



- November 19, 2011
- Ohio Stadium, Columbus, OH
- 3:30 p.m. (ET)
- TV: ABC -

It's Senior Day in Columbus Saturday, as the Buckeyes host Penn State in the penultimate game of the regular season. The football game is meaningful for both teams in terms of the conference standings, and for their possible postseason positioning, but much of that is a sidebar story to the events that will define 2011 for these programs.

On one sideline at the Horseshoe will be a team and a program that has seen its season marred by an unprecedented scandal, its iconic coach unceremoniously terminated, and its reputation as an example to other schools left in tatters. On the other sideline will be [Penn State](#). Which is to say....Ditto.

Luke Fickell will look across the field Saturday and see something he has yet to see in his brief stint as the head man at Ohio State...a head coach with less experience in this gig than he has. No fan who bought a ticket for *Tressel vs. Paterno XI* as recently as six months ago could

possibly have foreseen that both men - one a household name, the other a living legend - would be absent, let alone fired, by the time the kickoff rolled around. But here we are.

Before anyone hits the “email the author” button above to express his outrage at my speaking of the two schools’ scandals in the same sentence, let me assure you that I too find the comparison outrageous. It was tempting in the first few hours after the Sandusky story broke to note that it placed the failure to report jerseys-for-tattoos in a whole new perspective. But it soon became evident that scoring empty-net goals for Ohio State by comparing their NCAA rule-breaking with the still unfolding Penn State horror could serve only to trivialize the crime of child-rape, and nobody with any sense wanted to go there. The absence of victims in the OSU story makes any comparison ludicrous on its face.

That said, the “scandalized-programs-with-the-famous-fired-head-coaches” angle to this game is the one that leaps out at the fan and the casual observer. We can take note of that obvious parallel without presuming to equate the two schools’ respective failings. Consider that done.

Ohio State is 13-12 in the all-time series with Penn State, not counting last year’s [vacated victory](#). The Buckeyes are 8-2 against the Nittany Lions in games played in Columbus. Before you get too warm and fuzzy about that stat, consider that the two losses were the only games in which OSU started a freshman quarterback (Schlichter - ‘78 and Pryor - ‘08) as they will on Saturday.



It Matters Who Wins..Sort of...

So there will be a game, and unlike some folks who think Penn State should immediately dissolve their football program, I see no reason why the current Penn State players should be punished in that way. No one on this roster did anything wrong, and the team has a legitimate shot at a berth in the inaugural Big Ten title game on Dec. 3 in Indianapolis. I don’t think they’ll

get there, but that's beside the point. It will take years for this stain to leave the Penn State program, but they're not going to stop playing football there.

A win over the Buckeyes would clinch a tie for the Leaders Division title for the Lions, although they would probably still have to beat Wisconsin in Madison next week to get that ticket to Indy. Penn State (8-2, 5-1) would thus appear to have more to play for than the Buckeyes, who come in at 6-4, and 3-3 in the conference. Ohio State is not yet eliminated from contention for the conference title game, though that is somewhat akin to saying the Browns are not yet mathematically eliminated from the playoffs.

No, it's not really that remote. OSU would need to win out (PSU, @Michigan), and Wisconsin would have to lose at Illinois this weekend, and then beat Penn State next week. If Purdue wins out (Iowa, @Indiana) there could be a 4-way tie (5-3) atop the division, with only Purdue holding the head-to-head tie-breaker over the Buckeyes. As I see it, the two biggest flies in the ointment are the long odds of Illinois beating Wisconsin, and the looming tough match-up for OSU in Ann Arbor. It's like the man said... ["So, you're telling me there's a chance."](#)

Going Bowling

As to bowl game projections, everything remains completely up in the air for both teams. OSU wants to get their NCAA sanctions announced and behind them as soon as possible, so that if there is to be a postseason ban, it can take effect this year and give them a fresh start on 2012. There has been talk that the university might self-impose a bowl ban for this year just to make sure they get it out of the way, but I don't believe they are yet convinced that a postseason ban is inevitable. They would certainly hate to miss out on the extra 3-5 weeks of practices that a bowl invitation permits, and that their young team sorely needs.

For Penn State, it's impossible to predict tomorrow, let alone what happens a month from now. They could find themselves qualified to play a major bowl game, but emotionally exhausted and uninterested in contesting one. In the unlikely event that they win the Big Ten and qualify for the BCS, they would have a bowl invitation by default. More likely is an 8-4 or 9-3 final record, with no conference title game appearance, and it's hard to imagine any bowl committee with a choice in the matter relishing the announcement to their sponsors and local supporters that they plan to invite Penn State to their annual party. Stay tuned.

State of the Bucks

The Buckeyes are beat up...no question about it. Fickell announced Thursday that Andrew Sweat is unlikely to play at all against the Lions, and injured starters DT Jonathan Hankins, OT J.B. Shugarts and WR Philly Brown will probably play, but he is unsure how much action they will see. If Shugarts is limited, we'll probably see Jack Mewhort move outside from guard to RT as he did last week in the second half, and Corey Linsley will again take over at guard. The biggest problem will be trying to stop the Penn State rushing attack without Sweat, the most productive of the OSU linebackers, and with Hankins at less than 100%.

This game marks the 2011 debut of senior wide receiver [DeVier Posey](#), who had to serve

back-to-back 5-game suspensions for NCAA violations. Given the way he let his teammates down, it seems strange to talk about his “leadership” being a factor for this team in their last two games, but that’s the first word out of their mouths when they are asked what his return means to the team. We know that he is far and away the best receiver on the roster, and having him there has to help. Dan Herron has also been banged up, but he is expected to play as well.



Key Personnel - Penn State

Offense - Interim coach Tom Bradley has settled on [Matt McGloin](#) as his starter at QB after the team had used [Rob Bolden](#) early in the season. McGloin has completed 106 of 196 attempts, (54.1%) for 1386 yards, 7 touchdowns and 3 interceptions. In last year’s game in Columbus, McGloin started out very sharp, but came apart in the second half, throwing two interceptions for touchdowns as OSU came back with 35 unanswered points after trailing 14-3 at the half.

Running back [Silas Redd](#) is one of two standout skill position performers on a Penn State offense that has struggled to put points on the board. Redd *(pictured below)* is a naturally gifted runner, who combines great speed and cutting ability with the kind of power not often found in 5’10, 207 lb backs. He is 4th in the Big Ten in rushing at this point, with 210 carries for 1,059 yards and seven TD’s, and is averaging over 105 yards per game.

The other main man to watch on offense for the Lions is receiver [Derek Moya](#). The 6’5”, 210 lb senior captain leads the team with 34 catches for 592 yards, with three TD receptions. McGloin has another big athletic target on the other side in 6’3”, 214 lb. junior [Justin Brown](#), who has contributed 32 receptions for 423 yards and a touchdown.

The offensive line is down a bit by the usual Penn State standards, but with four seniors and a junior, they are experienced. Kicker [Anthony Fera](#) is solid as both placekicker and punter.



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