

The Week That Was: Midway Point

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This week's Ohio State-free TWTW takes a look at a pair of early surprise teams- both led by elderly coaches who all but define their



programs- and highlights the rest of the week in college football as we head through the season's midsection.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- Clemson/Maryland: It took a big-time comeback for the Tigers to beat the Terrapins 56-45 and keep their undefeated season alive. Trailing 35-17 early in the second half, Clemson clawed back on the arm of Tajh Boyd (270 yards, four touchdown passes) and the legs of Andre Ellington (212 rushing yards, two touchdowns.) In the last quarter and ten minutes the Tigers exploded for 39 points. Sammy Watkins put Clemson ahead for good with an 89-yard kickoff return for a touchdown with 7:24 left and Ellington put it away moments later with a 44-yard scoring run. Thanks to 576 yards of total offense the Tigers managed to withstand a poor defensive effort; Maryland finished with 468 yards of its own, including 291 on the ground.

Wildcat Revival V2.0: Two decades ago Bill Snyder took over a Kansas State that had gone 3-40-1 over the previous four seasons and turned it into a powerhouse that came within a [blown fourth-quarter lead](#)

of playing for the 1998 BCS Championship. From 1997 through 2000 the Wildcats went 44-7 and won the Big 12 North twice. In 2003 they won their first outright conference title in almost

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seventy years when they

[routed top-ranked Oklahoma](#)

in the Big 12 Championship Game. All of this at what was arguably the worst program in big-time college football when Snyder took over.

There's a reason they [named the freaking stadium after the man](#) .

In his third season back after taking over from Ron Prince, Snyder has crafted another renaissance, albeit on a smaller scale. After going 13-12 the last two seasons the Wildcats are 6-0 and on a beeline for a top ten spot in the polls. They've done it with a ground game that's on pace to boast two 1,000-yard rushers and an opportunism that has resulted in one of the nation's best turnover ratios. They've won close games- five of their wins are by a touchdown or less- and they've got solid wins over Miami, Baylor, Missouri and Texas Tech.

The schedule is about to get meaner. After a probable layup at Kansas the Wildcats host Oklahoma on October 29 and then face Oklahoma State, Texas A&M and Texas in the following three weeks. It's a daunting stretch, but as 2003 shows, it doesn't pay to count out Bill Snyder and his Wildcats against a dominant Sooner team. And with Kansas and Iowa State also remaining to be played, an eight-win season seems almost a shoo-in. It isn't Michael Bishop and Mark Simoneau in Manhattan these days, but Snyder's latest is not bad at all as far as revivals go.

Lion's Share: If there were a reward for "Worst-looking 6-1 major-college team in the country" Penn State would be the likely recipient. The Lions were thrashed at home by Alabama in their only loss and own deeply unimpressive wins over Indiana and Purdue, two members of the Big Ten's doormat contingent. Penn State is 78th in the nation in total offense, 80th in passing offense and 96th

in scoring offense. Quarterbacks Rob Boldin and Matt McGloin have combined for six touchdown passes- one more than Robert Griffin III has thrown in three separate games.

Yet thanks largely to a defense that is sixth nationally in both points and total yards allowed, the Lions are 6-1. More importantly they're 3-0 in the Big Ten, which puts them in first place in the Leaders Division by a half-game over Wisconsin. Moreover the schedule remains forgiving. Next week Penn State heads to Evanston to take on struggling Northwestern, followed by games at home against Illinois and Nebraska. It isn't completely out of the question that the

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Lions could be 9-1 when they travel to Columbus to take on Ohio State. (Take the under in that game.)

It's likely this team isn't for real and is due to be laid low by its inept offense. But the bottom line is that the Lions are winning the games they're supposed to win, however ugly- and that by doing so they've made themselves a most unlikely contender for the Big Ten Championship. Style points don't matter as long as you've got more points on the scoreboard.

WAC, Indeed: If a league is only as good as its best team, the Western Athletic Conference is currently the worst league in major-college football. Boise's defection to the Mountain West has shorn the WAC of its flagship program and oh, does it show. None of the eight teams have a winning record- the best showings are Nevada, Hawaii and surprising New Mexico State at 3-3- and combined overall record for league members is 20-31. First-place Fresno State lost to Boise 57-7 two weeks ago, starkly revealing the gap between the Broncos and their old lodge brothers.

This isn't the first time the Western Athletic Conference has lost its biggest-name program. Arizona State dominated the league for years until it and the University of Arizona defected to the Pac-10 in 1978. Brigham Young assumed the role as starring power until it and the rest of the WAC's original core broke away in 1999. In both cases the conference was able to recover, although it never really got over the defections of six core members to form the Mountain West. Boise, with help from a few compelling Hawaii, Nevada and Fresno teams, kept the concern on life support for a while.

But with Boise already gone and the other three as good as gone the WAC has no ability to stay above water as it did in 1978 and somewhat did in '99. The remainder is no better than either the Mid-American Conference or Sun Belt and not a whole lot better than its little brother, the Big Sky Conference. Shabby as it may be, 2011 is really the last go-around for the conference that once kept us up late on Saturday nights with 52-45 shootouts. Ty Detmer, Dan McGwire and Dee Dowis are long gone, and so is the old iconic WAC, which was once anything but.

