

The Week That Was: Number One With a Bullet

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Monday, October 11 2010 11:56 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, October 12 2010 3:20 PM



Ohio State didn't need the legs of Terrelle Pryor to get Jim Tressel's 100th career win at Ohio State- and to vault themselves to the top of the polls.

Instead the Buckeyes used Pryor's arm and a nasty defense to overwhelm Indiana, 38-10 at the Horseshoe. Coupled with top-ranked Alabama's loss at South Carolina, the win moves Ohio State to the number-one spot in the national rankings... for now. Next week the Buckeyes will be in Camp Randall Stadium, at night, for their first major road test of the season. And they'll arrive in Madison with the biggest of targets on their backs.

It's going to get a lot tougher from here on out, starting next Saturday night in Cheese Country against a Badger team with [a history of spoiling Scarlet and Grey dreams](#) . But for now, feel free to raise those index fingers skyward. Your Buckeyes are Number One.

A Word on Terrelle Pryor: With the franchise player coming off a minor leg injury against Illinois it was clear that the coaching staff didn't want him to spend too much time- any time, actually- outside of the pocket. There was not one designed running play called for Pryor on Saturday against Indiana. One of college football's most gifted running quarterbacks was a straight drop-back passer all afternoon.

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And as it turned out, that strategy worked awfully well against a porous Hoosier defense. Unencumbered by any type of pass rush, Pryor had the better part of the afternoon to scan the field and he invariably found his receivers running wide open through the middle of Indiana's baggy zone. The result was perhaps the finest passing performance of his Ohio State tenure: 24-of-30 for a career-high 334 yards and three touchdowns with no interceptions. As usual when he's on his game Pryor spread it around, spraying passes to nine different receivers. He even completed a pass to himself, snagging a deflection and keeping it for a one-yard loss.

It won't come that easy every week. And against Wisconsin's veteran, athletic secondary Pryor will need to find running lanes to help his team win. But for this week it was fun to watch the young Pennsylvanian channel Dan Marino- or at least Joe Germaine- and play the role of the classic drop-back artist.

A Word on the Running Game: It's a good thing the passing game was clicking because, outside of a couple of big plays, the running game was not. Aside from Boom Herron's 39-yard run that opened the scoring, the Buckeye running backs generated 122 yards on 26 carries- a decent-but-not-great 4.7 yards-per-carry average that was inflated by some late-game work against Indiana's backup defenders. Ohio State took to the air not only because it was working like a dream but because it was unable to consistently get solid chunks on the ground. Against a Hoosier defense that came into the afternoon ranked 108th nationally in rush defense, it was a disquieting trend.

It's true that for the most part Indiana sold out to stop the run, regularly packing the box with eight and nine defenders. But there was still a marked lack of physicality on the part of the Ohio State offensive line. The big eaters simply weren't getting much push up front. And if there were holes the Buckeye runners didn't do a very good job of finding them.

It's a problem, one the welcome exclusion of Brandon Saine from the ground game hasn't solved. The bell-cow back isn't on the roster and the offensive line's run-blocking issues, which have been ongoing basically ever since Jim Tressel took the head-coaching job, won't be solved any time soon. From here on out the running game is going to stay what it is: Terrelle Pryor and an *ad hoc* committee of relative mediocrities.

Speaking of Saine: The senior from Piqua didn't run the ball once on Saturday- which was good. He lined up exclusively as a receiver instead- which was better. Saine collected four catches for 84 yards and was on the receiving end of a 60-yard scoring bomb that made it 21-0

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early in the second quarter. Saine has been highly productive in the passing game all season and now has four touchdown catches to go with 13 overall grabs for 159 yards.

Posey Power: DeVier had a nice bounce-back from his dismal outing in Champaign last weekend with eight catches for 103 yards and a touchdown. It was Posey's second 100-yard performance of the season- the other came in the win over Miami of Florida- but he'll have to be more consistent to surpass his 828-yard production of 2009.

What Else is New: Oh, and Dane Sanzenbacher had his usual touchdown to augment his four-catch, 60-yard afternoon. Sanzo now has seven touchdowns this season, as many as he scored in his first three years combined. He did drop a pass, which occurs about as often as Halley's Comet.

Defense Doesn't Rest: Indiana came into Saturday's game with one of the most explosive passing attacks in college football. The Hoosiers were ranked tenth nationally in passing offense as a team while quarterback Ben Chappell was ninth in yards per game. Granted, Indiana hadn't faced a top-sixty pass defense before Saturday, but their overall numbers were impressive and observers were to be forgiven if they thought the Hoosier air attack might pose a problem for Ohio State's depleted secondary.

As it turns out those fears were completely unfounded. Chappell was a virtual non-factor, throwing for just 106 yards and getting picked off twice. Wide receiver Tanden Doss, who racked up 15 catches for 221 yards the previous week against Michigan, had one reception for 12 yards against the Buckeyes. His tag-team partner Damarlo Belcher, who had ten grabs against the Wolverines, was held to four catches for 14 yards.

The keys were consistent pressure on Chappell from the front four- no sacks, but plenty of rushed throws and knock-downs- and physical, aggressive coverage on the part of cornerbacks Devon Torrance and Chimdi Chekwa, both of whom were outstanding. Torrance set up Ohio State's second touchdown midway through the first period with an interception and 25-yard return to the Hoosier 33-yard line. Two plays later Pryor found Sanzenbacher for the score and it was 14-0.

Play of the Game: It was made by the defense- specifically, the terrific senior linebacker

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tandem of Ross Homan and Brian Rolle. Early in the second period, with Ohio State leading 21-0, a Nate Williams stunt forced Chappell to throw off his back foot into traffic. Homan tipped the ball into the air and had it kick off his foot on the way down- right into the breadbasket of a diving Rolle for a spectacular interception. It was a play somewhat reminiscent of the famed [“Flea-Kicker”](#) play from the 1997 Nebraska-Missouri classic.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- LSU/Florida: You can call Les Miles all sorts of things- zany, impetuous, even just plain dumb. But while you're at it, don't forget to call his LSU Tigers what they are- unbeaten. Even after the quarterback and clock-management problems that have plagued them all season, the Bengals are 6-0 after coming from behind to beat orange-clad Florida in Gainesville, 33-29. LSU scored the game-winning touchdown on [Jarrett Lee's fade to Terrance Tolliver](#) with six seconds to play.

And on this night, it wasn't Miles but his heralded counterpart, Urban Meyer, who wore the dunce cap. Why Meyer didn't have his team prepared for the fake on LSU's 53-yard game-tying field-goal attempt with 35 seconds to play is, to put it kindly, baffling. First of all, Leslie the Hat has [a history of trickery](#) in these situations. Secondly, LSU called a timeout just prior to the attempt, which should have been a dead giveaway that *something* abnormal was afoot. It wasn't as if the Hat was looking to ice his own kicker.

Yet Florida was still caught completely off-guard by the fake; so much so that kicker Josh Jasper was able to get past the first-down marker despite having to scoop up the errant lateral on a short hop. Urban Meyer is supposed to be one of the smartest men in the business. He's supposed to have all the angles covered. Yet on Saturday night he was hoodwinked, bamboozled by the guy with the joy buzzer in his palm, the seltzer-shooting flower in his lapel and the busted clock in his mind. Once again the joke was on someone other than Les Miles.

Gut-Check Garcia: Ever since he arrived in 2007 as Steve Spurrier's first top-flight quarterback

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recruit at South Carolina, there have been two versions of Stephen Garcia. There's Good Stephen, the cool, strong-armed field general. And there's Bad Stephen, whose misguided throws, turnovers and poor decisions have been the bane of his demanding mentor. Game to game, series to series, play to play, the Ole' Ball Coach never knows which Stephen he's going to get. Two weeks ago Good Stephen was nearly flawless as the Cocks built a 27-21 lead at the end of three quarters on the Plains of Auburn; then two fourth-quarter fumbles by Bad Stephen helped his team squander the game.

It was all Good Stephen in the first half of South Carolina's game against Alabama on Saturday. The junior from Florida was literally perfect in the opening thirty minutes, completing all nine of his attempts for 94 yards and three touchdowns as the Cocks built a 21-9 halftime lead. It took all of eleven seconds of the second half for Bad Stephen to show up. On the first play of the third quarter an errant snap shot past Garcia and bounced inside the South Carolina five-yard line. Instead of falling on the ball, preserving the possession and setting up a punt, Garcia, as if in a fit of pique, simply [flipped the ball out of the back of the end zone](#) for a safety. It was now 21-11 and Alabama would get the football. The partisan crowd at Williams-Brice Stadium seemed to shudder as one; South Carolina has always been a snake-bitten program and Garcia's brain-fart seemed to awaken the ghosts that have haunted the Cocks and their fans for decades.

But this was not a normal day for South Carolina or for Stephen Garcia. After the Tide kicked a field goal to make the score 21-14, Good Stephen came back for good, converting three third downs with clutch passes in a 15-play, 82-yard touchdown drive that made it 28-14. Garcia would go on to lead another touchdown march in the fourth period as the Cocks salted away their first-ever win over a top-ranked opponent, 35-21. For the day Garcia would complete 17-of-20 for 201 yards and three touchdowns with one interception. In the battle between Good Stephen and Bad Stephen, Good Stephen- and his team- had emerged the victor. And barring their perennial November collapse, it appears that South Carolina will be in the thick of the SEC race all season.

They Are Who We Thought They Were: Michigan, that is. In their first match-up with the fast, physical opponent the Wolverines were overmatched by their rivals from Michigan State. The Spartans rolled up 536 total yards, held the ball for more than 35 minutes, ripped off three scoring plays of more than forty yards and totally dominated the Wolverines in Ann Arbor, 34-17. It was the first time Sparty has won three straight over Michigan since 1965-67.

And super-hyped Denard "Shoelace" Robinson looked decidedly mortal against a defense with a pulse. Robinson rushed for only 86 yards 21 carries and was intercepted three times, twice in

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the end zone. His longest run of the day was only sixteen yards. At 5-1 Michigan is still in the driver's seat for its first bowl bid since the 2007 season, but any illusions the Wolverines might have had about winning double-digit games and contending for a Big Ten title are likely up in smoke.

As for Michigan State, this is rapidly becoming a special season in East Lansing. At 6-0 the Spartans are off to their best start since the 1999 season and with Ohio State off the schedule, their chances of reaching the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1988 are very much alive. Michigan State is balanced and creative on offense, fast and aggressive on defense, blessed with experienced playmakers on both sides of the ball, well-coached and resilient. This is, quite simply, a damned good football team, one that embodies its tough, impassive head coach.

Hurrying Husker: While Denard Robinson's star descends- for the time being, at least- that of another speedy underclass quarterback continues to rise. Taylor Martinez was again spectacular in Nebraska's 48-13 rout of Kansas State in Manhattan on Thursday night.

[Martinez ran for 241 yards on 15 carries](#)

with four touchdowns, including an 80-yard sprint that blew the game wide open early in the third period. With running backs Roy Helu and Rex Burkhead- the

[I.M. Hipp](#)

and

[Rick Berns](#)

of the new century- combining for 167 yards, the Huskers hit the Wildcats for a staggering 451 yards on the ground. Not surprisingly, Nebraska is second in the nation in rushing, behind only Air Force. The Huskers are also 5-0 and haven't won a game by fewer than fourteen points this season.

Whether they can continue at that level depends in large part not on Martinez's legs, but on his arm. The freshman has only thrown the ball 64 times so far- an average of just under thirteen attempts per game. Nebraska faces a tough three-game stretch starting on Saturday with a visit from Texas and continuing with road tilts at Oklahoma State and Missouri. All three boast respectable run defenses. At some point young Taylor is going to have to throw the ball to win. The success he has in throwing the ball- or the lack of success, as the case may be- will determine whether or not Nebraska contends for the National Championship this season.

Stupor Bowl: Someone had to win Saturday's match-up in Las Cruces between 0-4 New Mexico State and 0-6 New Mexico; it simply couldn't be avoided. At the end of a sloppy four quarters of football that team was the Aggies, who took down the Lobos, 16-14, on a Tyler Stamper field goal with 1:56 to play. Not surprisingly, the outcome came down to whichever

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team was less inept and that team was New Mexico State, which committed two turnovers to New Mexico's five and 75 yards in penalties to the Lobos' 115. This was probably New Mexico's best chance to win a game this season, although the Lobos do have Colorado State and Wyoming left to play. New Mexico State, meanwhile, will have a chance to add on to its victory total when it hosts San Jose State on Halloween Eve.

Still, as bad as was this latest edition of the Rio Grande Rivalry, it could have been worse. Consider the game between archrivals Kansas and Kansas State on November 7th, 1987. Kansas entered the fray at 1-7, with the only victory a one-point squeaker over I-AA doormat Southern Illinois; K-State was 0-8- including a loss to a two-win Austin Peay team- and mired in a winless streak that would eventually reach thirty games. The teams proceeded to play to a [17-17 tie](#), combining for eight turnovers, at least three missed field goals and a raft of other mistakes. At least there was a winner in Saturday's Toilet Bowl.

Wild One: No, this is *not* the score of a [Bracket Buster](#) game from mid-February. Murray State defeated Missouri State on Saturday by the score of 72-59, scoring 34 points in the last sixteen minutes of the game to destroy a 52-38 deficit. The Racers and Bears combined for 1,421 total yards with Murray State quarterback Casey Brockman completing 32-of-41 for 570 yards and seven touchdowns without an interception. By contrast, the Racers scored 66 points in their [opening-round upset](#) of Vanderbilt in the NCAA Tournament last March.

Winners of the Week

Illinois: All of a sudden Ohio State's ugly victory in Champaign doesn't look so ugly anymore. The Illini got their first-ever win in State College by manhandling Penn State, 33-13, out-gaining the Lions 437-235 and holding them to 65 rushing yards and seven first downs. Illinois went out and got new offensive and defensive coordinators in Paul Petrino (Bobby's brother) and Vic Koenning in the off-season and it looks as if the investment is paying off.

Syracuse: The Orange might not quite be ready to wake the echoes of Marvin Graves and "the Missile" Qadry Ismail, but they're certainly showing improvement under second-year coach Doug Marrone. The 'Cuse is 4-1 for the first time since 1999 after upsetting South Florida in Tampa, 13-9.

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Utah: Amid all the talk about Boise State and TCU, the Utes continue to win and look good doing it. They put a woodshed job on a decent Iowa State team Saturday, rolling up 593 total yards and blowing out the Cyclones in Ames, 68-27. If the Utes can survive a road test at Air Force on October 30th, they should be undefeated when they host TCU the first weekend of November. Strangely enough though, all Utah got from a road wipeout of a passable Big 12 opponent was a one-slot drop from tenth to eleventh in the AP poll. So much for style points.

Florida State: The Seminoles made an emphatic statement on Saturday night, wiping out archrival Miami of Florida on the road, 45-17. Jimbo Fisher's team is now 3-0 in the ACC and has only two road games left at N.C. State and Maryland.

Northern Illinois: The Huskies got a big win over a team they might see again in the MAC title game, coming from behind to knock off Temple, 31-17. Quarterback Chandler Harnish led the way, throwing for 211 yards, running for 71 and accounting for two touchdowns. NIU out-gained the Owls 420-272 and shut them out in the second half.

Losers of the Week

Penn State: Most observers expected the Lions to regress a bit this season, but no one expected *this* kind of regression. Joe Pa's team has now lost two straight by a combined score of 57-16 and have scored one touchdown in those two games. With no identity in offense and little speed on defense, the season could be swirling the bowl for the men in the generic white-and-blue uniforms.

Arizona: If Wildcat fans thought their team had turned the corner they were at least temporarily mistaken. A disheartening home loss to Oregon State dropped them to 1-1 in the Pac-10, with road trips to Oregon and Stanford waiting on the November docket. As it looks right now, that long-awaited first trip to the Rose Bowl will have to wait another year at least.

Miami: The Hurricanes simply haven't progressed under Randy Shannon. They were embarrassed at home by Florida State on Saturday night, their second lopsided loss of the season to a ranked opponent. All of that talk about the swagger being back, about 'Da U being

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back has shriveled in the face of reality- and another also-ran finish in the ACC.

USC: The face of the Trojan program has changed from Pete Carroll to Lane Kiffin, but the nemesis remains the same. Gadfly Jim Harbaugh took his third in four games from the Men of Troy on Saturday night, with Nate [Whitaker's 30-yard field goal at the gun](#) giving Stanford a 37-35 win. USC is now 1-2 in the Pac-10 for the first time since 2001, Carroll's first season in Los Angeles.

Middle Tennessee State: Dwight Dasher's return to action after sitting out a four-game suspension didn't turn out the way he'd hoped. Dwight's Blue Raiders were dashed by rival Troy, 42-13 Tuesday night in Murfreesboro, and the dual-threat quarterback was held to 27 yards rushing. Once again the Trojans, at 2-0, are the team to beat in the Sun Belt.

Next Week: This one is big. Armed with their first number-one ranking since the 2007 season, the Buckeyes invade Madison for a 7:00 showdown with the Wisconsin Badgers. It might not get any tougher than this one.