



Ohio State scored 35 unanswered points in the second half Saturday to beat Penn State 38-14 and stay in the chase for the Big Ten championship. OSU tailback Dan Herron had a career game with 190 rushing yards on a day when not much else was going right for the Ohio State offense, and the Buckeyes' defense returned two interceptions for touchdowns after halftime to break open a tight game. With the win, 9th-ranked Ohio State moves to 9-1 overall, and 5-1 in Big Ten play.

At halftime, with the Buckeyes trailing and getting badly outplayed to that point, Jim Tressel told his team that he already knew what the media was going to say the game's turning point was...and then they went out and made him look like a prophet.

Penn State (6-4, 3-3) was up 14-3 with just over two minutes to go in the half, and seemed poised to score again. Facing a 4th-and-1 with the ball at the OSU 20-yard line, the Penn State coaches decided to try for the first down instead of the field goal. But PSU tailback Silas Redd was dragged down by OSU safeties Jermale Hines and Orhian Johnson short of the mark, and the Buckeyes went to the locker room at the half still down 14-3, but buoyed by the big stop.

After the game, Tressel related how he told his players at the half that the game's turning point was already behind them. "Well, we talked at halftime about the fact that the turning point in the game was when we stopped them on fourth down in the second quarter, and that all the stories were going to be written as that being a turning point, so don't make me a liar."

Tressel doesn't do a lot of yelling in good times or bad, so when he does, he has the players' attention. Of the halftime atmosphere Tressel added, "The halftime locker room was not a fun place, but it was not a place that looked like there was any quit in anybody." Whatever else was said at halftime, the Buckeyes looked like a different team after the intermission.

First Half All Blue

And it's a good thing. The 21-3 first half debacle in Madison is still probably the worst half of football by the Buckeyes this season, but this one was close. Looking like they got more rust than rest from the week off, the Buckeyes were equally inept on both sides of the ball in the first half.

It looked at first like they might make short work of the Nittany Lions when Terrelle Pryor hit DeVier Posey with a 49-yard bomb on the game's third play to set OSU up with a first down on the Penn State 12-yard line. But in a sign of things to come, Pryor and the Buckeyes couldn't convert on third down, and they settled for a quick 3-0 lead. They would finish the half 0-for-4 on third down conversion attempts.

Pryor made some news this week when he said he would come back to OSU for his senior year, in part because he didn't think he was ready yet to play in the NFL. And at times Saturday he threw the ball like he was determined to prove it.

Pryor did run the ball more than he had in recent weeks, and had gains of 12, 11, and 14 yards on his way to 49 rushing yards on nine carries. And he only had five incompletions, going 8 of 13 for 139 yards passing, with two touchdowns and one interception for the game, so someone looking at the stat sheet instead of the game film wouldn't assume he had a bad outing. But even he would tell you that he did. (Pryor's postgame quote to ESPN: "I played terrible")

There were a couple of throws that sailed long, some shorter throws off target, and a couple of checkdowns to short routes that went into the books as completions, but failed to convert first downs. Then there was the red zone interception, a recurring problem, this one a deep corner route on a rollout that either should have had more zip on it, or shouldn't have been thrown at all.

But if Pryor had a shaky first half, the vaunted Buckeye defense struggled even more...at least until they stiffened for the big 4th down stop right before the half.

McGloin Impressive...For a Half

Penn State quarterback Matt McGloin and the Nittany Lion offense came out firing, and aggressively attacked the OSU defense. After a punt on their first possession, McGloin completed 6 of 7 pass attempts on a 10-play, 67-yard touchdown drive, topped off with a 23-yard TD pass to Justin Brown. It was the first touchdown pass for Penn State in Ohio Stadium since they joined the Big Ten 20 years ago, and it gave the Lions a 7-3 lead.

McGloin threw the ball crisply and accurately, making good use of play action, and exploiting the Buckeyes' soft zone pass defense. He took several shots downfield, and was consistently on target, one time drawing a pass interference penalty. The Lions ran the ball effectively enough to make the play action work, rushing for about 70 yards in the half, with Evan Royster and Silas Redd doing most of the damage.

All in all, McGloin looked poised and well-coached, as the Penn State offensive staff helped their young quarterback with some imaginative play-calling. McGloin showed more of the same accuracy on the Lions' next possession, completing 4 of 5 attempts and again finishing with a TD pass, this time to Derek Moyer on a 6-yard post, to give the Lions a 14-3 lead and get the assembled 105,466 squirming in their seats.

The Scarlet squirming continued after a 6-play Buckeye possession ended with another punt, and the Nittany Lions mounted yet another long drive...13 plays worth...until their 4th-down failure at the OSU 20 allowed a collective sigh of relief from the Ohio Stadium crowd. The OSU players said later they didn't hear their fickle fans booing them as they left the field at halftime. Don't believe it.

A Long Drive Starts the Comeback

Penn State got the ball to start the second half, and moved it into OSU territory before being forced to punt, and they backed the Buckeye offense up against their own goal line with the kick. Starting at their own 4-yard line, Pryor and the Buckeyes proceeded to march 96 yards in 11 plays to climb back into the game.

The drive featured a 19-yard run by Herron to get OSU out of the shadow of their own goal, and then another 19-yard run on a sweep left by Brandon Saine a few plays later to set the Bucks up at the Penn State 5-yard line. In between, Pryor rushed for 21 yards on two carries and hit Posey for nine more, and Herron finished it off with a 5-yard burst up the middle for the score. It was 14-10, and the OSU defense was about to get into the comeback act.

Penn State picked up a quick 20 yards on two rushing plays after the kickoff, but Matt McGloin was about to find out how fleeting is fame. OSU's Devon Torrence had been picked on by McGloin several times in the first half, but the senior cornerback was ready when they came his way four plays into their first 3rd quarter possession. Torrence jumped the route, got his hands on the ball at the Penn State 34-yard line, and after tipping it again, gathered it in and sprinted in for the touchdown, putting a wide receiver move on McGloin at the 10 to go in untouched.

Defense Rises and the Bucks Catch a Break

Finally back in the lead at 17-14, the Buckeyes were going back to their grinding rushing attack in the 3rd quarter, and they got to the Penn State 20 before Pryor's interception at the Lions' 2-yard line briefly interrupted their second half charge. As it turned out it didn't matter much, because the OSU defense was all finished allowing Penn State to move the football. A 17-yard run by the Lions' Silas Redd in the third quarter, right before Torrence's pick-six, was the last first down the Nittany Lions would see on this day.

A three-and-out by the Lions after the interception resulted in a punt and a Buckeye possession starting in Penn State territory. When a holding call set up a 2nd and 23 at the OSU 42, Tressel decided to go deep. Pryor got great protection on his drop, and aired one out deep down the middle intended for Posey. Posey went up with two PSU defenders at the 5-yard line and the ball was tipped right into the hands of Dane Sanzenbacher, who was trailing the play, and Sanzenbacher finished off the 58-yard touchdown pass as if that was the way they drew it up.

But the unraveling of Penn State was not yet complete. On the third play after the kickoff, McGloin was picked off again, this time by cornerback Travis Howard, and Howard had an easy dash to the end zone from 30 yards out. It was 31-14, and the squirming was over.

Dan Herron finished off his brilliant individual effort with 70 rushing yards on the next Ohio State possession, including 47 on one run, and Pryor capped the drive with a 5-yard TD pass to Jake Stoneburner to make the final 38-14.

Miscellany

Penn State got a taste of their own medicine Saturday. Last week they trailed Northwestern 21-0 before scoring 35 unanswered points to win going away. One week later they know what it feels like to be on the other end of that kind of onslaught.

Terrelle Pryor had 139 yards passing for the day, and 107 of them came on two completions. One of those two completions, for 58 yards, was caught by a player who was not the intended receiver.

On the other hand, Pryor's 139 yards were accomplished on 13 attempts (10.7 yards per att.). Penn State had only 20 yards more in passing yardage, but it took them 33 pass attempts to get there (4.8 yards per att.)

Iowa took a little bit of the luster off of next Saturday's OSU game at Kinnick Stadium by dropping one to Northwestern on Saturday. Does that mean they'll be disheartened or ticked off this week?

Safety Orhian Johnson had a good game for the Buckeyes, leading the team with eight total tackles, including five solos. Heyward, Hines and Homan had seven tackles apiece.

Links:

[OSU Athletic Communications - Box Score and Complete Stats](#)