

Buckeye Leaves: Jack Sawyer, Denzel Burke, Xavier Johnson Have Standout Performances In Cotton Bowl



Ohio State finished the season with another loss, falling to No. 9 Missouri 14-3 in the Cotton Bowl in a game in which the offense failed to score a touchdown.

Here were selections from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff for players worthy of receiving Buckeye Leaves after the loss to the Tigers:

Patrick Engels: Denzel Burke made the difficult decision to play in the Cotton Bowl and finish off the season strong instead of opting out for the NFL draft, and that decision certainly paid off for the junior cornerback. Burke, who was projected to be a second-round pick in this year's NFL draft before this game, may have catapulted himself into the first round with a strong performance on the big stage in AT&T Stadium. He seemed to be all over the field for the Buckeyes defense early and often, and he was particularly strong defending against the run and short passing game, where he delivered two bruising hits in the first half that were felt throughout the stadium.

Burke, who finished with five tackles and a tackle for loss, showed a level of physicality that is nothing new for him this season, as he had some other big hits on his résumé earlier this year. But it likely showed NFL scouts in attendance that he can take on bigger receivers and running backs at the next level, where he may very well be next season.

Braden Moles: Junior defensive end Jack Sawyer was a menace to Missouri throughout the Cotton Bowl and was arguably the most impactful player on either side of the ball in without a doubt his best game in three seasons with the Buckeyes.

Of his four tackles, three were sacks - a career high, and also tied for the most by an Ohio State player in a bowl game - including a 9-yard sack on the Tigers' first play of the second half. While Sawyer has said he is leaning toward a return to Ohio State next season, a performance like this might have him reconsidering things with all eyes on him in the Cotton Bowl.

Greg Wilson: In his last game as a Buckeye, Xavier Johnson showed up in a big way as possibly the most important feature of Ohio State's offensive attack. He showed up in the running game with 35

yards from just five rushes and caught two passes for 31 yards, the first for freshman Lincoln Kienholz' first completion of the game, taking a huge hit to the ribs after he brought it in.

He went down on the sideline after his catch, and it looked like Johnson's Ohio State career could possibly be over if he had to leave the game because of it, but he toughed it out and came back into the game to make an impact.