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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

September 17, 2005

Young & Texas Get The Job Done Vs. Ohio State, 25-22

By CHRIS NIDA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

For much of Ohio State's 25-22 loss to Texas on Sept. 10, fans in the Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 105,565 could have blinked their eyes and thought they were watching the 2002 national champion Buckeyes.

After some early struggles, the defense was buckling down and did not allow a touchdown for 44 minutes. OSU was getting the better of the special teams battle. The offense wasn't setting the world on fire, but the kicker was nailing field goals left and right.

The difference, however, between the national title winners and the team that suffered this heartbreaking loss was twofold. One, the '02 Buckeyes might never have faced a team as good as the Longhorns squad that entered the Horseshoe. And two, whenever there was a clutch stop to be made or offensive play to be had, the national champions thrived.

Against Texas, these Buckeyes did not.

"The game was going the way we wanted it to go," OSU junior safety Donte Whitner said. "The last five minutes, they made some plays and we made some mistakes."

No sooner did UT quarterback Vince Young's knee hit the Ohio Stadium turf on a game-ending kneel-down than critics began pointing fingers at who was culpable for Ohio State's first nonconference home loss in 15 years.

Senior tight end Ryan Hamby dropped a sure touchdown pass from Justin Zwick — twice, the second after absorbing a ferocious hit from Longhorns cornerback Cedric Griffin. Sixth-year senior kicker Josh Huston pushed a 50-yard field-goal attempt just right that would have put OSU up by nine points. And junior quarterback Justin Zwick, scrambling and trying to make something happen after Texas took a one-point lead with 2:37 to play, fumbled away the ball deep in his own territory.

After the game, though, the Buckeyes weren't pointing fingers at anyone but themselves.

"We didn't do our part on offense," sophomore receiver Anthony Gonzalez said. "I feel like as a receiver that we didn't do what we had to do. I like to think that we're the best unit in the country, and I just don't feel like we did what we had to do."

Defensively, the Buckeyes

Continued On Page 10



JEFF BREHM

HOG-TIED — Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith (10) gets tripped up by Texas linebacker Aaron Harris (2) during the Longhorns' 25-22 win in Ohio Stadium Sept. 10.

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OPINION

Inability To Punch It In Is Confounding

After a summer filled with enough bluff and bluster to hype a presidential election, the payoff for the so-called "Clash of the Titans" was certainly a letdown for Ohio State.

And from the very second when the clock reached 0:00, the finger-pointing among the OSU faithful began in earnest. Exactly how could Ohio State blow so many chances and let a win over No. 2 Texas slip through its hands?

I will admit that I was as surprised as anyone to watch Longhorns QB Vince Young make the plays he needed to make against the Ohio State defense. That is not because I think Young is overrated. He is not overrated. He is a tremendous talent who will likely continue to get better and better.

But he is not without his flaws, and the Buckeyes have traditionally been able to rise to the occasion on defense when a highly regarded quarterback takes them on.

Against Texas, however, that did not happen. Young first established his running game then actually beat the Buckeyes with his arm. Next to no one believed that could happen, yet that is precisely what did occur.

And now Ohio State is left to ponder how that game got away.

Quite frankly, it got away because of the lack of offensive production in the red zone. And regardless of your particular quarterback of choice, the fault did not rest with Justin Zwick any more than it did with Troy Smith.

I know that Smith seems to have more fans in his corner right now, and even I tend to agree that the electricity he seems to exude gives the team a little more spark than Zwick. But the truth of the matter is that during the game against Texas, Smith really didn't move the team any better than Zwick did.

For example, Zwick started and played for two series before giving way to Smith. Those first two possessions were terrible including a three-and-out on the first possession of the game. A little closer examination of that drive, however, shows a dropped pass by Ted Ginn Jr. on first down and a dropped pass by Anthony Gonzalez on third down.

I wouldn't presume to speculate that if either reception had been made it would have been an entirely different ballgame. But I'm also not about to dismiss the fact that those drops helped set the early tone.

Smith entered the game for the Buckeyes' third series and immediately produced results. He got his team on the board with a field goal after the first then engineered OSU's best drive of the game on his second, moving 80 yards in nine plays for a touchdown.

Smith wound up piloting scoring drives on each of his first five possessions. But with the exception of that 80-yard march, he really didn't do much moving of the team. The other four drives went for 8, minus-1, 22 and 11 yards and each resulted in field goals.

All told, Smith was at the controls for seven possessions that resulted in 121 yards. Zwick was under center for six possessions and they totaled 114 yards. And while Smith's possessions

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with

Mark Rea

resulted in 19 of the Buckeyes' 22 points, the team averaged only 3.3 yards per play when he was at quarterback. The average with Zwick was only slightly better at 3.7 yards per play.

What does all this mean? For one thing, the inability of the Ohio State offense to punch the ball in the end zone evidently continues to confound the Ohio State coaching staff. In a very real sense — at least against Texas — that was due in equal part to both quarterbacks being unable to manufacture a big play.

Zwick nearly did it in the third quarter, but his pass to Ryan Hamby — which was right on the numbers — bounced away from the normally sure-handed tight end. Smith tried to do it with the legs that served him so well in the Michigan game last November but wound up with just 27 yards and got sacked twice — once more than Zwick.

Did the coaching staff give either quarterback a fighting chance to win the ballgame? That is, of course, debatable.

Ginn, for example, touched the ball only three times on offense, grabbing two receptions for 9 yards and running one aborted reverse for minus-2 yards. Texas was keying on Junior and trying to knock him off his routes, but it didn't seem like the Buckeyes were even looking toward him for large chunks of the game.

Likewise, many fans have been critical of the running game. Antonio Pittman has shown that he can run with authority, but there is no way he can hold up to a season full of pounding if the Buckeyes can't (or won't) develop someone to go with him.

So where does the blame rest for this loss? Obviously, the buck stops at the top and head coach Jim Tressel must accept his share. I'm sure he will. This was a game that was imminently winnable on several levels, and yet the Buckeyes did not get it done. That is an anomaly in the Tressel era when OSU has usually found a way to win tight games.

I humbly reserve the right to reject the criticism that Tressel was too conservative in his play-calling even though the Buckeyes ran the ball 36 times and threw it only 26. Only 17 of those rushing plays were from a running back — all by Pittman — while Smith and Zwick combined to run it 18 times. (The other was Ginn's reverse.)

If I have any criticism of the play-calling, it would be that there was seemingly little attempt to test the Texas cornerbacks. One of the few times they did, the Buckeyes scored their only touchdown when Holmes outdueled UT corner Cedric Griffin.

The bottom line was that this was not an individual loss to be pinned on Tressel, Zwick, Smith, Hamby or even Josh Huston, who could have put the game out of reach had he connected on

his sixth field-goal try of the evening. This was a total team loss and should be regarded as such. The vaunted defensive unit was painfully slow to get into a rhythm, so slow in fact that Texas had built up a 10-0 advantage that looked ridiculously easy.

Then, at the end of the game with everything riding in the balance, the defense again couldn't come up with a stop when it had to.

But do I blame the defense? Absolutely not. A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter and every other guy on that unit played their guts out. If the offense had made just one or two plays during any one of eight different possessions, the defense would never have been put in the position to have to protect the lead at the end.

I know we should give credit where credit is due, and Texas is a tremendously talented football team. But every Longhorn player and coach got on the charter flight home to Austin knowing they were damned lucky to have won.

Yet, they made the plays and Ohio State didn't. The Buckeyes should have won that game, and yet they didn't.

Now, the real question is not who's to blame but rather where do we go from here?

Who's It Going To Be?

This pains me greatly, but I can't help thinking that this season is going to go the way of the 1996 and '97 seasons when John Cooper couldn't seem to settle on Stan Jackson or Joe Germaine at the controls.

I am not and never have been in favor of a two-quarterback system. I don't think it helps the offensive attack in terms of continuity and flow of the game, and we perhaps saw a reflection of that against Texas.

I must admit that I was surprised when Tressel went back to Zwick in the third quarter. But he did provide a little bit of a spark that seemed to have been missing, and the entire complexion of the game might have changed had Hamby been able to hold onto that pass in the end zone.

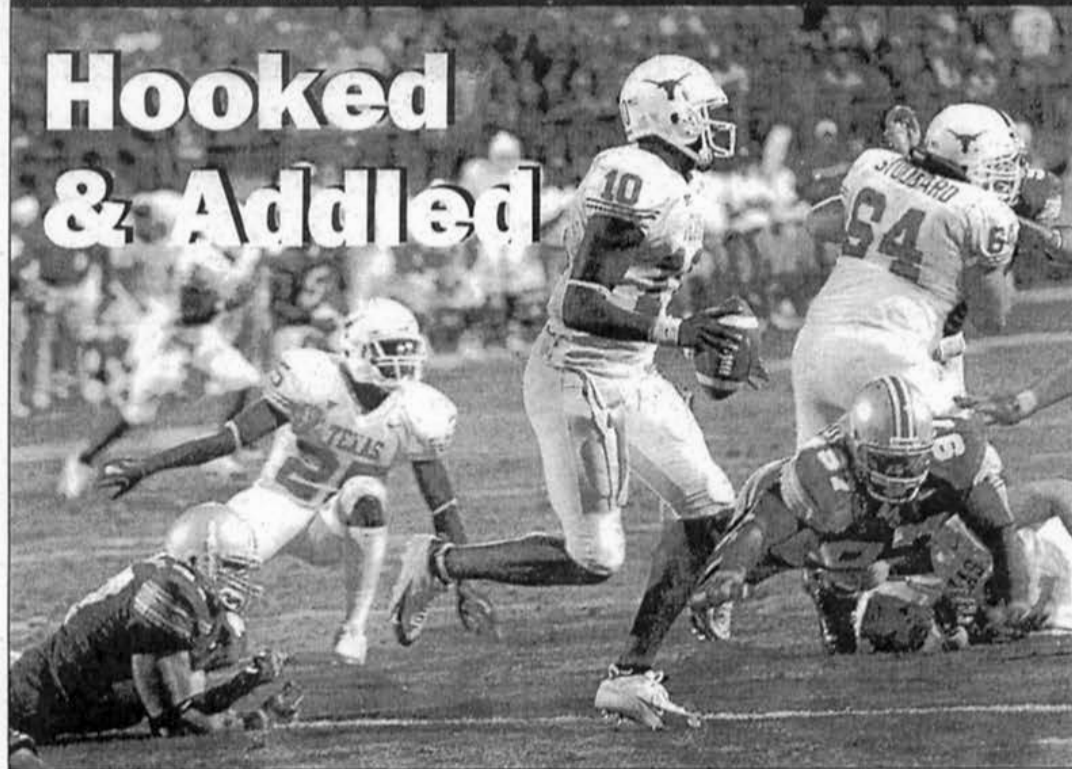
I'll also admit surprise to Tressel's choice of Zwick after Texas had scored late in the game to take a 23-22 lead because I felt Smith's added ability to run the ball would better serve a two-minute offense. I suppose I should feel some vindication for that opinion after Zwick was stripped of the ball on a first-down scramble, but any kind of thought along those lines quickly evaporates when you consider Smith held the ball too long on the next series and was sacked in the end zone for a safety.

Ohio State's next opponent — winless San Diego State — will likely do nothing to solve this quarterback quandary. In fact, I would expect Todd Boeckman to see action against the Aztecs. But when Iowa comes to town Sept. 24 for the Big Ten opener, I would humbly suggest that Tressel pick a starting quarterback and stay with him until he proves he can no longer do the job.

A quarterback merry-go-round never seems to work for a championship-caliber team, and this season is far from over.

OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS

Hooked & Addled



JEFF BREHM

VETERAN YOUNG — Texas quarterback Vince Young (10) took center stage in his team's narrow win over Ohio State, throwing the game-winning touchdown with just over 2 1/2 minutes to play.

Buckeyes Face Questions After Loss To Texas

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Huge momentum swings, outstanding offensive plays and dynamite defensive performances helped the game between No. 2 Texas and No. 4 Ohio State live up to most of its advanced billing.

But in the end, the Buckeyes — who had scratched back from an early 10-point deficit and heading into the final three minutes were holding onto a lead by their fingernails — simply couldn't hold off the Longhorns, and Texas pulled out a 25-22 victory at Ohio Stadium.

It marked the first meeting ever between the two college football titans, each of which is among the top five winningest Division I-A programs of all time. It also was No. 4 Ohio State's first nonconference loss in the Horseshoe since 1990 and the program's first loss at home in seven night contests.

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel praised his team but lamented the abundance of missed opportunities that ultimately cost the Buckeyes dearly.

"I think you have to start with the fact that our kids played their hearts out. It was a well-fought football game," Tressel said. "I'm disappointed that we had several opportunities and didn't cash in on enough of them to win. We're going to have a good football team, but obviously we have to be more consistent."

Tressel had to be talking about his offense. Four times, the Buckeyes started a possession inside Texas territory, and four other times they started within 10 yards of midfield. Yet all OSU could get from those eight possessions was five

field goals. The other three possessions wound up in punts.

There were other opportunities as well. Ohio State special teams veteran Antonio Smith missed a second-quarter tackle on Longhorns kickoff returner Ramonce Taylor in the end zone that would have been a safety. The score was 10-10 at the time.

In the third quarter, a sure touchdown pass bounced off normally sure-handed tight end Ryan Hamby and the Buckeyes had to settle for a field goal.

And the Buckeyes allowed the Longhorns to get a cheap field goal before halftime, poaching a kickoff in the waning seconds and then getting slapped with a personal foul penalty on the end of the run.

"We had our opportunities — we just couldn't cash in," said OSU offensive lineman Rob Sims. "It's very disappointing to get into the red zone and come away with only three points. Offensive production in the red zone — that's it right there. We didn't get it done."

The lack of production in the red zone was supposed to be a thing of the past with the Buckeyes' new-look offense and their deep stable of talent.

However, while OSU got some tough yards against a staunch Texas defense, it still managed only 111 rushing for the game and didn't appear to have the ability to pick up yardage when it was absolutely necessary.

"This was a tough loss especially considering how we had them against the ropes throughout most of the game," OSU center Nick Mangold said. "It just seemed like we couldn't get that one big play we needed when we needed it."

The game also was supposed to solve the quarterback conundrum facing the

Buckeyes but probably only added to the controversy of whether Justin Zwick or Troy Smith should start.

For the record, Zwick started and completed 9 of 15 passes for 66 yards. But when he couldn't move the team early and the Buckeyes fell behind 10-0, Smith entered the game and immediately sparked a resurgence.

But he, too, fell victim in the second half to an offensive attack that could not cross the goal line and Zwick returned to the lineup midway through the third quarter.

After the game, Tressel was elusive about how either quarterback played, going so far as to say he wouldn't evaluate their play without grading the game film.

But Zwick said it was by design that the two would play early.

"We knew we would each have to play two series," he said. "I think it worked well for us (but) it was hard to get going tonight. We had good field position but were not able to capitalize."

In the end, Zwick led six series and the Buckeyes netted 114 yards and three points. Smith piloted seven possessions, worth 121 yards and 19 points.

Rough Beginning For Buckeyes

Despite the fact the Buckeyes could not capitalize on their red-zone opportunities, the game featured a host of excellent plays on both offense and defense from both teams.

In the beginning, however, it was Texas making most of the big plays. In fact, the Longhorns seemed to blow right through Ohio State in the early going.

After the Buckeyes went three-and-out on the game's first possession — thanks to dropped passes from Ted Ginn

Jr. and Anthony Gonzalez — Texas embarked upon an 11-play, 64-yard drive that was nearly all quarterback Vince Young.

The 6-5, 233-pound junior scrambled for 52 of those yards and helped set up the first score of the game, a 42-yard field goal by David Pino at the 10:03 mark of the first quarter.

And there was to be more of the same. OSU punter A.J. Trapasso pinned the Longhorns back at their own 16-yard line, but Young came out firing again, this time directing a 10-play drive that resulted in a touchdown.

The UT quarterback showcased his arm instead of his legs, throwing for 58 yards during the march, the last five to receiver Billy Pittman to give his team a 10-0 advantage with 1:37 remaining in the opening period.

By that time, not only were the Longhorns holding a 10-point lead, they looked to be on the verge of a blowout. They had already piled up 148 yards and eight first downs while the Buckeyes had 26 yards and just one first down.

But OSU got some life on the ensuing kickoff when Santonio Holmes returned it 47 yards to near midfield, and then Texas was hit with an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty.

That gave the Buckeyes possession at the Texas 36-yard line, and Smith entered the game. But a holding penalty stunted the drive, and the team had to settle for a 45-yard field goal from Josh Huston.

That score seemed to spark the defense, which finally got a stop, and the Buckeyes went back to work. This time, Smith engineered an 80-yard drive that covered eight plays, including a 14-yard run by Antonio Pittman on a second-and-10 play and a 12-yard toss from Smith to Gonzalez on a third-and-5.

The most important play came, however, on a third-and-8 when Smith threw a perfect pass in the corner of the end zone for Holmes, who took the ball away from Texas cornerback Cedric Griffin. That touchdown play covered 36 yards and tied the score at 10 with 8:11 remaining in the first half.

More importantly, it triggered a huge momentum swing for the Buckeyes. Three plays into Texas' next drive, OSU linebacker A.J. Hawk stepped in front of a Young pass and returned the interception 24 yards to the UT 18. On the possession after that, Hawk recovered a fumble by Texas tailback Selvin Young to give the Buckeyes the ball at the Longhorns 30.

Unfortunately, Ohio State couldn't muster any offense on either opportunity. With Smith still at the controls, the Buckeyes actually went backward on the first possession and netted just 22 yards on the second, squandering a first-and-goal situation at the Texas 6.

Huston bailed them out on both occasions, hitting a 36-yard field goal and then a 25-yarder to give the Buckeyes 16 unanswered points and a six-point advantage with just 35 seconds left until halftime.

However, the OSU kicker was instructed to poach the ensuing kickoff, and Tarell Brown fielded it at the 19. He returned it 12 yards, but then the Buckeyes were assessed a costly personal foul penalty that gave Texas the ball at their own 46.

On first down, Young connected for 36 yards to freshman tailback Jamaal Charles, and the Longhorns got into position for Pino to boot a 37-yard field goal right before the half.

OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS

Letting It Slip Away

That glitch didn't seem to carry over into the second half because OSU safety Nate Salley picked off Young on the second play of the third quarter, giving the Buckeyes excellent field position again at the Texas 37.

Again, the offense fizzled with only 11 yards in six plays and again Huston was called upon. His 44-yard field goal pushed the Buckeyes' advantage back to six points.

That touched off a period where the teams exchanged field goals. The OSU defense bent on the next possession — giving up a 63-yard pass play to Pittman, who nearly broke it for a touchdown. But Texas had to settle for a 25-yard Pino field goal before the Buckeyes answered with Huston's fifth three-pointer of the night, a 26-yarder at the 5:12 mark of the third period, making it a six-point lead for Ohio State again.

From that point, the game seemed to settle into a battle for field position. And the Buckeyes seemed to be winning that battle as Trapasso continually pinned the Longhorns back inside their own 20-yard line. The OSU redshirt freshman punted four times in the game, each time dropping his kick inside the opponent's 20.

The Buckeyes nearly put the game out of reach at the five-minute mark of the fourth quarter, moving from their 30-yard line to the Texas 29 with a first-and-10. But the drive stalled — in fact, it lost 4 yards from there — and Huston was forced to try a 50-yard attempt, which sailed just outside the right upright.

That gave the Longhorns one final chance and Young was up to the task. Starting at his own 33, the Texas QB got his team going with a 9-yard pass to Charles on a third-and-6 play.

But the dagger came at the 2:37 mark. Texas receiver Limas Sweed was let go at the line of scrimmage by OSU cornerback Ashton Youboty, then Salley was just a hair late on help coverage. Young's pass was perfectly thrown, Sweed made a twisting catch and the Longhorns had a 24-yard touchdown. Pino's PAT provided the eventual winning point and a 23-22 lead, although the game wasn't quite over.

The Buckeyes got the ball back, but on a first-down scramble Zwick fumbled and the Longhorns recovered. OSU's defense held near the goal line on fourth down, but on the next play, Smith was sacked in the end zone for a safety to account for the final score.

For the game, Young lived up to his billing as a possible Heisman Trophy candidate, throwing for 270 yards and two touchdowns and adding another 76 yards on the ground. Zwick and Smith combined to throw for 144 yards and one score but added only 38 more yards rushing.

On defense, Hawk played an exceptional game for the Buckeyes. He had a game-high 12 tackles, including three for loss and two sacks to go along with his fumble recovery and interception. Bobby Carpenter added 11 stops, while Donte Whitner and Anthony Schlegel had eight apiece.

Game Notes

- No. 2 Texas was the highest rated team to visit Ohio Stadium since No. 1-ranked Iowa lost to the Buckeyes in 1985 by a 22-13 score. OSU has now played the No. 2-ranked team according to The Associated Press on 11 occasions and has a 7-4 record in those games.

- Overall, the Buckeyes have played 62 games against teams ranked in the AP's top five and are 24-31-7 in those games, including a 13-10-2 mark at home.

- It also marked the first loss against a top-10 team for Tressel in Ohio Stadium. He had won his four previous games at home against top-10 teams.

- The loss snapped the team's streak of 36 consecutive victories at home against nonconference opponents. The last defeat at the hands of a nonleague foe came on Sept. 22, 1990, when the Buckeyes dropped a 35-26 decision to Southern Cal.

- That game actually ended before the clock read 0:00 as a severe thunderstorm hit the area. After an unsuccessful onside kick by the Buckeyes in the waning seconds, officials called the game.

- The contest was just the seventh night game in Ohio Stadium and the first defeat under the lights for the Buckeyes. It was the 34th night game in program history, and the team now shows a 25-9 record in those contests which include bowl games.

- Huston tied a single-game record with his five field goals. He tied the mark originally set by Bob Atha in 1981 against Indiana and equaled last year by Mike Nugent in the North Carolina State game.

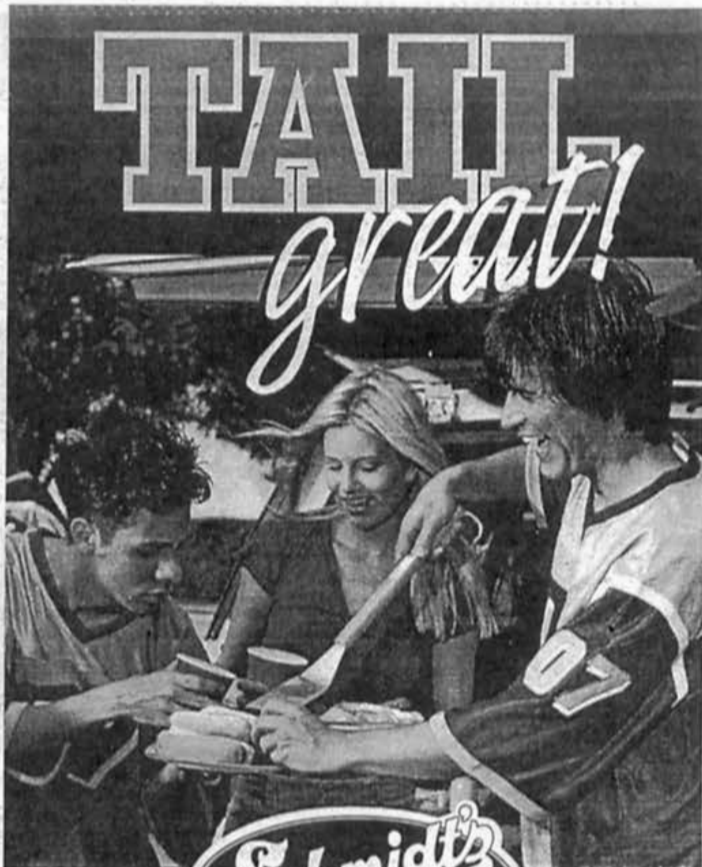
- His missed 50-yarder ended a streak of 16 consecutive made field goals by Buckeye kickers. Nugent connected on his final nine attempts of the 2004 season and Huston had nailed his first seven tries this year before the miss.

- The sellout crowd of 105,565 broke the Ohio Stadium record by a mere 26 fans. The previous mark was set at 105,539 for the 2002 Michigan game.

- OSU has a streak of 21 consecutive sellouts at home and has played in front of 14 consecutive sellout crowds overall.

- After selling all 15,225 programs it printed for the season opener against Miami (Ohio), Ohio State upped the order to 29,000 for the Texas game and again sold out.

- The school is donating \$2 from each sale at all four home games this month to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.



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COVER STORY: LASSEED

Turns Out Texas' Young Had Plenty Of Arm

Continued From Page 1

accomplished their goal of making Young beat them with the pass. After rushing for 52 yards on the opening drive, the multifaceted QB finished with just 76 on the ground for the game.

But after letting the 'Horns march 67 yards in seven plays and put the eventual game-winning score on the board with just over 2 1/2 minutes to play, the defense couldn't totally absolve itself.

"We feel like we could have done a lot better than what we did," Whitner said. "We pride ourselves on stopping the run and we pretty much did that, but we still lost the game. So anytime you lose a game, you feel like there's a little bit more you could have done."

Even Huston, who tied the OSU single-game record with five field goals and whose only miss was that 50-yarder late in the fourth quarter, felt as if he should have changed the game's outcome.

"If I make that kick, who knows how things turn out," Huston said. "I'm glad that they gave me a lot of chances, but I could have done better."

Perhaps the lesson to be learned from everyone's readiness to accept blame, then, is that — as in virtually every loss — there wasn't one overriding factor that kept the Buckeyes from defending their unbeaten record in home night games.

"We have the players to do it," Gonzalez said. "It's not like we don't have the guys. Whether it's difficult or not, so what? Life is difficult — do it. We have to get after it and score some touchdowns."

Rotation Tribulations

Of all the postgame criticisms leveled at the Buckeyes — either by themselves or outsiders — their failure to put the ball in the end zone would appear to be the most legitimate.



JEFF BREHM

DROPPED SPIRIT — Ohio State center Nick Mangold (55) does what a captain should — mentors one of his teammates. Ryan Hamby dropped what looked to be a sure touchdown pass in the third quarter of the Buckeyes' game with Texas and took the miscue hard.

OSU started eight drives from their own 41-yard line or closer, half of those in Texas territory, and got just 15 points from that advantageous field position. The team's only touchdown — a 36-yard pass from Troy Smith to Antonio Holmes — came on a drive that began at the OSU 20, and even that almost ended early when Texas defensive back Drew Kelson dropped a sure interception.

"We really felt like if we would have gotten a touchdown out of one of those, we really would have sealed the game," Whitner said. "Even that last field goal — if we had hit that, we would have been up nine and that just gives us a lot more leverage and lets us do a lot more things."

Following the game, fans, Internet denizens and both local and national media suggested the problem was a lack of consistency under center. If that was indeed the case, none of the Buckeyes were saying as much afterward.

Zwick started the game, but after two drives that netted a total of just 26 yards and that both ended in punts, fellow junior Troy Smith was quickly inserted. That brought a roar of approval from the throngs in attendance, and though he picked up just 3 yards on a quarterback keeper on his first play from scrimmage, there seemed to be a spark in the offense once again.

Smith later rushed for 10 yards on the drive, but a holding penalty prevented him from ever picking up a first down. The series did end with a 45-yard Huston field goal, but the Buckeyes had to go only 8 yards to do so because of a long Holmes kickoff return and a Texas personal foul penalty.

Tressel stayed with Smith under center for the next four drives, and each of them ended with scores. Smith's second series was the 80-yard drive featuring both the touchdown and the near interception, and his following three opportunities ended in field goals.

But those three drives accounted for only 32 total yards and came after Longhorn turnovers. So the Buckeyes went back to Zwick, with whom they would stay for four of the next five drives, including the all-important one after Texas' go-ahead score.

Naysayers were quick to voice the opinion that Tressel should have gone with Smith when the game was on the line, and they were particularly boisterous after Zwick's fumble. But statistically, Zwick had led OSU's second- and third-longest drives of the day on two of his last three chances, while Smith had taken the Buckeyes just 2 yards in three plays in his previous series under center.

"Any player wants to be in the game and get in the groove," Smith said. "They want to play. But that's what (Coach Tressel) sees, and he felt he was doing what was best for the team at that time."

Zwick nearly matched his counterpart word for word.

"It's something you have to deal with," he said. "You ask anybody and they'll say they want to be in there all game. You just have to take advantage of things while you're out there."

Outside sentiment seems to be that there's no way for an offense to find a

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rhythm with quarterbacks consistently entering and exiting the game.

The players involved don't really seem to buy such thoughts.

"I can honestly say that at no point did I think to myself, 'Oh, X quarterback's in — maybe we won't be as effective,'" Gonzalez said. "I can honestly say with a complete, 100-percent straight face that I don't think it made a difference in terms of who was in. I think they both played well. Things happen."

Moving On

With the loss, dreams of an undefeated season and defending home turf went up in a puff of burnt orange and white.

But all is not lost, for any number of reasons. For one, it's the nonconference season — the goal of a Big Ten title is still alive and well, particularly with both Iowa and Michigan losing the same day.

More importantly on a national

scale, it's early in the year, and it's not as if OSU fell prey to some unheralded underdog. The Buckeyes were in it until the end with another Rose Bowl contender, and they did nothing to embarrass themselves on a national stage.

"It certainly hurts our national title hopes, but it doesn't completely take them away," Gonzalez said. "We still have a chance at a national title. It's not like they blew us out. If you're a voter and a bunch of teams have one loss, it would be hard not to put us in, I think."

That, of course, would require Ohio State winning all of its remaining games. That means rebounding against San Diego State, taking care of Iowa at home, coming off an open week to battle Penn State on the road and, obviously, going into Ann Arbor and emerging with an unblemished conference record.

But that's what the Buckeyes were planning on doing all along anyway.

"It's not like it changes," Gonzalez said. "It's not like we're saying, 'Well, we had a loss to give and now we gave

it.' It's nothing like that. It's just that we had to win out to begin the season and we still have to win out. We can still accomplish great things."

That's not to minimize the sting of the loss. It's just that so soon after a defeat that many felt could have easily swung the other way, some Buckeyes may have found solace in

realizing that there was still plenty to play for.

"It's painful because anytime you're at Ohio State you're expected to win every game," Whitner said. "But you know, we're going to bounce back from this game. Even though we lost this game, we still have a chance to go to the national championship."

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS

Early Drops Proved A Bit Of A Harbinger

The energy on the Ohio Stadium field at kickoff of the Texas game was such that both combatants needed time to gain their bearings.

It might have been more pronounced on the Ohio State side as the Buckeyes went three-and-out with two dropped passes on balls that were well thrown by Justin Zwick.

"Those things happen sometimes," Zwick said. "There was a lot of energy out there. I don't know if that was the difference or not."

For a variety of reasons, the OSU offense was never truly humming. Prosperity would be followed by a dropped pass or a lackluster run or a poor decision, and the net result was a paltry 255 yards of offense and only one touchdown despite excellent field position for most of the game.

"Early on, we had some dropped balls, (but) I don't really think we were out of rhythm," offensive lineman Rob Sims said. "We were moving the ball all right, but we'd have a dropped ball or a missed block or something else. When we got into the red zone, it seemed like we made more mistakes."

Though it appeared on the surface that it was mostly OSU's own doing, the Longhorns defense had something to do with it.

"When we had the short field with the turnovers, our defense kept forcing them to kick field goals," Texas head coach Mack Brown said. "I thought our

INSIDE THE OFFENSE with Mike Wachsman

defense fought hard and really did some things when it had to."

The Longhorns kept it pretty basic against OSU but did a couple of things here and there to serve as disrupters.

"They moved their front guys around a little bit," Zwick said. "But I think we picked it up pretty well after a bit."

Wide receiver Santonio Holmes added, "They blitzed a little bit more than we thought. They didn't blitz that much on film, but they knew the right time to blitz today. That took us out of rhythm a little bit."

Two Heads Not Better Than One?

Much was made heading into the game about the expected rotation of quarterbacks, and OSU did indeed employ a double quarterback look for much of the game.

Zwick started the contest and finished 9 of 15 in the passing department for just 66 yards while Troy Smith, who entered the game on the Buckeyes' third series, completed just 5 of 11 for 78 yards although he connected with Holmes for the Buckeyes' only touchdown of the game.



JEFF BREHM

ONE AND ONLY — Despite blanket coverage from Texas cornerback Cedric Griffin (8), Santonio Holmes gathers in the football for Ohio State's only touchdown in a 25-22 loss to Texas. Holmes led Ohio State with four grabs for 73 yards.

The decision not to stick with one guy might have ultimately hurt the Buckeyes because there was never enough time for either one to get into the swing of things.

"Anyone wants to be out there," Zwick said. "You have to do what you can while you're out there and when you're called on."

Smith, who was coming off a two-game NCAA suspension, showed some rust and made some hurried decisions under pressure in the game. But afterward, he sounded like he was comfortable with the coaching moves.

"It worked OK," Smith said. "When we get the chance to make plays, we have to make plays. Unfortunately we came up short today — as a team. We have to get better."

And when Smith was pressed about the quarterback situation, he admitted, "It's hard to get in a flow," before quickly adding, "but you have to live with it."

Scribes poke and prod players about the situation, believing that the players truly have a favorite for the quarterback position. But to a man, there seems to be nothing like that in the huddle or the locker room.

"They made plays — both of them," senior center Nick Mangold said. "Things seemed to work with both of them in there. I don't really have any problem with it right now."

The Buckeyes had the ball for just two meaningful series in the fourth quarter, and Zwick steered the ship on both.

OSU was moving the ball well until bogging down just inside the Texas 30, and Zwick missed a wide-open Roy Hall on third-and-14. It might not have picked up the needed yardage, but it would have put Josh Huston in a much more favorable position than the 50-yard field-goal attempt he was left facing.

Huston pushed it just wide right, and Texas scored a go-ahead touchdown on its next drive.

"If I make that kick, who knows how things turn out," said Huston, who booted a school record-tying five three-

pointers before that. "I'm glad that they gave me a lot of chances, but I could have done better."

"Distance was never a problem. I hit a 60-yarder in warmups going to the north end and a 55-yarder going south. So I can kick it that far. I just didn't hit it."

Zwick came back in with 2:31 left on the clock and the ball at the OSU 31 but fumbled after being forced out of the pocket by Drew Kelson. The ball was pounced on by UT's Brian Robison, and the next time Ohio State took possession it was on its own 1-yard line with just 25 seconds to play.

While many fans lamented that turnover, Zwick was not totally to blame.

"I felt like we were going to win when we had that last drive," said receiver Anthony Gonzalez. "I honestly felt like we were going to win. Justin may have fumbled the football, but he was looking at me, and I didn't beat my man."

"That's something I have to deal with. I told him, 'Blame it on me if you want because I didn't get open.' I know that. This is tough. This is not the fun part."

Is That Miss Or Misses?

Ohio State was its own worst enemy on a number of occasions, bogging down in the red zone and failing to do the things necessary to win the game.

One of the big plays came when Zwick hit tight end Ryan Hamby right on the numbers in the end zone. The ball bounced off Hamby's chest and into the air, but as it came down it looked like the OSU senior would still be able to come down with it.

Instead, he was blasted by UT cornerback Cedric Griffin and lost the football.

"I thought we had a touchdown (there)," Zwick said. "Sometimes things happen. If we run that play in practice 10 times, he catches it 10 times."

Smith said he made it a point to keep Hamby's spirits up after the play.

"You can't dwell on things that are over," Smith said. "We have to move for-

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ward. Ryan has been here from day one, and he's a great person and a great player. He's our starting tight end and he's not going anywhere. If the play happened like that again, we'd throw it to him again."

There was also a pair of special teams blunders by the normally reliable Antonio Smith, who had a hold on a kick return by Ted Ginn Jr. and missed a tackle on Texas return man Ramonce Taylor that would have resulted in a safety. But Taylor got away and was able to bring the ball all the way out to the 35-yard line.

"I was pumped," Huston said. "I thought we had him. He took it like four yards deep, and we had him. He got away and made a big play for them."

OSU settling for five field goals and scoring just one touchdown hammered home the point about taking advantage of opportunities.

"We've got to capitalize, man," Holmes said. "We have to execute plays a lot better, and I'm confident we will."

Gonzalez said he was surprised at just how poorly the Buckeyes are playing in the red zone thus far in 2005. In the season opener against Miami (Ohio), just two of their five red-zone trips resulted in touchdowns. Against Texas, they were inside the red zone three times and failed to cross the goal line.

"When we were in camp, we did a good job in the red zone," Gonzalez said. "For whatever reason, though, we're just not executing right now. That's the difference in my opinion."

"I believe we won the turnover margin, and we were outrushing them for most of the game, and we won the special teams in my mind. So what is there? We didn't get it done in the red zone. That, we have to find a way to get done."

If most of the offensive wounds hadn't been self-inflicted, the pain might

be easier to deal with.

"It was usually something stupid that we're better than," said Sims. "Those things sometimes happen early in the season, but we have to get better at it."

The loss was definitely demoralizing for Ohio State, which entered the game ranked fourth in the nation. While

national title hopes aren't completely dashed, they are dimmed quite a bit.

But the Buckeyes want to prove that they aren't dead yet.

"It's not like we're never going to put the scarlet and gray on again," Troy Smith said. "We have San Diego State next week, and that's a big game."

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS

Young's Heisman Candidacy Alive And Well

Based in large part on his performance against Michigan in the 2005 Rose Bowl, Texas quarterback Vince Young came into this season touted as a Heisman Trophy hopeful.

Certainly no disrespect was meant, but Ohio State linebacker Bobby Carpenter stated the goal of the OSU defense was to derail Young's Heisman campaign, meaning the Buckeyes' chances for a win appeared solid if they shut down Young.

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, he left Columbus remaining a viable candidate.

Young completed 18 of 27 passes for 270 yards and two touchdowns, offsetting his two interceptions in the Longhorns' 25-22 win on Sept. 10.

"He made his plays," OSU cornerback Ashton Youboty said. "I don't think he hurt himself. Whatever other Heisman runner-ups are competing against him, he's wherever he was when he came here."

The Buckeyes were well aware Young was a threat on the ground after he scampered for 192 yards and four touchdowns against Michigan in the Rose Bowl, leading his team to a come-from-behind 38-37 victory and winning game MVP honors.

But while Young ran for 1,079 yards last season — averaging 89.9 a game — his arm remained suspect. He completed 59.2 percent of his passes but averaged just 12.5 yards per completion and 7.4 yards per attempt. In addition, he had nearly as many interceptions (11) as passing touchdowns (12).

"We really didn't think he could beat us throwing the ball, so we really dared him to throw the ball," strong safety Donte Whitner said.

Young took that dare as a challenge, and the end result was the Buckeyes' first nonconference loss at home since 1990. Along the way, he threw for 270 yards, just 19 shy of his per-

**INSIDE
THE DEFENSE
with
Eric Loughry**



JEFF BREHM

HAWK TAKES FLIGHT — Ohio State linebacker A.J. Hawk (47) leaps over a fallen Texas receiver after picking off Longhorns quarterback Vince Young in the second quarter. Hawk finished the night with a game-high 12 stops, a fumble recovery and a pick.

tackles and had an interception and a fumble recovery that both set up scores. "He threw the ball well on us when he needed to."

When he needed to most, at the end of the game and with his team trailing 22-16, Young threw extremely well.

Texas took over possession of the ball at its own 33-yard line after OSU kicker Josh Huston was wide right on a 50-yard attempt with 5:00 remaining in the game. A first-down pass interference call on cornerback Tyler Everett moved the ball to the Texas 48, but the Buckeyes held the Longhorns on their next two plays to just 4 yards.

But when faced with a third-and-6 at the OSU 48, Young hit freshman running back Jamaal Charles for a 9-yard gain to sustain the drive. Six plays later, with second-and-9 at the Buckeyes' 24, Young rolled left and tossed the ball to Limas Sweed, who had a step on Youboty down the left sideline. Safety Nate Salley arrived just after the ball in the end zone, but Sweed held on for what would prove to be the winning score.

"When we needed to stop them, we didn't," Hawk said. "That was the bottom line tonight."

Young, who has now directed five fourth-quarter come-from-behind touchdown drives during his career at Texas, said he always thought his team would come through.

"Basically, we've been through this, man, and I was walking down the sideline before that drive, telling the guys that we were going to get another chance," he said. "On the touchdown, Sweed just came off the ball right good and made a great play for us."

The Buckeyes were in a Cover-2 defense on the touchdown, meaning Youboty was responsible for Sweed off the line of scrimmage and then Salley was to pick up coverage downfield.

"It wasn't really a good reroute on my part," Youboty said. "I didn't buy the safety enough time to get over top, and (Young) just made a play."

Young said he was surprised that Youboty let Sweed go.

"Working all week, that was the first time I had seen them go to the go-to (receiver) all night," he said. "Basically,

sonal high set against Kansas in 2003.

"I think because of our scheme, as far as not trying to have him run, have him throw more, I think he actually hurt us a little bit throwing," OSU defensive end Jay Richardson said. "And we should have gotten a little more pressure, and that's on the front four."

Young added 76 rushing yards, with 32 of those coming on a run on the Longhorns' first drive to set up a field goal. Young was limited to just 22 yards after halftime, though, with the real damage being done through the air.

"Obviously he's a great runner, and tonight he showed he's a great passer," said OSU All-America linebacker A.J. Hawk, who led the Buckeyes with 12

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they went to the go-to and blitz, and dropped back in the zone. Again, Sweed made the play."

His receiver may have made the play — and the twisting catch while falling to the ground was a good one. But Young placed the ball perfectly just over Youboty and out of the reach of Salley.

"If it wasn't thrown there, there's no way (Sweed) was going to make that play," Salley said. "He threw it right where only his receiver could have got the ball, and Sweed made a great catch."

Salley credited Young's demeanor with the game on the line.

"He doesn't let himself get too emotional or too hyped up," Salley said. "He's always very relaxed and calm. You see that in all very good quarterbacks — especially when the pressure's on."

"You see that in him, and he did a great job of that today, staying cool and believing he was going to make the big play."

Overaggressive To Start

Prior to the game-winning score, the Texas offense had been held in check from most of the final three quarters. The first period was a different story, however, as the Longhorns took a 10-0 lead with scores on their first two possessions.

After the Buckeyes' offense went three-and-out on its first turn, Texas covered 64 yards — 52 on three runs by Young — in 11 plays and took a 3-0 lead on a 42-yard field goal from David Pino.

Young started Texas' next drive with a 33-yard completion to Billy Pittman, putting the ball at the Texas 49. The drive ended with a 5-yard touchdown

strike from Young to Pittman.

"Coming out in the first quarter, I felt our defense was just overaggressive," Youboty said. "We were trying to out-physical them and our overaggressiveness hurt us."

That eagerness to make a big play led to some from Young.

"The adjustment was just guys being where they're supposed to be and just carrying out their assignments, and not trying to overpursue, not trying to get a kill shot on him," Whitner said. "You have to leverage the ball and stay outside when you're supposed to be outside because Vince Young likes to bounce outside. That's what we started to do."

So there were not drastic alterations to the defense, and like the Michigan game last season when the Wolverines scored on their first two possessions but were then shut down for most of the game, the defense regrouped.

"The schemes stayed the same. We pretty much ran the same plays, but we just kind of got more confident," Salley said. "We relaxed a little bit."

When the defense settled in, it appeared Young and Texas were coming undone.

After OSU tied the game at 10, Texas' ensuing possession ended when Young threw an interception to Hawk. Pressured by defensive end Mike Kudla, Young threw the ball right to the OSU linebacker, who returned it 24 yards to the UT 18.

"I would have liked to take my interception back for a touchdown," Hawk said. "That would have helped us out a lot."

Instead, the Buckeyes settled for a

field goal from Huston. On the second play of the Longhorns' next possession, Richardson forced a fumble by running back Selvin Young and Hawk was there for the recovery at the Texas 30. Another field goal gave the Buckeyes a 16-10 lead.

Then, on the second play from scrimmage after halftime, Salley intercepted a pass from Young that had been tipped by Carpenter.

"I think we had a good rhythm going, especially getting those turnovers and getting pressure on Vince Young," Salley said. "That helped us out a lot."

Not enough, though.

"We pride ourselves on getting turnovers and winning the turnover margin," Whitner said. "Hardly ever in Ohio Stadium will you win the turnover margin and lose. We had field goals when we would have liked to have touchdowns, but that's the way it goes sometimes."

Texas has made a recent habit of losing the turnover battle but winning the war.

"We lost three turnovers and it's hard to win football games if you lose turnovers 3-0," said UT head coach Mack Brown, whose team actually lost the turnover battle 3-1. "But we did it 2-0 against Michigan in the Rose Bowl and 3-0 tonight."

Applying The Pressure

The Buckeyes kept Young and Texas relatively in check for the third quarter, save for a 63-yard pass to Pittman on a crossing route that set up a field goal, making the score 19-

16. The Longhorns' next two possessions yielded just 3 yards each, and nothing came out of a short 25-yard drive after that.

During that stretch, the Buckeyes were able to put some big hits on Young, but at 6-5, 233 pounds, he was able to absorb the blows.

"I thought we got a lot of hits on him," Richardson said. "In the third quarter, he was hurting a little bit."

He was knocked woozy for a couple of seconds in the late going and stumbled his way to the sideline. But he cleared his head and would come back to hurt OSU.

"We hit (Young) a couple of times pretty good where he was slow getting up," said Hawk, who tallied two of the Buckeyes' three sacks in the game. "But he's a good player and keeps coming back, and that's what makes good players like that. They come back and they know they're going to get hit and they keep playing."

The Longhorns finished with 382 total yards, a lot of it coming from Pittman, who had 130 yards and a touchdown on five receptions. Besides Young, though, Texas managed just 39 rushing yards between running backs Charles, Selvin Young and Henry Melton.

But in the end, it came down to Texas' final drive when Young made the play that won the game.

"I felt like our defense played 3 1/2 quarters of great football and allowed one drive to ruin the game," Richardson said.

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Tressel Will Wait To Assess QB Situation

Throughout the season, BSB is publishing excerpts of head coach Jim Tressel's postgame press conferences. Here is what he had to say following the loss to Texas.

Jim Tressel: "I think you have to start with the fact that our kids played their hearts out and played hard and fought hard and played against a very tough football team in Texas. Tip the cap — their kids played extremely hard."

"It was a well-fought football game. It was disappointing that we had so many opportunities and didn't cash in on enough to win. We've got great seniors and excellent leaders like the (co-captains) sitting here and we're going to have a good football team, but obviously

we have to be much more consistent than we were this evening."

Q. What led to the decision to go with Justin Zwick at quarterback on the final drive in the fourth quarter?

JT: "We had discussions throughout the course of the whole evening as to who would have opportunities, and I can't give you one particular reason for it. We just thought at that moment it was the best thing to do and I'm not exactly sure which drive you mean, but ... Oh, on the fumble? We just thought that was the way to go right at that point."

Q. Can you talk about the first quarter. Texas was up 10-0 and Troy Smith almost throws the interception, but you battled back down the field and eventu-

ally tied the game. Can you talk about the importance of that drive?

JT: "We knew that it was going to be a long battle. Our guys, even when we were down 10-0, we knew we were going to fight our way back in it and putting that drive together and scoring that touchdown, that gave us the proof that we needed that it indeed was going to happen."

"I thought throughout the whole course of the game there was a belief factor there that we were going to get it done, and we didn't come up with some of the plays to do it, but it wasn't because our kids didn't prepare and it wasn't because they didn't fight because they did both of those things."

Q. Did you ever feel like you had Vince Young figured out after the first quarter? It seemed at least from time to time after that you had him stymied.

JT: "Our guys did a good job mixing things up. They did a good job at times. I thought the fact that we caused the turnovers we did, if we would have done a better job of making touchdowns, it would have come out a different way."

"I thought our defense did a good job and fought like crazy and came up with things that we needed, such as field position and turnovers and we didn't get it done."

Q. Could you assess the play of the two quarterbacks separately?

JT: "Oh, probably not. You'd have to go back and watch the film. There were some times where we didn't do what we needed to do and there were other times where we did. We're a little bit too close to the situation without the luxury of watching it to be able to go back and (assess their performances) play by play."

Q. Is using both guys one of those things where if you win, it looks ingenious, and if you don't, people are going to second-guess it a lot more like many things in coaching?

JT: "I suppose like anything, when they work, it was a good idea, and when they didn't work, it wasn't. I think what you have to do, whenever you make decisions, is always go back and talk about why you made the decisions and where they were right and where they perhaps weren't right. Same thing when you call a play or when you call a blitz or whatever it happens to be, but that's what we do. We go back and work to get better — evaluate ourselves."

Q. Not to take anything away from Texas, but as you leave here tonight, is this a game that will haunt you? Do you believe that you let it get away, that this is one you should have won?

JT: "We think we're capable of winning every game. I don't know what that word 'haunt' means exactly, but it disappoints me because of these guys sitting at this table right now and those guys that are seniors that have done such a great job of getting us prepared for this game."

"We didn't come through for them. I don't know about getting haunted, but it's disappointing."

Q. How damaging is this loss? It is just one game, but Michigan lost today and Iowa lost, and it looked like the runway was clear. If you won this game, you could set sail. How do you look at it?

JT: "The runway is full of games. We didn't get this one done and that's the fact and we have to get after it next week. We have a lot we can accomplish, and I know our guys know that."

Q. Could you talk a little bit about



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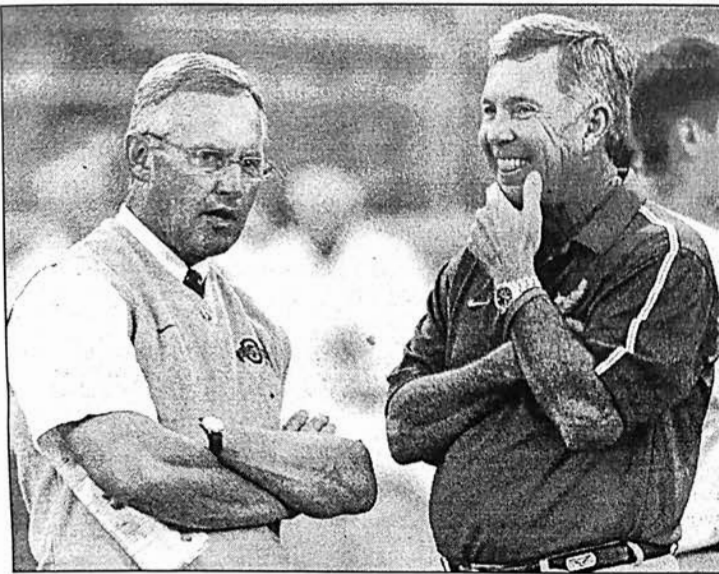
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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS



JEFF BREHM

WELCOME TO COLUMBUS — Head coaches Jim Tressel and Mack Brown have a brief pregame meeting at midfield. The game between the Buckeyes and the Longhorns was the first in history between the two college football powerhouses.

the factors that led to Ted Ginn Jr. not being a bigger factor in the game?

JT: "Oh, not exactly. I could sit here and I suppose we could put a film on. I can't think of any times where you're sitting there saying, 'Gosh, Ted was wide open' or whatever it happens to be. Ted's the guy who's going to go out there, he's going to run his route or run his block or do what he has to do. We'll see how he graded out. I think he did fairly well. We were looking for ways to get him the ball and Santonio (Holmes) and Tony (Gonzalez) and everyone else. It obviously wasn't by design we wanted him to have less, that's for sure."

Q: Talk about your defense — in particular A.J. Hawk and Nate Salley with the turnovers.

JT: "They were hitting like crazy. They were playing as hard as you could possibly play and I'm sure the guys from Texas will tell you it was a physical game. Both teams were physical. And

again, I tip my cap to Texas because they fought for 60 minutes, too.

"But Nate and A.J. and Bobby (Carpenter) and all those guys, they were playing their hearts out. You don't really know how much we appreciate that. They're extraordinary people."

Q: Do you think the last field-goal attempt by Josh Huston (a 50-yarder that sailed just wide) could have put the nail in them or not?

JT: "I think it would have been big, but it's like I told Josh, I'm not as disappointed with a miss there as I was with the fact that we didn't get him closer. I don't ever worry too much about what someone else didn't do. We didn't get him closer, and that's what is as disappointing to me as anything is."

"If we weren't going to score a touchdown, we needed to make it a lot closer field goal and we didn't, and I feel bad about that. Josh Huston should feel good about his performance tonight."

Q: Defensively, did you expect Vince Young to throw for 270-some odd yards? Wouldn't people have expected if Young was going to get that many yards, most of it would have come on the ground? Was that something you expected this week?

JT: "Well, I think when you have to put people into the box to stop his run, there are times when the pass (defense)

is going to be a little bit vulnerable, and they have good backs and that type of thing and so I thought (Young) did a good job throwing the ball.

"He's a good football player. He played hard, and you could see he was getting hit and beat up and kept coming back, and I just have a lot of respect for him. And his team won tonight."

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Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel's assessment of the game: "It's disappointing. We didn't get this done and that's the fact. We still have a lot we can accomplish, though, and I know our guys know that."

Texas head coach Mack Brown's assessment of the game: "You've got to give Ohio State credit. Jim had those guys ready to play. They played like he likes to play — they forced turnovers, they were great in their kicking games and they took it down to the wire."

Texas quarterback Vince Young on what was going through his mind as he prepared to embark on what would be the winning touchdown drive: "Just pitching in my man, do not turn the ball over, take care of the ball, just find the plays and take it a play at a time. We've got some great athletes on our side of the ball. Just in my head, just saying, 'Man, do not turn the ball over.' That was the only thing in my head."

OSU safety Nate Salley on Young's performance, which included 270 yards through the air and 76 more on the ground: "He's a very tough guy. Obviously, he can run well but he's also improved his throwing. He did a very good job on us."

Texas receiver Limas Sweed on his game-winning catch in the fourth quarter: "It was a great feel, you know, but it just goes back to practice. We do that every day in practice, so it really was nothing. Just like another day in practice."

Brown on the same subject: "It was a great catch but it was also a great read and throw. It wasn't the primary read and Vince took it all the way across the field and laid it up over the outside shoulder and made a tremendous pass."

Young on the comment attributed to OSU linebacker Bobby Carpenter that the Buckeyes' goal was to make sure the Texas QB was no longer a Heisman Trophy candidate after the game: "Trash talk always inspires me. That's where I'm from, just growing up, hearing things like that. But Carpenter knows and he did a great job playing a great game."

Young on whether the Ohio Stadium crowd was the loudest he had ever heard: "Oh, no. We've had worse. Playing in the Rose Bowl, playing at (Texas) A&M, Arkansas — it's always loud. We're used to it."



JEFF BREHM

STRETCHING IT OUT — Ohio State quarterback Justin Zwick takes off with the football during the Buckeyes' showdown with Texas. Zwick completed 9 of 15 passes for 66 yards and added 11 yards rushing.

OSU quarterback Troy Smith on his first action since the Michigan game last November: "It felt great. Decision-making is still a big part of my game that needs improvement. But other than that it felt great."

OSU quarterback Justin Zwick on sharing the positional duties with Smith: "I think it worked well for the most part. I think we both did some good things and we both did some things we'd like to have back. I think both of us would like to play, but it's not up to us. We have to keep working hard and see what happens."

OSU center Nick Mangold on the brewing quarterback controversy: "I think it's a luxury to have two. That's especially if, God forbid, any injury comes up and one of them goes down. Having two guys back there with their leadership — well, having two is always better than one."

OSU safety Donte Whitner on whether any teammate said anything to tight end Ryan Hamby after he dropped a sure touchdown pass in the third quarter: "Nobody says anything to him because nobody's perfect. Everybody makes mistakes and everybody made a mistake out there — at least one — tonight."

OSU kicker Josh Huston on his 50-yard miss after connecting on a school record-tying five field goals earlier in the game: "It wasn't anything where I had to change my form or do something different. I just didn't get through on it and pushed it a little right. Coach (Tressel) told me that he should've got us closer, but when it comes right down to it, I should have made it."

Brown on the performance of Huston: "Gosh, is he good. I know he's got a sixth year, and I can see why they gave him one."

OSU offensive lineman Rob Sims on Huston: "It is nice to know he is a reliable kicker and gives us points when we need him. He is proving himself as one of the top special teams players in the country. We just used him a little much tonight. We needed to turn at least one of those field goals into a touchdown."

Brown on his decision to go for the touchdown with a fourth-and-1 near the end of the game: "We thought we would score, but even if we didn't we felt like it would be very, very difficult for them to go 99 yards in 25 seconds with no timeouts. As for kicking a field goal, we thought about it but very honestly, I wasn't really excited about kicking off to them again."

Mangold on the missed red-zone opportunities for the Buckeyes: "We had so many opportunities, so many letdowns with turnovers and getting the ball from the defense and not putting it in the end zone. I definitely thought we could do things a lot better. It just kind of stings a little bit."

Brown on whether the victory would silence his critics about not being able to win the "big" games: "I don't think you ever silence critics anymore. Critics are critics because that's what they're paid for. What you do learn at Ohio State and Texas is you do your best and understand there will be critics. You're not perfect and you make mistakes, but I'm not worried about that anymore."

OSU receiver Anthony Gonzalez on his feelings after the game: "I don't think I've ever been so angry in my life. Some people may be sad or want to cry — I'm fired up. I'm so angry right now because I just feel like we didn't do what we had to do. I personally feel like I didn't do my part to help us win this game. I'm very angry right now."

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS

It Was Like A Michigan Game In September

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

They say everything is big in Texas, so while the mighty Longhorns were making their way to Columbus, it was only fitting that the Sept. 10 OSU-Texas game was being billed as one of the biggest ever at Ohio Stadium.

But how big is big?

In this case, the rabid OSU fan base, the school administration and the media prepared as if the answer to that question was "biggest ever."

With more than 1,000 credentialed media on hand, easily a record — even the biggest Michigan games, including the 2002 game with the BCS title game bid on the line, had a tad over 900 — and local and national coverage ratcheted to a new level, the game certainly drew as much hype as any in recent years.

Former OSU associate athletic director Archie Griffin helped push through the two-year contract with the University of Texas more than five years ago, sure that he had made a historical venture. He just didn't know how well received it would be.

"When we did it, we thought it would create a lot of national attention, but I would say that it has even exceeded my expectations," Griffin told BSB. "It's wild. The last game I can think of that had this much hype around it before the conference season was Notre Dame in 1995 and this even equals that and maybe more, especially when you consider it's the first time they've met."

Others such as ESPN's Kirk Herbstreit, like Griffin a former Buckeye, also pointed to the electricity generated by Notre Dame's much-anticipated visit in '95. However, the Irish were the No. 15 team in the country, not a No. 2 outfit playing at night before the entire nation.

ESPN's "College GameDay" crew stamped it as the top game of the day with their presence at an elaborate set on the south side of St. John Arena. Not to be outdone, big brother ABC, which broadcast the prime-time bonanza nationwide, erected a temporary set of its own inside the stadium next to the south stands for the normal studio team of John Saunders, Craig James and Aaron Taylor.

Outside the Horseshoe was a bustle and pregame buzz perhaps unsurpassed in the stadium's 84 years of existence. Up until game time, most tickets still were scalping for a firm \$300 apiece — and that was just to be up in the sway of the south stands. Promotions, bands, big screens, the sale of OSU gear, food, drink and merriment only added to the normal tailgate scene.

Promoters treated the day as if it were a Michigan game. Bands blared at several pregame bashes and the Hineygate entrance was cut off at 6 p.m. because of the volume of people whooping it up outside the Holiday Inn on the Lane. Another shindig at the Blackwell Inn where the team was staying stretched out past the lobby.

Just down Lane Avenue from the epicenter of the pregame frivolity was the Red-Hot Roundup, a Texas-sized barbecue/soiree at OSU's Schottenstein Center that was co-hosted by OSU president Karen Holbrook and Texas president



JEFF BREHM

PLENTY OF TIME FOR TAILGATING — Tailgating festivities got under way early for the Ohio State-Texas showdown as fans of the schools set up as early as 7 a.m. for the 8 p.m. kickoff. The atmosphere was charged up for the game, which was shown nationally by ABC and featured the ESPN "College GameDay" crew.

Larry Faulkner. Both schools' marching bands and mascots treated fans at the roundup, at which ABC play-by-play man Brent Musburger proclaimed the setting to be "the best of big-time college athletics."

Holbrook opened her address by pointing out that Michigan had already lost to Notre Dame, setting off a roar of approval. Among the special guests seated in the front row of the crowd of approximately 5,000 were OSU greats Griffin and Jack Nicklaus.

Back outside in the bright Ohio sun was a horde of Buckeye fans that appeared to number twice the size of Ohio Stadium's 100,000-plus capacity. The only other preconference game mass of humanity that even compared — at least since the arrival of No. 3 Oklahoma in 1977 — was the throng on hand for the '95 Notre Dame game. However, the Texas faithful outpointed the Irish fans of 10 years ago with the most visiting fans in and out of the stadium anyone could remember seeing.

In effect, burnt orange was seen in every vector around campus.

"Where are they all coming from?" one OSU backer asked rhetorically at the jammed-to-the-rafters Varsity Club.

Coverage of the game began while OSU's season-opening extermination of Miami (Ohio) was still warm. After mopping up the RedHawks, questions concerning the Longhorns came like flies to a Texas rib roast.

Coming out of their Jim Tressel-induced, monotone-quote comas, the players didn't even attempt to hide their giddiness. Neither did the normally staid Tressel, who fed right into the hype throughout the week.

"Everyone who has been a part of this game will remember this game for the rest of their lives because of the excitement around it and the atmosphere that will be there," the coach told reporters three days before the contest. "And to me, there's no price tag on that."

Tressel also reminded onlookers that the team's appearance in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl came with six weeks of hype.

"I think our guys have done a good job

of having only one week of it," he said.

ESPN Redeems Itself

After a year's hiatus from campus, "College GameDay" returned in force with an even more technically elaborate set and its familiar on-air trio of Chris Fowler, Lee Corso and Herbstreit.

After loads of analysis concerning the value of Texas quarterback Vince Young, OSU's QB shuttle and all the national implications, Corso donned the head of Brutus Buckeye while predicting an OSU victory to the delight of the thousands of fanatics huddled around the configuration.

It was a moment that no doubt won back some of the fans once jaded by various unsubstantiated claims of program wrongdoing on the network and in ESPN The Magazine. Herbstreit, though, said the show already had been greeted with open arms. He credited much of that turnaround to new athletic director Gene Smith, who just two weeks earlier had flown into network headquarters in Bristol, Conn., on his own. Smith met with vice president of programming and production Mark Shapiro and other ESPN executives to rebuild a bridge between the two entities.

Former AD Andy Geiger had publicly criticized the media conglomerate, even once stating that GameDay was no longer welcome on campus.

In an exclusive interview with BSB just hours before the Texas game, Herbstreit said he didn't detect any backlash from the show's return engagement.

"I think that's been kind of forgotten," he said. "I don't think people appreciated it (before). They let me know about it and they let ESPN know about it, but I think since Gene Smith has come in, he has really embraced the relationship with ESPN."

In making a 200-yard walk from the set to his hotel room, Herbstreit was accompanied by four police officers and besieged by autograph seekers. However, he said no extra security measures were put in place as compared to GameDay's visit two years ago.

"There's been none of that," he said. "There's really no reason to. This has always been not only one of my favorite stops — my favorite stop — but even Chris and Lee and the producers — everybody loves to come to Columbus."

"Despite a lot of the hype and buildup last year, we all as a show have always loved coming here because it's one of the best shows we do."

"People that don't live here really don't understand the impact. The other guys at ESPN who don't live here or haven't been here maybe they don't understand the severity of it. We understand that you should think, 'Wow, is everything OK?' They don't even think about it."

"But once Gene Smith embraced us and Jim Tressel embraced us and the entire athletics department embraced us, I felt good about it."

Herbstreit said he had little doubt the network would be on hand for the game, even before both teams were ranked in the top five of The Associated Press poll. As far as he was concerned, the matchup was bigger than the one with Notre Dame in 1995 or any other September game he could remember.

"I think the stakes are higher," he said. "You have Texas coming in at No. 2, Ohio State is at No. 4, it's early in the year. Then you throw in the individual superstars who are involved — the Heisman Trophy potentially is involved in this game. Vince Young is a legitimate candidate. If he performs well, he bolts to the top. If Teddy Ginn has a couple of punt returns or a couple of big touchdowns, he's going to vault to the top."

"I think with the potential and expectations of both teams, it adds to it. Then you throw in the history and the way Texas beat Michigan in the Rose Bowl, it makes it crazy."

I Need Tickets

"Crazy" equates to "money" in the volatile world of ticket scalping, and lucky ticket holders and professional brokers certainly tapped into the demand.

Some local advertisements back in the summer asked for four figures for a Texas ticket, and even as game day approached it was clearly a seller's market.

"It's been kind of a weird roller coaster," Ryan Forgacs of The Main Event said the day prior to the game. "We started out probably about 275 (dollars), I think it was, and then as we started selling tickets we'd hit 300, three and a quarter. We were selling so many, it went from 350 to 400 pretty quick. So from about Aug. 1 to Aug. 15, we were at about \$400 a ticket."

That fluctuated again when the university ticket office mailed out ducats, putting seeds more into circulation.

"When it's a big game like this everyone knows that the tickets are valuable, so a lot of people decide to sell them," Forgacs said. "Then the market starts to come down to reality, almost like a stock market."

Forgacs said the cheapest seats were selling for an even \$300 the day before the game. Good seats — say in A deck at about the 20-yard line — were more in the \$600 range.

"Honestly, this game is definitely more expensive than any game I've

OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS



CHRIS NDA



JEFF BREHM



CHRIS NDA

WHO WAS THERE? — Well-known faces at Ohio Stadium for the Texas game included, from left, Nick Lachey, Eddie George (talking with OSU athletic director Gene Smith) and New England Patriots star Mike Vrabel.

seen," he said.

Tressel said earlier in the week that he talked specifically to players about the dangers of scalping tickets — which is an NCAA violation — and even brought in some former players to recount dealing with such temptations.

By the reactions of some customers, Forgacs sometimes feels like he's handing out a gold ingot.

"I don't think I've ever seen anyone burst into tears but they get real excited," he said. "Sometimes they don't even want to hold them because they're afraid they're going to lose them. It's crazy."

Handiwork Of Archie & Andy

Of course, the other way to land tickets is through university channels such as joining the OSU Alumni Association, which now claims Griffin as its president.

Griffin said the association is enjoying a big year with enrollment but he doesn't believe he could attribute the spike to the public thirst for Texas tickets.

Still, it's interesting to note that OSU leaped to second in the nation in active enrollment (behind Penn State) in a year when the football team was playing the biggest nonconference home game in at least a decade, if not ever.

It also didn't hurt that the visit by the Longhorns — the first-ever in program history — was a modern novelty much like those by ranked foes UCLA in 1976, Oklahoma in '77, Florida State in '81 and, of course, Notre Dame in '95.

"Andy and I felt good about the matchup," Griffin said of the pursuit of the series with Texas. "I can't think of a reason why Ohio State has never played Texas before. It blows me away, to tell you the truth."

"I kind of think the fans deserve to see these types of games. This is good for college football. It's good for our kids to be able to travel to another place and experience a new area, which they'll get to do next year. And with the way we recruit nationally, I think it's good from that standpoint, too, to get even more exposure."

Some of the hype can be traced to the unwillingness of other big-name programs to place a potential time bomb on their September ledger. The Big 12, Southeastern Conference and Atlantic Coast Conference all have league title games that promise an automatic bid to a BCS bowl but greatly threaten to knock the loser of that game completely out of the championship picture. Therefore, most programs from those

leagues don't go big-game hunting early in the season.

Meanwhile, Michigan, Michigan State and Purdue are intent on main-

taining their agreements with Notre Dame, and U of M and Ohio State remain on a quest to find a big-time pre-conference opponent on a regular basis.

Jan. 2, 2001 — but fans kept "Texas, 2005" in their memory banks.

That was more than evident on a summery Saturday, Sept. 10.

OSU, for example, plays at Texas and at Washington the next two seasons then begins home-and-away series with USC (2008-09), Miami of Florida (2010-11), Cal (2012-13) and Virginia Tech (2014-15).

Discussions with Texas began in 1998. At the time, OSU was the No. 1 team in the country and the hierarchy believed John Cooper had cemented the program back in the elite of college football.

Things didn't work out as planned with Cooper — he was fired

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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

For OSU, There's Still So Much To Play For

I love big football games.

I love the anticipation. I love the electricity in the air on game day. And I especially love a big football game when it lives up to its billing like the game between Texas and Ohio State did.

As the game between the Buckeyes and Longhorns unfolded, I honestly thought of the Ohio State-Notre Dame game of 1935, the so-called "Game of the Century," and wondered if this is what it was like on that game day 70 years ago. Seventy years from now, will people recall the epic struggle between the 'Horns and Bucks as they recall the game between OSU and the Irish? Surely, this game will at least be up there with the dramatic Ohio State-Oklahoma clash of 1977.

What do all the above referenced games have in common?

They were nonconference clashes between traditional powers who seldom play each other. Sadly, these type of big games — unless they are in bowl settings — are going to become increasingly rare.

First of all, with the ever-escalating costs of running a wide-ranging athletic department, the powerhouse programs are becoming more and more reluctant to sign on for the home-and-home agreements necessary to schedule other powerhouses. That's giving up a nonleague payday.

It is more cost effective to take on the Youngstown States of the world, who are more than happy to travel to cities like Columbus, take their licking, collect their big paycheck that allows them to finance their ever-increasing athletic department costs, and then, as John Cooper used to say of his days taking Tulsa in to play Arkansas, "Get on the bus, get your boxed chicken dinner and go home."

There's another reason, however, that these marquee games are going to become more and more obsolete, and that's the rise of the BCS system and the obsession with determining a national champion. Much of the talk heading into the Texas-Ohio State game had to do with how the loser would most likely be eliminated from the national championship picture (though that is not necessarily the case).

It's almost as if for a school like Ohio State or Texas, if you are no longer playing for a shot at the title, it's a big let-down. With the cheapening of the non-championship bowl games — that I believe the BCS system has affected — there's little left to play for upon elimination. Teams will set up their nonconference slates to give themselves the best shot at making it to the season's final game.

In the days of the old bowl system, a loss to the Longhorns, while painful for the Buckeyes, would have little ultimate meaning for Ohio State: The goal of the season would still be to beat Michigan and go to the Rose Bowl. So, despite the loss, there would be plenty left to play for.

Even in today's environment, the 2005 Ohio State team still has plenty to play for. They still have the opportunity to avenge their embarrassing loss to Iowa from last season, they have a chance to beat Michigan for the fourth time in Jim Tressel's five years at Ohio State, reversing the trend from the

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Cooper era. And there's still a chance for the Buckeyes to win their first outright Big Ten championship since 1984, though the payoff for that championship would most likely be somewhat lessened this year because, as is the case every fourth season, the Rose Bowl is reserved for the national championship game.

There's still even a chance to go to the national championship game. Teams with one loss have frequently been participants. The Buckeyes showed against Texas — at least to me — that they have the potential to stand toe to toe with any team in the country.

The road to wherever Ohio State is headed this season starts Sept. 17 against San Diego State.

The Game Itself

It's hard to summarize a game of this magnitude with all its ebbs and flows even in an entire issue of BSB — though we are going to do our best — let alone this column. To condense it down to its simplest form, the Buckeyes settled for field goals too many times when touchdowns would have put the game away.

On a star power level, I thought the game proved to be a struggle between Texas QB Vince Young and A.J. Hawk and his fellow OSU linebackers. Young won the early battle, Hawk, Bobby Carpenter and company won the middle rounds, and Young came back to score the knockout late.

There were many big plays, but just as importantly many big mistakes by both sides throughout the contest — that's what makes a great football game. Those are well-documented throughout the paper. For the team that loses, however, there is always going to be second-guessing. Heck, when a team wins a close game such as this, there is frequently second-guessing.

I'm going to try to limit my Monday morning quarterbacking to just a couple of areas.

First of all, the Buckeyes need to settle on a quarterback. I can't believe that changing QBs several times in such a huge game is beneficial to a team's offensive continuity, and Ohio State's offense certainly struggled. Just go with the quarterback who gives you the best chance to win, and I believe that quarterback to be Troy Smith.

I know he made some mistakes, I know that he was at the controls several times when the Buckeyes failed to convert for touchdowns, and I know that Justin Zwick did some good things, including putting one right on the money for Ryan Hamby in the end zone that might have changed the outcome of the game if the tight end had held on.

But if you are going to go to that Tressel favorite — the field position game — as the coach appeared to do with the Buckeyes leading in the second half, I think Smith offers you more options as perhaps the team's best runner. And if you get the ball back with just 2:31 to play needing to score, again I believe Smith gives you the best chance for success.

None of this is a knock on Zwick. He's

proved to everyone that he is a good quarterback.

I lived through the Steve Bellisari years when Ohio State had a hard time putting one good quarterback on the field. There is something to be said for having depth at such an important position, and the Buckeyes seem to have that.

But settle on a starter, regardless of who it is.

Also, with OSU's defense outplaying its counterparts on the Buckeye offense and A.J. Trapasso having buried all four of his previous punts inside the Texas 20, I might have punted and played defense, rather than going for that 50-yard field goal with the risk of turning the ball over on the 33 after a miss. The worst case scenario would probably have been Trapasso kicking the ball in the end zone and the Longhorns still would have had 13 yards farther to drive, a key factor in the field position game. Of course if Josh Huston is about 12 inches more to the left on that kick, this is all moot.

As I said, I'm second-guessing. I'm sure many of you are, too. I'm sure Tressel, after so many years in the coaching business, is used to it.

For all the talk of all of OSU's weapons and all the different things we were expecting to possibly see from the Ohio State offense, it looks like we're also — in tight games at least — still going to see Tressel Ball. The play of punter Trapasso and kicker Huston — with his five field goals and strong attempt at that failed 50-yarder — bodes well in that department. And the defense also looks like it is of potentially championship caliber, which also plays to Tressel's strengths.

Let's hope in the next big game, we're not left second-guessing.

Puzzling Polls

As I write this, the polls following the OSU-Texas game have not come out. I'm assuming, though, that Ohio State will drop from its fourth-place ranking.

I have never understood if a No. 4 team plays the No. 2 team virtually even up why they would drop in the polls. Texas was supposed to be better than the Buckeyes. How does almost beating them making you a worse team than when you entered the game?

The Place To Be

Those of you who spent the entire day in the shadow of the stadium on Texas game day are probably not surprised that Ohio State was included on a recent USA Today list of the 10 best places to tailgate. The list was compiled by Dave Hollingsworth, who along with Steve Waite wrote "Rivalry Saturday: An Odyssey Inside College Football's Most Storied Games."

"Find a tailgate spot with a view of majestic Ohio Stadium," Hollingsworth suggests, "then attend Hineygate, a party that includes live music and big-screen TVs. Before kickoff, take in the Skull Session at St. John Arena, the best pregame college pep rally, featuring

OSU's marching band and the football team entering to a thunderous ovation."

Other hot spots listed included the University of Mississippi, Wisconsin, the Rose Bowl for UCLA games, Georgia, The Landing in Jacksonville for the Georgia-Florida game, West Point, Notre Dame, the Cotton Bowl for the Red River Shootout between Texas and Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

Checking Other Tailgates

If you would like to see how some of the other Big Ten schools tailgate but do it in a Buckeye environment, you might want to look into the OSU Alumni Association's Buckeye Bashes.

The Alumni Association will be having bashes at Penn State, Indiana, Minnesota (I love this one because it is on Kirby Puckett Place, outside the Metrodome) and Michigan this year.

Packages at Indiana and Minnesota are even available that include game tickets. Call (800) 862-5827 or (614) 292-2371 or look the association up on the web at ohiostatealumni.org for all the information.

Investing In Ginn

Though frequently bland in postgame interviews — he reverted to "We'll have to look at the film" after the Texas game — Tressel made an interesting analogy concerning Ted Ginn Jr. following the Miami game.

Tressel was asked about his lightning-fast athlete's penchant for moving laterally and trying to make moves, sometimes resulting in lost yardage. Tressel equated Ginn to risky stocks, the implication being that those stocks often lose money, but they are also the ones that can be the big gainers.

"I don't ever like to squash one's creativity," the coach said.

Does anyone besides me figure that Tressel's portfolio is loaded with blue chips and bonds rather than risky issues?



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