

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 34, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 24, 2015



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SONNY BROCKWAY

BACK ON TOP – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer (center) raises the new championship trophy after his Buckeyes beat Oregon in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship.

By **JEFF SVOBODA**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Urban Meyer is always the man with the plan. There's the plan to win, his in-game philosophy on how to beat opponents. The components are no different than what many other teams teach – play great defense, score in the red zone, win the turnover battle and win the kicking game – but Meyer's focus on those four aspects of the game drives much of what the Buckeyes do.

But there are plenty of other plans at play as the coach goes about his annual quest to mold his team into a championship unit. There's the plan put in place to make sure the players are in peak physical condition spearheaded by strength and conditioning coach Mickey Marotti, a total philosophy that takes into account hydration, nutrition and physical conditioning.

There's the plan to make sure the Buckeyes grow in more than just a football sense, a series of offseason workshops each year that include networking, résumé building and a speaker series designed to mold the team off the field as much as on it.

Add it all up and Meyer believes in his methods, believes that the totality of what he teaches can lead to great things.

"Something he's said since he's been here is the plan is infallible," Ohio State senior co-captain Michael Bennett said. "When he came in, the first thing he said was, 'The plan is infallible and if you follow the plan that I have in place, it is going to work.'"

"Each year, we have believed in that plan more and more and more. This year is the first year that we've gotten every guy to be like, 'Just tell us what to do, we'll go do it.'"

It helped that Meyer had the rings to throw on the table to back up his claim. He began his coaching career in 2001 and won 17 games in two seasons

Continued On Page 10

National Championship Coverage

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 72-page championship recap is overflowing with information about Ohio State's College Football Playoff crown as well as features, news and updates on all of OSU athletics, including:

- Full coverage of the CFP National Championship win against Oregon including a game recap, features about the offensive and defensive performances, player and coach quotes, game analysis and more
- A recap of and stats from the Buckeyes' Sugar Bowl comeback win vs. SEC foe Alabama
- Features on the excellent postseason runs of quarterback Cardale Jones and running back Ezekiel Elliott
- Stories on what the title win meant to Ohio State's seniors as well as former Buckeye players
- A feature on what the win might do for Ohio State recruiting in the future under Urban Meyer
- Reports from the men's and women's basketball and men's hockey programs
- Plus all of BSB's regular briefs, columns and features

OPINION

Magical Season Will Never Be Forgotten

I have had the great pleasure of covering the Ohio State football team for more years than I care to remember, but I have never borne witness to a more incredible, implausible, unbelievable chain of events than what culminated Jan. 12 with the sixth consensus national championship in program history.

Teams aren't supposed to lose their three-year starting quarterback less than two weeks before the start of the regular season and win a national championship.

Teams aren't supposed to lay a huge egg in front of a nationwide TV audience in early September and win a national championship.

Teams that are forced to start a third-string quarterback late in the season aren't supposed to win a national championship.

And yet, Ohio State overcame all of that adversity and then some, and still somehow found itself on the championship podium following a 42-20 vanquishing of second-ranked Oregon – installed by the oddsmakers as a seven-point favorite – following the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship.

Throughout this magical season, I have often been asked to put the title chase into some kind of historical perspective, and I'm not sure I can.

National championship seasons are so unique to themselves that each is extraordinary in its own way. That is especially true at Ohio State, where most of its titles are ancient history to many of today's fans. Championships won in the 1940s, '50s and '60s helped shape the program but were accomplished so long ago that it makes the recent titles much more special.

Still, it's difficult to compare the 2002 and 2014 teams of destiny.

The 2002 national championship run was such a wild ride with all of its close games and fantastic finishes, but that team of Buckeyes didn't experience the kind of gut punches as this year's squad. Imagine, if you can, that championship team of a dozen years ago losing Craig Krenzel just before the season and then backup QB Scott McMullen early in the fourth quarter of the Michigan game. It is exceedingly doubtful that Ohio State could have handled defending national champion Miami (Fla.) in the BCS title game much less beaten the Hurricanes in double overtime.

I know there are teams that have ridden backup quarterbacks to championships, but I know of no team that has placed its fate in the hands of a third-stringer under center and even come within a whiff of winning a title.

What Cardale Jones was able to do by leading the Buckeyes to victories against Wisconsin, Alabama and Oregon was nothing short of remarkable. But the fact that he was even in position to excel must be credited to Urban Meyer and his coaching staff.

When Meyer was hired at Ohio State shortly after the end of the disastrous 2011 season, no one could have known he would bring a national championship to the school just three years later.

Think about it for a second. Where the program was the day Meyer was introduced as the new head coach and where the program is today can't be measured in conventional terms. The Buckeyes were mired in the wake of an NCAA investigation that had cost former head coach Jim Tressel his job and led to a 6-7 season, the most losses the team had experienced in one season in more than a century.

Some programs take years, even decades, to return to elite status following those kinds of tribulations. But Meyer responded with a perfect season during his first year, a trip to

the Big Ten Championship Game in his second, and a national championship in his third.

What can he possibly do for an encore? Placing the bar of excellence incredibly high is sometimes a difficult cross to bear. After winning the national title in only his second season in Columbus, Tressel led the Buckeyes to two more title-game appearances but was never again able to raise the championship trophy.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

But the feeling seems different this time. Although this season was so special because of all the mountains Ohio State had to climb, you get the idea that Meyer expects his team to contend for the championship next year and the year after that and the year after that. Beaming as he basked in the championship glow, the coach suggested how sweet it would be to make a return trip to next year's title game. That theme continued throughout the postgame comments from players and coaches inside the OSU locker room.

And why not? With a loaded roster that returns the likes of Ezekiel Elliott, Joey Bosa, Jalin Marshall, Michael Thomas, four-fifths of the offensive line, eight defensive starters, both kicking specialists and perhaps three star quarterbacks, why wouldn't Ohio State be favored to defend its national championship at next year's title game?

Of course, back-to-back undisputed national championships have been accomplished only twice in the last 35 seasons, and the Buckeyes have never in their long history won two in a row. Then again, Meyer seems to specialize in doing the impossible.

QB Times Three

When the Buckeyes open fall camp, they could have a two-time Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, the fifth-place finisher in the 2014 Heisman Trophy voting and the offensive MVP of the Big Ten Championship Game playing quarterback.

Of course, those accolades were won by three different players, making it an understatement that the quarterback conundrum Meyer could face next fall is unique.

No one knows what transpired between the time Jones called a press conference at his high school to announce a self-described "life-altering decision," and then told the world he was going to return to Ohio State for the 2015 season. To my knowledge, only Peyton Manning and Mike Doss have scheduled press conferences to announce they were staying in school. The other 99.9 percent of those events typically signify the end of a college career and the beginning of the pursuit of NFL stardom.

Jones and his return will have a significant impact on the Buckeyes in general, but a greater impact upon Braxton Miller in particular.

Those who naturally assume Miller will transfer to Oregon, LSU, Houston or some other quarterback-starved program have apparently forgotten he will not be medically cleared to begin throwing again until early summer. Presumably, it will take some additional time after Miller resumes normal football activities – perhaps as long as another month – to know if his surgically repaired shoulder has fully healed.

While questions surround Miller and his

availability moving forward, Jones will have taken virtually every first-team snap at OSU spring practice while Meyer and new quarterbacks coach Tim Beck mold their 6-5, 250-pound man-child from raw gunslinger to polished product. In the meantime, J.T. Barrett will continue to rehab his ankle injury, making the signs seem clear to me that the Buckeyes have begun their transition to the Jones-Barrett (or Barrett-Jones) era at quarterback.

So, where does that leave Miller? Apparently in a state of limbo, but only if he wishes to remain a quarterback. Anyone can plainly see his athletic talents as a playmaker, but those same observers also know Miller has always been a flawed quarterback in terms of accurately throwing the football, and there is no place in the NFL for flawed quarterbacks with limited accuracy. If you don't believe me, ask Tim Tebow or Terrelle Pryor.

On the other hand, the NFL is in almost constant pursuit of athletic playmakers. Hines Ward, Kordell Stewart, Antwaan Randle El, Josh Cribbs and Denard Robinson are proof positive that former quarterbacks can excel in the NFL if they are willing to parlay their athleticism into playing other positions.

If Miller is willing to become a more versatile player, becoming the kind of hybrid who can line up in the backfield, in the slot, out wide and, yes, even behind center at times, he can become even more lethal to opposing defenses than he has been in the past.

And if he is willing to assume that kind of role on the field, it seems to me the best course of action for him is to return to Ohio State in the fall.

And Finally

- Obviously, any running back is only as good as his offensive line, and the Ohio State line improved tremendously over the course of the 2014 season. But Ezekiel Elliott is one of those game-changing running backs who actually makes his offensive line look better. How good is Elliott? He finished the season with three consecutive games of more than 200 yards rushing, and no other player in program history – not Archie Griffin, not Keith Byars, not Eddie George – has ever had as many as two 200-yard games in a row.

- ESPN and other news outlets reported that Meyer joined Alabama head coach Nick Saban as the only coaches in history to win major-college national championships at two different schools. That would be true if the conversation were limited to the modern era. The legendary Glenn "Pop" Warner was the first coach to win titles at two different schools, earning three national championships at Pittsburgh in 1916-17 and 1919, and another at Stanford in 1924.

- After the national title game, Meyer was asked if he entertained any thoughts of coaching in the NFL one day. The coach gave what seemed to be a rambling kind of answer, but OSU fans can relax. Meyer isn't going anywhere. He was made to coach college-aged kids, and college-aged kids were made to be coached by him.

- Two of the most unsung heroes of the 2014 national championship run were Mark Pantoni and Mickey Marotti. As recruiting coordinator, Pantoni has few peers in talent evaluation, especially as it pertains to the future needs of the Ohio State roster. Meanwhile, thank Marotti and his rigorous strength and conditioning program for keeping the Buckeyes motoring throughout the national championship game while their Oregon counterparts were sucking air about midway through the third quarter.



Vol. 34, No. 14
Jan. 24, 2015
www.BuckeyeSports.com

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$77.95/year.

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| 2014-15 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 34) | | | |
|--|----------|--------|----------|
| No. 1 | Sept. 6 | No. 13 | Dec. 20 |
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The next issue (Jan. 31 cover date) will be mailed on Jan. 27.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.



Charter Member

COVER STORY

Meyer Leads OSU To Unexpected National Title

Continued From Page 1

at Bowling Green. He moved on to Utah and went 22-2 in two seasons, crashing the BCS party by winning the Fiesta Bowl in 2004.

Then he went on to Florida, where he became a rock star head coach thanks to a pair of BCS championships in three seasons. He reached the top of the college football mountain by beating Ohio State in 2006 and Oklahoma two years later, and his 24-2 mark in his first two years in Columbus showed the plan was still something to follow.

But as he walked off the field at the end

of the Orange Bowl that concluded the 2013 campaign with a second consecutive loss, Meyer realized there needed to be an update to the plan. He needed to build a team that was better at dealing with adversity, better at developing leadership, better at having a bedrock culture that was expertly defined and easy to live up to.

Little did he know just how important that work would be for his team in 2014 – and rarely has a plan ever come together quite like this one did. It was capped when Ohio State beat Oregon, 42-20, to win the inaugural College Football Playoff and return to the top

of the mountain in the college football world, giving the program its sixth consensus national championship and first since 2002.

“I love these players,” Meyer said after a remarkable postseason run that included wins vs. Wisconsin, Alabama and then the Ducks with the team’s No. 3 quarterback at the helm. “This team wasn’t supposed to do this, but they fought through adversity, they got stronger and stronger and stronger, and this is a great team. We finished the year a great team.”

The Right Mind-Set

Meyer has described running a college

football program as one of the most complex endeavors he can imagine, and he’s right. More than 100 players aged 18 to 23 and a well-stocked roster of coaches and support personnel are involved, and with so many ingredients in the stew, getting them all to pull in the same direction in synchronicity is a daily struggle.

At the conclusion of last season, Meyer knew the Buckeyes were close – a 12-2 record, an undefeated regular season and two close losses vs. top-10 teams to end the year proved that fact – but he knew he needed to tweak his formula.

The Buckeyes hadn’t had particularly great leadership from the veterans in 2013 – Meyer was particularly worried during the early months of the year – and the end to the campaign led him to believe that there was just something missing.

A master motivator, Meyer had long prided himself on cutting through the well-intentioned but ultimately directionless slogans that most college sports teams use to find the specific messages that actually drove his players to succeed, but he realized he needed some help to get his players to a different level.

For that, he turned to Tim Kight, a Columbus-area guru on the subject whom Meyer met at a social event in the spring of 2013. Kight had worked with the Buckeyes some that year, introducing the phrase “Event+Response=Outcome,” a mantra that holds that a person has little sway over what events happen in their life but can get the outcomes they desire by putting together the appropriate response to those events.

E+R=O bracelets started to appear around the Woody Hayes Athletic Center during the 2013 season, but Meyer wanted more.

“I can honestly say I’ve never worked on anything as hard in my life since that day we walked off the field in south Florida to make sure that we have the exact culture that I want, that we all want at Ohio State,” Meyer said in April.

He essentially gave Kight the keys to the car. The team met Friday mornings in May to hear lessons from Kight, and team members held a graduation ceremony from the program at the end of the month. There was honest talk – Meyer called out one eventual offensive starter in front of the entire team at one session, and he had choice words for a previous captain at another – and lessons learned.

From that came the shell of the culture Meyer wanted established. There was no time for players or coaches to blame each other, complain about their circumstances or feel as though they had to defend their actions. Even the coaches had to go through a five-week seminar designed to improve their skills on the field and off.

There was a three-pronged system developed to describe the way the Buckeyes were expected to approach their work. Players were expected to show complete effort by going from point A to point B in four to six seconds, the length of the average college football play. Competitive excellence – constantly working to improve one’s craft – was demanded. The power of the unit, the ability of each piece of the OSU program to push the team to great heights if it came together and did its job, was emphasized. Coaches were termed “unit leaders,” and in an effort to bring position groups together Meyer mandated that each undertake activities with each other as diversified as waterskiing or ziplining.



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2015 OSU Football Schedule

| Date | Opponent | 2014-15 Record | Bowl Result |
|----------|--|----------------|---|
| Sept. 7 | at Virginia Tech | 7-6 | Military Bowl: Virginia Tech 33, Cincinnati 17 |
| Sept. 12 | HAWAII | 4-9 | None |
| Sept. 19 | NORTHERN ILLINOIS | 11-3 | Boca Raton Bowl: Marshall 52, Northern Illinois 23 |
| Sept. 26 | WESTERN MICHIGAN | 8-5 | Potato Bowl: Air Force 38, Western Michigan 24 |
| Oct. 3 | at Indiana | 4-8 | None |
| Oct. 10 | MARYLAND | 7-6 | Foster Farms Bowl: Stanford 45, Maryland 21 |
| Oct. 17 | PENN STATE | 7-6 | Pinstripe Bowl: Penn State 31, Boston College 30 (OT) |
| Oct. 24 | at Rutgers | 8-5 | Quick Lane Bowl: Rutgers 40, North Carolina 21 |
| Nov. 7 | MINNESOTA | 8-5 | Citrus Bowl: Missouri 33, Minnesota 17 |
| Nov. 14 | at Illinois | 6-7 | Heart of Dallas Bowl: La. Tech 35, Illinois 18 |
| Nov. 21 | MICHIGAN STATE | 11-2 | Cotton Bowl: Michigan State 42, Baylor 41 |
| Nov. 28 | at Michigan | 5-7 | None |
| Dec. 5 | Big Ten Championship Game (Indianapolis) | | |

* - 2014-15 Bowl team

Ohio State's National Championships

| Year | Record | Poll Championships |
|------|--------|--|
| 1942 | 9-1 | AP |
| 1954 | 10-0 | AP (UCLA won UPI, FWAA) |
| 1957 | 9-1 | UPI, FWAA (Auburn won AP) |
| 1961 | 8-0-1 | FWAA (Alabama won AP, UPI) |
| 1968 | 10-0 | Unanimous |
| 1970 | 9-1 | NFF (Nebraska won AP, FWAA; Texas won UPI) |
| 2002 | 14-0 | Unanimous |
| 2014 | 14-1 | Unanimous |

Key: AP (Associated Press media poll); UPI (United Press International coaches poll); FWAA (Football Writers Association of America); NFF (National Football Foundation).

"He has the dedication," Kight said of Meyer. "He has always had that. He does not need us for that, but they sought a systematic approach. That's exactly what we've brought. Here's what's interesting, and Meyer and I have talked about this - I don't think there's hardly anything that we've ever said that he didn't already believe. But we are very effective in the mechanics of how to teach it and install it."

It all sounded good during the offseason, but would it work? Even the players expressed skepticism.

"I'm not going to lie ... we were doing it right after workouts and guys were tired and nobody was paying attention," quarterback Cardale Jones admitted. "And then when those type of events really started to come up in life and really through the summer, we really realized that this was something that's beneficial and this was something that really can help us respond to certain events."

Of course, at this point, the events Ohio State faced have been well-documented. Losing the leading rusher and receiver from 2013, not to mention four standout offensive linemen and two first-round draft picks on what had been a leaky defense, the roster was thought to be a year away from competing for a national title. That was even before Aug. 18, when quarterback Braxton Miller threw a standard out pattern and yelped in pain, his season over as the labrum in his right throwing shoulder was in need of surgical repair.

Fans and observers wondered how Ohio State would respond with a redshirt freshman going in at quarterback replacing a senior captain - not to mention two-time Big Ten MVP - and the answer seemed clear Sept. 6. Ohio State couldn't run on Virginia Tech, the offensive line was overwhelmed and J.T. Barrett threw three interceptions as the Buckeyes lost at home 35-21 to seemingly end any title aspirations before they truly began.

Ohio State started to right the ship on the field, but the struggles off it never waned. First-team All-Big Ten defensive end Noah Spence was supposed to miss just two games but failed another test for banned substances on the doorstep of his return, ending his season.

Injuries to such key starters as Jeff Heuerman and Dontre Wilson lingered, and the team's depth was also weakened by the injury bug. All the while, Ohio State battled on the field to get back into national contention, but thoughts of a title were the furthest thing from OSU's mind with a pair of blows Nov. 29-30.

First, while Ohio State was putting the finishing touches on yet another win vs. rival Michigan, Barrett suffered a broken bone in his right leg, ending the campaign for the Heisman Trophy candidate. A day later, the body of missing walk-on lineman Kosta Karageorge was found, dead of an apparent suicide.

The issues could have torn apart a lesser team. Instead, the Buckeyes thrived.

"You are going to hit storms, and we prepare," Meyer said. "You've heard about the E+R=O, or there's going to be events that take place; how do you respond to events? You can't control those. There are things that are going to happen that are from bad to awful. How does the team respond? How does your family respond? That's when people have issues."

"We're all broken people that have to have some direction, some purpose and some guidance, and we work extremely hard on that. And to see our team respond, I made the comment before that this team has taught me so much about how to respond to adversity because I can't remember coaching a team that's been through more. Certainly with the Braxton Miller situation and throughout the course of the year other things have shown up, and they have really responded. That's the essence of a good team."

"If you can hit the storm and come out the other end stronger, that's called a real, real team, and how many of those are out there? I've done this 30 years and probably can count them on one hand. Some people might think it's the luck of the draw. I think it's leadership and training. We certainly had that this year."

For Meyer, that could be encapsulated by the situation in which Jones found himself at the end of the year. He left spring firmly ahead of Barrett in the battle to become the top backup behind Miller but instead saw the younger player move ahead of him in fall camp, become a starter when Miller went down and then launch himself into the Heisman race.

He could have packed it in, stopped taking mental reps in practice and started looking over transfer options. Jones admitted there were even times his mind wandered, times he wasn't sure his opportunity would ever come, but he didn't stop putting in the effort.

And when Barrett did go down with injury, Jones was clearly ready. His response led to the outcome the Buckeyes were looking for.

"Event plus response equals outcome," Jones said. "It's all about how you respond to each event, getting the outcome you want. We did a program here at Ohio State in the summer with Tim Kight, and he broke down the whole process of E+R=O. It's deeper than just E+R=O, and we graduated from the program."

"It helps when you have a tough time or something tough happens. You've got to understand that you've got to have a positive response and have a positive outcome."

A Championship Team

As Meyer alluded to, the Buckeyes were a team in the truest sense of the word by the end of the campaign. Ohio State might not have been ready for the on-field challenges of the end of the season were it not for the off-field things that popped up, events that created a bond that was obvious in the way the team often talked about winning for the seniors, or the way Michael Bennett and

Adolphus Washington walked off the field after each playoff game arm in arm.

"That's just something that I'm going to take for the rest of my life because when you play for somebody else, it's like you play even harder," sophomore safety Tyvis Powell said. "That's what I think helped this team get to where we're at because everybody started playing for selfless reasons, started playing for each other, and the leadership just took over, and the team just became unbelievable."

For that, Meyer thanked leadership, a skill and trait he actively went about building throughout the previous calendar year.

"I've done this 30 years," Meyer added. "How many teams actually come together like that? Because the dynamics of college football, the different cultures that you just put in a meeting room together, the age group of nonsense, from 18- to 22-year-olds, and we all want that team. You can say, well, the coach put it together. Coaches don't put that together. It was genuine, because if it wasn't genuine, that would have surfaced."

There were some who wanted to point to the Buckeyes as a team of destiny, but that almost makes it sound like the playoff run was a fluke, that a dropped pass by an opponent or a lucky bounce gave the Buckeyes a win they might not have deserved.

Instead, this was a team that simply got as its works deserved, to borrow a quote so often used by former head coach Jim Tressel. Ohio State jelled into a unit that could not be stopped as it knocked off the two consensus best teams in the nation in SEC champion Alabama - winner of three of five previous crowns - and No. 2 Oregon, the recent national darlings that have impressed because of speed and flash.

"We had the will," center Jacoby Boren said. "We came to learn this team wouldn't lose. That's just something that we carried with each other throughout the year, and I think that's what made this team so strong."

Looking back, it's easy to pick a number of so-called turning points where the Buckeyes' fortunes turned for the better. You could go all the way back to the day Meyer took over, Jan. 3, 2012, and immediately went about repairing what had been broken as the Buckeyes slid into a disarray-filled 6-7 season in 2011.

You could look to the moment when Meyer, on assignment as an ESPN analyst, watched Alabama celebrate the 2012 national title and called his staff from Miami to institute "The Chase" to get his team focused on the track to reach its lofty goals.

You could look to a few months later when Meyer inked the nation's No. 1 recruiting class, a group that already boasted nine starters in its second fall on campus.

You could look to the Penn State game, when Ohio State faced a seven-point overtime deficit and the loudest student section in the country only to roll to two straight touchdowns and a victory that Meyer said the

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average team loses 99.9 percent of the time.

You could look to the revenge win at Michigan State two weeks after that, a dominating performance that tight end Nick Vannett said told the team it was the best in the nation.

Or you could look to the double dose of adversity involving Barrett and Karageorge, two painful events that pushed a close team to another level when it needed it most.

All of those moments led up to a big one, as Meyer and his jubilant team climbed a makeshift stage on the middle of the AT&T Stadium field the night of Jan. 12. Confetti swirled in the air as teammates hugged, players and coaches alike grabbing championship hats and celebratory newspaper pages like they were candy.

The chase was over, the adversity beaten. The response led to the outcome the Buckeyes could previously only dream of. A true team of Buckeyes had become national champions.

"Not one time have I ever heard an offensive player criticize a defensive player or a special teams player, and the same with the coaching staff," Meyer said. "It's how you respond to adversity that's in your life, and our guys have been trained how to do it, but it's not that easy. You can train however you want. These guys have great heart for each other."

"A lot of people say that. Very few back it up. These guys backed it up."

The Many Emotions Of A National Title Team

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

An explosion of gold and silver confetti fell from the sky, showering Ohio State, the newly crowned champion of college football.

Some Buckeyes clamored to get onstage for the postgame celebration, while others were content to stay at field level, soaking it all in. The trophy was presented and soon was littered with fingerprints as it was passed from player to player, raised to the heavens by some, kissed by others.

Some players were boisterous as Buckeyes could be overheard asking for another team to play. Others, like junior left tackle Taylor Decker, were incredulous, shouting "We did it" to anyone who would listen. There were confetti snow angels and

streamers tucked into national championship hats.

There were multiple ways that Ohio State players expressed the emotions they felt after being crowned national champions, feelings that were clearly difficult to put into words but were evident on the faces of every player.

"I'm at a loss for words and I'm just happy for the team," senior linebacker Curtis Grant said. "I don't even want to leave."

"I haven't thought about anything yet. It all seems like a dream right now."

While the middle linebacker was at a loss, vocal sophomore safety Vonn Bell was clearly still fired up about proving the odds-makers wrong after the Buckeyes turned back Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and Oregon in the national championship game as underdogs.

"We shocked the world, we kept improving every day and we overcame adversity, so I think nothing can stand in the way of this team and how hungry we are," Bell said.

Bell was on the stage as head coach Urban Meyer presented the national championship trophy and running back Ezekiel Elliott and safety Tyvis Powell were presented the offensive and defensive MVP awards. He, like nearly all his teammates, was wearing a hat that made it clear what the Buckeyes had accomplished, reading "2014 Undisputed National Champions" in bold, gold lettering.

Doran Grant was on the stage next to Bell during the trophy presentation. Once the gold-plated trophy had been bestowed on Ohio State, Grant attempted to offer insight into what the win meant for the 2014 Buckeyes and for him personally.

"This was our dream to get here," the cornerback said. "Everyone counted us out after the Virginia Tech loss, and we didn't

waver. We never wavered and that's why we're here."

"National champion forever, we just made history. It's the greatest feeling in the world right now. I can't explain it."

Putting the emotions of a national championship into words was difficult for all the Buckeyes. It was easier for the team when they were expressing those emotions to one another.

Following the season-ending win, Michael Bennett spent every second of the celebration alongside fellow defensive tackle Adolphus Washington. The two remained side-by-side in the locker room after the win, answering reporters' questions in tandem.

"It's an incredible way to go out," Bennett said. "You can't wish anything more than this. I'm so thankful for who I get to do this with, the D-linemen around me, the rest of the team around me. I could play next to this guy all year and he could be such a big part of this, that's the biggest thing. The national championship is amazing, but we're doing it



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EMOTIONAL NIGHT – Ohio State sophomore safety Vonn Bell (11), seen here with fellow sophomore Michael Thomas (3), was among the most excited Buckeyes after the game.



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with guys that we love and guys that love us so it's that much better."

Washington and Bennett were far from the only pair of Buckeyes showing emotion for one another after the 42-20 win over Oregon.

Following the victory, offensive line coach Ed Warinner embraced right tackle Darryl Baldwin. The senior began his career as a defensive lineman for the Buckeyes. He contributed on special teams and in a reserve role until the 2014 season. This year, Baldwin started every game along the offensive line.

Warinner, an Ohio native, worked 28 years in coaching before he made it to Ohio State, a place he always envisioned his career would bring him. Three years later, he was a national champion as a Buckeye.

"Well for Darryl it's been a long journey and for Ed Warinner it's been a long journey, and that journey came to fruition tonight," the coach said after the win. "I've coached at a lot of places and I always wanted to coach at Ohio State and it took me a long time to work my way back home and be a Buckeye and that journey – we reached a goal of winning a national championship.

"For Darryl, he found his home on the offensive line, worked really hard the last three years, became the starting right tackle and grew into a really solid player that helped us win a national championship so we were just talking about how hard the journey has been, but how worth it it's been."

Warinner and Baldwin weren't the only two who culminated a long, difficult journey with a national championship on Jan. 12.

There was Curtis Grant, a five-star recruit who failed to live up to fan expectations early in his career but delivered his best season as a senior.

There was also Luke Fickell, the embattled defensive coordinator who served as the interim head coach for a year after the dismissal of Jim Tressel. The coordinator was blamed by many for the Buckeyes' back-to-back losses to end the 2013 season, but his unit held one of the highest scoring offenses in the country to just 20 points in the 2014 College Football Playoff National Championship.

Fickell was emotional after the win, but not for what he had accomplished.

"It's really hard to reflect on something personal when you've got all these guys around you because that's what it is," he said. "They've been selfless, they've committed themselves to one another. We asked them not to think about themselves, and we can't do that as coaches. So right now, I'm just so happy to be around these guys, these coaches and these players. I'm so happy for the guys around more than I am for myself."

To even begin to understand what players were feeling, you must take into account what the team and the individual have been through.

For Joshua Perry, the win was about where he had come from. The junior linebacker grew up dreaming of becoming a Buckeye, starring at Olentangy High School, just north of Columbus.

"I was telling everybody that I wanted to bring it back to Columbus so badly," he said. "Everybody would ask me about the game, and I kept telling them I wanted to bring it back to Columbus. It's really special to actually do it. It's been such a crazy journey like I said, and I know Columbus is definitely going to appreciate it.

"It's a testament to what our culture is, testimony to how we've trained and do our business. It's just been really special for us to be able to do what we've done."

The hard work that the Buckeyes put in throughout the offseason and during the

season culminated in a national championship. While that work made a championship a possibility, some were still in shock after Ohio State earned it.

"It's unbelievable, honestly," senior co-captain Jeff Heuerman said. "I can't even say it's a dream come true because I don't even know if I ever really considered this a realistic dream. I don't know. I can't even describe it."

The Buckeyes received hats and shirts on the field for their accomplishment, and Meyer was presented with the championship trophy. The team will also receive rings to remind them of how their 2014 season ended. But when looking at the players' jubilant faces after they won the title, even years from now they won't need to be reminded what winning a national championship feels like.

"I really don't know what I'm saying right now because I'm in such shock still," reserve lineman Joel Hale said. "What are we talking about? We won the national championship. That's really all I have to say. What else can you say?"

There were multiple times throughout the 2014 season that the Buckeyes could have folded, but they stayed the course, believing that they were worthy of national championships. They were proved right when confetti cannons went off and silver and gold fell from the sky.

"At Ohio State, we never really doubt ourselves," defensive lineman Joey Bosa said. "The goal every season is to be national champions, nothing less. When we're training hard in the offseason, we're not thinking, 'Oh, maybe next year.' It's always this year. We've worked so hard and we're such a close team, it's just so amazing that we finally did it."

With a 22-point lead, Ohio State knew it was going to be crowned champions before the clock hit zero against Oregon. Players waited anxiously along the sideline, ready to swarm the field and celebrate as a team. The Buckeyes were underdogs in the final three games they played this season and won them by a combined 88 points.

Ohio State didn't just win the national championship, it won it emphatically.

"It's the team," Curtis Grant said. "There's nothing else really other than the team and us really believing in each other. That's all it took. If you look at all the adversity that we went through, losing two quarterbacks and Cardale (Jones) stepped up and helped us win the national title. That's part of being a team and we trained for this from day one. You never know when your number's going to be called so you always have to be prepared and ready."

Tight end Nick Vannett echoed the linebacker's sentiment, his emotions overflowing not because he was a national champion but because the team was.

"We just overcame adversity and we fought until the end, and I couldn't be happier that we won a national championship," he said. "I love this team."

Following the game, that was the most consistent emotion across the board for the national champion Ohio State Buckeyes – love. Various members of the team expressed love for each other, love for their coaches and love for the university.

That love is what made the 2014 Buckeyes such a close team, a quality that propelled them to a national title. As confetti fell on the players as they rushed onto the field that they dominated in a national championship game, that love was evident, even if the whole thing didn't feel real.

"It's a dream come true," Warinner said. "It's a special day. It's so exciting."

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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

Ohio State Completes Chase, Bucks Ducks

By MATTHEW HAGER
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

"The Chase is complete."

The words of Urban Meyer rang true as confetti came down at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, after the Ohio State football team completed an unlikely run with a 42-20 victory against No. 2 Oregon in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship.

It was Ohio State's eighth claimed national title, its sixth of the consensus variety and the first crown since 2002. The head coach since 2012, Meyer instituted the motivational message known as The Chase after his initial season and in year three at Ohio State delivered the national championship to his home state.

"I love these guys," said Meyer, a native of Ashtabula. "I'll never forget what (legendary NFL coach) Bill Parcells said - it's like a blood transfer. We're officially brothers for the rest of our lives because we're champions."

With a third-string quarterback leading a young squad that most thought was one year away from contending for a national title, the Buckeyes (14-1) pummeled the Pac-12 champions with their running game. Sophomore Ezekiel Elliott capped an unforgettable three-game stretch with a 246-yard performance and four touchdowns. Elliott sliced and diced the Ducks, averaging 6.8 yards per carry, and was the obvious choice for the game's offensive player of the game.

Not to be overlooked were the efforts of third-year sophomore Cardale Jones, who will likely never be forgotten by OSU fans after leading the Buckeyes to a 59-0 rout of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, a 42-35 win against No. 1 Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and a national title win against the Ducks. He completed 16 of 23 passes for 242 yards with a touchdown and an interception against Oregon.

Seven receivers caught Jones passes. Redshirt freshman Jalin Marshall led OSU with five receptions for 52 yards. Sophomore Mike Thomas caught four passes for 53 yards, and junior tight end Nick Vannett caught a TD pass.



SONNY BROCKWAY

UNSTOPPABLE - Ohio State sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott (15) breaks through a tackle attempt by Oregon defensive back Reggie Daniels (8). Elliott rushed for 246 yards and four touchdowns in a 42-20 victory.

Ohio State's attack was a balanced one. The Buckeyes rushed for 296 yards and threw for 242. That helped OSU overcome four turnovers, including three involving Jones, who said he was able to take the mistakes in stride.

"I wasn't flustered because there were mistakes that could have been avoided," he said. "Definitely the fumble that I tried to throw out of bounds, and I think the interception, I think it bounced off Jalin (Marshall's) pads or something like that. They didn't force us to commit those mistakes."

"It was hard to be flustered or nervous or down when you have the other guys on defense playing the way they're playing, and then definitely when you've got the guys up front blocking the way they were blocking,

we really felt like we could score anytime we wanted."

The Ohio State defense allowed 465 yards but did a masterful job limiting the high-powered Oregon offense. The Buckeyes excelled in key situations, allowing just 2 of 12 third-down conversion attempts and also stopping the Ducks twice on fourth down. Oregon also scored just one touchdown and two field goals in four trips to the red zone and turned its four gained turnovers into just 10 points.

Sophomore safety Tyvis Powell led the way with nine tackles to earn defensive MVP honors, while redshirt freshman linebacker Darron Lee added eight stops. Sophomore safety Vonn Bell and junior defensive lineman Adolphus Washington each recorded a sack.

Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Marcus Mariota capped his impressive season by completing 24 of 37 passes for 333 yards and two touchdowns with an interception for the Ducks (13-2). He also rushed for 39 yards. Thomas Tyner led the Oregon rushing attack with 62 yards, while Byron Marshall caught eight passes for 169 yards and a score.

"They're an outstanding defense," Oregon head coach Mark Helfrich said of OSU. "We knew that coming in, and they did some different things - not different things completely schematically, but by kind of percentage of what they had done to that point. We had a couple opportunities to convert a couple of huge third downs and had some plays there to be made, but didn't execute in the red zone."

Meyer, meanwhile, was complimentary of the vanquished Ducks.

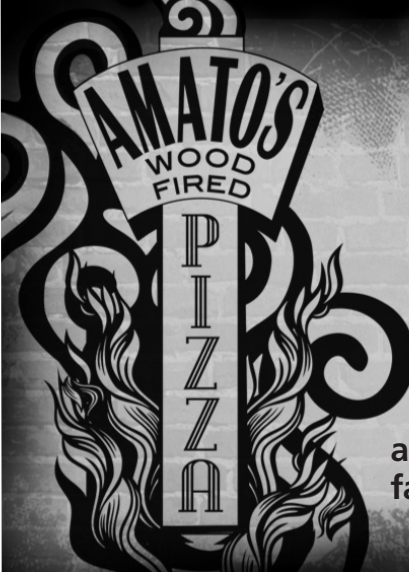
"I thought they were a great team," he said. "I think we tackled well, and other than turnovers, that's as well as we've played. I've got a lot of respect for them."

Rough Start, Good Finish

Oregon received the ball to begin the game and marched down the field for an opening score, dodging a pair of bullets on its first drive. The first came when Tyner fumbled on a 10-yard gain that moved the ball into OSU territory. He fell on it, allowing the drive to continue. Later, Mariota appeared to have the ball stripped by OSU linebacker Curtis Grant, but upon review Mariota's knee was down.

The Ducks scored the game's first touchdown four plays after the overturned Mariota fumble. On first-and-goal from the OSU 7, Mariota eluded pressure and found a wide-open Keanon Lowe in the end zone for a score. Aidan Schneider added the extra point to give the Ducks a 7-0 lead with 12:21 left in the first quarter.

The drive was quintessential Oregon. It went 75 yards in 11 plays but took just 2:39



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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

off the clock. The Ducks never faced a third down and averaged 6.8 yards per play.

The Buckeyes failed to answer the score. Ohio State did record a first down on a third-down run by Jones, during which he bowled over Oregon inside linebacker Rodney Hardrick. He attempted to scramble for another first down three plays later but was stopped short by defensive back Reggie Daniels.

The Ohio State defense held Oregon to a punt on its second time on the field. After allowing a 28-yard gain on a Lowe reception up the middle to the UO 38, the Buckeyes forced a punt from the 45 that was downed at the OSU 3.

Ohio State took momentum thanks to a 97-yard drive that resulted in the Buckeyes' first touchdown. It did not start well, as the Buckeyes faced a third-and-8 at the 5 before Jones found Corey Smith for a 26-yard gain to the OSU 31. The march advanced to the UO 35 before the Buckeyes faced a fourth-and-2. Ohio State's offense remained on the field, and Jalin Marshall got the necessary 2 to continue the drive.

Two plays later, Elliott took a handoff, got a key trap block by junior tight end Nick Vannett, broke through some arm tackles and raced for a 33-yard touchdown. Freshman Sean Nuernberger added the extra point to knot the game 7-7 with 4:36 remaining in the opening quarter.

After the Buckeyes forced another Oregon punt, they marched down the field to take their first lead. Marshall gave Ohio State great field position following a 17-yard punt return to the UO 46. It took Jones and company just four plays to reach the end zone, helped in part by a pass interference penalty on Oregon that moved the ball to the 18.

Elliott then rushed 17 yards on another

bruising run to the UO 1, and on the next play, Jones found Vannett for a touchdown near the front left pylon.

"It was amazing," Vannett said of the touchdown catch. "Not too many people can say they got a touchdown in the national championship game. I have a lot to be thankful for."

Nuernberger's PAT made it 14-7 with 1:08 left in the quarter, the drive lasting just 1:27.

Ohio State committed the game's first turnover early in the second quarter. A botched handoff between Jones and Elliott caused a fumble that was recovered by UO's Alex Balducci at the Oregon 40.

The Buckeye defense prevented a momentum swing on the ensuing drive. The Ducks earned a first-and-goal at the 10 but were stopped on downs. On fourth down from the 3, Tyner rushed up the middle but was stood up by multiple players at the 1.

Ohio State committed its second turnover after the defensive stand. The Buckeyes drove the ball downfield and looked primed to get into the red zone. Smith caught a deep ball from Jones and raced down the right sideline toward the end zone. Oregon defensive back Troy Hill popped the ball from Smith's hands, however, and Hardrick fell on it at the Ducks' 9 with 8:46 left before halftime.

Again, the Buckeyes prevented the miscue from turning the momentum. Ohio State forced a three-and-out, capped with a sack by Washington.

Jones helped the Buckeyes extend their lead after the punt, thanks in large part to a 45-yard toss to Devin Smith in single coverage that advanced the ball to the 6. Three plays later, Jones barreled into the end zone on a 1-yard TD that, after the Nuernberger PAT, gave Ohio State a 21-7 lead with 4:49 left before halftime.

Oregon got back on the board on its next drive. Mariota engineered a 12-play, 66-yard drive that lasted 4:01. It ended short of the end zone, however, with Schneider booting a 26-yard field goal to make it 21-10 with 48 seconds on the clock.

Both teams had one additional possession in the final minute but neither team scored, giving the Buckeyes an 11-point lead at halftime.

Title Time

Ohio State marched down the field after taking the second-half kickoff before committing its third turnover. Spurred by a key Jones fourth-down run to keep the drive alive, the Buckeyes advanced to the 37 before Jones looked to find Jalin Marshall on a first-down pass. Marshall bobbled the catchable pass right into the hands of Oregon linebacker Danny Mattingly, who came down with the ball at the UO 30.

This time, Mariota made the Buckeyes pay. On the first play after the turnover, Mariota dropped back to pass and found an open Byron Marshall on a skinny post racing down the middle of the field. He hauled in the pass and reached the end zone, crossing the line an instant before dropping the ball in celebration. Schneider added the extra point to make it 21-17 with 11:23 left in the third quarter.

The Buckeyes continued to shoot themselves in the foot on the next drive. Ohio State drove near midfield before Jones dropped back on a first-and-10 at the OSU 49 and had the ball slip out of his hands while backpedaling on a scramble. Oregon's Arik Armstead fell on the ball at the OSU 23.

Oregon narrowed the OSU lead to one after the fumble, as the Buckeyes held the Ducks to a 23-yard field goal by Schneider

to make it 21-20 with 6:39 left in the third quarter. Redshirt freshman Eli Apple made the biggest play of the possession, pushing Evan Baylis out of bounds before the tight end was able to come down with a potential touchdown pass on third-and-4 from the 6.

"It's phenomenal that we held them to a field goal when Cardale dropped it going way deep into our own territory," Meyer said. "That to me was a changing point of the game. It made it 21-20 if I'm correct, and I thought when that happened, I thought we had a chance to win this game."

The Buckeyes answered the bell. Elliott's talented legs carried the way on the 75-yard drive, as the sophomore rushed for 44 yards on six carries – the last of which went for a 9-yard touchdown run on the final play of the third quarter. Nuernberger added the PAT to give the Buckeyes a 28-20 lead.

The OSU defense forced a three-and-out, and Elliott followed that with the knockout punch. The Buckeyes marched 76 yards on nine plays – seven runs – and boosted their lead to 15 with a 2-yard touchdown run by Elliott against a tired Oregon defense that struggled to stop the run in the second half.

Nuernberger added the extra point with 9:44 showing on the clock to give Ohio State a 35-20 lead.

The Ohio State defense did the rest. The Ducks were held to a punt and turned the ball over on downs on their next two possessions following the Elliott TD. The sophomore tailback then provided the exclamation point and concluded the scoring with a 1-yard touchdown run with 28 seconds remaining.

Nuernberger added the extra point to set the final score and give Ohio State the national championship.

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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

Offensive Line Delivers Complete Performance

By RYAN GINN
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When the Ohio State football team flies in luxury, it's not the quarterbacks or the wide receivers who sit in first class. Nor is it sophomore Ezekiel Elliott, who ran for nearly 250 yards and four touchdowns in the CFP National Championship on Jan. 12.

No, that honor belongs to the offensive linemen.

"That's always been who we are," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said in a press conference the morning after the game. "You win on the offensive and defensive line."

Trench warfare was the recipe in a 42-20 win against Oregon at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, that gave the Buckeyes their first national championship since 2002. It was especially true of the offensive line, which tore up Oregon's defensive ends and generally made life miserable for the Ducks' entire 3-4 front.

Seeing a fit offensive line bully a group of defenders who couldn't keep up certainly fit the pregame narrative, but the parties involved were flipped when perception met reality. The Ohio State defense handled Oregon's tempo just fine, but the same couldn't be said for the success rate of the Ducks' defensive linemen.

In the fourth quarter, Oregon's defensive linemen spent the time between plays with their hands on their knees, trying to catch their breath before each looming battle against five bears in football uniforms.

"They were subbing out a lot," junior left tackle Taylor Decker said. "You could tell they were kind of huffing and puffing. We were just hitting them and hitting them and hitting them, and we were just going right at them. Right up the middle. We were running the ball right up the middle. We know we're a tough, physical team. Like I said, we can assert our will on people."

Part of that credit goes to strength and conditioning director Mickey Marotti, who made sure players on both sides of the ball were ready to go against one of the most athletic teams in the country less than two weeks after battling No. 1 Alabama.



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO PRESSURE – Ohio State's offensive linemen, including junior Taylor Decker (68), helped the offense slice and dice the Oregon defense – and kept sophomore quarterback Cardale Jones (12) upright.

"We have a great conditioning staff," offensive line coach Ed Warinner said. "Thanks to Mickey Marotti, our offensive line is in great shape. We saw them getting tired and kept banging away and banging away. We found something in the run game there."

They certainly did.

Ohio State handed the ball to Elliott just 11 times in the first half, but that number swelled to 36 by the end of the game. He finished with the most rushing yards in a championship game (dating back to the first BCS season in 1998), as his 246-yard total obliterated the 200 yards Texas quarterback Vince Young gained in the 2006 Rose Bowl. He broke his own record for most yards in a BCS/CFP game, besting the 230 yards he rolled up against Alabama just 12 days earlier, and also set OSU's new postseason record.

Although his workload in the first half was rather typical of his output throughout

the season, Elliott knew what would be coming from offensive coordinator Tom Herman the rest of the game.

"I knew we were wearing them down," Elliott said. "I knew we were bigger and more physical than them going into the game. If we did it right, at some point that D-line and those linebackers were going to break down."

"I think in the third quarter, I saw it coming on. I saw the O-line getting better and better. I knew they were going to have trouble stopping our run. Coach Herman, he was feeling the same thing, so we just gutted it out."

More importantly than Elliott and Herman, the offensive line knew it. The confidence increase in that unit from the Virginia Tech game to the end of the season was nothing short of remarkable. The five players who gave up six fourth-quarter sacks in the only loss of the year spent the national championship game begging their coaches

for more chances to grind Oregon down into dust.

"They've been growing," Herman said. "They've been maturing and growing and buying in and every week getting better. If there is a better O-line coach in America than Ed Warinner, you are going to have to prove it to me because I don't think there is. They love him, they play hard for him and they play for each other, and they just kept growing up and growing up and growing up and proving everybody wrong and getting themselves better every week. It's a real joy to see those guys succeed."

Before the drive that made it 35-20 in the fourth quarter, Meyer told his linemen that a touchdown would win the game. A few plays later, Elliott was in the end zone for the third time and the Buckeyes knew they had a stranglehold on the Pac-12 champions.

"We kind of found a rhythm running the football, and the guys were doing a really good job," Herman said. "We were wearing them out. Our offensive line came off the sideline after that drive and said, 'Keep running it because we've got them worn down,' and we listened to them."

"You kind of get a sense of when a team is going to break," redshirt freshman left guard Billy Price said. "They had some great players over there and they were tough guys. We just were the tougher team."

Elliott was the player sent to the podium after the game to collect the offensive MVP award, and it would be hard to argue that he wasn't deserving of that accolade. But he and the coaches also recognize that a group of five men paved the way for that to happen.

"Zeke's a tremendous talent and we wouldn't be here without him, but a running back is only as good as the guys up front," Herman said. "To couple his talent with their development and their improvement is a recipe for what you've seen the last few weeks."

In one of the better consolation prizes one could receive, the players who refer to themselves as The Slobs surely collected their reward on the flight home to Columbus the following day. Their first-class performance in the title game earned it.



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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

Dominant Defense Shut Down High-Octane Ducks

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It was supposed to be a shootout.

That's how the College Football Playoff National Championship, a contest featuring two of the highest scoring offenses in the nation in Oregon and Ohio State, was billed.

The Buckeyes' defense made sure that only one of those high-powered units got going in the biggest game of the season. Ohio State held Oregon more than 27 points below its season average in the 42-20 championship win, limiting the Ducks' yardage total to 465, more than 90 yards below their average entering the game.

The Silver Bullets earned their name at AT&T Stadium, controlling the game with a physical approach that neutered the Ducks' famed tempo-based offense, dominating third down and responding when put in tough situations by the Ohio State offense.

It was a redemptive season-ending performance for a unit whose late-season struggles were a key factor in back-to-back losses to end the 2013 campaign.

"It's just so gratifying to see guys believe in what you're doing and then to go out there and perform," defensive coordinator Luke Fickell said. "I'll tell you what, at the end of the year we put on film what we really are: We're a great defense."

Third-Down Dominance

The Buckeye defense dominated in the title game, limiting Oregon to its lowest point total of the season. A main reason for the success was the way Ohio State dominated third down.

Oregon came out of the gates strong, engineering a 75-yard touchdown march on the game's first possession. The Ducks didn't face a third down on that drive, but once they did, they struggled. Oregon converted just 2 of 12 third downs in the game.

"We could really say tonight we won the game on third down," Fickell said.

Oregon didn't convert a third down until the final two minutes of the first half, failing on its first five tries. The Ducks converted on consecutive third-down attempts during that second-quarter drive, but the Buckeyes found



SONNY BROCKWAY

THE DUCK STOPS HERE – Oregon's high-powered offense found traction difficult against the Ohio State defense, including defensive linemen Rashad Frazier (17) and Adolphus Washington (92).

a way to get a stop on that possession as well, halting Oregon on a third-and-4 and forcing a field goal.

Of course, third downs are not converted in a vacuum but rather a product of a team's success in earlier downs. Ohio State was effective on first and second down to disrupt the Ducks' plan and force Oregon into uncomfortable third-and-long situations. On average, the Ducks had to pick up 9 yards on their 12 third downs.

"It definitely was a mental thing," defensive tackle Adolphus Washington said of the success on the game's most critical down. "We pretty much knew what they were going to do most of the time, and we got the job done."

Washington, who had a third-down sack and helped stop the Ducks on one of their two failed fourth-down attempts with a tackle, played a big part in the defense getting Oregon off the field.

Oregon entered the game converting more than 51.6 percent of its third downs on the season, the fourth-best mark nationally. Fickell said a big part of the reason the Ducks connected on just under 17 percent of tries in the title game was the variations the Ohio

State defense had, never doing the same thing twice on third down.

Getting those critical third-down stops, 10 of them in all, allowed the defense to disrupt the Ducks' fast-paced attack.

"We knew the importance of it," Washington said. "We knew that we had to stop them on third down because we knew that our package, we had only three defensive linemen so we knew that if they got that first down, they were going to go hurry up. We just knew that we had to stop them."

Tempo Tamed

As Washington intimated, the success on third down was also effective in limiting the damage that Oregon could cause with its much-feared tempo. It's hard to wear out a defense when you can't stay on the field.

The Ducks entered the game running plays within 20 seconds of each other on average in the first half of games and could get as fast as every 16 seconds, a blistering pace that often caught opponents flat-footed with little time to get the call from the sidelines and diagnose the Oregon formation. The Buckeyes largely avoided those struggles in the championship game.

Ohio State took preparation for the Ducks' tempo seriously, posting "16" signs throughout the Woody Hayes Athletic Center to serve as a constant reminder and running two offenses alternating by play at the No. 1 defense with the goal being one snap every 16 seconds. Clearly, that preparation paid off.

"You get two huddles going. Two huddles running at us," junior linebacker Joshua Perry said. "You put the clock up there and try to get it running as fast as possible. It's trained us to make the play and get up and save the celebration for when we get off the field. You turn right to the sideline, get the call and then look at what's going on on the field."

The Buckeyes did appear a bit stunned on the Ducks' first drive, one that traveled 75 yards in 11 plays and took up 2:39 of game clock. Oregon ran a play every 14.5 seconds on that drive, but OSU found its legs from there, stopping the Ducks on their next five possessions.

"It's a mental side of things," Fickell said of combatting tempo. "We knew we were in great shape from all of the things that we've done. The reality is, can you keep your mind in it? Can you keep your mind in the grind?"

D Bowed Up After Turnovers

The top-to-bottom success of the Buckeyes'

defense against Oregon becomes all the more impressive when accounting for the positions that the Ohio State offense put in.

Four times the opportunistic Ducks defense capitalized on Ohio State turnovers, but their offense didn't as the Buckeye defense prevented Oregon from doing what it had done all season – converting turnovers into points.

"To have four turnovers and still beat a team like that 42-20, an incredible experience," head coach Urban Meyer said after the win.

Oregon entered the national title game scoring an average of 5.0 points on the 30 turnovers they had forced. Against Ohio State, four turnovers resulted in just 10 points.

After a clean first quarter, Ohio State gave Oregon the ball twice in the second. A Cardale Jones fumble on the Buckeyes' first drive of the period set the Ducks up at their 41-yard line, by far their best field position to that point. The Ohio State defense bent but didn't break, turning Oregon over on downs on fourth-and-goal.

On the Buckeyes' next drive, they were back at it. Corey Smith put the ball on the turf while fighting for extra yards after a 47-yard reception. The Ducks' field position wasn't as good this time as they recovered the ball on their own 9-yard line, and the Ohio State defense was even better in its second quick-change situation, forcing a three-and-out.

"We had too many turnovers, but we were able to withstand it just because our defense played their best and they were able to hold them," right tackle Darryl Baldwin said. "That didn't really hurt us that bad."

"They were put in some really bad situations."

In the first half, the Ducks had no points to show for the two turnovers they created.

Safety Tyvis Powell, the team's leader in tackles and defensive MVP in the championship game, said he was proud of how his unit handled the quick-change situations. The fact that the Buckeye offense had been moving the ball successfully also gave the defense confidence, he said.

"Just get the ball back," Powell said of the defense's mind-set. "We were excited to get out on the field anytime, and actually we saw that our offense was driving down the field the way they were. They just made little mistakes and turned the ball over. Seeing that, it just made us want to get the ball back."

The second half saw the Ducks offense convert on both opportunities that the Buckeyes handed them, but Ohio State was able to limit the damage. Oregon quarterback Marcus Mariota fired a 70-yard score after one turnover, but the OSU defense held Oregon to a field goal after the offense gave the Ducks the ball at the Buckeye 23-yard line on the next possession.

On average, the Ducks began drives on their own 39-yard line after turning the Buckeyes over. On its 10 drives that didn't come after turnovers, Oregon started on its own 20.

Despite being put in tough positions, the Buckeye defense responded on the biggest stage in the title game, limiting Oregon to 2.5 points per turnover. That's all the more impressive considering the Ducks scored 34 points on five Florida State turnovers just 11 days before the national title game.

"If you have four turnovers in a national championship game, you should be done," center Jacoby Boren said.

Because of a complete effort from the Ohio State defense, the Buckeyes weren't.

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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

Buckeye Game Analysis

Play Of The Game

Ohio State used only a handful of different running plays to run over Oregon to earn the first-ever College Football Playoff championship, and one of those allowed the Buckeyes to reclaim momentum in the third quarter of the title game Jan. 12.

Oregon had used a pair of turnovers to inch back into the game, getting a touchdown and a field goal to trim the Buckeyes' 21-10 halftime lead to a single point. But the Buckeyes still had the lead, and a 12-play, 75-yard drive that came mostly on the ground allowed OSU to reclaim the upper hand.

Ezekiel Elliott ran for 44 yards on six carries on the drive, including the final 9 yards on the final play of the third quarter to give the Buckeyes a 28-20 advantage.

Ohio State went to one of its bread-and-butter plays, with quarterback Cardale Jones lining up in the shotgun and Elliott to his right. Tight end Jeff Heurman lined up on a wing to the right with Jalin Marshall in the slot to the left inside wideout Corey Smith. Devin Smith, meanwhile, lined up as the split end on the right.

Before the snap, Marshall went in motion from left to right in jet sweep action, causing the Ducks defense to shade to the right. At the snap, the offensive line blocked down to the right to seal off the Oregon defensive line, while right guard Pat Elflein and Heurman kicked back to the left.

The Ducks kept two men home on the right side for Marshall and Jones on the option action, while Elliott followed Elflein and Heurman to the left. The lineman stood up linebacker Tony Washington, while Heurman blocked linebacker Joe Walker, who had looked to blitz and made a nice play not to get caught up in the wash.

That left Elliott alone with Tyree Robinson, who didn't have much of a chance. Elliott cut left and started to outrace the safety to the corner, and Robinson could only jump on Elliott's back near the 3. The OSU back barely seemed to notice as he ran over cornerback Chris Seisay, whom Corey Smith had blocked near the goal line. The two Ducks were left in Elliott's wake as he spun across the goal line with the touchdown that ended all Oregon momentum for the game.

The run also pushed Elliott over 200 yards for the day in a dominating performance that earned him game offensive MVP honors.

Hidden Play Of The Game

Given that Ohio State never trailed in the second half, it seemed like an easy win for the Buckeyes in the 22-point beating of the Ducks. But early in the game, things weren't going well for Ohio State, which trailed 7-0 and was pinned deep in its own territory.

An Oregon punt was downed at the 3-yard line, and the first two plays netted just 2 yards for Ohio State, leaving the Buckeyes with a third-and-8 at the 5. Jones took a shotgun snap, settled into his own end zone and looked right.

Evan Spencer ran a deep route and Oregon dropped a corner well back into three-deep coverage, leaving a hole underneath. Rather than panic, Jones stood tall in the pocket and found Corey Smith on a deep cross to the right, and Smith caught the ball and got to the 31 before running out of bounds.

The 26-yard gain gave OSU a much-needed first down, and Jones found Marshall for another 26 yards on the next play. That sparked the offense, as Elliott ran for a 33-yard touchdown shortly thereafter, and the 97-yard drive tied the score and Ohio State would never trail again.

What Worked Well

Winning the line of scrimmage: There was some concern coming into the title game about the way the Buckeyes would be able to run the football. Oregon runs a 3-4 defense with big defensive ends who try to pinch toward the middle of the field on run plays, resulting in a look that somewhat mimics the "Bear" defense that Virginia Tech used to shut down the Buckeyes early in the year. Meyer spoke before the game about how impressed he was with the Oregon DEs, but the Buckeyes won the battle with 296 yards and five touchdowns on the ground.

Third-down success: Oregon's opening drive of the game ended with a touchdown after 11 plays, and it was so ruthlessly efficient that the Ducks didn't face a single third



SONNY BROCKWAY

MOVING THE STICKS – Ohio State wide receiver Corey Smith (84) picked up a key first down during an OSU touchdown drive in the first quarter.

down. But by the end of the game Ohio State dominated that stat. The Buckeyes went 8 for 15 on their own third downs, but the defense shone, keeping Oregon to 2 for 12. In the two games of the playoff, Alabama and Oregon converted a combined 4 of 25 third downs.

What Didn't Work

Holding on to the ball: Not to harp on one of the themes of the game, but Ohio State turned the ball over four times against one of the most opportunistic teams in the nation. Oregon wasn't able to convert as it had in the past, a credit to the Buckeye defense, and Ohio State was able to win a number of games on the season despite multiple turnovers including wins at Michigan State and Minnesota and both playoff games. Just imagine how good the Buckeyes would have been if they could have held on to the ball.

Inside The Numbers

1: The loss was the first for Oregon head coach Mark Helfrich when his team won the turnover battle (17-1) and when scoring first (15-1).

3.75: That was the difference in average number of points for each team in the red zone. Ohio State had five trips and left with five scores, an average of 7.0 points. Oregon had a touchdown and two made field goals in four trips, an average of 3.25.

5: Ohio State moved to 5-0 all-time in the state of Texas.

14: The Buckeyes won 14 games on the season, tying a school and national record in FBS.

37:29: Ohio State's time of possession in the game, the second time in as many postseason games vs. Oregon's blur offense that it has dominated the stat. The Buckeyes had the ball for 41:37 in the 2010 Rose Bowl, a game record, on the way to a 26-17 win. OSU had a 23:01-6:59 advantage in the second half of the playoff championship.

288: Ohio State gained only 19 yards on its first eight plays then had 288 on its next 28, an average of 10.3. Oregon, meanwhile, had 103 yards on its initial 12 plays (8.6 average) and just 96 on its next 24 (4.0).

Reviewing The Matchups

Ohio State rush offense vs. Oregon rush defense: After Ohio State put together an impressive performance against Alabama, it seemed like the Buckeyes would have a physical advantage up front, and that was proved as Elliott

ran for a BCS/CFP title-game record 246 yards. Jones added 38, many of the tough variety, as he bowled over Oregon defenders multiple times to convert critical third downs. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Oregon rush offense vs. Ohio State rush defense: Oregon's pass offense has improved this year – after all, QB Marcus Mariota won the Heisman Trophy – but the Ducks have often excelled on the ground during their record-breaking run of exciting offenses over the past decade. But after early success, the Ducks couldn't get anything going, finishing with 132 yards and 4.0 yards per carry. That included just 33 net rushing yards after halftime, and the Ducks couldn't get the tough yards in the red zone. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Ohio State pass offense vs. Oregon pass defense: Elliott got a lot of the headlines for his physical, pounding runs, but Jones was excellent, completing 16 of 23 passes for 242 yards. He had a single touchdown and an interception, but the pick should have been hauled in by Marshall. Jones also lost a fumble when the ball squirted away as he tried to throw it away, but he more than made up for it with his efficient throwing. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Oregon pass offense vs. Ohio State pass defense: The Ducks had their most offensive success through the air as Mariota put up excellent statistics including 24 completions in 37 attempts, 333 yards, two touchdowns and an interception on the last play of the game. Byron Marshall had an excellent day receiving for the Ducks with eight catches for 169 yards and a 70-yard TD as safety Vonn Bell bit on an underneath route. **EDGE: Oregon**

Special teams: Ohio State's kickoff coverage unit was excellent, as Kyle Clinton had three touchbacks and the Buckeyes limited dangerous return man Charles Nelson to just 52 yards on four returns. Cameron Johnston also had two more punts downed inside the 20 on three tries. Otherwise, Oregon was solid as well as Aidan Schneider made both of his field-goal tries. **EDGE: Even**

Intangibles: Ohio State dominated this category as it has tended to do this season. The Buckeyes didn't let an early deficit bother them, but Oregon didn't react well to adversity as the Ducks struggled on third downs, committed 10 penalties to OSU's five and couldn't convert the gifts given by OSU into points. It takes tremendous intangibles to be a championship team, something proved yet again by Ohio State. **EDGE: Ohio State**

– Jeff Svoboda

OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 42, Oregon 20

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer on the Buckeyes' improvement this season: "I don't want to get overdramatic, but it's as improved a football team – and I've watched football for a long time – from game one to game 15. I've never seen anything like it."

Oregon head coach Mark Helfrich on the loss: "It's not much fun because these guys had a great season – not a good season, a great season – and to end it like this is certainly not the way we wanted to do that. But again, I could not be prouder to be associated with these guys."

Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones on whether the win validates the Big Ten: "It depends how people want to look at it. When we got into the playoffs, we didn't say, 'Let's do it for the Big Ten.' All due respect to our conference, to me it's one of the toughest conferences in the country, but we didn't strap up and say, 'Let's go play for Wisconsin, let's go play for The Team Up North.' We wanted to play for each other. We wanted to prove something to not the country about the Big Ten but prove something to the country about The Ohio State University."

Meyer on winning for Ohio: "I'm not shy about the love I have for this great state. Ashtabula, Ohio, is my hometown. I've gotten to travel all around the country, and I realized how fortunate I am to grow up in a great town like that in a great state. I played college football here, and to bring now a national title to the great state of Ohio, it's almost surreal."

Meyer on the decision to run the ball in the final minute of the game instead of taking a knee up 35-20: "I didn't even think about taking a knee. I can't even tell you the situation. I'm trying to even visualize what happened. But we play to win and we play to be aggressive in what we do, so that didn't even – I didn't hear it over the headsets, and I certainly didn't think about it at that time."

Oregon quarterback Marcus Mariota on the loss: "I mean, it hurts. You put in so much work, you put so much effort into the year, and it's tough. It's tough to go out with a loss. That's just – things happen. Ohio State played a great game today, great program. They just out-executed us for a couple more quarters."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Luke Fickell on strength coach Mickey Marotti's impact on preparing to face Oregon's tempo: "That's Coach Marotti. That's more of a psychological thing. Are you really going to get in better shape in 10 days? No. Physiologically you're not going to get in better shape, but if you lose a couple of pounds you think in your mind, 'I'm leaner, I'm lighter, I'm faster.' That's the master thing that Coach Meyer does. He gets them to

believe in what they do and when guys believe, it's unstoppable."

Meyer on Ohio State's improved defense this season: "Defense won the game. We lose that game if we don't stop them on turnovers. We consider that a stop when you hold them to a field goal. Championships are won with defense, and our defense has been on a difficult journey the last couple of years, but the future of our defense is even better because there are a lot of young guys playing."

Meyer on limiting Oregon's tempo-based offense: "That was the whole challenge since when we found out after the Alabama game we were playing Oregon is if we can somehow eliminate that fatigue factor and turn it into inside drill and turn it into a game that's a block-and-tackle game that we could win this game, and obviously they did it."

Ohio State defensive tackle Michael Bennett on Oregon's status as the betting favorite: "We're underdogs to the media. We know what we can do. Other teams watch us on film and know what we can do. So we have a lot of confidence coming into these games. We never felt like underdogs, especially in this game. We felt we would be able to shut them down, and we did."

Oregon wide receiver Byron Marshall on why the OSU defense succeeded: "Ohio State has a great defense. They have all season. Their front seven is unbelievable, so hats off to them. There was not one thing specifically. I think they just played a great game. I think we kind of missed some opportunities. We had a couple of red-zone trips in the first half that we didn't capitalize on, whether it was a field goal or a touchdown. I think we kind of missed some opportunities, and they played a great game."

Ohio State offensive line coach Ed Warinner on the run game: "We have confidence in who we are and what we do. Early in the game, I didn't think we were playing that well. I could see some jitters, I could see some things happen that aren't usual for our guys, but we weathered that and started playing better, and as our confidence grew and we started helping them with some better play selection, we started getting an idea of what would work and started figuring them out on defense a little bit, then good things started happening."

Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott on the toll of his 36-carry workload: "Oh, I definitely feel it now, but I knew going into the game that we wanted to run the ball. We knew that our O-line was bigger and more physical than their D-line, and we just had to punch them in the

mouth. The O-line, they came out, they played their butts off and they paved the way for me."

Ohio State running backs coach Stan Drayton on Elliott: "He's a disciplined back. You give him footwork, you give him landmarks, he's going to stay true to that. The vision and the instincts come natural. That's what happens with great backs."

Ohio State center Jacoby Boren on the play of the running backs: "They made our job a heck of a lot easier. They were running the ball hard. I told someone else, I kept looking up at the Jumbotron. Zeke was breaking through tackles and going for another 10-15 yards, and that makes our job a heck of a lot easier. He had a great game tonight."

Ohio State left tackle Taylor Decker on the drive that increased the lead to 35-20: "Coach Meyer came over to us and said, 'You guys go get another score and this one might be over.' We took it upon ourselves, especially as an offensive line, to get that done."

Elliott on his rushing performance, including an OSU bowl-record 246 yards: "It's starting to sink in. Just getting the MVP, I credit that to my big boys up front – actually everybody on the offense. Everybody does their job, and nothing would be possible without that team effort. But just setting that record, I feel blessed. All the great running backs that have come through Ohio State – Archie Griffin, Eddie George, Beanie Wells – just being able to accomplish something that all of them weren't able to accomplish, it means the world to me. I'm happy that I was able to carry on that lineage this season."

Helfrich on the challenges of the playoff system: "You know, if anything it's the newness of it. Certainly you get to the point where you're playing for the Pac-12 championship and then it's one avenue, and then you're committed 100 percent to winning that game and then congratulations and high fives, and you flip around and get ready for another outstanding team."

Ohio State wide receiver Michael Thomas on the possibility of repeating next season: "I mean, why not? This is a great group of guys, great group of coaches. I just want to soak in everything that they're giving me and enjoy everything and get back here and win another one for the next senior class."

Elliott on what it will take to repeat as champions: "We've just got to stay a hungry team. We're losing some great seniors, but we have a lot of great young players that will step up, and this year was just a great year to learn a lot of things. I think we'll be the same team next year. As long as we stay humble, we grind hard in the offseason, don't let our heads get too big, I think we'll be here next year."



Mark Helfrich



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OHIO STATE VS. OREGON

Meyer, Buckeyes Talk Championship Victory

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Following Ohio State's 42-20 win vs. Oregon to capture the first-ever College Football Playoff title, OSU head coach Urban Meyer, game offensive MVP Ezekiel Elliott and quarterback Cardale Jones met with the media at the postgame press conference.

Abridged comments from the three Buckeye representatives follow.

Meyer: "On behalf of the Ohio State University and the great state of Ohio and my players and coaching staff, I want to tell the College Football Playoff committee and everyone associated with this incredible experience that it was done first class, and I think you have two great teams out there. We have a lot of respect for Oregon and (head coach Mark) Helfrich, but I love these players."

Question: You guys turned the ball

over four times. I think you said coming into this game you couldn't do that and win this game. Is this sort of a microcosm of all the adversity you had to overcome this season to win this game?

Meyer: "It is, and it's also a testimony to the improvement our defense has made. We won that game because of Ezekiel Elliott and of course our offensive line, but our defense, to hold Marcus Mariota - I know he threw for a bunch of yards, 300-plus yards, but our defense, we tackled tonight and did a great job."

Q: This was an extremely young team that you have. First of all, is this something that you thought would be coming perhaps another year, maybe not right now, particularly the way you started out, and secondly, could you

talk about the future of the program and just how bright it is?

Meyer: "Well, I think Eli Apple, Zeke, I thought we had high expectations for Zeke because we saw what he could do last year, but that group of sophomores that we have that really stepped up and played, they complemented the seniors. Whenever you have a coaching transition, there's usually a little bit of a blip or a miss in the recruiting, and if our sophomore class didn't step up, we wouldn't be where we are. I mean, it's incredible."



Urban Meyer

"A lot of them are redshirt freshmen, and yes, to answer your question, I certainly did not see that happening after spring practice and early in the season. But I undervalued - I didn't quite understand the improvement that these guys could make."

Q: I know you probably prefer not to talk about yourself but maybe you can in this one case. You do join one other person who's been able to bring two schools to a national championship. It does say a lot about what Nick Saban has done, what you have done. Can you talk about that it means to do something that has so rarely been done?

Meyer: "I'm very humbled that you brought that up, but I'm also the first one to appreciate the people who did it, and that's our players."

Q: Zeke is obviously the MVP of the game, rushes for a new record ...

Meyer: "A monster."

Q: What have you seen from him all season as improvement, and then the last three games where he obviously just blew up?

Meyer: "I love Zeke because he's very humble, comes from a great family and deserves the credit. However, he's the most underrated back in America. He's one of the best post-contact-yard guys I've ever been around, and on top of that he's a great human being. We get him at least for one more year. I'll give you a couple days off, Zeke, and we're back at it, you and Cardale."

Jones: "The chase is on."

Q: Urban, could you in a nutshell talk about how you challenged your defense tonight to face that so-called up-tempo challenge?

Meyer: "We challenged them and we had 16 (seconds between plays) signs everywhere. Every time our players went to get

something to eat we had one of those big signs that lights up, and we thought if we could eliminate the fatigue factor and make them block us and make them play football that we'd be in pretty good shape, and that's what we did, even after all those turnovers."

Q: Two years ago you were doing postgame coverage for ESPN after Alabama beat Notre Dame, and you said something to the effect that everybody had to rise to their level. What impact, if any, did that have on you, and do you feel like your program is in that position now?

Meyer: "I think I sat and watched it, and every one of these players and everybody on the coaching staff, everybody associated with our program, I called our strength coach, I said I'm going to send you a text right now and I want it in their hands immediately. That was 'The Chase,' and that's when that big sign went up in the facility, that's when we created an area for our players to go get extra work, and that was one of those wow moments when I saw a team just dominated in the national championship game, and they looked better than we did. Somehow we had to get to that level, and that was The Chase."

Q: Can I ask each of you to take a step back, first Cardale, then Ezekiel - what does it mean to have done this, to overcome the odds and to be on top of the college football world?

Jones: "It means a lot because going back to early August, late August, around camp, everybody counted us out when our Heisman Trophy quarterback went down, and then when the first college football playoff rankings came out we were like No. 16. Long story short, we weren't supposed to be here. The odds were stacked against us through the whole season, and for us to be sitting right here as national champs, it not only means a lot to me but our community, Buckeye Nation and our hometowns."

Elliott: "It means everything to us, just being able to accomplish this great accomplishment, winning the national championship after everything we went through this season, losing Braxton (Miller), then losing to Virginia Tech and how we rebounded against that, and the tough game at Penn State that went to double overtime, then traveling to Michigan State in that hostile environment, then losing J. T. (Barrett) and having this clown (Jones) step in. It seems like we've been through everything, and it made us who we were."

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Jones Raises Ceiling Of Meyer's Offense

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

One after another, Ohio State quarterbacks spent the 2014 season doing more than just keeping the spot warm for their predecessor.

When two-time conference MVP Braxton Miller went down with a season-ending shoulder injury in late August, redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett was an unknown commodity. His play against Virginia Tech, in which he took seven sacks and threw the game-clinching pick-six, didn't do anything to dissuade fans from counting down the days until Miller's return.

But then Barrett rebounded by tossing six touchdowns against hapless Kent State and steadily progressed with each passing week. As the regular season wore down, he was regularly torching Big Ten foes and lending legitimacy to the possibility that Miller might never resume his role as OSU's starting quarterback.

Barrett's broken right fibula against Michigan set the cycle in motion again.

His backup, sophomore Cardale Jones, had never played a meaningful snap during his three years in Columbus. More famous for a tweet belittling classwork than anything he'd done on the field, he suddenly found himself holding the keys to Urban Meyer's offense. Jones survived The Game and began his quest to resuscitate Ohio State's season and his reputation.

Few bothered to consider the possibility that Jones was anything other than a temporary guardian of the offense, even after he led the Buckeyes to a 59-0 trouncing of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game.

And yet one month later, it was Jones holding the CFP National Championship trophy aloft at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. It was Jones who held a press conference to announce he'd be remaining in school despite a legitimate chance at a respectable draft position. Now, it's Jones who will head into the 2015 season as the presumed starter.

It all started in the conference champi-



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO ONE-HIT WONDER – Sophomore Cardale Jones (12) took over at quarterback prior to the Big Ten Championship Game and excelled in all three postseason contests.

onship, but his legend truly began to grow following his performance in a 42-35 Sugar Bowl win against Alabama. In that game, Jones was 18 of 35 for 243 yards, one touchdown and one interception. Those numbers looked relatively modest, but Jones also helped the Buckeyes convert 10 out of 18 times on third down.

After the game, Alabama head coach Nick Saban hinted that the Buckeyes were capable of certain offensive aspects with Jones that they didn't appear to possess with either other quarterback. An idea that would have been laughed at by Jones himself just months earlier suddenly had an air of legitimacy to it.

"I thought they were a very underrated team by everybody in terms of how people thought about them, especially the way they played against Wisconsin and the way they played later in the year," Saban said. "The one thing that the new quarterback does is

he has a tremendous arm, and they have some very talented receivers. Those things became very apparent in the last two games because of the quarterback.

"Now, they were a little different and the quarterback was a great runner when (Barrett) was playing, and he was a good passer. But it wasn't so obvious when you watched the film all season long that they had these great skill players that could really make plays down the field."

Jones helped make that obvious. His connection with senior wide receiver Devin Smith appeared supernatural at times, and other playmakers such as sophomore Michael Thomas also flourished under Jones. That, in turn, opened the door for sophomore running back Ezekiel Elliott to bulldoze his way through the middle of the field, which wasn't loaded up with safeties in run support.

While it wasn't hard to wonder if Jones

could keep up the torrid pace of his first two starts, he showed against Oregon on the biggest stage of all what Ohio State was capable of with him at the helm. Even with four turnovers – a couple of the fluky variety – the Buckeyes managed to hang 42 points on a playoff opponent for the second game in a row.

He finished the game against Oregon having completed 16 of 23 passes for 242 yards, one touchdown and one interception. The numbers certainly tell part of the story, but the way he went about directing the Ohio State offense was a sight to behold.

Decisive and bold, Jones looked like he belonged as the conductor of the offense. He turned into an escape artist against the pass rush and a bulldozer during short-yardage situations. When Ohio State needed 1 yard on the ground, he got it. When the Buckeyes needed 10 yards through the air, he made it happen.

All the while, he alternated professing confidence in his prodigious skills – teammates described his ability to throw the ball 85 yards in the air and more than 50 yards from his knees with awe – with disbelief that the situation was playing out as it did.

"I mean, this is unreal, man," he said before the title game. "This is like a frigging movie or a book. The best way I can describe that is basically just unreal. Every time someone is asking me about it, I'm pinching myself. I can't pinch myself any harder, so I guess I won't wake up."

It took the third quarterback choice and the final three games of the year – the most important ones, by the way – for Meyer's offense to realize its truest form. That it came in an unexpected way was just a bonus for a coaching staff whose roster is turning into an embarrassment of riches.

"This is why we do what we do, to see guys develop," Meyer said. "A theme that we have around our facility is, it's never too late to change. Some guys change when they're 50 years old – it's too late. Other guys change when they're going through the journey like we all did when we're 17 to 21 years old, 22 years old in his case. We're very proud of him."

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Plenty Of Praise For OSU After Buckeyes Take Title

By **MARCUS HARTMAN**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

As has become habit at Buckeye Sports Bulletin, we thought it would be interesting to see what some of the best writers from across Ohio and beyond had to say about a big sports event involving the Buckeyes.

When we started doing these stories (after the loss in the 2006 title game), they tended to follow negative events more often than positive. Lately that has not been the case, such as in this look at the reaction to Ohio State's national title triumph vs. Oregon.

Holly Anderson, Grantland.com – "What we got was the drowning of the Ducks, in a shallow puddle, and the Voltron bloom of Cardale Jones and Ezekiel Elliott on the sport's biggest stage. Ohio State's redshirt sophomore quarterback is capable of sneaking up on people, it turns out, in the sense that under so many helmets and pitchforks you can't always tell that what's being trotted up to your gates is a battering ram. Short of bolting one of his feet to the floor, there didn't seem to be much to do in the way of stopping him. The title game marked his third collegiate start. Meanwhile, Elliott you could hear even when you couldn't see him, with the acoustics of the JerryDome rounding out the vowels in the ZEEEEEEKE bellows until every successful carry was borne up to the catwalks on an indistinct rage-hum. He is, as of this writing, 19 years old. Surprise!"

David Briggs, The (Toledo) Blade – "If Ohio State's players said they were at a loss for words, the scene early Tuesday morning at AT&T Stadium was worth a million of them. All of the emotions from this implausible football season suddenly came undammed in a burst of joy. Doran Grant and a mass of his teammates dove headfirst into the golden confetti piled inches deep on the turf, then rolled over to carve out angels. Others futilely fought off tears."

Matt Brown, LandGrantHolyLand.com – "This was an easy Ohio State team to love. We got to see the maturation of not one but two quarterbacks who performed at levels none of us could have credibly dreamed of. Their running back became one of the best in Ohio State's already storied tradition of running backs, but he did it with half a shirt. Their best defensive player threw up a Twitter emoticon when he sacked a QB. Their second-best defensive player was an undersized high school quarterback, an afterthought to most fans in the most stacked recruiting class in school history. The team was littered with thoughtful, interesting, dynamic athletes. They took on every stupid, hacky #narrative that surrounded Ohio State football over the last several seasons, and blew it up with dynamite."

Paul Daugherty, The Cincinnati Enquirer – "What an absolute clubbing. Such a brass-knuckles show, in the last show of the year. Some of us believed Ohio State had a chance, if Ezekiel Elliott could be the star of

the evening. None of us who were objective and not rabid saw this coming. The Buckeyes played smash and grab against Oregon. They took what they wanted. In this game at least, Star Wars offense had no chance against a team that kept its feet firmly on the ground. Literally and metaphorically."

Spencer Hall, EDSBS.com – "After watching Ohio State smash Oregon to bits, you might be tempted to say that Ohio State doesn't have an obvious loss on the schedule for the next five years. You might really want to say that after watching this. No one would blame you. The Buckeyes defense turned a Heisman Trophy winner into a largely harmless irrelevance with nice numbers and zero danger, and the Buckeyes offense made a consistently excellent Oregon defense blow basic gap assignments it hadn't missed since 2013.

"They're deep, loaded with talent, and just won a national title with their third-string quarterback. Go back and watch their offensive line if you don't believe that, because they carried Oregon's D-line around like squawling infants who don't want to go in their car seats."

Bob Hunter, The Columbus Dispatch – "In a glitzy football palace that seemed like the perfect stage for the Ducks' highlight-reel offense, this was a national championship that an old-timer could love. OSU coaching legend Woody Hayes always saw the game as a test of manhood as much of a test of football, and he might have become giddy watching this."

Bill Livingston, The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer – "This is a victory that resonates throughout – as Meyer, a native of Ashtabula, a graduate of Cincinnati, a coach at Bowling Green and now at Ohio State always calls it – 'the great state of Ohio.'

"Our part of the country needed something good to happen," Meyer said.

"A good thing happened for much of Ohio Monday night, a year ahead of Meyer's most ambitious schedule, at the end of a journey his team completed against all odds, and it was accomplished with so many underclassmen playing such big roles that there will be immediate, serious talk of a repeat next season. The lasting image, as victory confetti sparkled in the lights, was of sophomore defensive end Joey Bosa, a unanimous All-American, holding the championship trophy. He cradled the gold and black bauble in his arms and rocked it, as if it were a baby with only good things ahead in life."

Stewart Mandel, Fox Sports – "No question, the Buckeyes have made (College Football Playoff Committee members) Jeff Long, Tom Osborne, Condoleezza Rice and the gang look smart indeed for including the Big Ten champs in their inaugural four-team bracket. But even they couldn't have possibly foreseen just how drastically their decision would alter the paradigm of college football. Two games ago, Ohio State's Cardale Jones was a still largely unheralded third-string quarterback. Two games later he's a national championship quarterback. Two games ago, Jones' teammate Ezekiel Elliott was not even an honorable mention All-Big Ten running back. Two games and 476 yards later, Elliott could win the Heisman if they held a re-vote this week. Two games ago the Big Ten was still a national laughingstock. Two games later, the Big Ten owns a more recent championship than the SEC. Two games ago, Alabama was the No. 1 team in the country and Nick Saban the sport's undisputed No. 1 coach. Two games later,

Urban Meyer has unseated Saban as college football's current top dog. And Ohio State is the sport's new budding dynasty."

Michael Rosenberg, SI.com – "The beauty of this, for Urban Meyer, is that he will win big regardless. Meyer is building a program that may surpass the one he built at Florida, and it was there for the country to witness in the national championship game Monday night. Ohio State was supposed to be a year away from this, but somewhere in the last six weeks the impossible became inevitable. Ohio State did not just beat Oregon 42-20. It physically dominated the Ducks. Nike founder Phil Knight has spent hundreds of millions on Oregon's facilities, and you wonder if he forgot to buy a bench press. The truth about this game was that Ohio State players felt it was over before it started. They watched film. They knew running back Ezekiel Elliott would barrel through the Oregon defense."

Drew Sharp, Detroit Free Press – "But it's utterly laughable to think that the Buckeyes' statement elevates the Big Ten's collective football profile. The two worst conferences in the Power Five have won the last two titles. But did Florida State's 29-game winning streak and 2013 national championship improve the overall perception of the ACC? Of course not.

"This wasn't Ohio State lifting up Michigan State and Michigan. This was Meyer putting further distance between the Buckeyes and the other 13 members of a conference that still looks at Outback Bowl victories over the SEC as celebratory achievements. If you're a Michigan State or Michigan fan today – and if you're being honest with yourself – you can't be happy with the realization that Meyer owns the Big Ten and won't surrender the title anytime soon."

Jon Solomon, CBSSports.com – "There's a new king in college football after Ohio State's 42-20 domination of Oregon. It's a resourceful, selfless team that rode the back of a historic running back who was virtually unknown a month ago and a third-string quarterback who blew up before America's eyes."

Pete Thamel, SI.com – "Part of Meyer's mad genius – more than any X's or O's he moves on the grease board – is his relentless ability to motivate. He emphasizes more themes than an English professor. He has more rallying cries than a rack of bumper stickers. There's pushing and pulling. There's prodding. Any motivational tactic will be exploited. And on Monday night, Meyer showed why his methods work."

Dan Wetzel, Yahoo.com – "The most remarkable thing about this team is that it arrived seemingly a year ahead of schedule, full of talented sophomores Meyer believed would form a title contender next season. OSU will certainly open the year at No. 1 in the polls and a favorite to repeat.

"The dominance of these Buckeyes (14-1) opens up the question whether Meyer is college football's top coach, a title most often given to Alabama's Nick Saban. It's a subjective title that spurs debate online and through talk radio. Saban's four national titles (three at 'Bama, one at LSU) still trumps Meyer by one. However, these Buckeyes showed Meyer at his best, recruiting and then meshing talent into a cohesive unit, developing players to maximize their ability and finally instilling them with confidence and motivating them to victory."

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Football Alums Beaming About Current Squad

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State football alums didn't exactly follow an Oregon trail to get to north Texas for the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship, but there were still plenty of former Buckeye players in attendance at AT&T Stadium for the event.

There was Kurt Coleman and Malcolm Jenkins and James Laurinaitis, players whose presence on the sideline and at the postgame celebration helped show the current Buckeye squad the alumni were behind them.

In the stands, Mike Doss, Craig Krenzler, Kirk Barton, Reid Fragel, Dustin Fox, Ted Ginn Jr. and others were present to provide even further support. And across the country, program alums such as Cie Grant tuned in to watch the Buckeyes go after the national title that some had won and that had barely eluded others.

And when Ezekiel Elliott plunged over the line one final time to set the 42-20 margin over the Ducks, they all felt a similar emotion – pride.

"It was amazing, it really was," said Fox, who now works as a sports radio personality in Cleveland. "It was just a really amazing run. I don't think we've ever seen anything like it because of the situation with the quarterbacks and the injuries and all that. For the team to be able to rally around this, it was amazing. To be there, it was special."

Grant wasn't able to make the trip, but he likely spoke for much of Buckeye Nation when he described his pride in watching what the 2014 edition of the Ohio State football team represented.

"We're super stoked about the way this team went about its business," he said. "This team embodies what an Ohio State Buckeye is as far as football goes. There were so many times Ohio State could have dropped the ball. But instead of doing that, they dug deep and decided to continue to write their story their way. I think if you're a true Buckeye fan, you had to marvel at the way these young men went about their business."

For those who did go, it was a chance to take in a party that only comes around every so often.

"I wouldn't have gone if I thought the team had no shot to win the game," Fox said. "But after going to the Alabama game and seeing

what this team did, you had to have a feeling there was something special going on. I was talking to Kirk Herbstreit after the Alabama game, and he was telling me this team had a very similar feel to what the '02 team had, kind of like a team of destiny, a train that couldn't be stopped."

What It Means

The win had special significance to Grant, who currently lives in western Pennsylvania, the heart of Penn State and Pitt territory as he described it.

He remembers playing on the 2002 team when a young kid named Evan always seemed to be tagging along at the football facility. The son of running backs coach Tim Spencer, little Evan was about 9 years old and spent as much time as he could around the football players, Grant said.

Grant's son, Braeden, just turned 9 and likes to wear his Ohio State jersey amid the crowd of Nittany Lions and Panthers gear, and the symmetry is not lost on Grant considering Evan Spencer has grown into being one of the key senior leaders on the Buckeye team and donned the same No. 6 Grant wore during his time at OSU.

"Evan was not a shy kid, let's just put it like that," Grant said. "He was one of the guys. Years later to see him wearing No. 6 and my son understanding the story behind that and me and him bonding a little bit, it was definitely special. It lets you know there are young kids watching you who are dreaming and who aspire to be like you in some way, shape or form."

"Evan was around us and he had the great sense to develop leadership skills, and I take my hat off to him."

For Coleman, the win had a different significance – the chance to earn bragging rights when he returns to work. College rivalries often make for good trash talk in professional locker rooms across the country. The safety spent the season with the Kansas City Chiefs, and he said he was looking forward to returning to the team with a national championship connected to his alma mater.

"I can't wait to go to OTAs," Coleman said. "It's going to be a great feeling. Everybody knows win or lose I'm always bragging about this team, but these guys, I'm going in with my head held high."

Fox said the victory helped restore a little luster to Ohio State's crown as it had been more than a decade since the program had emerged on top of the sport that unites the Buckeye State.

"Look, we won a title 12 years ago, and it was about time to get another one," Fox said. "As many games as we've won and big games and all that, it was about time. What was funny about it was just the fact that you did it with these circumstances. It was not the year everyone thought we'd win it."

Beating Adversity

This being Ohio State, virtually every player who has come through the program has either won a ring or had the chance to compete for them, so they know intimately how hard it is to get to the top of the mountain. For someone like Coleman, who fell just short as the Buckeyes lost in the title games in 2006 and '07, he was impressed with the way Ohio State battled through the tough times including an early-season loss.

"This team, especially at the beginning of the season, they went through so much adversity," said Coleman, who left with four Big Ten title rings as well as a quartet of Gold Pants. "It builds you for these types of moments, and it showed. These guys were fighting for every yard. They fought every single time. That's a beautiful thing. It's a testimony to the players and these coaches and what they invested in themselves."

There were also some obvious parallels to the 2002 team that won a surprise championship. That squad had many excellent leaders

but appeared to be building toward the 2003 campaign, but the Buckeyes won a number of close games – seven by a touchdown or less – on the way to a 14-0 season and national title game upset of Miami (Fla.).

This year's team also was expected to make its mark a year later, as nearly half of this year's starting lineup was composed of underclassmen and the team lost a pair of quarterbacks to season-ending injuries during the campaign.

"This team lost to Virginia Tech, a team that barely made a bowl game," Fox said. "If anybody thought we were going to win a national championship in the next few years, you would have bet your house that Braxton Miller would have been the quarterback, and it was the third guy behind him who did it. That's what is so crazy."

It took a team effort, the former players said, and that's what it often takes to win a championship. For someone like Grant, who lifted the crystal football in 2002 under Jim Tressel, the chance to see Urban Meyer pilot the Buckeyes to the top in such commanding fashion again drove home the importance of team football.

"It really takes a collective effort to win the national championship in all phases of the game," said Grant, who raved about all three phases of the game for OSU. "Overall, I was just very, very impressed. I think Coach Urban Meyer has done a remarkable job."


"He allowed me at times around the team, and I could really see that he has his thumb on the pulse of that team. He wants to make sure that everybody is ready and prepared, and I think that was one of the most ready and prepared teams that I've seen from start to finish."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 42, Oregon 20

Jan. 12, 2015 – AT&T Stadium; Arlington, Texas

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|-------------------|----|---|----|----|------|
| OHIO STATE | 14 | 7 | 7 | 14 | – 42 |
| OREGON | 7 | 3 | 10 | 0 | – 20 |

First Quarter

UO – Lowe, 7 yard pass from Mariota (Schneider kick), 12:21; 11 plays, 75 yards, 2:39 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 33 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 4:36; 10 plays, 97 yards, 3:16 TOP.

OSU – Vannett, 1 yard pass from C.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 1:08; 4 plays, 46 yards, 1:27 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – C.Jones, 1 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 4:49; 6 plays, 49 yards, 2:16 TOP.

UO – Schneider, 26 yard field goal, 0:48; 12 plays, 66 yards, 4:01 TOP.

Third Quarter

UO – B.Marshall, 70 yard pass from Mariota (Schneider kick), 11:23; 1 play, 70 yards, 0:10 TOP.

UO – Schneider, 23 yard field goal, 6:39; 6 plays, 17 yards, 1:42 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 9 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 0:00; 12 plays, 75 yards, 6:39 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Elliott, 2 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 9:44; 9 plays, 76 yards, 4:13 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 1 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 0:28; 5 plays, 14 yards, 2:17 TOP.

Att. – 85,689. Weather – indoors.



Team Statistics

| | OSU | UO |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| First Downs | 28 | 20 |
| Rushing | 18 | 7 |
| Passing | 8 | 13 |
| Penalty | 2 | 0 |
| Rushes-Yards | 61-296 | 33-132 |
| Passing Yards | 242 | 333 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 16-23-1 | 24-38-1 |
| Offensive Plays | 84 | 71 |
| Total Net Yards | 538 | 465 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 8-15 | 2-12 |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 3-3 | 0-2 |
| Punts-Avg. | 3-42.0 | 6-40.0 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 3-3 | 1-0 |
| Penalties | 5-30 | 10-76 |
| Time of Possession | 37:29 | 22:31 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Elliott 36-246; C.Jones 21-38; Samuel 1-6; J.Marshall 2-3; C.Smith 1-3. **UO**: Tyner 12-62; Mariota 10-39; Freeman 10-22; B.Marshall 1-9.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: C.Jones 16-23-1-242-1. **UO**: Mariota 24-37-1-333-2; Lockie 0-1-0-0-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: J.Marshall 5-52; Thomas 4-53; C.Smith 2-76; Vannett 2-9; D.Smith 1-45; Samuel 1-8; Elliott 1-(-1). **UO**: B.Marshall 8-169; Baylis 5-25; Stanford 4-61; Lowe 3-55; Nelson 2-21; Tyner 2-2.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Johnston 3-42.0-48. **UO**: Wheeler 6-40.0-52.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: J.Marshall 3-32. **UO**: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Samuel 1-23. **UO**: Nelson 4-52.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – OSU: None. **UO**: None.

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: None. **UO**: T.Hill, Coleman.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. **UO**: Armstead 1-0; Hardrick 1-0; Balducci 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Apple 1-8. **UO**: Mattingly 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: A.Washington 1.0-5; Bell 1.0-1. **UO**: Coleman 1.0-17.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: A.Washington 1.0-5; Bosa 1.0-2; Bell 1.0-1; D.Grant 1.0-1; McMillan 0.5-2; Frazier 0.5-1. **UO**: Coleman 1.0-17; Mattingly 1.0-2; Seisay 1.0-1; Dargan 1.0-1; Balducci 0.5-1; T.Washington 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.) – OSU: Powell 5-4-9; Lee 4-4-8; Apple 5-2-7; C.Grant 5-1-6; Bell 3-3-6; Perry 2-4-6; D.Grant 4-1-5; McMillan 3-2-5; A.Washington 1-2-3; Bosa 2-0-2; Schutt 1-0-1; S.Miller 1-0-1; Reeves 1-0-1; Worley 1-0-1; J.Marshall 1-0-1; C.Smith 1-0-1; Clinton 1-0-1; Lewis 0-1-1; Frazier 0-1-1; Bennett 0-1-1. **UO**: Daniels 7-2-9; Armstead 5-4-9; Buckner 5-3-8; Hardrick 6-1-7; Seisay 5-2-7; T.Washington 4-3-7; T.Hill 4-1-5; Dargan 4-1-5; Balducci 3-2-5; Malone 4-0-4; Walker 3-1-4; Coleman 1-3-4; Mattingly 2-0-2; French 1-1-2; Nelson 1-0-1; Swain 1-0-1; Robinson 1-0-1; Lowe 0-1-1; Stanford 0-1-1; Wheeler 0-1-1; Kamp 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OHIO STATE: Offense: Decker, Price, Boren, Elfein, Baldwin, Heuerman, Spencer, C.Jones, Elliott, Thomas, D.Smith, Nuernberger. Defense: Bosa, A.Washington, Bennett, S.Miller, Lee, C.Grant, Perry, Apple, Powell, Bell, D.Grant, Johnston. Reserves: E.Smith, McMillan, Wilson, Samuel, Webb, Burrows, Frazier, J.Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Dunn, Reeves, Ball, Booker, Worley, Fada, Clinton, Haynes, Rock, Burger, Munger, C.Williams, Farris, Lewis, Carter, Underwood, N.Brown, Vannett, C.Smith, Baugh, Schutt.

OREGON: Offense: Fisher, Stevens, Grasu, Hunt, Crosby, Baylis, Mariota, Tyner, B.Marshall, Lowe, Stanford, Schneider. Defense: Armstead, Balducci, Buckner, T.Washington, Hardrick, Malone, Coleman, Seisay, Dargan, Daniels, T.Hill, Wheeler. Reserves: Robinson, Mathis, Nelson, Loyd, Alie, Lockie, J.Williams, Swain, Freeman, Bassett, Walker, Daniel, Mattingly, Wogan, Ava, Talia, Carew, Pierson, Pisarcik, Schuller, Mundt, Prevot, Mondeaux, French, Kamp.

Season Statistics

2014-15 Game-By-Game

| Date | Opponent | Result/Time | Crowd |
|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---------|
| Aug. 30 (5) | Navy** | W, 34-17 | 57,579 |
| Sept. 6 (8) | VIRGINIA TECH | L, 35-21 | 107,517 |
| Sept. 13 (22) | KENT STATE | W, 66-0 | 104,404 |
| Sept. 27 (22) | CINCINNATI | W, 50-28 | 108,362 |
| Oct. 4 (20) | at Maryland | W, 52-24 | 51,802 |
| Oct. 18 (13) | RUTGERS | W, 56-17 | 106,795 |
| Oct. 25 (13) | at Penn State | W, 31-24(2OT) | 107,895 |
| Nov. 1 (13) | ILLINOIS | W, 55-14 | 106,961 |
| Nov. 8 (13) | at Mich. State (7) | W, 49-37 | 76,409 |
| Nov. 15 (8) | at Minnesota | W, 31-24 | 45,778 |
| Nov. 22 (7) | INDIANA | W, 42-27 | 101,426 |
| Nov. 29 (7) | MICHIGAN | W, 42-28 | 108,610 |
| Dec. 6 (6) | vs. Wisconsin^ (11) | W, 59-0 | 60,229 |
| Jan. 1 (5) | vs. Alabama# (1) | W, 42-35 | 74,682 |
| Jan. 12 (5) | vs. Oregon% (2) | W, 42-20 | 85,689 |

* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

** at Baltimore. ^ Big Ten Title Game at Indianapolis

Sugar Bowl at New Orleans

% CFP National Championship at Arlington, Texas

Team Statistics

| | OSU | Opp |
|-------------------------|---------|--------|
| First Downs | 386 | 283 |
| Rushing | 217 | 120 |
| Passing | 150 | 135 |
| Penalty | 19 | 28 |
| Average Per Game/Rush | 264.5 | 141.3 |
| Average Per Game/Pass | 247.1 | 201.1 |
| Total Offense | 7,674 | 5,136 |
| Total Plays | 1,099 | 1,032 |
| Average Per Game | 511.6 | 342.4 |
| Average Per Play | 7.0 | 5.0 |
| Penalties-Yards | 84-711 | 79-686 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 24-14 | 19-8 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 103-198 | 73-212 |
| Percentage | 52% | 34% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 13-22 | 10-19 |
| Percentage | 59% | 53% |
| Sacks-Yards | 45-307 | 28-203 |
| Time Of Possession Avg. | 31:30 | 28:30 |

Score

| By Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | Tot. | Avg. |
|-------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|------|------|
| Ohio State | 182 | 172 | 156 | 148 | 14 | 672 | 44.8 |
| Opponents | 83 | 76 | 72 | 92 | 7 | 330 | 22.0 |

| Rushing | Individual Statistics | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 273 | 1,878 | 6.9 | 18 |
| J.T. Barrett | 171 | 938 | 5.5 | 11 |
| Curtis Samuel | 58 | 383 | 6.6 | 6 |
| Cardale Jones | 72 | 296 | 4.1 | 1 |
| Jalin Marshall | 25 | 145 | 5.8 | 1 |
| Rod Smith | 24 | 101 | 4.2 | 4 |
| Dontre Wilson | 18 | 100 | 5.6 | 0 |
| Warren Ball | 18 | 85 | 4.7 | 0 |
| Bri'onte Dunn | 9 | 63 | 7.0 | 0 |
| Johnnie Dixon | 4 | 20 | 5.0 | 0 |
| Evan Spencer | 1 | 9 | 9.0 | 0 |
| Corey Smith | 1 | 3 | 3.0 | 0 |
| Jeffie Johnson | 1 | 2 | 2.0 | 0 |
| Noah Brown | 1 | -4 | -4.0 | 0 |
| TEAM | 14 | -52 | -3.7 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 690 | 3,967 | 5.7 | 41 |
| OPP Totals | 537 | 2,120 | 3.9 | 24 |

| Passing | Comp. | Att. | Pct. | Yds. | TD-INT | Eff. |
|-------------------|------------|------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|---------------|
| J.T. Barrett | 203 | 314 | 64.6 | 2,834 | 34-10 | 169.83 |
| Cardale Jones | 56 | 92 | 60.9 | 860 | 7-2 | 160.15 |
| Evan Spencer | 1 | 1,000 | 13 | 1-0 | 539.20 | |
| Jalin Marshall | 0 | 2 | 0.0 | 0 | 0-0 | 0.00 |
| OSU Totals | 260 | 409 | 63.6 | 3,707 | 42-12 | 167.72 |
| OPP Totals | 276 | 495 | 55.8 | 3,016 | 17-25 | 108.17 |

| Receiving | Rec. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Michael Thomas | 54 | 799 | 14.8 | 9 | 79 |
| Jalin Marshall | 38 | 499 | 13.1 | 6 | 57 |
| Devon Smith | 33 | 931 | 28.2 | 12 | 80 |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 28 | 220 | 7.9 | 0 | 22 |
| Dontre Wilson | 21 | 300 | 14.3 | 3 | 40 |
| Corey Smith | 20 | 255 | 12.8 | 0 | 47 |
| Nick Vannett | 19 | 220 | 11.6 | 5 | 26 |
| Jeff Heuerman | 17 | 207 | 12.2 | 2 | 32 |
| Evan Spencer | 15 | 149 | 9.9 | 3 | 22 |
| Curtis Samuel | 11 | 95 | 8.6 | 0 | 30 |
| Jeff Greene | 1 | 13 | 13.0 | 0 | 13 |
| Noah Brown | 1 | 9 | 9.0 | 0 | 9 |
| Rod Smith | 1 | 8 | 8.0 | 1 | 8 |
| Marcus Baugh | 1 | 2 | 2.0 | 1 | 2 |
| OSU Totals | 260 | 3,707 | 14.3 | 42 | 80 |
| OPP Totals | 276 | 3,016 | 10.9 | 17 | 83 |

| Scoring | TD | EPK | EPR | EPP | FG | PTS |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|-----|-----|----------|--------------|
| Sean Nuernberger | – | 89-89 | – | – | 13-20 | 128 |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 18 | – | – | – | – | 108 |
| Devin Smith | 12 | – | – | – | – | 72 |
| J.T. Barrett | 11 | – | – | – | – | 66 |
| Michael Thomas | 9 | – | – | – | – | 56 |
| Jalin Marshall | 8 | – | – | – | – | 48 |
| Curtis Samuel | 6 | – | – | – | – | 36 |
| Rod Smith | 5 | – | – | – | – | 30 |
| Nick Vannett | 5 | – | – | – | – | 30 |
| Evan Spencer | 3 | – | – | – | – | 18 |
| Dontre Wilson | 3 | – | – | – | – | 18 |
| Jeff Heuerman | 2 | – | – | – | – | 12 |
| Darron Lee | 2 | – | – | – | – | 12 |
| Eli Apple | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Marcus Baugh | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Joey Bosa | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Cardale Jones | 1 | – | – | – | 1 | 6 |
| Raekwon McMillan | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| Steve Miller | 1 | – | – | – | – | 6 |
| OSU Totals | 90 | 89-89 | – | – | 1 | 13-20 |
| OPP Totals | 43 | 42-42 | – | – | 1 | 10-15 |

| FG Distance | 0-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Total |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|--------------|
| Sean Nuernberger | 8-10 | 0-0 | 5-10 | 0-0 | 13-20 |
| OSU Totals | 8-10 | 0-0 | 5-10 | 0-0 | 13-20 |
| OPP Totals | 2-2 | 5-7 | 2-4 | 1-2 | 10-15 |

| Punting | No. | Yds. | Avg. | Bk | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|--------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Cameron Johnston | 48 | 2,164 | 45.1 | 0 | 73 |
| OSU Totals | 48 | 2,164 | 45.1 | 0 | 73 |
| OPP Totals | 96 | 4,078 | 42.5 | 1 | 73 |

| Interceptions | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Vonn Bell | 6 | 29 | 4.8 | 0 | 15 |
| Doran Grant | 5 | 106 | 21.2 | 0 | 37 |
| Tyvis Powell | 4 | 49 | 12.2 | 0 | 29 |
| Eli Apple | 3 | 8 | 2.7 | 0 | 8 |
| Darron Lee | 2 | 36 | 18.0 | 0 | 26 |
| Steve Miller | 1 | 41 | 41.0 | 1 | 41 |
| Raekwon McMillan | 1 | 24 | 24.0 | 1 | 24 |
| Erick Smith | 1 | 5 | 5.0 | 0 | 5 |
| Curtis Grant | 1 | 2 | 2.0 | 0 | 2 |
| Joshua Perry | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 25 | 300 | 12.0 | 2 | 41 |
| OPP Totals | 12 | 256 | 21.3 | 2 | 63 |

| Punt Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Jalin Marshall | 24 | 283 | 11.8 | 1 | 54 |
| Dontre Wilson | 14 | 136 | 9.7 | 0 | 32 |
| Jeff Greene | 2 | 10 | 5.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Ron Tanner | 0 | 22 | 0.0 | 0 | 9 |
| OSU Totals | 40 | 451 | 11.3 | 1 | 54 |
| OPP Totals | 10 | 58 | 5.8 | 0 | 35 |

| Kickoff Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-----------------|-----|------|------|----|------|
| Dontre Wilson | 22 | 528 | 24.0 | 0 | 43 |
| Curtis Samuel | 12 | 246 | 20.5 | 0 | |

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

Buckeyes Knock Off SEC Champions

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The irony, in many ways, was palpable. The man who had almost single-handedly started the SEC dynasty helped destroy it, and he did it in the conference's own back yard against its marquee team.

Urban Meyer directed his fired-up Florida team to a 41-14 win against Ohio State in the 2006 BCS National Championship Game, kick-starting an era of SEC dominance that included seven consecutive national championships, and the belief that the league was the best in college football in that span was so strong that the conference once had both teams in the title game.

And that reputation was built on the back of Ohio State, which not only dropped that championship game to the Gators but lost the 2007 version as well to LSU. That contest cemented the narrative of the SEC as the dominant league in the sport and the Big Ten, represented by OSU, as the antiquated conference struggling to keep up.

The Jan. 1 Sugar Bowl turned all of that on its head, so it was notable that it was Meyer again rewriting the script. His Ohio State team turned aside an early 21-6 deficit against No. 1 Alabama in the Superdome, using an offense that combined speed with power and an opportunistic defense to post a 42-35 victory in a College Football Playoff semifinal.

That Ohio State advanced to the first-ever CFP National Championship by slaying Alabama – which had won three of the previous five national crowns – and the SEC was not lost on anyone in the aftermath of the game.

“We talk about that,” OSU linebacker Joshua Perry said. “I think that we all take it to heart when other teams in the Big Ten get disrespected because of how much pride we take in our conference. This is a tradition-rich conference. A lot of great players come out of this conference. We have a lot of great players playing right now, so for people to say that one conference is head and shoulders way better than us, that stuff eats at us.

“There were times throughout the season when we were like, it would be cool to get a matchup against an SEC team as a benchmark to compare ourselves. These games make statements. We weren't given a ton of respect, we weren't given a big shot, and this is the Big Ten across the board. We were underdogs in every bowl matchup, right? But Big Ten teams were able to win games. I think it proves the perception isn't exactly what everybody thinks it is.”

For Ohio State safety Vonn Bell, who grew up in Chattanooga, Tenn., and attended high school just across the border in Georgia, the rivalry hit home. A five-star safety in the class of 2013, Bell trimmed his list to Ohio State and SEC schools



SONNY BROCKWAY

KNOCKOUT – Ohio State sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott (15) races past Alabama's Nick Perry (27) en route to a game-sealing touchdown run, much to the delight of junior tight end Nick Vannett (81).

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OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

Alabama and Tennessee before picking the Buckeyes in part because Meyer told him that Ohio State would soon be challenging the Crimson Tide for a title so Bell might as well be on his side rather than Alabama's when that happened.

Meyer's vision came through on New Year's Day in New Orleans, and Bell helped OSU leave victorious with a crucial interception in the red zone. Afterward, he realized the performance, just as Meyer had predicted, had turned the SEC narrative on its head.

"It's very big," he said. "It shows that this conference, we're a powerhouse too now. We have teams that can compete with anybody."

That was proved throughout the day. Not only did Ohio State beat Alabama, but No. 8 Michigan State beat fifth-ranked Baylor – the first team out of the playoff in the final rankings – in the Cotton Bowl and Wisconsin came back to beat Auburn, a team that had hung with Alabama in the regular season, in the Outback Bowl.

Seeing those results, Ohio State went into the game with Alabama secure in the knowledge it would be able to compete against what safety Tyvis Powell jokingly called "the greatest team in the world" given the almost unilateral belief in media and coaching circles that Alabama would win.

"There's a perception out here," Meyer said. "I'll tell you I think the tide turned a little bit when Wisconsin beat Auburn. Everybody on our team knew that. I made sure they knew that. When Michigan State came back and beat an excellent Baylor team, (we said) maybe the Big Ten's not that bad. Maybe the Big Ten is pretty damned good."

The game was particularly special considering Ohio State's history against the SEC in bowl games. Officially, taking out the Buckeyes' Sugar Bowl win during the 2010 season against Arkansas that was vacated because of NCAA sanctions, Ohio State entered the game 0-10 all-time vs. the conference in the postseason.

Now, thanks to Urban Meyer, the man who bucks history and rewrites narrative, that mark has one on the left side of the ledger.

"It was a breakthrough game," Meyer said. "I think the career record vs. the SEC was 0-10. I just kept seeing that stuff rolling on TV the last week. It was a breakthrough win against an excellent team."

A Gutsy Win

Ohio State knew it would need some gumption to knock off Alabama, a team that entered at 12-1 and ranked No. 1 in the nation, while playing in the Superdome, a venue in which momentum rolls down from the upper reaches of the massive structure and comes through in waves.

That meant even with the team's third-string quarterback in the game in sophomore Cardale Jones, poise was going to be among the prized assets for the Buckeyes.

"We knew coming in it wasn't going to be like the Wisconsin game, 59-zip, up and down the field," co-captain Jeff Heurman said. "We knew we were going to get stopped a few times and we had to overcome that, and we did."

Did they ever.

Ohio State trailed 21-6, and the Superdome – which was split close to 50-50 between Ohio State scarlet and Alabama crimson – was rocking. But the Buckeyes battled back, going on a 36-7 run and emphatically answering any questions about whether they were a championship outfit.

"We believed in the plan, we believed in each other," offensive coordinator Tom

Herman said. "We had an unquenchable belief in the mission and in the plan. It was real. It wasn't just coach-speak. These guys lived it and we were very confident.

"I felt confident that we were on track. That gave us some confidence, more so than maybe being down normally 21-6. We felt like we were moving the ball and making some plays. We just stubbed our toe in the red zone and had two turnovers. But we never lost confidence with that."

The win made a statement in a variety of ways. Not only did it redeem Ohio State and the Big Ten in terms of national perception, it showed that a Buckeye program that went through the speed bump that was the scandal that cost the team head coach Jim Tressel in May 2011 was without question among the elite in the sport.

Ohio State went 6-7 in 2011 before a quick turnaround under Meyer, but there were questions about just how good the Buckeyes were while running through the Big Ten and a questionable nonconference slate to a 24-0 start to the head coach's tenure. The doubters had plenty of ammunition after season-closing losses last year vs. Michigan State and Clemson, and the Sept. 6 loss this year to Virginia Tech at home made it three in four games for the Buckeyes, who looked more like pretenders than contenders at the time.

But as the team came together, buoyed in equal parts by an inspiring senior class and a precocious group of freshmen and sophomores recruited by Meyer, it showed it could compete with any team in the nation. Meyer didn't shy away from using Alabama as a measuring stick when he arrived at OSU, and the win showed exactly where the Buckeyes measured up – and where they need to keep getting better.

"I think after playing Alabama now, I think they have more depth in the defensive line," the coach said. "I think the talent level is pretty similar. I think they have more depth right now. They've been building the program. We're still at early stages of this program."

"I know it's year three, but we're going through that void right now. And we don't have the depth in certain positions, and they do. You're talking about the best – the last few years as good a program as there is. So that's the only difference."

Still, for one night in New Orleans, the Buckeyes were as good as – no, better than – the best. And it kept them alive for the ultimate prize that would eventually be won 11 days later.

"There's a little weight off your shoulders," Heurman said. "There are kind of a couple (weight) plates stacked up. You win the Big Ten and one comes off, you win this and another comes off. You still got one there though, you've still got one game to go."

"As a senior captain, this is how you want your team to be – a tight, close-knit group of guys who can overcome adversity. That's what we are and that's what we've shown this year. We've got one more to go."

Powell Wins Again

In November 2013, Powell caught a pass from Devin Gardner and in doing so sealed the Buckeyes' 11th win against rival Michigan in 13 chances.

When he arrived minutes after the game at the news conference, Powell still had the prolate spheroid in his hands and seemed to be in no hurry to put it down.

Yet after he caught Blake Sims' last-ditch Hail Mary on the final play of the Sugar Bowl to close out the win vs. Alabama, Powell sat in the team's locker room answering questions without the ball in his hand.

"Where is it?" a reporter enquired.

"Right here," Powell said, producing the football that was sitting under his folding chair. "It's not going anywhere. It's going right next to the Team Up North ball. Now I have two of them – two game-saving balls. It's a blessing."

At that, Powell turned his head down and gave the football a kiss.

It was somewhat fitting that he was the one to make the final play, as he represented the inner drive of the team. A three-star athlete who nearly quit football in high school, Powell woke up before dawn every morning for workouts to earn an Ohio State offer, and now he owned two of the more memorable pieces of memorabilia in recent Buckeye lore.

"When he rolled out that way, I'm like, 'He's really coming over here!' He threw it, and I'm like, 'This is money, baby!' I went up and snatched it," Powell said. "Doran (Grant) said he had a piece of it, but I took it from him because I'm selfish. Yes, I admit it, I'm selfish. As I caught it, I thought about taking a knee but then I looked up and saw all the green grass. I thought, 'Since I'm selfish, I'm going to go ahead and try to score!'"

Teammates joked that they thought about throwing their helmets at Powell to get him to stop and take a knee before he fumbled or a similar disaster took place, but the Buckeyes were safe. The ball wasn't going to leave his hands until the locker room – and even then he had plans to hold on to it for the rest of his life.

Buckeyes Best Tide

The Buckeyes (13-1) clinched a berth in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship vs. No. 2 Oregon, who blasted third-ranked Florida State by a 59-20 margin in the Rose Bowl, with the 42-35 win during which Ohio State outgained the Tide and forced three second-half turnovers to close out a furious Crimson Tide comeback.

"We're back. We're back," said OSU redshirt freshman linebacker Darron Lee, who had seven tackles with two sacks and three stops for loss and was the game's defensive MVP. "Those that thought we were gone, we're back. Be afraid, be very afraid."

It was not an easy victory by any means. Ohio State overcame the 21-6 second-quarter deficit by scoring 28 consecutive points to take a 34-21 lead in the third quarter. The lead was extended to 42-28 on an Ezekiel Elliott 85-yard touchdown run with 3:24 remaining in the fourth quarter, but Alabama did not quit. The Tide scored a touchdown with 1:59 remaining and had one final possession to try to tie the game, but the OSU defense stood tall to seal the victory.

"I tell you, I love these players," Meyer said. "Man, this group of guys – we played awful at times. But this is one of the great team wins we've been a part of because we didn't play well but we found a way to win."

Elliott had a stellar performance in

leading the Buckeyes. The game's offensive MVP rushed for a pair of touchdowns and gained a Sugar Bowl-record 230 yards against an Alabama defense that came into the game averaging 88.6 yards allowed on the ground per game. Jones, making just his second career start, overcame a slow start and threw for 243 yards on 18-of-35 passing with a touchdown and an interception.

Seven receivers caught passes for the Buckeyes, led by sophomore Mike Thomas, who caught seven passes for 66 yards and a highlight reel-worthy TD grab that gave the Buckeyes momentum heading into halftime.

The Buckeyes outgained Alabama, 537-407, and got several big performances from their defenders. Fifth-year senior middle linebacker Curtis Grant led OSU with 10 tackles. Redshirt freshman Eli Apple broke up two passes and combined with senior Doran Grant in holding Heisman Trophy finalist Amari Cooper to 71 yards receiving on nine catches.

"You plan and you prepare, and when you play against great players, you better have thoughts and plans in order to deal with them," OSU cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs said of defending Cooper. "He is a great player, and there was a lot of thought put into how we're going to manage to limit the damage that he can do. I don't know a lot of the numbers, but I felt like we did and I felt like our kids were really proud of that. I thought our kids rose to the challenge."

Alabama was led by Sims, who completed 22 of 36 passes for 237 yards with two touchdowns and three interceptions. Derrick Henry led the Tide's rushing attack with 95 yards and a score on 13 carries. Cooper's nine catches led the team, and he scored two of his team's touchdowns.

"We're very disappointed in the outcome of the game, but you have to congratulate Ohio State, who played a really, really good game," Alabama head coach Nick Saban said. "And we probably didn't play our best game."

After the Ohio State defense forced a three-and-out on Alabama's first possession, a 54-yard run by Elliott that included a stiff arm of one Alabama defender and a hurdle of another set up the game's first score. The Buckeyes were stopped in the red zone, but the 80-yard drive ended with a 22-yard field goal by freshman Sean Nuernberger that made it 3-0 with 11:32 left in the first quarter.

Elliott fumbled on Ohio State's next possession, though, and it took Alabama just two plays to turn the miscue into points. On second-and-2, Henry rushed over left tackle 25 yards for a touchdown. Adam Griffith added the extra point, giving the Tide a 7-3 lead with 9:25 left in the opening quarter.

Jones used his legs – he converted a third-and-8 with a 20-yard rush – and his arm, lofting a 40-yard pass to Devin Smith to the 1-yard line, to get OSU on the board on its next possession. He fumbled the shotgun snap on

Continued On Page 38

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 42, Alabama 35

Jan. 1, 2015 – Superdome; New Orleans

| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
|-------------------|----|----|----|---|----|
| OHIO STATE | 6 | 14 | 14 | 8 | 42 |
| ALABAMA | 14 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 35 |

First Quarter

OSU – Nuernberger, 22 yard field goal, 11:32; 10 plays, 80 yards, 2:26 TOP.

UA – Henry, 25 yard run (Griffith kick), 9:25; 2 plays, 33 yards, 0:28 TOP.

OSU – Nuernberger, 21 yard field goal, 5:17; 11 plays, 71 yards, 4:08 TOP.

UA – Cooper, 15 yard pass from B.Sims (Griffith kick), 2:06; 8 plays, 79 yards, 3:05 TOP.

Second Quarter

UA – Yeldon, 2 yard run (Griffith kick), 8:07; 5 plays, 15 yards, 2:02 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 3 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 2:55; 12 plays, 71 yards, 5:07 TOP.

OSU – Thomas, 13 yard pass from Spencer (Nuernberger kick), 0:12; 6 plays, 77 yards, 1:20 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – D.Smith, 47 yard pass from Ca.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 12:44; 6 plays, 75 yards, 2:16 TOP.

OSU – S.Miller, 41 yard interception return (Nuernberger kick), 3:21.

UA – B.Sims, 5 yard run (Griffith kick), 1:01; 7 plays, 84 yards, 2:15 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Elliott, 85 yard run (Thomas pass from Ca.Jones), 3:24; 4 plays, 95 yards, 2:00 TOP.

UA – Cooper, 6 yard pass from B.Sims (Griffith kick), 1:59; 6 plays, 65 yards, 1:17 TOP.

Att. – 74,682. **Weather** – 57 degrees, indoors.



Team Statistics

| | OSU | UA |
|--------------------------|---------|---------|
| First Downs | 23 | 21 |
| Rushing | 12 | 12 |
| Passing | 10 | 8 |
| Penalty | 1 | 1 |
| Rushes-Yards | 42-281 | 34-170 |
| Passing Yards | 256 | 237 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 19-36-1 | 22-36-3 |
| Offensive Plays | 78 | 70 |
| Total Net Yards | 537 | 407 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 10-18 | 2-13 |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 0-0 | 2-2 |
| Punts-Avg. | 6-46.5 | 7-55.0 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 2-1 | 0-0 |
| Penalties | 4-24 | 4-36 |
| Time of Possession | 31:19 | 28:41 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **OSU:** Elliott 20-230; Ca.Jones 17-43; Marshall 3-11; Samuel 1-1; N.Brown 1-(-4). **UA:** Henry 13-95; Yeldon 10-47; B.Sims 10-29; TEAM 1-(-1).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **OSU:** Ca.Jones 18-35-1-243-1; Spencer 1-1-0-13-1. **UA:** B.Sims 22-36-3-237-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Thomas 7-66; Marshall 5-55; D.Smith 2-87; Vannett 2-23; Elliott 1-13; Spencer 1-7; C.Smith 1-5. **UA:** Cooper 9-71; White 3-65; Henry 2-54; Howard 2-14; Fowler 2-14; Black 2-10; Vogler 2-9.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **OSU:** Johnston 6-46.5-60. **UA:** JK Scott 7-55.0-73.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Marshall 2-10. **UA:** Ch.Jones 2-10.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Samuel 2-23. **UA:** Ch.Jones 7-102.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **UA:** None.

FORCED FUMBLES – **OSU:** None. **UA:** Jackson.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **UA:** Collins 1-4.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** S.Miller 1-41; Powell 1-29; Bell 1-7. **UA:** Cy.Jones 1-32.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Da.Lee 2.0-8; Bennett 1.0-9. **UA:** Dickson 1.0-12; Pettway 1.0-5; Allen 1.0-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Da.Lee 3.0-11; Bennett 1.5-10; Washington 0.5-0. **UA:** Dickson 2.0-15; Allen 2.0-9; Ragland 2.0-5; N.Perry 1.0-11; Collins 1.0-8; Pettway 1.0-5; DePriest 1.0-1; Anderson 1.0-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **OSU:** C.Grant 5-5-10; Bell 8-0-8; Da.Lee 7-0-7; D.Grant 6-1-7; J.Perry 4-1-5; Apple 4-1-5; Bennett 2-2-4; Bosa 3-0-3; Powell 2-1-3; Conley 2-0-2; C.Smith 2-0-2; A.Washington 1-1-2; Elliott 1-0-1; Booker 1-0-1; Samuel 1-0-1; C.Williams 1-0-1; E.Smith 1-0-1; Dunn 1-0-1. **UA:** Collins 9-3-12; Ragland 2-5-7; N.Perry 5-1-6; DePriest 4-2-6; G.Smith 4-2-6; Dickson 5-0-5; E.Jackson 4-0-4; Reed 3-0-3; Foster 2-0-2; Cy.Jones 2-0-2; J.Williams 2-0-2; Allen 2-0-2; A.Robinson 2-0-2; Devall 1-1-2; T.Brown 1-0-1; Fowler 1-0-1; Anderson 1-0-1; Nysewander 1-0-1; Howard 1-0-1; J.Washington 1-0-1; Pettway 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OHIO STATE: Offense: Decker, Price, Boren, Elflein, Baldwin, Heuerman, Ca.Jones, Elliott, Thomas, Spencer, D.Smith. Defense: Bosa, A.Washington, Bennett, S.Miller, Da.Lee, C.Grant, J.Perry, Apple, D.Grant, Powell, Bell, Johnston. Reserves: E.Smith, Samuel, Burrows, Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Dunn, Reeves, Ball, Booker, Worley, Fada, Clinton, Haynes, Burger, Munger, C.Williams, Farris, Lewis, N.Brown, Vannett, C.Smith, Baugh, Schutt. **ALABAMA:** Offense: C.Robinson, Kouandjio, Kelly, L.Brown, Shepher, Vogler, Howard, B.Sims, Henry, Fowler, Cooper, Griffith. Defense: Allen, A.Robinson, Reed, Dickson, DePriest, Ragland, E.Jackson, Cy.Jones, Collins, N.Perry, G.Smith, JK Scott. Reserves: Black, T.Brown, White, Sylve, Yeldon, L.Jones, Anderson, Ro.Foster, Re.Foster, Hamilton, Cook, Stewart, Bateman, T.Jones, J.Williams, M.Smith, Ch.Jones, J.Washington, Di.Lee, Tenpenny, Devall, Evans, Nysewander, A.Taylor, Tomlinson, Mazza, Pettway, Barrineau, B.Green, Ivory.

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

OSU Overcomes Early Deficit, Turns Back Tide

Continued From Page 35

first-and-goal at the 1, though, and lost 8 yards after the recovery, and the drive ended with a 21-yard field goal by Nuernberger that made it 7-6 with 5:17 on the clock.

While the Buckeyes settled for a second field goal at the end of a promising drive, the Tide had little trouble reaching the end zone on its next possession. Alabama needed just 3:05 to march 79 yards over eight plays, and Cooper caught a 15-yard touchdown pass on an out pattern from Sims that, following a Griffith PAT, gave the Tide a 14-6 lead with 2:06 left in the opening quarter.

Ohio State committed its second turnover of the game early in the second quarter, giving the Tide another short field. Miscommunication between Jones and Smith, who never looked back for a pass that was picked off by Cyrus Jones, led to an interception that was caught at the OSU 47 and returned to the 15. T.J. Yeldon found the end zone five plays later on a 2-yard TD run, and Griffith's PAT made it 21-6 with 8:07 remaining before halftime.

The Buckeyes got back in the game on their next possession. Two 26-yard passes from Jones to Jalin Marshall put the ball in the Alabama red zone, and Ohio State converted on third-and-goal at the 3 as Elliott ran up the middle and plunged in for a touchdown. The PAT by Nuernberger made it 21-13 with 2:55 left before the half.

The OSU defense forced a three-and-out after the touchdown, giving Jones and the offense one more possession before halftime. The Buckeyes took momentum into the break thanks to an impressive six-play, 77-yard drive – and an unbelievable touchdown throw and catch. Jones helped the cause with a key 27-yard scramble to the Alabama 13, and after an incomplete, the Buckeyes used a trick play to reach the end zone.

With 19 seconds on the clock and the Buckeyes facing second-and-10, Jones took a shotgun snap and handed the ball off to Marshall, who was running right. He then pitched the ball to Evan Spencer, who threw the ball to a leaping Thomas, who made an acrobatic catch and got his left foot down in the end zone before falling out of bounds.

"I knew when it would get called I had a great chance to make it happen," Spencer said. "When I saw it coming it started to look pretty good. I just hoped that he would go get the ball and get his feet in bounds."

Nuernberger added the extra point with 12 seconds left on the clock, cutting the Alabama lead to 21-20 at halftime.

The momentum Ohio State took into the break continued into the third quarter.

The Buckeyes took their second lead of the game on the first possession of the second half. Facing a third-and-8 at the UA 47, Jones heaved a deep pass down the right sideline toward Smith. Alabama cornerback Eddie Jackson fell as the ball reached Smith, allowing the senior to walk into the end zone with a 47-yard touchdown strike – Smith's 30th and final TD grab as a Buckeye.

Nuernberger's PAT gave Ohio State a 27-21 lead with 12:44 on the third quarter clock.

Later in the third, Sims dropped back to pass on third-and-7 and threw the ball directly to senior defensive lineman Steve Miller, who had positioned himself in front of Cooper on a zone blitz. Miller picked up

some blocks and returned the pick 41 yards for a touchdown, sending the OSU supporters at the Superdome into a frenzy as Ohio State's lead grew to 34-21 with 3:21 left in the third quarter.

Alabama answered when the Tide went back on offense. Sims led a seven-play, 84-yard drive that lasted just 2:15. A 52-yard gain on a screen pass to Henry put the Tide in the red zone, and Sims later called his own number on a 5-yard rush up the middle for a touchdown. A Griffith PAT made it 34-28 with 1:01 remaining before the fourth quarter.

Alabama had a prime opportunity to retake the lead in the early portion of the fourth quarter when a Cameron Johnston punt took an inopportune bounce back toward the OSU end zone and was downed at the OSU 23. But the Tide quickly squandered the opportunity when Sims' first-down pass was picked off by Bell at the 1. Bell returned the pick to the 8 with 9:44 left on the clock.

The teams traded punts from there, and Ohio State took over at its own 5 with 5:24 to play and the six-point lead still on the board. The Buckeyes turned to their run game, gaining 4 on an Elliott carry on first down and 5 more on a Jones keeper. On third-and-1, Jones kept on an option run and ran through All-America safety Landon Collins to barely gain the yard necessary for a much-needed first down.

Then, on the ensuing first-down play, Elliott took a handoff and got a crucial block from Spencer that allowed the running back to race for an 85-yard touchdown. Elliott broke a tackle attempt by Xavier Dickson near the line of scrimmage and went the rest of the way untouched.

Jones completed a two-point conversion pass to Thomas to make it 42-28 with 3:24 on the clock.

Alabama did not quit, however, marching down the field thanks in large part to a 51-yard pass from Sims to DeAndrew White, who broke wide open on a double move. On fourth-and-2, Sims found Cooper for a 6-yard touchdown pass on a crossing pattern to cap a quick-strike drive that lasted just 1:17. Griffith's PAT cut the OSU lead to 42-35 with 1:59 remaining.

Alabama attempted an onside kick after the TD, and for a brief second, everyone in the Superdome held their breath as Spencer outjumped Ardarius Stewart for the bouncing ball. Ohio State couldn't get a first down, though, and had to punt to Alabama, which took over at its own 18 with 1:33 on the clock and no timeouts left.

The drive never got close to the end zone, though, as Sims' first two passes were caught both inbounds and short of the line to gain, keeping the clock moving. A pass to White and a Sims scramble moved the ball to the 50, and Sims hit O.J. Howard on the next play for 8 yards to get into OSU territory with 15 seconds left.

Sims' first Hail Mary was batted down by Eli Apple near the goal line, and on the final play, the Alabama senior threw to a scramble of bodies in the front right corner of the end zone. Powell outjumped everyone for the ball then raced to the OSU 29 before falling to the turf with the win literally in hand.

"There was going to be no way in the world I was going to let them score a touchdown," Powell said with his trademark smile afterward.

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

Buckeye Toughness Trumps Tide Rushing

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To understand how Ohio State defensive tackles Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington ended up walking off the Superdome field together, victorious, it's important to understand where they came from earlier in the season.

Although they were bookended with solid performances against Illinois and Michigan, the three mid-November games were not exactly a glowing endorsement of the Ohio State rushing defense.

Against Michigan State, the Buckeyes allowed 178 yards. That was followed up by a 218-yard showing from Minnesota. Things got even worse the following week when Indiana hit the Buckeyes for 281 yards on the ground. In that one, Tevin Coleman broke off runs of 90 and 52 yards. In each of those three games, opponents scored three touchdowns on the ground.

For those reasons, the Big Ten title game performance against Wisconsin couldn't have come at a better time. Facing an eventual Heisman Trophy finalist in Melvin Gordon, Ohio State held him to 76 yards on 26 carries. He didn't find the end zone – and neither did any of his teammates. After the game, he admitted that his chances of taking home the Heisman were likely nonexistent.

That win put the Buckeyes into the first College Football Playoff, and No. 1 Alabama awaited them in the Sugar Bowl. No team in recent history has done a better job of bullying opposing defensive fronts than the Tide. Wave after wave after wave of big, physical running backs cascade in the fourth quarter, when opposing defenses are too fatigued to do anything about it.

It's a recipe that Crimson Tide head coach Nick Saban rode to three national championships in a four-year span in Tuscaloosa. With running backs such as Mark Ingram (the school's first Heisman winner), Trent Richardson and Eddie Lacy, Alabama often has suffocated opposing teams by putting them in a run-heavy stranglehold that killed clocks and spirits.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that the 2014 edition of Alabama was built in the mold of its predecessors. As was often the case, the Tide boasted a pair of running backs so close in talent that fans often clamored for the backup to see more playing time. When it came time to win games, first-year offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin knew how to pour it on against broken teams. With both games close late in the third quarter, Alabama scored four straight touchdowns to defeat Auburn in the Iron Bowl and three straight touchdowns against Missouri one week later to claim the SEC Championship Game.

Film sessions did nothing to diminish Alabama's talent, but Bennett still knew how the war would be won. A couple of days before OSU's semifinal against the Tide, he was asked about how to stop the fourth-quarter onslaught that had punished so many other squads. He pinned OSU's chances on toughness and discipline. In those areas, he figured, the Buckeyes would shine.

"Stopping Alabama comes with toughness," Bennett said. "That comes with not letting them do that. That has nothing to do with game plan or anything. That's just them deciding to run the clock out and the other team not being able to stop them. I



SONNY BROCKWAY

WELL-EARNED PRAISE – Ohio State defensive linemen Michael Bennett (53) and Adolphus Washington (92) walk off the field together after helping the OSU defense limit Alabama's rushing attack.

don't think we're in that situation, and I don't predict that will happen."

He was right. It didn't happen.

Ohio State won the Sugar Bowl, and it did so by bottling up the Alabama running backs who had terrorized so many defenses this season. Sure, junior T.J. Yeldon and sophomore Derrick Henry both had their moments and collected a touchdown apiece. But both of those scores came in the first half as the Tide raced out to a 21-6 advantage. In the rushing battle, it was all OSU from that point on.

Ezekiel Elliott ran all over the SEC champs, racking up 230 yards. Meanwhile, neither 'Bama back hit the century mark. Henry finished with a team-high 95 yards on 13 carries and Yeldon managed just 10 carries for 47 yards.

"Their front did a really good job," Saban said. "We didn't handle them well in running the football like we thought we might be able to when we spread them out, and they did a good job on our perimeter screens and smokes. We made the blocks but they made the plays, and you've got to

give their players a lot of credit for the way they executed."

When the stakes were highest, Alabama couldn't crack the Ohio State defensive front. The Tide outscored opponents by a 102-55 margin in the final frame this season but could muster only nine carries for 32 yards in the fourth quarter against OSU. Bennett and Washington gave Alabama fits all night long but got better as the time got shorter.

The same could be said for their entire season. Although it didn't show immediately, something clicked in the Michigan State game, which was right about the time the two switched spots in the OSU defense. As the Buckeyes powered full-steam ahead toward the postseason, Washington and Bennett became a two-headed monster in the trenches. The duo proved inseparable the night of the Sugar Bowl, speaking together to reporters in the locker room after the win.

"That's why we're doing all these interviews together," Bennett said. "All year, we've been getting closer and closer. We personally feel like we have a big hand in these games. I think Alabama respected us. They knew they couldn't run it up the middle that much. My teammates bailed us out because I think a couple of times today they did get up the middle. This is my dude, and we shut down the middle as much we could."

Bennett credited the success to defensive line coach Larry Johnson Sr., the first-year Buckeye assistant whom he called the best coach at his position in the country. He also said OSU benefited from the group of guys on the line, none of whom lost hope when the game looked like it might be slipping away.

"I think the biggest thing is believing in your guys and believing in what your coaches tell you," Bennett said. "When we were down 21-6, a lot of teams would be like, 'Dang, this is over. This is Alabama we're playing and they're crushing us.' We all talked on the sideline and said, 'You know what? The score doesn't matter. You go win your individual battle every time.' That's what we did for the rest of the half, and that's what we did for the rest of the game."

What happened earlier was finished and erased from memory. In the late stages of the game and the season, Bennett and Washington were at their best.

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Ohio State Not Perfect, But Buckeyes Are Champs

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

When I think of Ohio State's victory over Oregon in the inaugural College Football Playoff National Championship, I think of the same thing I think about the Buckeyes' win over Alabama in the Sugar Bowl to advance to the final and about their pivotal conference win over Michigan State during the regular season. I think about how the final score in those games is not indicative of how well Ohio State played in those crucial contests.

As any Buckeye – player, coach or fan alike – has noted by now, Ohio State had a whopping four turnovers in the game against the Ducks, generally not a statistic associated with a championship win.

Or as national championship center Jacoby Boren said after the game, "If you have four turnovers in a national championship game, you should be done."

However, the turnovers were the only thing that could stop the Buckeye offense. The Ducks defense never really did, as Ohio State scored on six of its nine other drives. And the Buckeye defense was superb, limiting the damage of the turnovers to just 10 points.

When the defenders weren't covering for the foibles of their brothers on the other side of the ball, they were doing just fine in non-quick change situations, as well. In all, Ohio State forced Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota and the vaunted Ducks offense into six punts, stopped Oregon on downs at the OSU 1, and also stopped the Ducks at the OSU 9 and 6 to force field goals.

Sure, Oregon ran up 465 yards, but much of those yards came on the dizzying 11-play, 75-yard opening drive and a 70-yard, lightning-quick scoring strike from Mariota to Byron Marshall. The Buckeye defense was dominant.

If you just looked at the stat sheet, you would think that Mariota had a nice game, as he completed 24 of 37 passes for 333 yards and a pair of touchdowns against a single desperation interception.

But Spencer Hall of EDSBS.com said it better than I could: "The Buckeyes defense turned a Heisman Trophy winner into a largely harmless irrelevance with nice numbers and zero danger."

Who knows what the score might have been if the seemingly self-destructive Buckeyes hadn't turned the ball over those four times.

Similarly, Ohio State repeatedly shot itself in the foot against top-ranked Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. The Buckeyes lost a pair of turnovers against the Crimson Tide among myriad other mistakes but still posted the impressive victory.

The Tide turned an Ezekiel Elliott fumble into one touchdown and a Cardale Jones interception into another. Additionally, Jones fumbled a shotgun snap from the Alabama 1, helping to force a field goal rather than scoring a potential touchdown, ceding another four points.

Additionally, on a fourth-quarter possession, Jones was sacked deep in OSU territory and the Buckeyes were whistled for a pair of penalties, forcing punter Cameron Johnston to kick from his own end line, where he barely got away a short punt that back spun, giving Alabama the ball at the OSU 23.

No problem. Vonn Bell intercepted Crimson Tide quarterback Blake Sims on the very next play.

And I can't help but level that rare criticism against Buckeye coach Urban Meyer and offensive coordinator Tom Herman for throwing that long ball at the end of the game when pounding Elliott and running out the clock was the wiser move. That gave Alabama one last shot at what

at that point would have been an improbable victory.

Meyer would have looked like a genius if the long pass had worked, but he was going to look like a genius regardless unless his Buckeyes somehow misplayed what was a pretty pat hand. If ever there was a time to play Tresselball, this was it.

Yet despite all of the miscues vs. the Crimson Tide, Ohio State played outstanding offense and defense against what most felt was the best team in the country, and it was the Buckeyes who advanced to the CFP National Championship.

Of course Ohio State would never have faced Alabama and Oregon if it had not handily dispatched conference nemesis Michigan State, 49-37, in a game in which the score was not indicative of how much the Buckeyes looked to be the better team. There were a pair of lost fumbles, seven penalties for 50 yards, a field goal that fell short by inches and some dropped passes thrown in for good measure to slow the Ohio State Express against the Spartans.

Still, the Buckeyes prevailed easily because they were that good.

In the key games, they were good on offense, they were good on defense, they were good on special teams and, of course, they have a great coaching staff headed up by Meyer.

Now I guess you could say that if a team was *really* good it wouldn't make the kinds of mistakes and turnovers that Ohio State made in those three big football games. But the Buckeyes, despite their penchant for mistakes, still won those three important contests decisively.

It makes you wonder what Ohio State could do if it played a flawless game.

Oh, they did that against Wisconsin.

It Was Great, But ...

Shortly after the Buckeyes prevailed over the Ducks to win their first national championship since 2002, a reader emailed to ask where this game ranked for me among my favorite Ohio State games of all time.

Of course, I told him, it ranks right up there with the 2002 championship game and other favorites of mine like the Rose Bowl after the 1996 season and perhaps my all-time favorite, at least for entertainment value, the 1984 win over Illinois.

But as I said to the reader then, and I say to all readers now, I think I took more satisfaction from the win over Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. No, that game was not for the national title, but in the big picture, the long-term picture, it may be a more significant win.

Alabama is the standard by which football programs are measured right now, and its conference, the SEC, is the conference by which conferences are measured. Tide mentor Nick Saban is the coach by which coaches are measured, though I think many had Ohio State's Meyer right up there, even before the victory.

Alabama and Saban are certainly the team and coach that Meyer aspires to unseat as top dog, both on the field and in the recruiting wars.

There is no escaping Ohio State's record in the postseason against the SEC. The record book says the Buckeyes had never defeated an SEC school in the postseason, though I recognize the Sugar Bowl victory over Arkansas – I saw it, you saw it and you can't pretend it didn't

happen. But let's face it. The Razorbacks are not looked upon as an elite SEC team.

If you want to prove your team is fast, strong, tough, deep and well prepared, you have to beat Alabama. Ohio State did that and with no room for question such as when the Buckeyes beat Miami – the Alabama of its day – in the '02 championship game. Hurricanes fans, a dozen years later, are still complaining about that pivotal pass interference call.

Crimson Tide fans have no choice but to acknowledge that on Jan. 1, 2015, their team was soundly defeated by the Ohio State Buckeyes.

By the time the game with Oregon came around, it was almost anticlimactic. Oh, I savor the national championship. But I had already seen Ohio State beat Oregon soundly just a few short years ago in the Rose Bowl. I knew the Ducks would have to contend with the physical nature of the Buckeyes.

For all of the sophistication of today's game, football still comes down to who hits the hardest and who tackles the best. I am not minimizing the accomplishments of the Ducks in any way. They earned their way into the championship game. But in some ways Oregon features a gimmick offense that teams are ill-prepared for because they don't typically see that ultra-quick attack – almost like playing Navy and its option that most teams are unfamiliar with.

How well do they play against a truly physical team like Ohio State? Would they have struggled similarly against Alabama if the Tide had advanced?

I must admit that I was nervous after Oregon's first drive against the Buckeyes. Because we work on Saturdays, I hadn't seen the Ducks in action. That 11-play, 75-yard drive made me dizzy just watching it, so I can imagine how the Buckeye defenders must have felt as they were run up the field with little chance to get organized or catch their breath.

But by the end of the game, it was the Oregon defense that had trouble catching its breath as its members got a taste of good old-fashioned – and frequently belittled – Big Ten smash-mouth football.

"You could tell they were kind of huffing and puffing," OSU offensive tackle Taylor Decker said. "We were just hitting them and hitting them and hitting them, and we were just going right at them. Right up the middle. We were running the ball right up the middle. We know we're a tough, physical team."

Not only were the physical Buckeyes moving the football, but the Ohio State offense was indirectly helping slow the vaunted Ducks offense. A good way to hold a potent offense in check is to keep the ball away from it, and Ohio State held a dominating 23:01 to 6:59 edge in time of possession in the second half.

In Ohio State's 26-17 victory over the Ducks back in the Rose Bowl, they held a clock advantage of 41:37 to 18:23.

As I said, I had already seen Ohio State beat Oregon. And now I have seen the Buckeyes beat Alabama.

They Took Their Lumps

A couple of people who have taken their share of criticism from pundits and Buckeye fans alike should be acknowledged in light of Ohio State's amazing postseason.

Linebacker Curtis Grant has been pointed to by many Buckeye fans as someone who under-

performed throughout his Buckeye career, not because of his play so much as his failure to live up to his five recruiting stars earned coming out of high school. By the time Ohio State's latest linebacker stud, freshman Raekwon McMillan, took the field for the Buckeyes, those same unsatisfied fans were clamoring for the senior Grant to take a seat in favor of the rookie.

Rather than resenting McMillan, who had his moments as a freshman, Grant mentored him – another example of the team's all for one, one for all spirit.

Being a team player is fine, but it is still about what you do on the field, and when the championship march was in full swing, Grant played arguably the best football of his college career.

Grant had four tackles and a stop for a loss against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, a team-leading 10 tackles in the Sugar Bowl and another six tackles against the Ducks in the championship game.

Grant definitely rose to the championship occasion.

Kicker Kyle Clinton also took some knocks this season for his penchant for kicking the ball out of bounds, giving opponents good field position. He and his mates on the kick coverage team were outstanding in the College Football Playoff.

Alabama's average starting point after kicks was just short of its 21, while Oregon, on average, started just past the 20.

And what can you say about Luke Fickell, the lightning rod for any criticism directed toward the Ohio State defense for the past three years?

Those critical of Fickell will say that the improved defense is completely because of the presence of new co-coordinator Chris Ash. But if you say that all woes can be pinned on Fickell, you have to give him his props when the defense shines.

"Defense won the game," Meyer said of the championship victory. "We lose that game if we don't stop them on turnovers. We consider that a stop when you hold them to a field goal. Championships are won with defense, and our defense has been on a difficult journey the last couple of years, but the future of our defense is even better because there are a lot of young guys playing."

There is no question that Ash had an influence on the defense, but if he and Fickell hadn't meshed, his hiring would not have worked.

Give Fickell his due. The lifelong Buckeye is well versed in overcoming adversity, the hallmark of the national champions, and his demeanor no doubt rubbed off on his charges, as did his knowledge of defense.

Rose Bowl Revisited

With regard to the previously mentioned victory by Ohio State over Oregon in the 2010 Rose Bowl, we ran reprints of several BSB stories about that game from our Jan. 16, 2010, issue in our recent Jan. 9 electronic BSB Quickly that previewed the CFP National Championship.

Speaking of players perpetually blasted by some Buckeye fans, Terrelle Pryor was outstanding in that victory, completing 23 of 37 passes for 266 yards and a pair of touchdowns and rushing 20 times for a game-high 72 yards.

As I watch the Meyer-Herman offense, I often think about what Pryor might have done if he had been given the same coaching as Braxton Miller, J.T. Barrett and Coles and was in the same system.

The stories of the 2010 Rose Bowl are archived, and access is free to current BSB subscribers. For instructions on how to access BSB Quickly, see page 5 of this issue or call (614) 486-2202.