

The Week That Was: Seven in a Row

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

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Ho-hum: another year, another easy victory over Michigan. Ohio State made it an incredible seven in a row over the Wolverines on



Saturday and did it in routine fashion, steamrolling their one-time archrivals 37-7 at the Horseshoe. The longest winning streak ever by the Buckeyes over Michigan just keeps getting longer and there's no end in sight- at least not while the beleaguered Rich Rodriguez is still in charge of the Wolverine program.

With the big win Ohio State wraps up the regular season with an 11-1 record, the record sixth season in a row the Buckeyes have won double-digit games. Jim Tressel's team also finished with a share of the Big Ten Championship for the sixth straight season. It won't be enough for an automatic bid to the BCS- that will go to Wisconsin- but the Buckeyes are almost certain to get an at-large bid for their sixth BCS bowl in succession.

It's been quite a run for the Buckeyes. For the Wolverines, finally bowl-bound but hardly healthy under Rich Rod, it's been quite a run as well- for all the wrong reasons. Questions abound for the Maize & Blue, which after three years of the new regime still can't play defense, can't kick and can't compete in a Big Ten it once ruled with impunity. The men wearing those familiar striped helmets are but a pale imitation of the bully boys that threw their weight around under Bo Schembechler and his successors.

Maize and Blow: You can't win a game in the first quarter, the saying goes- but you can lose it.

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Michigan may have lost Saturday's game in the opening fifteen minutes. The Wolverines racked up 101 yards of offense on their first two drives and twice drove deep into Ohio State territory. But both forays came up empty as Michigan missed on a fourth-down attempt from the 28 and lost a Denard Robinson fumble from the Buckeye nine. Considering the fumble came at the end of a play that would have made it a makeable fourth-and-one, the Wolverines could have been leading 10-0.

Instead it was still 0-0. Ohio State opened the scoring on its first possession after the fumble, driving 74 yards to a Devin Barclay field goal that made it 3-0 at the start of the second period. The rout was on from there.

His Kingdom for Hayward Epstein: Rich Rodriguez went for it on that initial fourth down because, with his awful kicking game, a field goal from 45 yards was about as much of an option as Judaism in Saudi Arabia. Wolverine kickers are a combined 4-of-13 and haven't made an attempt of forty yards or more all season.

Trouble extends beyond the field-goal specialists, however. Special teams as a whole were highly dubious for Michigan all afternoon. The Wolverines yielded the kickoff-return touchdown by Jordan Hall that broke the game open and other than a 52-yard quick-kick by Tate Forcier the punting game averaged a meager 28.7 yards per. An 18-yard punt set up Ohio State's first touchdown drive, a neat 35-yarder that ended in Terrelle Pryor's seven-yard scoring strike to Dane Sanzenbacher.

Other than the fact that the defense and special teams are abysmal, Michigan is pretty solid in all facets, here in Rich Rodriguez's THIRD year on the job.

It was REALLY Over When: Jordan Hall defused Michigan's bomb squad with an 85-yard kickoff return for a touchdown with 7:50 remaining in the first half. The Wolverines had just sliced Ohio State's lead to 10-7 with an 85-yard drive capped off by Michael Shaw's touchdown plunge- a happily competitive state of affairs that lasted exactly twelve seconds. Ohio State went up 24-7 late in the half when Pryor avoided pressure and flipped a short pass to DeVier Posey, who took it the rest of the way for a 33-yard touchdown.

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The first-half statistics must have made painful reading for Wolverine fans, if only because they were so even. Michigan collected a robust 226 total yards and made four trips into Ohio State territory in the first thirty minutes, compared to 219 total yards for the Buckeyes. Yet thanks to a pair of turnovers and subpar special-teams play the Wolverines trailed by 17 points.

Dirty Laundry: About the only thing that didn't go right for the Buckeyes were the calls. Ohio State was flagged seven times for 81 yards on the afternoon. Two of the penalties were for unsportsmanlike conduct, both directed at Ohio State players for putting their [Nike Pro Combat gloves](#) together in a "Block O" sign following touchdowns. Dane Sanzenbacher was flagged for a bogus holding penalty that negated the final nine yards of what would have been a school-record 98-yard touchdown run by Dan Herron in the third period.

Speaking of Dan Herron... Boom got off to a slow start on Saturday, amassing zero yards on just six first-half carries. But with Ohio State looking to protect and expand its 24-7 lead after intermission, the powerful little runner finally got going- big time. Boom tacked on the last Buckeye touchdown early in the third period on a 32-yard burst and moments later ripped off the 89-yard gallop that should have been 98 to set up a Devin Barclay field goal and a 34-7 lead. In the second half alone Herron rushed 16 carries for 175 yards. It was a performance very similar to his 190-yard outburst against Penn State, when he compiled most of his gaudy totals after halftime.

Big Accomplishment: With three 100-yard outings in the last four games Boom accomplished a feat almost unthinkable in the warm days of September when he was one half of a tailback platoon with Brandon Saine. The junior from Warren finished the regular season with 1,068 rushing yards to go with 15 touchdowns. It's the first 1,000-yard season from a Buckeye running back since Beanie Wells racked up 1,197 two years ago.

Terrelle's Line: 18-of-27 for 220 yards with two touchdown passes and an interception; 12 carries for 49 yards. For the most part it was a solid performance- the Buckeyes were 10-of-18 on third down and Pryor made several great escapes on the way to important gains in crucial situations. The big man from Jeannette did commit one glaring error when he was picked off by Jordan Kovacs at the Michigan goal line near the end of the first half. Nevertheless, he was plenty good enough to collect his third pair of gold pants in as many years.

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Denard's Line: 8-of-18 for 87 yards; 18 carries for 105 yards. Robinson ran fairly well but he coughed up the football at the end of one of his better gains, didn't finish good drives and, as usual, was knocked out of the game. The fleet sophomore dislocated a finger on a hit late in the first half and played sparingly in the second. One-time Wolverine savior Tate Forcier substituted and did little better, completing 8-of-15 for 82 yards and an interception on the first play of the second half, setting up the Dan Herron touchdown that made it 31-7.

Four Years of Obliteration: Jim Tressel has dominated Michigan ever since his first meeting with the Wolverines in Ann Arbor back in 2001. But he has really turned the screws on the School up North in the four years that have passed since the one-versus-two showdown of 2006. In the last four meetings between the schools the Buckeyes have won by an average score of 28-7. Ohio State scored nearly as many points in the second quarter of Saturday's game (24) as the Wolverines have scored in the last four games combined (27.) A Rich Rodriguez-coached Michigan team has never led Ohio State at any point.

Three Years of Emasculation: Record-wise Michigan has improved in every year under Rich Rodriguez, going from 3-9 in 2008 to 5-7 in 2009 to 7-5 in 2010. But enfeeblement still grips the program in critical areas. The Wolverines are just 6-18 in Big Ten play and have yet to post a winning conference record under Rich Rod. They're a combined 0-8 against Ohio State, Michigan State and Penn State- the latter two teams owned lock, stock and barrel by Lloyd Carr.

Defensively the Wolverines have only gotten worse. Despite shuffling coordinators at the beginning of last season Rich Rod's stop troops have plunged from 67th nationally in total defense in 2008 to 82

in 2009 and all the way to 109th

in 2010. The 3-3-5 is a dead-duck formation against ground-and-pound Big Ten offenses and the personnel that executes it is no better. Greg Robinson is

[getting a lot of heat](#)

for his handling of Michigan's defense, but you could plug a prime Buddy Ryan into that position and he wouldn't get the job done- not with these players and not with this system.

It's simply the [Peter Principle](#) in action. Rich Rod would be a fine head coach in, say, Conference USA, where you can score a lot of points and win a lot of games without being a complete football team. That won't work in the Big Ten, where an offense that controls the clock, a defense that consistently gets stops and a kicking game that can tip the balance of close games are musts. Michigan used to do all of those things. They don't anymore, and that's

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why Rich Rodriguez should go.

But Enough About Michigan: Now the waiting begins for the bowl invitations to be given out. It looks very likely at this point that the Buckeyes will be [off to the Sugar Bowl](#)

to play (gasp) an SEC opponent- most likely Arkansas or South Carolina should the Cocks upset Auburn in the SEC Championship Game. There will be no National Championship in a season that shaped up as a National Championship-or-Bust proposition. But an opportunity to get the SEC monkey off this program's back is certainly nothing to scorn.

Around the Nation



Game of the Week- Nevada/Boise: 1.2 million dollars is the approximate difference in payout between the Rose and Humanitarian Bowls. That's how much, monetarily, Boise State lost on Friday night in Reno, along with the game, undefeated season, 24-game winning streak and, possibly, a chance to play for the BCS Championship. That's how much those two shanked chip-shots from Kyle Brotzman cost the Broncos. Brotzman [blew a 24-yarder](#)

that would have won the game for Boise at the end of regulation and missed a 29-yarder in the fatal overtime session.

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But the Broncos were exposed long before their end-of-game kicking failures. Their defense, which had hardly been challenged in the ten games after the Labor Day opener with Virginia Tech, was run over by Nevada's Pistol attack. The Pack rambled for 239 rushing yards after halftime and dominated time of possession, hanging drives of 63, 58, 68, 87 and 79 yards on Boise's weary stop troops. Nevada was fourth in the nation in rushing offense going into the game. The Pack can run on a lot of opponents. But if Boise couldn't stop them, how could it stop Wisconsin's rushing game in a Rose Bowl?

So all the talk about Boise's strength-of-schedule, about their level of competition- it's all over. The Broncos couldn't get through their WAC slate unscathed. The good news is it sets up a classic one-versus-two battle between big-time unbeatens, provided Oregon handles business in the Civil War against Oregon State and Auburn handles business in the SEC Championship Game against South Carolina. The bad news is, well- let's get to that directly.

The Auburn Problem: Counting on Alabama to stand up for all that is pure and good in college football is like entrusting Willie Sutton to provide security for your bank. But that was the situation on Friday, as the oft-tarnished Tide looked to knock Auburn out of the BCS Championship race- and prevent the Tigers from winning a title they [may have to vacate](#)

in a year or two. Unfortunately Nick Saban's team wasn't up to the job. After rolling to a 24-0 first-half lead the Tide gave it all up, losing a 28-27 Iron Bowl thriller to their cross-state rivals. At 12-0 Auburn needs only to beat South Carolina for a second time in the SEC Championship Game to secure a trip to Glendale.

But it'll be a game played under a cloud. Nothing in regards to Cam Newton actually taking money from anyone associated with Auburn University has been proven. But the allegations, combined with the recent forfeiture of Reggie Bush's Heisman Trophy and the accomplishments of the 2005 runners-up from USC, will lend a distinctly uneasy feeling to the BCS Championship, provided the Tigers get that far. This story isn't going away.

But Auburn isn't out of the woods on the field either, let alone off. The Tigers still have to beat the Cocks of South Carolina to punch their ticket- and that won't be easy. Steve Spurrier's team had Auburn on the ropes on September 25th before [falling apart in the fourth quarter](#). The Cocks are playing with a lot of confidence right now and will be very difficult to beat in Atlanta next Saturday. Alabama couldn't get it done- now it's the Old Ball Coach's turn to save the purity of the game and knock those ruffians from the Plains out of the championship hunt.

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Shannon Shorn: After four mostly mediocre seasons Miami of Florida has officially pulled the plug on head coach Randy Shannon. The former Hurricane linebacker and assistant coach was [handed his walking papers](#) after his team finished a disappointing 7-5 regular season with an overtime loss to South Florida in front of a sparse crowd at Sun Life Stadium.

Shannon was appointed to the job in large part to clean up the program in terms of academic performance and discipline- and for the most part he did that. Unfortunately he didn't bring the Hurricanes back to their old level of dominance- not even close. Miami struggled to a 28-22 record under Shannon with losses in the Emerald and Champs Sports Bowls. Too often the Hurricanes were sloppy and mistake-prone and once again they failed to even challenge for the title of the ACC, a league they were supposed to dominate when they came over from the Big East in 2005.

So where do the Canes go from here? There's plenty of talk about [Jon Gruden](#) or some other big-name coach coming down to Coral Gables. But the landscape has changed since the Hurricanes were last atop the college football world. The competition within their state has quickened, with Florida, Florida State, Central Florida, South Florida and even Miami's [old sparring partner](#)

Florida International in line for bowl bids. Miami's facilities are not top-notch, the fan base is fickle and the days of beating up on Big East patsies like Temple and Rutgers are over. Whoever gets the job will have his work cut out.

Fresh Blood on Top: One of the biggest stories of the 2010 college football season has been the fall from grace of a number of the game's blue-chip programs. Florida, USC and Texas- winners of a combined four BCS Championships in the last decade- were all way off their accustomed games. The Longhorns sustained the hardest slide, going from a berth in the title game to a 5-7 record, the worst for the program since 1997. Youthful Florida and probation-shackled USC slumped to 7-5 finishes and also-ran placements in conferences they dominated not so long ago.

But along with unexpected disappointments it's also been a year for Cinderella stories both big and small in this game, and a number of such stories came to fruition in the second-to-last weekend of the regular season. The O.G. Miami went a combined 3-21 in 2008 and '09 but rebounded to a stunning MAC East title, clinching with a win over Temple combined with Ohio's upset loss to Kent State. Florida International salted away a first-ever Sun Belt Championship with a home win over Arkansas State on Saturday. SMU locked up the West Division title in

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Conference USA and will play next Saturday for its first league championship of any kind since the pre-death penalty year of 1984. And Connecticut needs only to beat South Florida to nail down its first-ever Big East title.

The haves should be back at some point to reclaim their place in the elite- save USC, which might be down for a while. But for this season, at least some of the have-nots are having their day. Congratulations to these teams and others that have re-discovered the winning formula- or in some cases are discovering it for the first time. It's been a year for surprises both pleasant and unpleasant in this most fluid of games.

No More Winless: It is official- every single team in the FBS will win at least one football game this season. The last winless holdout finally got into the right side of the column on Friday, as the Akron Zips, behind three touchdown passes by Patrick Nicely, [knocked off Buffalo](#)

22-14 at InfoCision Stadium AKA the White Elephant of Exchange Street. Congratulations to the Zips. Actually Friday was a banner day for both Akron and Kent State, which played spoiler in knocking off Ohio and denying the Bobcats the MAC East title.

Winners of the Week

