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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

November 25, 2006



TROY STORY

Buckeyes Outlast Michigan To Earn BCS Title Shot Behind More Smith Heroics

By ADAM JARDY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

If it looked like the grin Troy Smith was wearing the afternoon of Nov. 18 had been seen before, there's a good reason.

In the immediate aftermath of Ohio State's 34-20 victory over Notre Dame in the 2006 Fiesta Bowl, the quarterback addressed reporters from a dais during postgame interviews with a wide grin.

But there was a slight difference this time. After beating the Fighting Irish, Smith grinned at the possibility of returning to Arizona for the 2007 national championship game.

On Saturday, he was grinning because that possibility has become a reality after the Buckeyes' third straight victory over the Wolverines capped a perfect 12-0 regular season and clinched a berth in the BCS Championship Game Jan. 8 in Glendale, Ariz.

It was a singular event that clinched a trio of goals set by the team in the months following last year's 10-2 finish: win the Big Ten outright, play for the national championship and, of course, beat Michigan.

Missions accomplished.

"I'll probably be wearing this smile for the rest of this week," Smith said following the

game. "You've got to fight through, persevere, and the 2006 Ohio State Buckeyes did just that. Outright Big Ten champs, baby."

Smith and his teammates had a lot to grin about in Ohio Stadium on this Saturday. Facing an also-unbeaten Michigan team that lost a legend in former coach Bo Schembechler on the eve of the game, the Buckeyes utilized nearly every offensive weapon at their disposal and withstood the Wolverines' best shot at ruining OSU's title hopes.

But 503 total yards later, the Buckeyes' 42-39 victory put the finishing touches on the undefeated regular season for their 18 seniors. As has been the case in recent history against the Wolverines, it was Smith leading the charge.

After Michigan took the opening kickoff and marched 80 yards in seven plays for the opening score, the Buckeyes responded in kind with a methodical 14-play drive that knotted the score nearly halfway through the first quarter.

"The first thing that goes through my mind is, 'It's going to be a long day,'" Smith said. "We know that we're going to have to step up and do some things to help the team out, and when you get to a situation where the other team isn't going to back down, you've got to bring your lunch pail, you know what I mean?"

On the drive, OSU called 12 pass plays. Smith completed 9 of 11 passes for 69 yards,

Who Will Be OSU's Opponent?

Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff writer Jeff Svoboda analyzes Ohio State's reaction to winning the Big Ten, whom the team might play in the national championship game and the bowl picture in general on pages 18-19.

with the other playing resulting in a sack. The nine completions went to six different targets, and the tone had been set.

"I think it's just the idea that we're going to take what the defense gives us," said freshman wideout Brian Hartline, who finished with three catches for 21 yards. "And if they want to double up on Gonzo (Anthony Gonzalez) and Teddy (Ginn Jr.) and everyone else, then we're going to hit Robo (Brian Robiskie) and myself and we're going to move down the field on you. I think it's pretty hard to find enough DBs to cover us all."

At the half, Smith had thrown for 241 yards and three touchdowns on 21-of-26 passing. By the end of the game, eight different receivers had caught passes for the Buckeyes.

The game lived up to its hype as the "game of the century" as the Wolverines nearly rallied for the upset. After U-M quarterback Chad

Continued On Page 8

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No. 3	Sept. 23	No. 18	Feb. 11
No. 4	Sept. 30	No. 19	Feb. 18
No. 5	Oct. 7	No. 20	Feb. 25
No. 6	Oct. 14	No. 21	March 4
No. 7	Oct. 21	No. 22	March 11
No. 8	Oct. 28	No. 23	March 18
No. 9	Nov. 4	No. 24	April 1
No. 10	Nov. 11	No. 25	April 15
No. 11	Nov. 18	No. 26	April 29
No. 12	Nov. 25	No. 27	May
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OPINION**Smith, Tressel Have Come A Long Way**

Standing amid the sea of humanity that swarmed the Ohio Stadium field following Ohio State's victory over Michigan stood two men, locked in an embrace of mutual respect. Neither spoke a word while the throng exulted around them, instead allowing the moment to wash over them as each nodded his head in agreement.

Three and a half years ago, it would have been doubtful to see Jim Tressel and Troy Smith speaking to one another much less hugging in front of 105,708 of their closest friends.

But it is perhaps testament to the character of both men that they could find the best in one another for the good of the team and wind up putting the Buckeyes on the cusp of a second national championship in five years.

Back in 2004, when the team was going through the growing pains of what turned out to be an 8-4 season, Smith became one of the few team members ever to publicly criticize Tressel. The comments were born out of the frustration the quarterback felt after losing the battle for the starting job to Justin Zwick and then seeing precious little action during the first part of that season.

Although Smith and Tressel denied it at the time, rumors persist that they had a closed door meeting in which both men aired their problems with the other. Probably neither knew it at the time, but that meeting likely helped them reach a deeper understanding of one another than they ever had before.

A few weeks later, with the season dangerously close to coming undone, Zwick suffered a shoulder injury in the first half against Iowa. Smith entered the game and threw a touchdown pass during a particularly ugly 33-7 loss to the Hawkeyes, finishing a modest 8 for 12 in the passing department for 76 yards.

No one in Iowa City that afternoon realized what was happening, but the torch had definitely been passed. Since that day, the Buckeyes have won 27 of their last 30 games, and Smith has played a big part in that success.

The transformation from a running quarterback to a dual threat who runs only when necessary was completed against Michigan when Smith became the first OSU quarterback ever to throw for four touchdowns in the rivalry game and, in so doing, broke the school's single-season record for scoring passes with 30.

Unless there is a groundswell of support for some unknown candidate in the next two weeks, Smith will win the 2006 Heisman Trophy easily on the strengths of his individual statistics (which are excellent), his leadership skills (which are even better) and the fact that his team will play for the national championship.

And when Smith rises to accept the trophy from the Downtown Athletic Club and becomes the sixth Ohio State player to be so honored, he will likely spend some time in praise of his head coach, who helped him become the player he is today.

Lost in the euphoria of this undefeated season is the way Tressel has once again geared his overall philosophy to the talents of his roster.

When the Buckeyes were rolling toward 14 consecutive victories and the 2002 national championship, there was always the feeling that title run was a bit of a fluke. Every bounce, every call and every big play seemed to go Ohio State's way as the team pulled out nail-biting victory after nail-biting victory right up to the double-overtime upset of Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl.

In the wake of that came the Maurice Clarett fiasco and the charges that Tressel ran a corrupt, win-at-all-costs program and had even when he was winning Division I-AA national

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with
Mark Rea

championships at Youngstown State. Some in the national press continue to derisively refer to Tressel as "Cheaty McSweatervest" even as they are begging for increased access to his team.

In the face of that storm – which only got worse when Smith was suspended for two games for taking money from a booster – Tressel continued to do what he has always done. He did his best to shield his players from the controversy and continued to lure his kind of players to Columbus.

Once Smith returned from his hiatus and knocked off the rust from some six months of relative inactivity on the scout team, the Buckeyes have clicked on all cylinders. He has led the team to 19 consecutive victories overall and three in a row over Michigan and will become the first Ohio State quarterback to win the Heisman in the modern era.

How was all that accomplished? Smith immersed himself in Tressel's way of doing things. He blew off social gatherings to study film. He studied the playbook on his off days. He began to attend offensive staff meetings to gain a better understanding of what the Buckeyes were doing and why. And as he began to do those things, his teammates took note and began to do the same.

Therein lies Tressel's genius. He is a master at conveying his message to his players and then allowing it to ferment. Have you listened to Smith lately? If you closed your eyes, you could swear you're hearing the head coach speak rather than the quarterback.

But it has become a two-way street. Smith has learned so much that he has become another coach on Tressel's staff. When he suggested last year after the loss to Penn State that perhaps the team was being too conservative, Tressel assessed the situation and concluded that his quarterback was on to something.

Since that game, the Buckeyes have averaged an astounding 35.5 points and 436.1 total yards per outing. Over the course of their 19-game winning streak, they have produced 40 or more points eight times and gained at least 400 total yards on 15 occasions. Four times, they have gone over 500 yards, including 503 in the win over Michigan, which represented their biggest output against the Wolverines since a 512-yard effort in the 50-20 victory in 1961. The offensive explosion came against a team that had been ranked No. 3 in the country in total defense and No. 1 against the run.

Three years ago, Ohio State could not have imagined such an attack from the guy who was always perceived to have the philosophy that stressed defense and special teams play with offense merely an afterthought.

The fact of the matter is that Jim Tressel made Troy Smith a better player and that allowed the Buckeyes to go undefeated in 12 games with a roster that lost nine regulars from the starting defense and five first-round NFL draft picks overall.

Back in January 2001 when Tressel made his now-infamous "310 Days" speech, it was clear that he was intent on re-establishing Ohio State as one of the perennial powerhouses in college football. Mindful that this year's team still has one sizeable hurdle remaining in the Arizona desert in about 50 days, the feeling in

Columbus is that his mission has been accomplished.

Big Game, Big Plays

The old cliché states that big players make big plays in big games and Ohio State certainly had its share against Michigan. Here a just a few of the ones I noted:

- The first came early when old reliable Roy Hall caught three passes on the Buckeyes' first scoring march, including a 1-yard touchdown. With the Wolverines trying to disguise their coverages on Ted Ginn Jr. and Anthony Gonzalez, Hall was able to get free in the middle of the Michigan zone and then did what a senior should do – he made the grabs whenever the ball came his way.

- Special kudos to freshman tailback Chris Wells, who went from one foot in Tressel's doghouse two weeks ago to early star of the game with his 52-yard touchdown bolt. On that run, the 6-1, 225-pounder flashed the skills that make everyone believe he is the next great Ohio State running back. He powered out of the grasp of U-M linebacker Shawn Crable in the backfield before turning on the jets to outrace Michigan cornerback Brandon Harrison to the end zone. One more thing that made the run special – both Crable and Harrison are native Ohioans.

- As long as we're on the subject of big runs, how about Antonio Pittman's 56-yard gallop in the third quarter? It was a simple trap play, and when left guard Steve Rehring came over to block down on linebacker David Harris, Pittman was able to break the line of scrimmage and he was gone.

- You will never see a better play fake than the one Smith carried out on his second-quarter touchdown pass to Ginn. He held a handoff perfectly and then fired a strike to Ginn for a 39-yard score. Ginn did his job, too, getting a step on Michigan cornerback Leon Hall to make the catch.

- Much has been made of how good Ginn and Gonzalez are, but the fact is that Junior will likely forgo his senior season and Gonzo may entertain the thought of it as well. Whenever they go, they will be sorely missed, but the cupboard certainly won't be bare. Brian Hartline and Brian Robiskie were integral parts of the OSU passing attack, and "The Brian & Brian Show" combined for 10 receptions against the Wolverines for 110 yards and a touchdown.

- Ginn has made many big plays during his career, but none bigger than the onside kick recovery he made as the clock wound down to the two-minute mark.

Buckeye Leaves Redux

A few weeks ago, I asked the question about whether an Ohio State player had ever filled both sides of his helmet with buckeye leaves. The answer is yes, and according to equipment managers, it has been done several times in the Tressel era.

It takes around 85-90 of the stickers to fill both sides of the helmet, meaning several players had already accomplished the feat this year heading into the Michigan game. Before taking on the Wolverines, Ginn was leading the team with 96 followed closely by Gonzalez and Stan White Jr. at 95.

The practice of awarding the stickers began in 1968 with longtime trainer Ernie Biggs, and the size of the leaves and the criteria for earning them have changed over the years.

For example, while watching the 1969 OSU-Michigan game on ESPN Classic recently, I couldn't help noticing that quarterback Rex Kern's helmet sported only 15 buckeye leaves.

COVER STORY: TROY STORY

Tressel Focused On Seniors, Big Ten Title

Continued From Page 1

Henne capped an 11-play, 81-yard drive with a 16-yard touchdown pass to Tyler Ecker with 2:16 remaining in the game, the Wolverines had pulled to within three points and proceeded to line up for an onside kick attempt.

The kick went directly to Ginn, who caught it and fell to the ground. Three plays and a first down later, the clock had run out and the Buckeyes emerged with the victory.

"Without a doubt it was the most amazing game I've ever seen and been a part of," senior defensive end Jay Richardson said. "Being able to play my last game here at Ohio Stadium and leaving beating Michigan is something I'll never forget in my whole life. It's the biggest win I've

ever been a part of."

Most of the seniors were freshman redshirts on the last Ohio State team to go undefeated. The effects of the 2002 Buckeyes, whose 14-0 season stands as the most successful in college football history, are still being felt today by this team.

"We took so much from that team and just brought it to this team," junior tailback Antonio Pittman said. "(The seniors) already knew what it took to get here. They led us great this year."

Smith said this year's team has a familiar sense of invincibility.

"It was kind of like the same feel I had in 2002, with that team," he said. "I wasn't playing, but it just felt like every single time we'd lace the cleats up and put the shoulder pads on, we weren't going to lose. Our seniors made us feel like that,



PAYING THE PRICE - Michigan receiver Mario Manningham (86) gathered in a team-high six catches against Ohio State for 86 yards, but he absorbed several hard hits, including this one from OSU linebacker James Laurinaitis (33). (Photo by Jeff Brehm)

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COVER STORY: TROY STORY

and hopefully the underclassmen felt that way about us.”

To top it all off, the game was Senior Day for the Buckeyes. Each one of the team’s seniors came through the “Tunnel of Pride” prior to the game, embraced head coach Jim Tressel at the mouth of the tunnel and then met their parents along the end zone in the north end of the stadium.

“My best friend is (offensive lineman) T.J. Downing, and he’s a senior and it was Senior Day, so against a Michigan team like that, to send him out with a victory is about as good of a feeling as you can ever have,” junior offensive lineman Kirk Barton said.

But the road to this point has not been a smooth one for the Ohio State program. Suspensions and off-the-field incidents – as well as a three-game losing streak in 2004 – have helped temper the team since the 2003 double-overtime Fiesta Bowl victory over the University of Miami.

It turned around for good, however, after one of the most difficult losses in recent years. After the Buckeyes were edged by Texas in week two last season, Tressel elected to hitch his wagon to Smith, making the Cleveland Glenville alumnus his starting quarterback.

Twenty-two games later, Smith is 21-1 as a starter, the Buckeyes have won 19 straight games and they are now headed back to the national championship game.

Who their opponent might be remains to be seen, but for now the focus is on all the goals accomplished this season. First up was the team clinching its first outright Big Ten championship since 1984 – the year Smith was born.

Since then, the Buckeyes have been co-champions six times but have not been able to hold the title alone in 22 years.

“The No. 1 thing in our minds was our seniors and making sure that their last game in this building was a great memory and obviously would lead to the outright Big Ten championship,” Tressel said. “The seniors and the outright Big Ten championship, that was our focus.”

This season marks the 14th time the Buckeyes have finished their Big Ten season undefeated but is just the second time in the last 27 years. That fact was constantly hammered home by a sign in the team’s meeting room.

The sign reads “Outright Big Ten Champions” and has the year “1984” written below it.

“For five years, I came and I sat in our team meeting room and through countless hours of meetings,” Smith said. “This means everything in the world to me. This group of guys that I’m with is so special and deserves everything that we have.”

To get there, the Buckeyes had to navigate what was arguably the nation’s most difficult schedule during the month of September – a month that saw them host Penn State and play both Iowa and defending national champion Texas on the road at night.

Starting the year as the pre-season No. 1 team, OSU was taken down to the wire just once in a 17-10 road victory over Illinois. The three-point victory over Michigan is the Buckeyes’ narrowest margin of victory this season.

It was Smith who led the charge, cementing his place in the record books as a Michigan-killer in his third start against the Maize and Blue.

In three games against the Wolverines, Smith has averaged 350.4 yards of total offense. He has completed 69 of 101 pass-

es (68.3 percent) and thrown for seven touchdowns against one interception.

In doing so, he becomes the first OSU quarterback since William H.H. “Tippy” Dye – who played from 1934-36 – to win three straight games against Michigan.

True to form, however, Smith deflected the credit to his teammates.

“I’ve said it time and time again. It’s not me beating Michigan, it’s the team that is lined up and took the field every year that I got to start as quarterback that beat Michigan,” he said. “They’re also 3-0.”

Despite the satisfaction that comes from beating Michigan for the third year in a row, Barton said the team still has its biggest goal remaining to play for.

“It was a big game because it was Ohio State-Michigan,” he said. “They don’t call

it The Game for nothing, but you don’t get a ring for winning it. Well, I guess we do because it was for the Big Ten championship, but we want the national championship. We want the big ring.”

Let’s Do It Again?

Although the Buckeyes’ status as the top team in the country is cemented after their victory over the Wolverines, the identity of the team they might face in the national championship game remains up for speculation.

The possibility exists for a Big Ten rematch in Arizona. Michigan entered the game as the No. 2 team in the country, and its one loss now has come on the road at the hands of the No. 1 team by three points.

Not many Buckeyes seemed excited

about the possibility of playing their biggest rival again, however.

“It would negate us winning today,” sophomore cornerback Malcolm Jenkins said. “It would negate this whole game, I think, because it’s almost like a rematch. But if we have to play them again, we have to play them again.”

With the loss, Michigan joined the ranks of one-loss teams that included USC, Notre Dame, Rutgers, Florida, Arkansas and West Virginia.

None of those teams lost to the No. 1 team in the country, however.

“I think Michigan is a very deserving football team,” Tressel said. “There can’t be many teams in the nation better than Michigan.”

“But I’m not going to get into it. My opinion doesn’t have a (BCS) vote.”



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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

Buckeyes' Game Plan Works Against U-M

Ohio State came out with a game plan to spread out the Wolverine defense and keep a lid on Michigan's offense. As it turned out, the former proved easier than the latter in the Buckeyes' 42-39 win.

Ohio State coaches Jim Tressel and Jim Bollman put the ball in the hands of their Heisman Trophy candidate at quarterback, Troy Smith. While he kept the Wolverines off balance, he also got key big-play contributions from the two-headed tailback monster of Antonio Pittman and Chris Wells.

Meanwhile, as so often happens in these matchups, the game turned on the play in the trenches. Ohio State's offensive line took to heart the challenge of facing the country's top-ranked rushing defense, while the defensive front seven was asked to hold its own against Michigan's new zone run-blocking scheme.

Using The Heavy Artillery

For the first half, Smith was as good as it gets. The senior signal caller completed 21 of 26 passes for 241 yards and three touchdowns, including an expertly run two-minute drill to close the second quarter in which he hit on 8 of 9 passes for all 80 of the yards.

The Buckeyes went to the locker room with 320 total yards, which was just four short of setting a season high for yards given up by the Wolverines in an entire game.

The last drive of the half was a microcosm of how Ohio State attacked Michigan most of the day. The Buckeyes spread the Wolverines out and let Smith pick them apart. He was left alone in the backfield, and with five wide receivers at his disposal for the last five plays of the drive, he completed passes to four different teammates, including the caper in the end zone to Anthony Gonzalez that covered 8 yards.

When he was finished, Smith had his third 300-yard passing day and fourth game with four touchdown tosses on the season. His final numbers – 29 for 41 for 316 yards

– were despite a third-quarter drought that saw him complete just 1 of 7 passes and throw an interception.

Perhaps the most impressive stat of his day was that he completed at least one pass to eight different receivers.

Bollman said it was not difficult to figure out whom to feature in the game plan.

"When you've got a legitimate Heisman guy, one of the candidates, you've got to use him in a game like this," Bollman said. "No one had really run the ball on these guys all year. So it wasn't like you were going to come out there and all of a sudden ram the ball down their throats. So it was a deal of doing our offense, trying to mix it up."

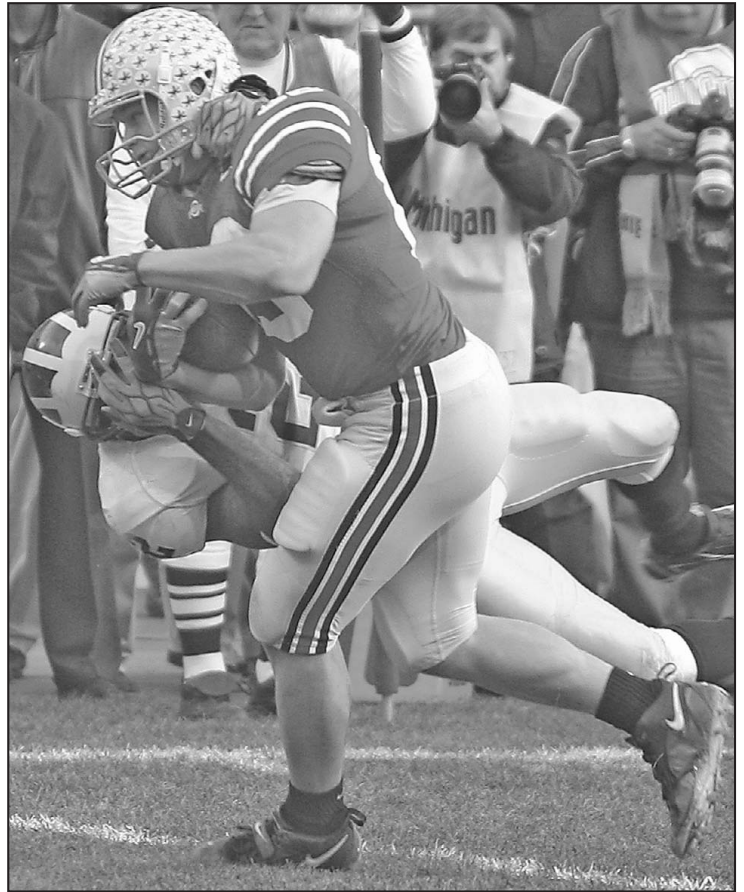
As for the excessive sharing of the ball, Bollman said, "None of that is orchestrated. You don't know where he's going to go with the ball. We always tell him to take what's there, and he does a great job of sitting in there and picking the open guys out a high percentage of the time."

To keep the Wolverines' pass rush, which came into the game with a Big Ten-best 40 sacks, off balance and help Smith utilize his weapons, Ohio State also incorporated a lot of plays that got him on the move, including rollouts and play-action bootlegs.

"As good as their defensive line was, if you sat back there and tried to do a lot of normal, drop-back passing, you were asking for it," Bollman said. "They had crunched everybody like that all year, so we didn't do very much of that. We did a little of it, but that's the one thing, when you spread it out like that, we think we have some pretty good wideouts so you can get some pretty good matchups. We know we're going to get blitzed, and Troy's going to get rid of the ball on time. It doesn't work perfectly all the time, but it works perfectly a lot of the times."

Brian Hartline, one of the extra receivers who saw extensive time in The Game for the first time, said the Buckeyes knew they might

INSIDE THE GAME with Marcus Hartman



HANGING ON – Ohio State fullback Stan White Jr. (89) hangs onto a reception while Michigan linebacker Shawn Crable (2) hangs onto White. It was one of 29 passes that Troy Smith completed for the Buckeyes during their 42-39 victory over the Wolverines. (Photo by Jeff Brehm)

have an advantage in matching up their fourth and fifth receivers against Michigan's extra defensive backs, especially when remembering Smith's ability to improvise.

"I think we realized there might be a

weakness there," Hartline said. "I think more of the weaknesses came with the DBs trying to prepare for Troy. I think the idea was that if we spread ourselves out and he can't find anybody, he's going to run. Either he's going to find somebody for 5 yards or he's going to run for 5 yards, and everything worked out."

Hartline caught three passes for 41 yards, while fellow backup Brian Robiskie snagged career highs of seven catches for 89 yards and a touchdown.

Ted Ginn Jr. led all players with eight catches for 104 yards and a touchdown on a play-action pass in the second quarter in which he outleapt a pair of Michigan defenders for the ball.

By spreading out the Wolverines, the Buckeyes were also able to create running lanes with which to gash the nation's No. 1 run defense. At no time was this better executed than on 50-plus-yard touchdown runs by Antonio Pittman and Chris Wells, both of which came at crucial points in the game.

Wells' run, which covered 52 yards, came in the second quarter and snapped a 7-all tie. Lined up in the shotgun next to Smith, a rarity for Wells, the burly freshman took a handoff on a draw, spun to avoid one defender in the backfield, then cut back up the middle and rumbled to the goal line. It eventually took three defenders to bring down Wells, but they weren't able to do so before he hit pay dirt.

As for Pittman, the junior broke through the right side of the line for a 56-yarder in the third quarter that stopped a run of 10 consecutive Michigan points and stretched Ohio

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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN



CREEPING UP – OSU linebacker James Laurinaitis (33) creeps toward the line of scrimmage during second-half action against Michigan. Laurinaitis led the Buckeyes with nine tackles as Ohio State beat the Wolverines and clinched a berth in the BCS National Championship Game. (Photo by Jeff Brehm)

State's lead back to double digits at 35-24. Sophomore Steve Rehring, pulling from his left guard spot, made the block that sprang Pittman, a trap on Butkus Award semifinalist linebacker David Harris.

Bollman said he thought both long runs were a result of Michigan moving its safeties outside to help cover the Buckeyes' wide receivers.

"(Wells) ended up making a great move at the line, and once he got through there, there was no safety in the middle of the field," he said.

But Ohio State was able to run the ball out of its more traditional I-formation as well, particularly as the game wore on and never better than on the game's final drive, when the Buckeyes ground out one last first down to run out the clock and preserve the win.

"When we were in two-receiver sets, we were running the ball at them, and if they didn't know it, I'd be shocked," Gonzalez said. "That was just our offensive line beating their defensive line and our running backs running through tackles."

On the game's final play, Pittman picked up 6 yards on a third-and-2, putting his team over 500 total yards for the day and into the national championship game.

"Our team wanted it more," Pittman said. "Our guys up front took it as a personal

challenge what they were saying all week and took it to heart. They came out here and blocked very well for me and Beanie and protected Troy."

The final carry, Pittman's 18th, also pushed Ohio State's rushing total for the day to 187 yards, or almost 160 more than Michigan was allowing per game coming into the contest.

Asked if the Wolverines' vaunted reputation was a motivator for his offensive linemen, Bollman replied, "Let's say it didn't harm them to get ready. That's for sure."

Right tackle Kirk Barton felt the Buckeyes had some new experiences for Michigan.

"We knew they really hadn't gone against

a great offensive line yet, and we felt like we were probably as good an offensive line as they'd gone against," he said. "So we felt like if we got after them it would be a little bit of a change for them because they hadn't really gone against a bunch of guys that block the way we do, and we were able to get after them today.

"We broke their hearts with those long runs because nobody had run the ball on them all year – allegedly – and then we show up and block them a little bit and get about 200 yards rushing on them."







Continued On Page 16

OSU

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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

Defense Did Enough To Push OSU To Win

Continued From Page 15

Defense Does What It Has To

Ohio State allowed a season-high 397 total yards, including 142 to Mike Hart, failed to force a turnover for the first time this season and allowed points for the first time after an opponent's takeaway.

While the numbers were anything but typical for the Ohio State defense, the unit still did what it had to do to pull out the victory.

Michigan quarterback Chad Henne finished a respectable 21 of 35 for 267 yards and two touchdowns, but he was sacked four times and pressured often. When the strong-armed junior had time to throw, he was effective at utilizing his plethora of weapons, but Ohio State was often able to disrupt him.

The Wolverines mounted four touchdown drives of 60 yards or more, but the nation's leaders in time of possession were never able to consistently hold onto the ball.

Ohio State finished with a modest time of possession advantage of less than a minute, but no Michigan opponent

had managed to come out on top in that stat in any of the Wolverines' first 11 games.

The 39 points were also a bit inflated, considering 10 came off turnovers committed inside the Ohio State 30.

"Putting our defense in a bind, that's not us," Bollman said. "We like to think of ourselves as a field-position outfit, too. Not that we're going to score every time we get the ball, but you can't do that to your defense."

Asked what it means to beat a team despite losing the turnover battle 3-0, Bollman had a frank reply.

"Well, I guess it says that we've got a pretty good football team," he said. "Usually that doesn't happen in this game, and the same thing happened last year. It shouldn't happen in this football game, and that's why I felt so bad for our defense a couple of times where we really put them in a bind."

Michigan took the opening kickoff and coolly drove 80 yards in five plays. Henne was 4 for 4 on the drive, including three completions for 56 yards to star wideout Mario Manningham. Hart capped the drive with a 1-yard run.

Manningham beat OSU corner Antonio Smith on all three opening-drive catches, prompting the Buckeyes to switch up how they covered the sophomore from Warren, Ohio.

That meant Malcolm Jenkins got the job of matching up with Manningham for much of the afternoon. Jenkins held him without a catch until Michigan's final drive, and in the meantime the Wolverine dropped at least two passes.

Jenkins came away impressed with his foe. Asked why Henne did not go to him often the rest of the game, Jenkins said, "He wasn't really open."

"We just played a little more Cover-2 and got a hit on (Manningham), tried to hit him and hold him up at the line a little bit more," Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Heacock said. "Early on, I think we had some young kids out there that got a little nervous early and a little bit out of character, trying to do too much, and the hype of the game might have gotten to us a little bit."

The Buckeyes played their base defense more than they had against any foe in the last month, as they predicted during the week that they would.

Senior linebacker John Kerr got a surprise start alongside James Laurinaitis and Curtis Terry. Kerr saw more time than he had perhaps all season and was part of a run defense that bent from time to time but was never broken as it held Michigan 60 yards below its season average.

With Ohio State playing Cover-2, the onus was put on the front seven to stop the running game without help from the safeties, who were often kept back off the line to protect against big pass plays over the top.

"Our D-line played pretty good, as they have all year," said Laurinaitis, who led the team with nine tackles. "We put a lot of pressure on Henne, and when he had time, he made plays."

Ends Jay Richardson and Lawrence Wilson both had sacks, as did tackle Joel Penton. Though many of their contributions were not reflected on the stat sheet, the Buckeye defensive linemen were a key part of stopping what Michigan wanted to do to move the ball.

"That's as physical as you'll ever see a contest," Richardson said. "We knew they were going to get some points. That's just how it is. The key was just trying not to give up any big plays and do not worry about what happened before. Worry about what's going on with the next play."

"Michigan does a good job of keeping you off balance because they have such a good running attack, but at the same time they have some great receivers."

He also pointed out that getting to Henne is particularly tough because Michigan rarely sent more than three receivers into patterns.

"It's like a brick wall back there because they've got all those offensive linemen and those tight ends and that back in there and it's like seven- or eight-man protection, so when you finally do get back there and make a play on them, it does feel pretty good," Richardson said.

Antonio Smith followed Laurinaitis with eight tackles, including a sack of Henne. Though he was victimized early in pass defense, Smith played his usual important role in run support.

"We just knew we had to stay calm, do the same things we'd been doing all year and just stay focused," he said. "I think the defense had some execution mistakes throughout the game, due to the emotions."

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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 42, Michigan 39

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel's assessment of the game: "I don't know how many yards we rushed for, but it seemed like it was OK, and it seemed like we threw it a good number, but again, I don't know what it was, but I thought - I thought we had a decent balance against a (Michigan) defense that was good. I was proud of the way our kids played and the way our coaches planned."

Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr's assessment of the game: "It was a great football game and I'm extremely proud of our team. I think we have a great football team. We have great kids. And I thought they competed as hard as anybody could have ever asked them to compete. Ohio State has a great football team, too, and give them credit."

OSU linebacker James Laurinaitis on whether the game lived up to his expectations: "I think it played out as one of the greatest games ever between 1 vs. 2 and Ohio State-Michigan. It's an honor to play in this game, and you feel even better to come out on top."

OSU receiver Anthony Gonzalez on the same subject: "It kind of lived up to its billing a little bit, I guess, which doesn't always happen. It's Ohio State and Michigan. What you see is what you get. It's always going to come down to a few plays at the end. It's usually the team that executes the best in the fourth quarter that's going to win, and we've been fortunate enough of late to be that team. It's something that you'll never, ever forget for the rest of your life, and I'm just honored to be a part of it."

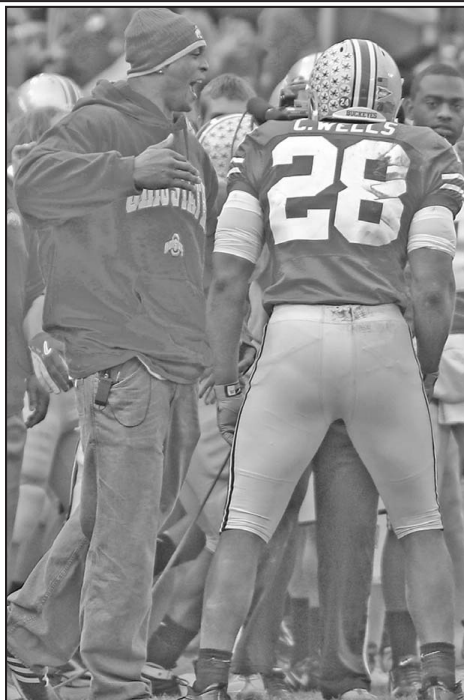
OSU tailback Chris Wells on his first thought as the game ended: "I thought, 'Oh, man. We're going to the national championship.' Before the game, though, I just broke down crying because I was so excited and just nervous to be a part of this. I was just so excited. Then, to get in the end zone like that - what a great feeling."

OSU quarterback Troy Smith on his third consecutive victory over Michigan: "Some things didn't go the way we wanted them to offensively, and constantly I was reminded by teammates that they follow me. They said, 'We pretty much react to the way you react.' And that meant everything in the world to me because no one on the sideline was going to let me get into a situation to where I was going to be down for a second. It had the implications of a huge game, but the national championship is something aside, something different than this. This is the Ohio State University-University of Michigan game, the biggest game in college football, and today the best team won."

Michigan quarterback Chad Henne on Smith: "He's definitely a great player. He proved that today. When there is pressure on him, he can get out of the pocket and make plays happen. So if he's leading the (Heisman Trophy) polls already, I'm sure he's going to get it. He's a heck of a player."

OSU offensive tackle Kirk Barton on the Buckeyes' running attack: "We just have great coaching. (Offensive coordinator) Jim Bollman never gets the credit he deserves, but he's a hell of a coach. Our offensive coaches had a great scheme today and we just executed it. Coach Tressel backed off us a little bit in practice this week. We had shorter practices and we were fresh today, and we were able to pound on 'em."

OSU tailback Antonio Pittman on his 56-yard



FIRED UP - Former Buckeye Eddie George (left) was among those on the sidelines waiting to congratulate tailback Chris Wells (28) after the freshman broke a 52-yard touchdown run in the second quarter against Michigan. (Photo by Jeff Brehm)

touchdown run in the third quarter: "The offensive line - those guys took care of business, something they were doing all day. They got me free past the linebacker, and once I got past the linebacker, I knew it was just split the safety and go."

Barton on the play of Pittman, who became the first player this season to rush for 100 or more yards against Michigan: "If he's not All-Big Ten this year - I said it last year, when he scored that winning touchdown (against Michigan) and they gave it to Albert Young and Tony Hunt, a bunch of no-names. Pitt's the best back in the Big Ten without question. He's probably one of the two best in the nation, and since (Oklahoma's) Adrian Peterson is hurt, he is probably No. 1 right now. I hope he gets his due, finally, because he's been carrying us for a while."

Michigan tailback Mike Hart, who had a game-high 142 yards and three touchdowns, on the Ohio State defense: "Their defense played good, but they're not as good as people thought, I guess I could say. We knew we were going to be able to run the ball, but we didn't put enough points on the board. There's nothing special about that defense."

Carr on what cost his team the victory: "I think we made too many mistakes. We gave up too many big plays. Anytime you give up two long runs for touchdowns and a long pass, it's going to be hard to beat anybody, but much less a team like we played today. Big plays simply were the biggest factor in the game from my standpoint."

OSU defensive coordinator Jim Heacock on Michigan's balanced offensive attack: "We had a few sacks, but it's hard to play the run and then

go rush the quarterback. They're a play-action pass team and what they do is very good. In the end, though, we made enough plays to get the win. That's the bottom line."

Bollman on the high-scoring affair that was supposed to have been a defensive battle: "It's unusual, isn't it? There's been a couple like that in the past, but not many, especially as good as the two defenses are."

Barton on whether he felt the game lived up to its hype: "Oh, yeah. I mean, did you watch it? I'll be going in to watch film tomorrow and this thing will already be on ESPN Classic."

OSU defensive tackle Joel Penton on recording a sack in his final game in Ohio Stadium: "It was kind of a surreal thing. Once you're in the game and into the moment, you're concentrating so hard and you forget all the surroundings. Then, all of a sudden, their quarterback is on the ground and you realize, 'Hey, I did that.' It was very exciting."

OSU receiver Roy Hall on what it means to be going to the national championship game: "It feels great. I'm proud of all our seniors who came in on a team that won the national championship, and now we're going back and this is our team. It just really makes you proud."

Tressel on his team's senior leadership: "Our seniors - what a special bunch of guys that just worked and worked and led and led. Everyone told them beginning last spring that we couldn't be a great team because we lost so many great players, but these seniors just decided that they were going to do whatever it took to lead a football team to reach its potential. Anything we've ever asked, they've done."

OSU receiver Brian Hartline on what sets his team apart: "It's the team aspect. This is a team and that's the biggest thing you learn as a younger player. When you come out of high school, it's all about you - what you did in high school, where you're going to visit, where you're going to sign. Once you get here, that stuff all goes away. The leadership on this team demands it, and it's a great feeling just to be part of that."

Fiesta Bowl board chairman Ellie Ziegler on the chances of an OSU-Michigan rematch at the BCS title game: "That's for the BCS to decide, for the polls and the voters. Our job is just to stage the best matchup in the state of Arizona at our new facility in Glendale. The Fiesta Bowl is very proud to be the first to host the double-hosting model, and we're really gratified that we were asked to do that."

Carr on the same subject: "Well, that's not in my control, and I really don't have any thoughts that I want to - I don't have any thoughts right now on that."

OSU defensive end Jay Richardson on the team he'd like to square off against in the title game: "I hope it's USC. I've always kind of wanted to play them because I've always heard so much about them and never got a chance to play them."

Smith, with the last word on the same subject: "I really don't care. I'm not really thinking about that right now. I just got finished winning an outright Big Ten championship against the University of Michigan. I just want to rejoice and be happy and celebrate with my teammates."

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Ohio State Countered Every Michigan Move

There's a certain irony in the fact that the Ohio State-Michigan game played upon the death of legendary coach Bo Schembechler was a 42-39 offensive outburst.

In the storied "Ten-Year War" between Schembechler and OSU's legendary Woody Hayes, the teams never combined to score more than 36 points – three less than the losers' total in the 2006 game – and that 36-point outburst came in the first game between the two coaching titans, Michigan's well-chronicled 24-12 upset of the Buckeyes in 1969.

That game in '69 helped set the tone for the Hayes-Schembechler rivalry, which helped ramp up an already intense rivalry to what it is today. While defense was the order of the day in those great games, offense took center stage in this latest, and perhaps biggest, edition of The Game.

Not only did the two teams combine for 81 points, but they also marched up and down the field to the tune of 890 yards of total offense, with an un-Ohio State-Michigan-like 583 of those yards coming through the air.

Michigan quarterback Chad Henne had a strong day, completing 21 of 35 passes for 267 yards and two touchdowns. Wolverine tailback Mike Hart was as good as advertised, racking up 142 yards and three touchdowns on 23 carries.

But the Buckeyes had a counter for everything the Wolverines produced. Although Hart may have had the best overall day of any of the running backs on the field, Ohio State countered with long TD bursts of 52 yards by Chris Wells and 56 by Antonio Pittman. And while Henne was brilliant at times, he was one-upped by Troy Smith, arguably the greatest quarterback in OSU-Michigan history.

The senior from Cleveland Glenville threw for 316 yards and four touchdowns, and in a game of relentless pass rushes, he was sacked just once to four times for Henne. Smith, who gained 328 total yards, now has the three highest marks in total offense against Michigan in OSU annals.

The thing that most impressed me about Smith's play this time against Michigan, aside from his toughness, was the way he spread the ball around. He hit eight different receivers, including five for three or more receptions, and four different Buckeye receivers caught Smith's touchdown throws. On Ohio State's first scoring drive, seldom-used senior Roy Hall was the featured target, converting a third-and-16 with a 27-yard reception and pulling in the touchdown pass.

Hall, who had all three of his receptions on that 14-play, 69-yard drive, seemed to heed OSU head coach Jim Tressel's credos of seniors saving their best for their final season and playing your best in the Michigan game.

By the time the game was over, Ted Ginn Jr., Anthony Gonzalez and Brian Robiskie would all shine in the Buckeye passing game, and each would add touchdowns to go along with Hall's.

The victory, on such a monumental stage, surely sewed up the Heisman Trophy for Smith. Even if Notre Dame's Brady Quinn ends up with comparable stats to Smith, the fact that the OSU quarterback twice led his team to victory over the No. 2 team in the country should be the deciding factor. In those games against Texas and the Wolverines, Smith was a combined 46 of 67 passing for a 68.7 percent completion mark,

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

good for 585 yards and six touchdowns against just one interception. And those are numbers against two pretty good defenses.

Speaking of good defenses, don't discount the play of the Ohio State defense just because of the number of points and yards posted by the Wolverines.

After the Buckeyes let Michigan march 80 yards almost unmolested on its first drive of the game for a 7-0 lead, the defense checked the Wolverines on their next three drives, allowing them just 46 total yards. In the meantime, the Buckeyes were building a 21-7 lead which forced Michigan to play catch-up the rest of the way – an important factor in the outcome.

Another key stand for the OSU defense came in the third quarter when Smith threw an interception and gave the Wolverines great field position at the Buckeye 25-yard line. Michigan could advance only to the 22, settling for a field goal, the first points allowed by Ohio State off a turnover all season. A touchdown there might have changed the outcome of what was ultimately a three-point Buckeye victory.

On Michigan's next drive, the Wolverines drove all the way to the OSU 33 before the Buckeyes forced them to turn the ball over on downs, again keeping critical points off the board.

The Ohio State defense also did a better job of limiting the big plays than its Michigan counterparts. The Buckeyes had four players – Pittman, Wells, Ginn and Robiskie – who had gains of 39 yards or more in the game, with three of those long gains going for scores. The longest play for Michigan, on the other hand, went for just 37 yards – a touchdown reception by Adrian Arrington.

The ability to limit the big play was also critical for OSU on Michigan's final scoring drive. Henne was able to march the Wolverines 81 yards for the score, but the Buckeye defense made them take 11 plays to do so, with the longest play covering 19 yards. The drive ate up over three minutes of valuable time, and once Michigan failed to recover the onside kick, there was no time left for the Wolverines to finish off the comeback.

It didn't look like it was going to do so, as Ohio State jumped out to two different 14 point leads in the first half, but this was a game that truly lived up to its billing. It was a fitting battle for the first time these bitter rivals entered the game ranked Nos. 1 and 2.

It might have been a little too high-scoring for Schembechler's taste, but both he and his mentor Hayes would have been proud of the effort and grit of both teams.

The Real MVP

Way back in the BSB football preview, I noted in this space that one of the keys to this season for Ohio State would be whether Tressel, ostensibly the team's offensive coordinator, would let his Buckeye offense do what it could do best.

"A couple of years back, I'm not sure the coach and his offensive partners realized what they had in Smith, Ginn and company, and I certainly don't think they had a clue as to how to best use these guys," I noted in the

August issue. "They've had a couple of years to figure that out now, and it's time to let the Buckeyes loose."

Let the Buckeyes loose is pretty much what Tressel and company did this season, and the result was an 11-0 record coming into the Michigan game. There was always a chance, however, that Tressel would revert to his early Ohio State offensive shell against the Wolverines.

Any fears of that were allayed when the Buckeyes came out firing on their first drive, calling 12 pass plays on a 14-play scoring march to knot the game at 7. The offensive fireworks were on, and by using all of its weapons, Ohio State was able to outscore the Wolverines, who also lit up the scoreboard.

In Tressel's first Michigan game, the now famous 26-20 victory in 2001, Craig Krenzel and the Buckeyes threw just 18 passes, completing 11 for 118 yards and a touchdown. Ohio State ran the ball 50 times for 137 yards, as compared to just 29 rushes this time out, though the Buckeyes gained 187 ground yards. Did the pass set up the run this year?

When Tressel first arrived in Columbus and everyone was fretting over his bland offense, a longtime Tressel watcher from Youngstown assured me that the coach was famous for adapting his teams – especially his offenses – to the talent at hand. Two trips to the national championship game later, I guess the guy from Youngstown was right.

I Don't Have A Vote, But . . .

Here is something that has always bugged me. In fact, I'm sure I've mentioned it in this space before.

Let's say the No. 1 college football team in the country plays the No. 2 team. The No. 1 team wins, but it's a hard-fought, really close game – maybe a 42-39 victory just for argument's sake. Why does the No. 2 team drop in the polls? You played the team ahead of you in the polls virtually even up. How does that suddenly make the teams behind you better?

This is obviously relevant right now because of the discussion about whether Ohio State might – or should – play Michigan again in the BCS National Championship Game. My thought is that a formula was established before the season to determine the participants. If Ohio State and Michigan are the top two teams, as determined by that formula, than so be it. There are your combatants.

I'm not advocating a rematch necessarily. In fact, I think it would somehow take

away from the greatest rivalry in college football. The teams are meant to meet in the last regular-season game each year. The postseason destination of the winner of The Game is important, but just one piece of this proud rivalry puzzle. Any scores to be settled should be settled in Ann Arbor at the end of next season, not necessarily in Glendale.

However, if Michigan is the second-best team in the country when all is said and done, the Wolverines should be headed to Glendale as well as the Buckeyes. I'm concerned that some of the poll voters, who play a significant role in the BCS formula, are going to downgrade Michigan because they don't want a rematch. They should vote on who they feel are the best teams in the nation, not in an attempt to set up a preferred matchup.

Remarkably, in the first BCS ranking after the OSU-Michigan game, the Wolverines were still No. 2.

Regardless of who the opponent is, however, Ohio State has already had its ticket to Arizona punched. For Buckeye fans, that's all that matters.

Arizona, Here We Come

Speaking of tickets to Arizona, just a reminder that there are plenty of packages to the big game offered in the pages of this issue of BSB.

We strongly suggest that you shop around and find the package that is right for you. We also warn you to expect some sticker shock. This trip won't be cheap, but if you want to go to the championship game, packages are often the way to go because they include all components, including tickets, which can be very difficult to come by.

Please let us know if you have any problems with any of the travel agents or ticket brokers who advertise with us, as frequent complaints will deter us from accepting future advertising.

Last Weekly Issue

Don't forget that this is the last weekly issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin for 2006, our 25th anniversary year. We will be back with our pre-bowl issue in mid-December and return to the weekly schedule in January, immediately following the national championship game.

With football recruiting heating up and only one issue of BSB in the next month and a half, this is a great time to sign up for BuckeyeSports.com, our Internet site which is updated several times daily.

You won't miss anything Buckeye if you sign up today. Remember to type in the word "Launch" when prompted for a gift or promotional code to receive a year of BuckeyeSports.com – normally a \$99.95 value – for just \$25.

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