



Ohio State had the potential game-winning extra point blocked with less than a minute to play in regulation, and then fell to Purdue in overtime 26-23 on Saturday in West Lafayette. The Buckeyes (6-4, 3-3) got behind early once again, failing to hold the lead at any point in the game, and Braxton Miller's late-game magic ran out after four quarters.

Miller's scrambling, 4th-down touchdown pass to Jordan Hall in the final minute of play evoked memories of his game-saver against Wisconsin two weeks ago. But Purdue's Bruce Gaston got up to block Drew Basil's PAT attempt, giving the Boilermakers new life, and they took advantage of it in the extra session.

The Boilermakers moved the ball with surprising ease before the half against the OSU defense, and despite some effective adjustments by the Buckeyes after halftime, Purdue found a way to score a TD in overtime, ending the game on a quarterback sneak from the 1-yard line after holding Ohio State to a field goal on their overtime possession.

Failing to convert the extra point was just one of several missed opportunities for Ohio State, any one of which might have turned the tide on this day. By my rough count, two or three possible interceptions were dropped by OSU defenders, and they were unable to recover two Boilermaker fumbles that might have been momentum changers.

### Wake Up Call

Just as they did against Indiana a week ago, the Buckeyes came out unprepared to answer the opening bell, and the Boilermakers had a 10-0 lead before the Ohio State offense was able to register their initial first down. Purdue was working with the benefit of a stiff breeze at their backs in that opening quarter, and the Buckeyes drove for a score once the second quarter gave them the wind advantage. Miller hit tailback Jordan Hall with a little dump-off pass, and

Hall picked his way through the secondary with the help of some good downfield blocking, and his 38-yard TD reception had the Bucks back in it.

But Boilermaker QB Robert Marve answered the OSU score with a 13-play, 88-yard drive for a touchdown before the half, a possession proving that the wind is only so important, especially if the defense puts on a clinic on how not to tackle. The first half OSU defense looked as if they had never seen the spread offense, as the Boilers were hitting on bubble screens, slants and stretch running plays, with the Buckeye defenders a step slow chasing them to the edge, and missing a lot of tackles once they got there. It was 17-7 Purdue at the break.



### Braxton Toughs it Out

Braxton Miller had an up and down day. The statistics don't look bad...43 yards rushing with a touchdown....132 yards passing with two TD throws. As usual, he was scintillating with the ball in his hands when the plays broke down and he was forced to improvise. But he did not throw the ball at all well, going 8 of 18 passing. Granted, the wind made it tough to throw, but Miller consistently overthrew receivers, failing to even come close on two deep balls aimed at open OSU targets. He also held onto the ball too long on several occasions, resulting in five sacks on the afternoon, including a crucial one in overtime.

In his defense, he has to know that he often represents the sole hope for first downs on the inevitable 3rd and longs that are routinely generated by Jim Bollman's prehistoric offensive scheme. It's hard to blame him for trying to make something happen with his feet when the called play doesn't work out. It's surprising, in fact, that he succeeds at picking up the first downs as often as he does.

The other factor working against Miller Saturday was the absence of right tackle J.B. Shugarts. Freshman Antonio Underwood started the game, and was beaten like a rented mule for most of the first half, leaving Miller exposed and helpless on a number of called pass plays. Underwood

was mercifully replaced by moving guard Jack Mewhort over to tackle and filling in at guard with the more experienced Corey Linsley.

Miller also had to fight through some illness during the game. He confirmed to reporters afterward what had been announced on the radio broadcast...that he had thrown up on the sidelines during the second half. He was holding his stomach, obviously experiencing some major abdominal discomfort. To his credit, he didn't miss any action.



Missed it By That Much

OSU had a chance to make it a one-score game at the half when a bad Purdue punt gave Miller and the offense a shot at a field goal as the half wound down. But Drew Basil's 50-yard attempt was wide right, ending his streak of 12 straight successful field goals. It would not be his last unsuccessful kick of the day.

It appeared that defensive coordinator Jim Heacock had words with his OSU defense at the half, because they came out looking like a different group in the third quarter. After a 3-and-out on the opening Purdue offensive series, the Buckeyes drove 58 yards in eight plays, with Miller capping it off with a 6-yard TD run on a cutback against the designed flow of the play. They were to have the wind for another ten minutes of the third quarter, but would prove unable to take advantage of it. Purdue put together a couple of sustained possessions in the quarter, getting three points along the way to go up 20-14, and Ohio State couldn't overcome their own penalties to move the ball after the initial TD drive.

The final quarter saw Ohio State stall in Purdue territory after a 5-minute drive, and then after another 3-play Purdue possession, OSU began their final drive of regulation with 6:15 to play.

Dan Herron and Miller used the ground attack to move the ball down to the Purdue 12, and that's when Miller got creative once again. On 4th-and 3 from the 13-yard line, he rolled right, eluded a couple of Purdue rushers, and finally found Jordan Hall alone behind the defense inside the 5-yard line. Hall fell into the end zone, and the sea of scarlet in the south stands erupted at what looked like the game-winner.

The thud of the extra point block brought them all back down to earth though, and Purdue still had 55 seconds to play with. OSU safety Orhian Johnson ended Purdue's hopes of a win in regulation when he picked off an ill-advised long pass by Marve in the waning seconds. A shorter completion might have given the Boilers a shot at a Carson Wiggs field goal, but Wiggs could have just taken off his kicking shoe at that point as it turned out.

### OT Goes Badly

Miller and the OSU offense had just three plays in the overtime...and the first two lost yardage. Herron was stuffed for a loss on first down, and Miller took a 5-yard sack on second. That made the 15-yard completion to T.Y. Williams on 3rd down come up a yard short, and Fickell opted for the Basil field goal.

It looked for a time as if a second OT might be needed, as the Buckeyes forced Purdue into a 3rd and 12 at the 15-yard line on their OT possession. But Marve hit Gary Bush inside the 1-yard line for a first down, and the QB ended the game one play later on a sneak.



Shazier Shows...Sweat Smacked...Simon Silent

The bright spot of this deflating loss had to be the play of freshman linebacker Ryan Shazier, playing in place of Andrew Sweat, who left the game after a blow to the head. It has been obvious to observers of Shazier's limited playing time this year that he brings elements of speed, aggressiveness and play-making to this defense that are in short supply elsewhere. In a little over a half of play, Shazier (*pictured*) finished second on the team with seven tackles, including six solos and the Buckeyes' only sack of the game. He should start the rest of the way, even if that means moving Sweat over to the middle linebacker spot to accommodate him.

Whatever the Purdue coaches game-planned to try to neutralize Ohio State's best defensive player John Simon, it appears to have worked. Simon was nearly invisible in this game, registering one tackle and one assist, and failing to put much pressure on the Boilermakers' quarterback duo.

Jordan Hall had two touchdown receptions among his three catches on the day. Who knew that he could be an effective receiver? Well...just about everyone. Hall's utility as a pass-catcher had to be the most talked about and least implemented offensive strategy for Ohio State since throwing to the tight end. However, he came into the game with just two receptions for the season. This team continues to make the term "offensive coordination" seem oxymoronic.

Also-Rans

Wisconsin and Penn State now appear to be the only real contenders to be the Leaders Division participants in the Big Ten title game in three weeks. Michigan State is in the driver's seat in the Legends, and the most likely scenario now is a rematch of the MSU-Wisconsin thriller. If the Buckeyes are permitted to play in a bowl game, it will probably be in late-December, and will be the sort that involves the name of a pizza company or a lawn-trimming device.

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