

Game Analysis: Buckeye Passing Attack Leads The Way



What Worked Well

It was the Buckeye passing game, same as it has been all year. You can't break records if things aren't working well, and Ohio State absolutely blasted through nearly every single one in its path. Wideout Jaxon Smith-Njigba claimed school records for yards and receptions in a single season, and a single-game bowl record for yards at 347 on 15 receptions. His three touchdown receptions, as well as the three from Marvin Harrison Jr., are tied for the Rose Bowl record.

Meanwhile, the man throwing them the ball broke some records of his own. C.J. Stroud now sits atop Ohio State's school leaderboard for passing yards in a game with 573 and in both yards and touchdown passes (six) in a Rose Bowl (Smith-Njigba's 15 receptions are a Rose Bowl record as well).

After a pair of sloppy drives to open the game, Ohio State's passing attack was completely impossible to stop and led the Buckeyes on their dramatic comeback all the way to a victory in an instant classic.

What Didn't Work

The defense, though it tightened up in the second half and allowed only 10 more points, did surrender 35 points in the first half. It was a disastrous start for Ohio State's much-maligned defense, and it forced that electric offense into a second half without any real margin for error.

Ohio State's rushing attack remained at large, too. TreVeyon Henderson rushed 17 times for 84 yards and did not find the end zone. He was without a big play to inflate his total, and 4.9 yards per carry without a breakaway isn't disastrous, but it didn't seem as though the Buckeyes felt they could rely on the rushing attack in any critical spots. The passing attack rescued them from needing to, though.

Play Of The Game

Where to begin? Had the result gone in the other direction, Britain Covey's 97-yard first-half kickoff return or Cameron Rising's breakaway, 62-yard quarterback sneak would likely get the nod, but the

Buckeyes won, so they earn play of the game honors. And no play is more deserving than Smith-Njigba's 30-yard reception that put the Buckeyes on top 45-38 in the fourth quarter.

Though it would not seal the game - that went to Noah Ruggles' field goal a possession later - it was a fantastic cap to a fantastic performance from both passer and receiver. Stroud put the ball over Smith-Njigba's shoulder in a place only he could snare it, and the sophomore tracked it all the way into his hands, keeping his feet in bounds as he hauled the pass in with a defender nearby, helpless to stop it.

It looked like the kind of catch that junior wideout Garrett Wilson would make, and with Wilson's career at Ohio State coming to a close just before this game, it felt like a passing of the torch.