2 in the SEC for the first time since 1993, when Ray Goff was the head coach in Athens, and don't look capable of taking advantage of the vulnerability of Florida in the East.

The Mountain West: I guess we can put an end to that talk of the MWC being superior to the Pac-10. The Mountain got eroded big-time this past weekend, with Air Force and San Diego State falling just short at Oklahoma and at Missouri respectively, BYU getting spread-eagled by Florida State, Wyoming getting half-a-hundred rung up on them by Boise State, UNLV getting manhandled at Idaho and Colorado State getting trounced by the O.G. Miami. Only Texas Christian carried the Mountain West banner with authority out of conference, beating up on Baylor.

Iowa: The Hawkeyes had plenty of goodies in the cupboard going into 2010: an experienced quarterback in Ricky Stanzi, two outstanding receivers and a dominant front four. What they lacked was veteran talent on the offensive line. That defect manifested itself in Saturday night's loss at Arizona. After the Hawkeyes had stormed back from a 27-7 deficit to tie the score they had the go-ahead extra point blocked, leaving the game snarled at 27-27. Then, after the Wildcats had re-taken the lead, Iowa had its comeback bid snuffed out by four straight sacks. Iowa still has every opportunity to go to Pasadena, especially with a Big Ten schedule that has Penn State, Wisconsin, Michigan State and Ohio State all coming to Iowa City. But the Hawkeyes are going to need to get a little less green on the offensive front if they want to reach any BCS bowl for the second consecutive season.

Jake Locker: The supposed possible top overall selection in the 2011 NFL Draft was horrid in Washington's 56-21 loss to Nebraska, completing 4-of-20 pass attempts for 71 yards, a

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touchdown and two interceptions. If Locker can't break the 20 percent-completion mark against the Cornhuskers, what's he going to do against the Ravens and Steelers?

Next: The Buckeyes close out September against Eastern Michigan, Saturday at 3:30. The Artists Formerly Known as the Hurons have lost 15 straight games, so don't hold your breath in anticipation of an upset. This one should be a scout-team player's dream.