

# Game Analysis: Buckeyes Rout Volunteers

## 42-17



### What Worked Well:

Heading into the game against Tennessee, there was much made about how Ohio State fans would react come Dec. 21 if the Buckeyes were burdened with some early struggles. ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit even went as far to say that Ryan Day and his team were better off playing their first-round matchup away from Ohio Stadium to avoid the awkwardness of being booed on their home field. Because of this potential development, as well as the herd of Tennessee fans who flooded the Horseshoe who were waiting to erupt and steal some of the home-field advantage away from the Buckeyes, it was imperative for the Buckeyes to get off to a quick start - something they've struggled to do all year - and silence both the critics and Vols fans.

Luckily for Day and Ohio State, that's exactly what they did on Dec. 21. From the moment Josh Turbyville kicked off to Emeka Egbuka to start the game, the Buckeyes made sure that their fans stayed engaged and the Tennessee faithful were silent. They began the game on offense with an efficient five-play, 75-yard drive that ended with a 37-yard strike from Will Howard to Jeremiah Smith and then continued the momentum on defense with a quick three-and-out. This set the tone for how the beginning of the game went. From there, Ohio State went on a five-play, 68-yard touchdown drive to go up 14-0 off a 1-yard Quinshon Judkins rush, caused the Volunteers to lose 18 yards on three plays to force another punt, and then went on a seven-play, 58-yard scoring drive to take a resounding 21-0 lead with over three minutes to go in the first period.

Ohio State's first-quarter flurry not only put the Volunteers on their heels early but also put the Buckeye faithful into a frenzy, giving Ohio State a significant home-field advantage that not many thought would be there in the hours leading up to kickoff.

### What Didn't Work:

As always with blowouts, there is not much to say about what went wrong in the blowout win over the Volunteers. But if there was one thing to critique heading into the Rose Bowl against Oregon, it may be the defense's inability to contain the shifty Nico Iamaleava in the run game. Ohio State did a great job of limiting Iamaleava's production in the pocket, forcing him to complete a season-low 45.2 percent of his passes for an also season-low 104 yards and zero touchdowns, but when he got outside of the pocket and looked to run, he became a major thorn in the Buckeyes' side.

Iamaleava carried the ball a team-high 20 times for 47 yards and two touchdowns in the loss, and many of those yards came on scrambles where instead of trying to throw into a tight window he abandoned the pocket, made multiple defenders miss and came away with significant gains. This was most evident during Tennessee's second drive of the third quarter when he easily slithered past Ohio State's best defenders on consecutive plays to rush for 8 yards to gain a first down on third-and-6 followed by another 5 yards on first-and-10. Those two carries did not mean anything in terms of the result of the game, but it does show that the Buckeyes may need to devote some more time these next few weeks to pursuing the quarterback in open space and wrapping him up, something that will be important in the Rose Bowl when they once again match up with a shifty runner at quarterback in Dillon Gabriel.

### **Play Of The Game:**

Although many fans will point to Smith's first touchdown of the game as the play of the game, the freshman's second score may have been the most important one. With the Buckeyes holding onto just a 21-10 lead early in the third quarter following a late first-half surge from the Volunteers, they were in desperate need of another high-impact play that could put momentum back on the home team's side and create some extra separation on the scoreboard.

Ohio State got exactly that on its sixth play of its first drive of the quarter, where on first-and-10 from the Tennessee 22-yard line, Howard found a streaking Smith down the sidelines and delivered one of his best throws of the season. The fifth-year gunslinger threw an impressive, high-arching pass that was lofted over the head of Vols sophomore defensive back Jermod McCoy and right into the arms of Smith, who hauled in the pass in the end zone for the 22-yard score. Howard's pass could not have been placed any better, and it also could not have come at a better time in the game. It gave the Buckeyes a commanding 28-10 lead in the second half, one which they would only expand on en route to the blowout 42-17 victory.