



Ohio State did almost everything right for two and a half quarters in Lincoln, Nebraska on Saturday night, building a 27-6 third quarter lead over the Cornhuskers with a solid offensive performance that absolutely no one saw coming. But an injury to quarterback Braxton Miller and a fourth quarter collapse by the OSU defense allowed Nebraska to score 28 unanswered points and pull out a 34-27 victory over the Buckeyes for their first Big Ten win.

Husker quarterback Taylor Martinez, running back Rex Burkhead and the Nebraska offense rediscovered their option rushing attack in the second half, and the OSU defense had no answer for it after the momentum of the game shifted on a key third quarter play. The Buckeyes had the ball and a 3-touchdown lead when old “Mo” changed uniforms. Linebacker Lavonte David swiped the ball from Miller as he fell to the turf on what would have been a first down carry at the OSU 23-yard line, and the air immediately began coming out of the Buckeye balloon.

The Huskers got a quick score to pull within two TD’s, and on the next offensive series for OSU, Miller suffered an ankle sprain that would sideline him for the rest of the game. From that point on, it was a combination of porous defense, questionable play-calling by OSU coaches, and the well-documented ineptitude of backup QB Joe Bauserman that worked to doom the Buckeyes’ chances for an upset.

### Where From Here?

What looked for a time like it might be a positive turning point of sorts for the beleaguered Ohio State Buckeyes (3-3, 0-2) now looks instead like a sign that the season is circling the drain. The one aspect of the team that had seemed reliably capable...the defense...folded like a tent under the pressure of an inspired opponent and a hostile venue. And the improved game plan and play-calling on offense that moved the chains consistently in the first half were nowhere to

be found when the chips were down in the second.

Two unbeatens are next on the schedule....this week at Illinois, and then a date in Columbus with Wisconsin. This Buckeye team did a commendable job of pulling itself together after the disheartening MSU loss and taking it to a decent Nebraska team with an inspired fundamental effort into the second half. But games are 60 minutes long, and having allowed it get away from them in such disheartening fashion, it's hard to imagine these Buckeyes being able to crank it up repeatedly as the Big Ten schedule grinds on.

This loss marks the first time since 2004 that Ohio State has lost consecutive games, and the first time since that same year that they have lost more than one Big Ten contest. And the season is half over.



Braxton: Two Steps Forward...One Back

On the offensive side of the ball, Braxton Miller was the main reason the Buckeyes led the game 20-6 at the half. To give credit where it is due, offensive coordinator Jim Bollman did a better job of getting him out of the pocket and calling his number at the right times. And the return of Mike Adams at the crucial left tackle spot helped immensely in both the run game and in pass protection. But Miller's ongoing development and confidence...along with his uncanny elusiveness...were what sparked the Buckeyes to some unexpected first half productivity.

Miller had 91 yards rushing on 10 carries, and 95 yards on 5 of 8 passing. He had a 32-yard TD to Jake Stoneburner on a tight end screen for the first OSU touchdown, and single-handedly put the Bucks in place for a field goal as the first half ended, with a 29-yard run after Orhian Johnson had intercepted Martinez with just 16 seconds to play. Miller made his share of mistakes, and got lucky at least once when Husker defenders failed to pick off some ill-advised throws they had in their hands. But his biggest mistake was the one beyond his control...the third quarter ankle sprain that put Bauserman into the game.

Carlos Hyde had his best game as a Buckeye, with 104 yards and two touchdowns, including a 63-yard dash over the right side that stunned the Memorial Stadium crowd into silence as the Buckeyes assumed a 17-3 lead in the second quarter. Jordan Hall added 49 yards rushing on 17 carries (2.9 avg.), but the play calls for him were mostly between the tackles where his lack of ideal size works against him.

### Defense Disappears

The Buckeye defenders came up big in the first half, with an assist from the Nebraska coaches, who went away from the option attack highlighting the things Taylor Martinez does well, in favor of trying to make him a dropback passer. The Huskers managed just two field goals before the break, but went back to Martinez the runner in the second half, and his success there helped open up the passing game for him as well.

Starting with an 18-yard option keeper for a touchdown following Miller's third quarter fumble, Martinez kept the OSU defense guessing the rest of the way with quarterback draws up the middle, pitchouts to Burkhead, and a variety of option plays to the edge. OSU linebackers and defensive backs struggled to get off blocks and they missed a few tackles....and it was game on. Rushing success opened the door to some play action passing, and Martinez capitalized with a 36-yard TD pass to Quincy Enunwa off a play fake to draw the Huskers within one score as the third quarter wound down.



### Bauserman's Folly

Of everything that has gone wrong...the defensive struggles...the frustrating coaching decisions...the missing players that might have helped...nothing seems to elicit the utter exasperation of Ohio State fans like seeing Joe Bauserman playing quarterback. The much-maligned 9th-year senior was awful once again against Nebraska, going 1 for 10 passing with an interception, and landing as many balls outside the field of play as he did inside the lines.

Just as frustrating was the play-calling with JoeB in the game....with more passes called than runs...with his team, at least for a while, holding the lead in the game. His decision-making wasn't much better...repeatedly trying to go deep down the field (slinging the ball from his hip) when all he and his mates needed to cement a victory was a few first downs on high-percentage throws, (if indeed such a thing exists with JB under center).

All in all, this can only be viewed as an opportunity squandered. Give credit to the kids from Nebraska for mounting an inspired comeback (the greatest comeback in their storied history, by the way), but it's hard to escape the fact that the Buckeyes lost their poise and their composure down the stretch....one of the hallmarks of a team this young and inexperienced.

Without Miller at quarterback, the prospects for the season's second half would be bleak. With him, they look only slightly better.

The star-crossed 2011 Ohio State season continues in Champaign next Saturday against the 6-0 Illini. That has been a tough place for the Buckeyes to play in the very best of times. It goes without saying that these are not those times.

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