

Justin Fields' Masterpiece Sends Ohio State to Miami



Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields could not have picked a better time to play the game of his life.

One game after a nightmare outing against Northwestern, and one year after a loss to Clemson that ended in a Fields interception on a miscommunication, Fields torched the Tigers to give Ohio State a 49-28 win in the Sugar Bowl.

The final numbers for Fields were outstanding: 22 completions on 28 passes for 385 yards and six touchdowns. That would have been the performance of a lifetime against just about anyone, let alone in a College Football Playoff semifinal against No. 2 Clemson. And if that weren't impressive enough, Fields did the majority of his work in immense pain, nursing a rib injury that came on a hit that got Clemson linebacker James Skalski ejected for targeting.

The pain was so bad that Fields said he received one or two injections in the sideline medical tent, but he continued.

"I don't know exactly what it was," said Ohio State coach Ryan Day. "I said, 'What happened?' He goes, 'I took a shot and it kind of hurts over here.' I said, 'Well, why don't you go get with the doctors and we'll kind of figure that part of it out?' He's tough. We'll get an assessment here tonight, maybe into tomorrow, and figure out exactly what it was and what happened. But I really don't know. I just asked, 'Can you do it?' He says yes, and we kept rolling from there."

The touchdowns came in bunches, but the most critical stretch came in the second quarter after his injury. Almost immediately after the hit, Fields tossed a 9-yard touchdown to wide receiver Chris Olave. After a Clemson punt, Fields orchestrated a drive that squeezed in one more touchdown before halftime, finding Jeremy Ruckert in the end zone with 11 seconds left.

After briefly facing the possibility of being without Fields for the rest of the game (instead he missed only one play), Ohio State instead walked into the locker room at halftime with a three-touchdown lead.

Less than two weeks ago, Fields was used by detractors as an argument to keep Ohio State out of the playoffs. Against Northwestern in the Big Ten title game, he completed just 12 of 27 passes with two interceptions and no touchdowns. His mistakes frequently undid the work of running back Trey Sermon, and he looked like a shell of his typical self.

Fields looked inward. Day said he thought Fields learned a lot about himself this week as a quarterback. That came primarily from the extra work the junior quarterback put into his preparation.

"I prepared for this game like I've never prepared for a game before," Fields said. "I think that showed on the field, and I'm just proud of my brothers, proud of my teammates and proud of the way they played."

Now, Fields is the best argument for Ohio State's chances at a national championship. If the Buckeyes play the way they did against Clemson, they can play with any team in the country.

Most importantly, they now know exactly what they have in Fields, a warrior who played the best game of his career less than two weeks after the worst game of his career - and did so in a tremendous amount of pain.

"I mean, my body is pretty beat up right now," Fields said. "But, you know, I'm happy. And my teammates are happy. And this is a feeling like no other. So I know my body is going to be hurting tomorrow morning, but it's worth it for this win and for my teammates. I think that's really what pushed me. I was just thinking all the things that we've sacrificed as a team. That's really what got me through the whole game."

It also got Ohio State to Miami, where the Buckeyes will face Alabama for a national championship.

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