

Game Analysis: What Worked, Didn't Work, And Play Of The Game In Ohio State's 28-14 Cotton Bowl Win



What Worked Well:

It wasn't the first half that we saw from the Buckeyes in the first two games of the College Football Playoff. They scored 14 points in the first 30 minutes of the Cotton Bowl after getting a combined 55 points in the previous two, and they needed a late 75-yard score from TreVeyon Henderson to get there. But while the OSU offense struggled to work through the penalties that were slowing it down, the defense didn't allow the Texas offense to get anything.

The Buckeyes went into the locker room with a 14-7 lead because Jim Knowles' unit was suffocating for quarterback Quinn Ewers and the Longhorns, and that was largely due to the front four of JT Tuimoloau, Ty Hamilton, Tyleik Williams and Jack Sawyer.

In the first quarter, the Buckeyes continued their dominant pass rush with two sacks, adding another in the beginning of the second period. They were also able to keep batting down passes the entire game, an addition to the defense in the past three games that has been extremely important. The defensive linemen had three of the six passes broken up by the Buckeyes in the game, and Sawyer's touchdown in the fourth quarter secured the win.

What Didn't Work:

Sometimes it feels cheap to say that the thing that went wrong in a game was penalties. It can be an easy cop-out since penalties are always a bad thing. But in this game, there was nothing that held this Ohio State offense back more than flags. When the Buckeye defense was dominant early in the game, it seemed like OSU should have been cruising out to a huge lead as it had in the previous two games. But due to many different flags, they couldn't get anything going.

It began with an uncharacteristic 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on Henderson and continued with two holding penalties, two false starts and an unnecessary roughness, adding up to 60 yards lost on six flags for the Buckeye offense and three flags for 15 yards on the defense compared to a total of five penalties for 54 yards on Texas.

Both teams were hurt by penalties, but it seemed that this could have been a bigger win if Ohio State had been more disciplined early on.

Play Of The Game:

There were many options for play of the game that continued to top the previous one. Henderson's touchdown at the end of the first half was the first contender before Will Howard ran for a long first down on a late fourth down.

Then after the Buckeyes went up 21-14, Texas drove down the field to the OSU 1-yard line before a 7-yard tackle for loss by Lathan Ransom and a Sawyer tip forced a fourth-and-8 that was likely for the game. That set up the play of the game, where Sawyer rushed around the edge and knocked the ball out of Ewers' hands, scooped the fumble up and ran it back 83 yards for a touchdown, the longest fumble recovery in the history of the College Football Playoff.

It was the signature moment of the nearby Pickerington, Ohio, native's Buckeye career and the nail in the coffin that helped send Ohio State to the national championship game against Notre Dame.