

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 34, No. 2

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 13, 2014

Night Terrors

Virginia Tech Upsets No. 8 OSU

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

An Ohio State team that entered the season with a lot of holes to fill sprang a bunch of leaks Sept. 6 in a loss against Virginia Tech.

The most significant difference between the two teams in VT's victory was that one played aggressively while the other seemed to mostly try to. The Buckeyes might figure out how to play like the Hokies by the end of the season, but it won't undo the 35-21 final score.

Coaches and players alike agreed in a somber postgame interview room at Ohio Stadium that the only way to avoid sinking as the season wears on is to go back to work on the many deficiencies the Hokies exposed, some physical and others mental.

"We have enough skill on this football team to get by people," head coach Urban Meyer said. "It didn't look like it, but we have to get by people – or what you saw today you'll see every week."

Odds-makers in Las Vegas installed No. 8 Ohio State as a double-digit favorite against Virginia Tech, a perennial power from the ACC coming off consecutive disappointing seasons under legendary head coach Frank Beamer.

Like Meyer, Beamer has a team with a lot of new faces to work into his lineup this year, including at quarterback. More than half of Virginia Tech's starters on defense are new, too, and there are a handful of young play-makers on offense the Hokies hope will reenergize an attack that has been stagnant during the past few seasons.

But while Ohio State spent the offseason installing a new defensive scheme and trying to change the way the Buckeyes play, Virginia Tech was simply reloading a stop unit that has been doing the same things to opponents for decades under coordinator Bud Foster.



JOSH WINSLOW

CROWD (DIS)PLEASER – Virginia Tech tight end Bucky Hodges (7) hauls in the go-ahead touchdown pass to the dismay of Ohio State sophomore safety Vonn Bell (11) and the Ohio Stadium crowd.

The result was starkly different outcomes as Virginia Tech took Ohio State out of what it wanted to do offensively and the Hokies were able to dictate terms when they had the ball just enough to come away with the win. That VT defensive back Donovan Riley put the game away with 63-yard interception return for a touchdown in the closing minute seemed appropriate even if it made the final score less indicative of how close the game might have been. The Hokies defense was the dominant unit of the night, and it deserved a signature moment.

Meanwhile, Ohio State walked away wondering what to make of itself on both sides of the ball.

"Well it's certainly difficult to determine what our identity is when you're facing a team that is basically making you say, 'This is going to be your identity. You're not going to run the ball and you're going to have to beat us throwing the ball,'" Ohio State offensive coordinator Tom Herman said. "Literally with both every gap inside covered and everybody playing man coverage, we weren't good enough tonight to make them pay for that."

The timing of such a matchup was problematic for Ohio State as new quarterback J.T. Barrett was under pressure for most of the night behind a rebuilt offensive line that had problems of both the mental and physical variety. Barrett, a redshirt freshman playing only his second college game, threw two touchdown passes but also tossed three interceptions.

Riley's appeared to come on a miscommunication with wide receiver Corey Smith, who was running deep as Barrett threw an out route that found only Virginia Tech players in the area. The other two came when the youngster went deep and was picked off by the free safety, a defender who was not there much of the night as Virginia Tech often rushed everyone who was not in man-to-man coverage with a receiver on most – but not all – plays.

"That was 'zero man' (coverage) most of the game, and they put their corners on islands that we didn't expose," Meyer said. "And then we miss a couple of protections and

we're on our backs. It was a gutsy effort by our quarterback. Obviously not good enough, but a quarterback is a product of those around him, and we all have to get better."

Barrett finished the night with 219 yards passing and 70 yards rushing, but he was not efficient in piling up those numbers. Twenty of his 29 passes were incomplete, a result of a combination of hurried throws, bad decisions and drops. He also carried the ball 24 times, a number that included seven sacks and several scrambles when he was either rushed before he could get through his progressions or could not find anyone open if he did examine every possible outlet.

"I think he handled it pretty much like any guy starting his second game with a bunch of blitzing would," first-year starting right tackle Darryl Baldwin said. "It's tough when we don't block everyone the whole time, but I thought he handled it well for this being his second game starting."

But that gets back to the defenses. While the Ohio State offense was not ready to face such an aggressive attack, the Buckeye defense was not ready to execute its own.

The time since the Ohio State defense deserved the moniker Silver Bullets seems to be slipping farther into the past with every 30-plus-point game by the opposition. Virginia Tech's was the third in the last four and the ninth in the 27 games Meyer has been head coach of the Buckeyes.

Things were supposed to be different this season – and they still might be – but the changes to the scheme and the mind-set were not in effect yet as Virginia Tech ground out the 14-point win at Ohio Stadium, Ohio State's first loss there to an unranked nonconference opponent since 1982.

Chris Ash was hired as a new co-defensive coordinator in the offseason to team with longtime assistant Luke Fickell to install a more aggressive scheme in the secondary with more pressure coming from the front seven, but the newness of the attack was apparent throughout the

Continued On Page 8

OPINION

Hokies' Win No Fluke Against Young Buckeyes

Woody Hayes once said, "There's nothing that cleanses your soul like getting the hell kicked out of you." Well, if the old man was right, the soul of the Ohio State football team must be squeaky clean after the Buckeyes absorbed what can only be described as a good, old-fashioned butt-whipping Sept. 6 at the hands of an inspired Virginia Tech team.

The Hokies came into Ohio Stadium and silenced a record crowd of 107,517 by executing a solid game plan on both offense and defense.

Defensively, Virginia Tech concentrated from the get-go on neutralizing Ohio State's speed advantage by shutting off the perimeter run game, and to say the Buckeyes had no answer from press box to sideline would be an understatement.

Despite being known as a defense that will blitz early and often from a variety of angles, the Hokies pretty much had their own way with OSU's offensive line all night long, sacking redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett seven times and pressuring him into three interceptions.

Offensively, Virginia Tech offered an attack that wasn't overly complicated, but the Ohio State defense struggled to get the Hokies off the field when it mattered most. Quarterback Michael Brewer, a junior transfer making his first collegiate start on the road, engineered an efficient attack that was successful on seven of its first 10 third-down conversions and staked Tech to a 21-7 halftime lead.

During that first half, the Buckeyes made more mistakes – both mental and physical – than most pee-wee league teams make during an entire season.

Just within the first three minutes of the opening quarter, OSU linebacker Darron Lee drew a personal foul for a late hit on Brewer, running back Dontre Wilson dropped a third-down pass that would have given his team a fresh set of downs, and on the next play, a high snap threw off the timing of punter Cameron Johnston, whose subsequent 24-yard shank set up the Hokies' first touchdown.

The comedy of errors then continued in all facets of the game for the Buckeyes.

The defense got caught in a blitz on Virginia Tech's second touchdown and made matters worse with shoddy tackling. The Hokies started that drive at their own 42, courtesy of a personal foul penalty on junior Ron Tanner, who tackled the kickoff return man after he was clearly out of bounds.

There was a false-start penalty on guard Billy Price, stunting an OSU drive that ended in a missed 40-yard field goal – one of two first-half misses by freshman kicker Sean Nuernberger. His second miss was a 27-yarder that came on the heels of a dropped pass in the end zone by receiver Corey Smith.

There was a high snap from center Jacoby Boren to Barrett resulting in a 15-yard loss that squandered good field position, soft coverage by cornerback Eli Apple that allowed Brewer to convert a third-and-17 pass from his own end zone, and a pass interference call on Apple that negated a third-and-7 incompleting, allowing Virginia Tech to sustain another drive and score what turned out to be the winning touchdown.

Mix in senior Kyle Clinton's kickoff that went out of bounds – an inexcusable penalty that has occurred each of the first two weeks – after Ohio State had finally tied the score at 21, an offensive line that simply could not keep a relentless Virginia Tech rush

out of Barrett's face, and miscommunication between Barrett and Smith that resulted in the final coffin-nailing interception return, and you have the first loss to an unranked nonconference opponent at home since 1982 and the first loss in a home opener since 1978.

In retrospect, those of us who predicted a victory for the Buckeyes against Virginia Tech should have known better. Personally, I have covered college football much too long to have fallen into the trap of believing raw talent could overcome a lack of experience. The truth of the matter is that Ohio State is simply too young and too inexperienced right now at too many key positions to expect anything other than what happened against the Hokies.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

A favorable schedule from here on out – not to mention playing in a conference that has now been exposed as the poster child for mediocrity – should mean that a Big Ten championship remains a possibility for the Buckeyes.

Still, I think when two-time national champion head coach Urban Meyer was hired in December 2011 and then proceeded to put together three consecutive top-five recruiting classes, the goal for Ohio State was to be the best team in all of college football, not merely the best team in a mediocre conference.

Random Ramblings

• Did you ever wonder why ESPN studio analyst Mark May seizes upon every chance to bang on the Buckeyes? May, who is a proud alumnus of the University of Pittsburgh, where he earned All-America honors as well as the Outland Trophy in 1980, has never forgiven Ohio State for what he perceived to be running up the score during a 72-0 thrashing the Buckeyes gave the Panthers in 1996. OSU is 19-5-1 all-time against Pitt, and after the 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech, the Buckeyes are now 40-17-1 against current members of the Atlantic Coast Conference.

• Despite that excellent all-time record, Ohio State is working on a three-game losing streak against ACC teams. Before losing to the Hokies, the Buckeyes dropped a 40-35 decision to Clemson last January in the Orange Bowl and lost a 24-6 contest at Miami (Fla.) in 2011. The most recent victory for OSU against a member of the ACC came in 2010 – a 36-24 home win against the Hurricanes. But since that game was vacated by the NCAA, the last recognized success for the Buckeyes against an ACC team was a 22-14 win at North Carolina State in 2004.

• For Meyer, it was only his second loss in eight games against ACC teams during his head coaching career. He was 7-1 against ACC teams while at Florida, with the only blemish on that record a 31-7 loss to Florida State in 2010.

• Virginia Tech bettered its all-time record to 31-21 against current members of the Big Ten. That record is a bit misleading since it counts games against Maryland, Rutgers and Nebraska played before those teams joined the conference. The Hokies have played only three times against Big Ten teams that were league members at the time

of the game. In addition to this year's win against OSU, Tech scored a 45-20 win over Indiana in the 1993 Independence Bowl and lost a 23-20 overtime decision to Michigan in the 2011 Sugar Bowl.

• Hokies head coach Frank Beamer might be the winningest active head coach at the Football Bowl Subdivision level, but he is not the most famous person produced by his hometown of Mount Airy, N.C. – not by a long shot. That distinction would belong to film and television star Andy Griffith, who first came to prominence in the early 1950s with a comedy recording of "What It Was, Was Football." If you have never heard the tale of a wide-eyed country boy attending his first-ever football game, you owe it to yourself to find it on YouTube. As they say, laughter is the best medicine.

• Did you wonder why Ohio State played in its home scarlet jerseys against Navy? It was because the Midshipmen were unveiling their new uniform design inspired by the Navy's Summer Whites. The design was accurate in nearly every detail from the gold belt buckle and solid white shoes to the stars and three parallel stripes on the uniforms of co-captains Noah Copeland and Parrish Gaines, insignia depicting the rank of midshipmen lieutenants.

Speaking Of The B1G

• The hot seat got a little hotter for Brady Hoke in Ann Arbor. Not only did Michigan get smoked by Notre Dame, the 31-0 shutout loss was the first time the Wolverines had been held scoreless in a game since a 26-0 loss to Iowa in 1984. That ended a Football Bowl Subdivision record streak of 365 consecutive games without being shut out. Going back even further, Michigan hadn't suffered a shutout loss at the hands of a nonconference opponent since a 25-0 loss in the 1951 season opener to Michigan State. The Spartans didn't become full-fledged members of the Big Ten until 1953.

• It might be a while before you find a better individual effort than the one displayed by Nebraska running back Ameer Abdullah to propel his team to victory against McNeese State. With the score tied at 24 and the Cornhuskers facing a third-and-6 in their own territory, Abdullah took a swing pass and broke five tackles on his way to a 58-yard touchdown with 20 seconds left to give Nebraska a 31-24 victory over the upstart Cowboys, who have beaten Football Bowl Subdivision teams each of the last two seasons – Middle Tennessee in 2012 and South Florida last year.

• Despite entering the game as 3½-point favorites, Purdue turned the ball over three times and committed a handful of costly penalties, all resulting in a 38-17 loss to Central Michigan. The myriad of mistakes aside, the oddsmakers should probably have seen the upset coming. Fifth-year Chippewas head coach Dan Enos is now 8-1 lifetime against the Boilermakers, including seven victories while he was at Michigan State as a player (1987-90) and assistant coach (2006-09).

• Northwestern's woes continued with a 23-15 home loss to Northern Illinois. The Huskies have won five of their last eight games against the Big Ten and are working on a three-game winning streak against the conference that includes victories at Iowa and Purdue last season. NIU's next Big Ten assignment comes in September 2015 at Ohio State.

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 34, No. 2
Sept. 13, 2014
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)

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The next issue (Sept. 27 cover date) will be mailed Sept. 16.

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



Charter Member

OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

Offensive Line Buckles In Crunch Time

In its season opener against Navy, the rebuilt Ohio State offensive line didn't put together the most impressive first-half performance. That problem improved after half time, and redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett completed all four of his second-half passes for 130 yards and two touchdowns.

With more time to throw, the Buckeyes scored a touchdown on each of their final three drives.

GAME NOTEBOOK Ryan Ginn

"It didn't resemble an offensive line of Ohio State the first two quarters," Buckeye coach Urban Meyer said after the 34-17 win over the Midshipmen. "I'm being hard on them, but they played much better in the second half."

One week later, after the 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech, Meyer had no such praises to soften his criticism. Barrett was hounded for the entire game, but the Virginia Tech defense actually got to him when it mattered. After allowing one sack in the first half, the Ohio State offensive line surrendered a whopping six sacks in the fourth quarter.

Part of that can be chalked up to the massive holes being filled on the offensive line – Corey Linsley and Jack Mewhort both started in their NFL debuts – but the problem ran deeper than that. Virginia Tech stifled the Buckeyes with a risky aggressive scheme that often left no safety help in the secondary, overwhelming and outnumbering the OSU blockers with the additional blitzers.

It's a look that Ohio State expected to some degree, but it featured variations and alterations that left the second-most inexperienced offensive line in the country confused about how to handle the relentless onslaught schemed up by Virginia Tech defensive coordinator Bud Foster.

"They didn't exactly do it the way we thought they would," said fifth-year senior right tackle Darryl Baldwin, one of four new starters in the trenches. "We kind of had to go on the fly and change our system up a little bit. We found a couple of plays that worked, but not everything was working for us and it just threw us off a little bit."

Baldwin noted that the six sacks in the fourth quarter were unacceptable but the Buckeyes were never able to stop the numbers advantage that Virginia Tech had.

"It's hard because it seems like there's always going to be one extra guy that nobody's blocking," Baldwin said. "It just felt like that all night for us. I'm not sure how to fix that. We need to find a better game plan, and I'm sure we will."

Aside from the scheme, the offensive linemen simply need to block better in order to help out the offense. With eight and nine players in the box on most plays, Ohio State coaches were forced to provide blocking help that left fewer skill players on the outside.

"Really, the only way to attack that is the speed option and throw the football," Ohio State offensive coordinator Tom Herman said. "We were a little bit limited because we had to keep some guys in protection to help our offensive line, which gave the quarterback less options, so that was difficult."



Darryl Baldwin

The inexperience on the line and throughout the entire offense also led to issues in communication, which may have hurt the Buckeyes when it came to identifying what the Hokies were doing and how they needed to adjust.

"Communication is always a big one," Baldwin said. "We just have to communicate what we see in the defensive front, the quarterbacks and receivers need to communicate what they see in the secondary. It can just all get better."

For Meyer, unlike in the game against Navy, the last two quarters against Virginia Tech produced more questions than answers. With an offensive line coach such as Ed



JOSH WINSLOW

NOT-SO-SPECIAL TEAMS – Freshman kicker Sean Nuernberger (96) missed two field goals, two of several miscues the Ohio State football team made in the kicking game in the loss to Virginia Tech.

Warinner, though, Meyer believes that this group is capable of the improvement that it will take to become a productive unit by the end of the season.

"You really find out about people," he said. "And I have a lot of confidence that some of these young people – now they're veteran guys – are going to get better and better each week. We just have to do a better job."

More than anything, it will take work. There is no substitute for game action – and the offensive line should develop with each contest – but each practice rep and film session has become even more valuable now.

"We have a lot of young guys on offense and defense – particularly on the offensive line with four new starters," Baldwin said. "We just have to come back tomorrow, look

at what we did and see what we could have done better. Everyone has room for improvement. We just have to get better."

Special Teams Struggle Hurts

Meyer spoke prior to the Virginia Tech game about how Hokies coach Frank Beamer opened his eyes to the importance of special teams in 1998 when Meyer was doing some special teams work as an assistant at Notre Dame.

The third-year Ohio State coach couldn't have been pleased, then, to see his squad mangle just about every phase of the kicking game against the Hokies.

The tone was set for a poor showing when sophomore punter Cameron Johnston uncharacteristically shanked a 24-yard punt to end Ohio State's first possession of the game, giving the Hokies the ball on the Ohio State 43-yard line. Virginia Tech responded with the first score of the game 10 plays later to take a 7-0 lead.

When that punt was brought up in the postgame press conference, Meyer offered a predictably brief and cutting remark.

"Don't punt the ball 24 yards," he said. "So we've got to work on that. Don't punt the ball 24 yards."

Had the problem been limited to that, Ohio State might have been fine. Instead, the Buckeyes came up empty on back-to-back drives early in the second quarter when freshman kicker Sean Nuernberger missed a pair of field goals. His 40-yard attempt drifted far to the left, while a kick from 27 yards out on the next possession bounced off the left upright.

In both cases, the kicks looked different from the style he employed against Navy when he converted a pair of field goals. Instead of following through the ball, Nuernberger appeared to toe at it. If any Buckeye fans were clamoring for senior kicker Kyle Clinton to take over spot kicks, those prayers went unanswered – Nuernberger was sent back out for the PAT attempts on the final two Ohio State touchdowns and successfully converted both of them.

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OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH



JOSH WINSLOW

NEW LOOK – The Ohio State football team entered the field through a new tunnel entrance that was built under the South Stands.

Clinton did, however, make a misstep of his own.

When Ohio State scored a fourth-quarter touchdown to tie the game at 21, Clinton booted the ensuing kickoff out of bounds, allowing Virginia Tech to start at its own 35-yard line. The Hokies marched down the field in six plays, scoring a touchdown and regaining a lead they would not relinquish again.

“(Special teams) set us back a little bit,” Meyer said. “And we missed a couple of field goals, gave up a punt return. The kickoff coverage was OK.”

Conversion Crisis On Offense

One area in which Ohio State could not afford to fall short – especially given its opponent’s success in this department – was in third-down conversions. Virginia Tech managed to extend drive after drive, finishing 9 of 17 on third-down plays. Ohio State, on the other hand, successfully moved the chains four times in 16 third-down situations.

“We just haven’t been able to get on a roll offensively,” Baldwin said. “The defense has been playing well, and when we get these opportunities we haven’t been taking advantage of them. Those three-and-outs have been killing us, and third down especially. Once we get that fixed, we’ll be good.”

All three of Barrett’s interceptions came on third down, and he also took a sack on a bad snap in a third-down situation. Only four of the third downs required 5 yards or less to gain a first down, and on four separate occasions the Buckeyes needed at least 16 yards to move the chains.

There was one bright spot, as Barrett’s 53-yard touchdown pass to Michael Thomas late in the third quarter came on third down.

Barrett Can’t Match Opener

After going 12 for 15 for 226 yards and two touchdowns against Navy, Barrett’s line

looked dramatically different against the Hokies. The Texan completed less than one-third of his passes, finishing 9 of 29 for 219 yards, one touchdown and three interceptions.

Unlike the opener, Ohio State wasn’t able to keep him out of unfavorable situations once he made his first mistake. With the offensive line failing to provide adequate protection and receivers failing to gain separation against one of the best secondaries in the country, Barrett didn’t have ideal circumstances.

“J.T.’s a grinder,” senior tight end Jeff Heuerman said. “I think that’s what you saw tonight. He grinded. I think he did everything in his ability for us, and there are a lot of positions on the offense that we need to do a better job and help him out and bring him up and allow him to make some plays.

“I think the coaches know that and the players know that as well. He’s the quarterback but he’s not the whole offense. There are a lot of moving parts and a lot of parts that need to be tightened down a little bit in order for him to be as successful as he wants to be.”

On the other hand, part of playing quarterback means accepting the blame for a team-wide failure in addition to receiving a large portion of the glory during more successful outcomes. Herman described Barrett’s play against the Hokies as “not very good.”

“At the end of the day you’re judged at that position by whether you win or lose and how many points you score ... and we didn’t do that,” Herman said. “Certainly it’s not a one-man show, and there were times he did run quite a bit there. We’ve just got to make sure good things continue to become good things and we minimize the mistakes that he made.”

Team Gets First Look At ‘Shoe Renovations

The home opener against Virginia Tech marked the first time that Ohio State was able to soak in the renovations made to

2014 OSU Football Schedule

| Date | Opponent | Time/Result | TV | Record, Sept. 6 Results |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Aug. 30 | vs. Navy* (at Baltimore) | W, 34-17 | CBS Sports Net. | 1-1, 31-24 win over Temple |
| Sept. 6 | VIRGINIA TECH* | L, 35-21 | ESPN | 2-0, 35-21 win over Ohio State |
| Sept. 13 | KENT STATE^ | Noon | ABC or ESPN2 | 0-2, 23-13 loss to South Alabama |
| Sept. 27 | CINCINNATI*% | 6 p.m. | BTN | 0-0, Open week |
| Oct. 4 | at Maryland* | TBA | TBA | 2-0, 24-17 win over South Florida |
| Oct. 18 | RUTGERS*# | 3:30 p.m. | ABC, ESPN or BTN | 2-0, 38-25 win over Howard |
| Oct. 25 | at Penn State | 8 p.m. | ABC/ESPN/ESPN2 | 2-0, 21-3 win over Akron |
| Nov. 1 | ILLINOIS | 8 p.m. | ABC/ESPN/ESPN2 | 2-0, 42-34 win over W.Kentucky |
| Nov. 8 | at Michigan State* | 8 p.m. | ABC | 1-1, 46-27 loss to Oregon |
| Nov. 15 | at Minnesota* | TBA | TBA | 2-0, 35-24 win over Middle Tenn. State |
| Nov. 22 | INDIANA | TBA | TBA | 1-0, Open week |
| Nov. 29 | MICHIGAN* | TBA | TBA | 1-1, 31-0 loss to Notre Dame |
| ^ – Alumni Band Day * – Bowl team % – Hall of Fame Day # – Homecoming | | | | |

Ohio Stadium over the offseason. The multi-million-dollar project included the addition of nearly 2,600 seats to the south stands, permanent lighting around the stadium that was utilized for the first time against the Hokies, new FieldTurf and a new, wider tunnel entrance for the players under the south stands.

“What a great way to open the new stadium under the lights,” Meyer said on his radio show before the game.

Meyer and the team did not see the renovations, which cost \$13.7 million, before the home opener. Prior to the Virginia Tech game the team had not seen the stadium since training camp, the coach said.

“It still had some work to do,” he said. “I remember looking at it and thinking, ‘Glad I’m not in charge of this.’ They had a lot of work to do.”

The work got done and the renovation expanded the seating capacity of Ohio Stadium to 104,944, making it the third-largest stadium in the country. Only Michigan and Penn State boast bigger venues.

“It was crazy running out in the stadium the way it was,” Josh Perry said after the Virginia Tech game. “It looked amazing and the tunnel was great.”

The official attendance was 107,517, an Ohio Stadium record.

Virginia Tech Game Offers Firsts For Young Buckeyes

While the loss to Virginia Tech marked a lot of negative firsts for Ohio State – most notably the first home loss to an unranked nonconference opponent since 1982 – some young players had positive firsts to take from the two-score defeat.

Redshirt freshman Eli Apple recorded his first career interception, picking off Michael Brewer on a nice play early in the first quarter. Barrett, meanwhile, picked up his first career touchdown run on a 2-yard scamper later in the same period.

In all, freshmen and sophomores have accounted for 49 of the Buckeyes’ 55 points so far this season with Devin Smith’s 80-yard touchdown against Navy serving as the lone exception.



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Since 2002, the Greater Columbus Sports Commission has hosted more than 240 new sporting events, generating close to an estimated \$500 million in visitor spending.

COVER STORY

Buckeyes Drop Prime-Time Battle To Hokies

Continued From Page 1

game as Ohio State still gave Virginia Tech receivers plenty of room to make key catches, even on some third-and-longs that kept drives alive. The Buckeyes blitzed fairly often, too, but not many of them were effective, leaving the defensive backs out to dry too often.

"Regardless of your plan, if you can't execute it doesn't matter what kind of players you've got and all that," Fickell said. "We've got to really go back to the execution of what we do, and I think our kids understand the base concepts of what we do. When it got down to the situation, we just didn't execute great."

Offense Falls Short

Foster bedeviled the Buckeyes with a bevy of different blitzes, but his overall game plan relied on two key pieces of strategy: covering the three interior offensive linemen with defensive linemen (called a "double eagle" or "Bear" front) and playing man to man on the outside.

That meant Ohio State could not run up the middle without having three of its new starters there (at center and both guards) win one-on-one matchups, and it could not throw downfield without having the same type of success with its receivers against the aggressive VT cornerbacks and safeties.

There are ways to beat schemes like Virginia Tech's, but they are not easy to execute. Having a veteran quarterback with exceptional talent is a big help, but Ohio State's was on the sidelines in street clothes.

Braxton Miller, Ohio State's three-year starter who is out for the season after having shoulder surgery in August, not only might have had a better chance reading the Hokies secondary and executing difficult throws, but his unique blend of speed and quickness could have made a major difference in running outside, away from where the Virginia Tech defenders were massed.

"There are two unblocked defenders standing right there at the point of attack," Meyer said. "One thing the option does,



JOSH WINSLOW

UPS & DOWNS – Ohio State redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) compiled 289 yards of total offense but was sacked seven times.

it equalizes one defender and we had a couple of big (run plays), one touchdown by (Ezekiel Elliott) and some plays in the

option game, but there's no inside run game when they do that."

He noted that the Buckeyes saw similar

defensive fronts from Purdue and California in 2012 but found a way to win both games. Miller hooked up with speedy wide receiver Devin Smith for a game-winning 72-yard touchdown against the Golden Bears, and backup quarterback Kenny Guiton rallied the Buckeyes against the Boilermakers.

With Miller sidelined and Guiton having graduated, that duty fell to Barrett, who hooked up with Smith for a 58-yard pass play and hit Michael Thomas and Dontre Wilson for gains of 53 and 40 yards, respectively, but too often found his receivers unable to get open.

"There's not enough confidence in our skilled athletes, and we worked so hard, recruited so hard," Meyer said. "We've got to do better and win some matchups. That's what it comes down to is winning matchups."

Picking Up The Pieces

Meyer, his players and assistants were all clearly disappointed with their showing after the loss, but none was willing to offer much in the way of an excuse for the performance.

They all remained adamant that their plans can still work and the talent is in place for a stellar season even if a third consecutive perfect regular season went out the window after only two weeks.

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COVER STORY

"They really did a good job preparing for us and exposed us a little bit, where some of the weaknesses are right now on our team," Meyer said. "And it was rather obvious what it is. But we can play better on both sides. We're anxious to get back to work tomorrow and get a little better."

Herman agreed the Buckeyes have a lot to fix but praised his team's resilience.

"We've been trained to respond in the right way to something like this happening," Herman said. "We'll get up tomorrow and I told my guys, 'Let this one hurt tonight, but when you get up in the morning, it's time to go to work.' And the work is not only preparing for the next opponent but making sure we continue to get better as a group."

Herman may have an advantage over his counterparts on the defensive coaching staff as he is able to continue to reinforce what the Buckeyes did over the past two seasons to be one of the best offenses in the country. They will continue to tailor an attack to play to Barrett's strengths and push such young playmakers as Wilson,

Elliott, Thomas, running back Curtis Samuel and receiver Jalin Marshall to help make up for the loss of Miller.

The offensive line's development also figures to be key in telling the tale of how the Ohio State season plays out, but that is another area that has been strong since Meyer and line coach Ed Warinner arrived in Columbus.

While developing young talent and building chemistry on offense is a fact of life for young teams in college football, the way the Buckeyes lost to Virginia Tech was also a reminder that cultures do not change overnight.

Ohio State once played defense the way the Hokies do. The schemes were somewhat similar, but the mind-set was much more the same. However they were attacking, that was the proper term for what they were doing.

The Buckeyes may be learning there is more to playing aggressive defense than

changing the scheme. They looked like a team that is still figuring out how to get in their opponents' grill, a place Virginia Tech spent most of the night when Ohio State had the ball.

"It does take time, but we really don't have time," said linebacker Joshua Perry, who had 11 tackles, including two for loss. "We have to ask guys to step up now. That's going to be one of the things we work on. Being aggressive is a great thing because you get guys on their heels, but if you don't execute it properly, you put yourself in some shaky situations. We have to get back to execution."

Tight end Jeff Heuerman, a clearly frustrated senior captain, spoke highly of his teammates. He was shut out in the passing game – in no small part because he was forced to stay in to help the overwhelmed offensive line with pass protection for Barrett – but expressed confidence in what is yet to

come for the 2014 Buckeyes on both sides of the ball.

"It seemed like we never got ahead of them offensively," Heuerman said. "Defensively on their side of the ball I think they were one step ahead. They just seemed to have a lot of answers for things we were doing, and we hit a few things here and there but I don't think we ever got ahead of them like we do on a lot of teams. Hats off to them. It's a good football team and classy guys and a good coaching staff, and it's just part of the game."


"You know, it's not the last game of the season. We have a long season we've got to finish out. Coach Meyer's message to the team afterward was we can still accomplish what we want to accomplish at 11-1 so we've just got to tighten down the bolts a little bit and take care of business and figure out what we did wrong and learn from it and move on. We've got Kent State this week and then a bye week and Cincinnati, and then it's a whole different season so we're looking forward to it."



Tom Herman



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OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

Virginia Tech Pulls Off Upset Of Sloppy OSU

By MATTHEW HAGER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

What was supposed to be a historic night for the Ohio State football program was.

Just not how the Buckeyes wanted.

Playing under the now-permanent lights at a renovated Ohio Stadium in front of a record crowd of 107,517, the visiting Virginia Tech Hokies spoiled the party and ruined No. 8 Ohio State's night with a 35-21 upset victory. It was the first time the Buckeyes had lost a home opener since dropping a 19-0 game to Penn State in 1978 and the first time they lost at home to an unranked nonconference foe since falling 34-17 to Florida State in 1982.

It was a poor night all around for the Buckeyes (1-1).

Several special teams miscues hurt Ohio State throughout the game, and neither the offense nor the defense fared particularly well. Redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett produced 289 yards of total offense but completed only 9 of 29 passes and had three throws intercepted. Barrett's 70 yards rushing were more than the rest of Ohio State's ball carriers combined, as Ezekiel Elliott, Curtis Samuel and Dontre Wilson combined for 53 net yards between them. The new-look offensive line allowed Barrett to be sacked seven times.

"Our opponent really did a good job preparing for us and exposed us a little bit where some of the weaknesses right now are on our team," said Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who saw his team lose for the third time in four games dating back to last season.

The revamped Ohio State defense faced its first major challenge of the season and allowed 320 yards to the Hokies. The Buckeyes did produce three turnovers, but Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Brewer threw a pair of touchdown passes, including one that capped a crucial go-ahead touchdown drive in the fourth quarter.

Freshman placekicker Sean Nuernberger missed a pair of field goals, fifth-year senior Kyle Clinton booted a kickoff out of bounds for a penalty to set up the Hokies on what turned out to be the game-winning touch-



JOSH WINSLOW

TIE GAME – Ohio State sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott (15) excited the crowd early in the fourth quarter when he avoided a tackle attempt by Virginia Tech's Dadi Nicolas (90) en route to a 15-yard game-tying touchdown run.

down drive, and sophomore punter Cameron Johnston's 24-yard punt in the first quarter led to Virginia Tech's first score.

Virginia Tech (2-0) earned its first win over a top-eight foe on the road in 35 tries. The Hokies had pointed to their trip to Columbus as a chance to regain national prominence after several down seasons.

"When you play good teams like we play, you've got about a 50-50 shot of winning and when you go on the road, it probably goes down a little bit," Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer said. "I think this is a big, big win for the program and for the status of our program."

Dark Night

Ohio State redshirt freshman cornerback Eli Apple earned his first career interception on the opening drive of the game when he picked off a jump ball thrown by Brewer, but the Buckeyes went three-and-out after the turnover and the Hokies opened the scoring on their second drive of the game.

Taking over at the Ohio State 43-yard line after the short punt by Johnston, Virginia Tech embarked on a 10-play touchdown drive that lasted nearly five minutes. The biggest play of the drive came on a third-and-6 at the Ohio State 26. Brewer avoided a blitzing Buckeye pass rush, rolled left and found Ryan Malleck for a 13-yard gain to the 13.

Four plays later, Shai McKenzie plunged up the middle for a 2-yard touchdown run that, following a Joey Slye extra point, gave the Hokies a 7-0 lead with 7:05 remaining in the opening quarter.

It did not take the Buckeyes long to answer the opening score, however, with a touchdown of their own. Barrett might not have been known as a major running threat prior to the season, but the redshirt fresh-

man used his legs to get Ohio State on the board. He carried the ball five times for 61 yards – including consecutive runs of 25 and 20 yards on a scramble and an option run, respectively – and reached the end zone on a 2-yard keeper up the middle. The PAT by Nuernberger tied the score 7-7 with 3:51 left in the first quarter.

Another special teams miscue set up Virginia Tech on its next drive. Following the Barrett TD, the Hokies took over at their own 42 thanks in part to a late hit personal foul on Ohio State junior Ron Tanner on the kickoff return.

Brewer converted a pair of third downs on completions of 11 and 8 yards on the ensuing drive, one that was capped by a 14-yard touchdown run by Marshawn Williams. Slye's extra point made it 14-7 in favor of the visitors with 19 seconds left in the first quarter.

The trading of scores ended on Ohio State's next drive, which concluded with a Nuernberger field-goal attempt that sailed wide left from 40 yards. Ohio State was set up to get on the board after a 40-yard circus catch by Wilson that included him reaching around defensive back Chuck Clark to make the snag at the Virginia Tech 28, but the freshman kicker from Buckner (Ky.) Oldham County missed for the first time in his career when he pulled the field-goal try wide left.

Ohio State forced the Hokies into a three-and-out on the next possession, and Barrett again hit a deep pass over Virginia Tech's defense, this one a 58-yarder to Devin Smith that put the ball at the 10. But Barrett threw three consecutive incompletions – the second one going right through the hands of junior wideout Corey Smith in the end zone – and Nuernberger missed his second try

of the night, hitting the left upright from 27 yards out.

The offenses remained dormant until near halftime when Virginia Tech extended its lead with another touchdown.

Again starting with solid field position following a 35-yard punt return by Greg Stroman, the Hokies marched 61 yards on eight plays en route to the end zone. Brewer completed 5 of 8 passes on the drive for all 61 yards, and his final completion went to full-back Sam Rogers for a 10-yard touchdown. The PAT with 1:09 left in the second quarter gave VT a 21-7 halftime advantage.

The stats at the break were not pretty for the Buckeyes. Barrett rushed 13 times for 69 yards in the first half. Everyone else on the team – Elliott and Samuel, specifically – had four carries for 5 yards. The defense also struggled, allowing Virginia Tech to convert seven of its 10 third downs.

Ohio State also had several key miscues in the first half that could have changed the momentum. In addition to Nuernberger's two missed field goals and Smith's dropped TD, the Buckeyes failed to put any points on the board in the second quarter on a drive they started at the VT 34. Ohio State lost 14 yards in three plays thanks in part to a high snap over Barrett's head by center Jacoby Boren on third down and was forced to punt.

Ohio State attempted to seize momentum by scoring on its third drive of the second half.

Taking over at the OSU 14, Barrett led the Buckeyes on a six-play, 86-yard drive that was capped by a 53-yard touchdown reception by sophomore Michael Thomas. The wide receiver from Los Angeles caught a pass on a slant route, broke the tackle of cornerback Brandon Facyson and outraced

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OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

the Virginia Tech secondary down the field for a score.

Nuernberger's extra point boot with 3:01 remaining in the third quarter cut Virginia Tech's lead to seven, 21-14.

The Buckeyes maintained their newfound momentum on Virginia Tech's ensuing drive when sophomore safety Vonn Bell, who was making his first start of the season and second of his career, stepped in front of a Virginia Tech receiver to make a diving interception of a Brewer pass near midfield.

Unfortunately for Ohio State, the Buckeyes went three-and-out on their next possession, but the defense made another big play when sophomore Joey Bosa came through the right side of the Virginia Tech defense and hit Brewer deep in Virginia Tech territory. Brewer fumbled the ball, and fifth-year senior Rashad Frazier fell on it at the VT 15.

Two plays later, Elliott took an option pitch from Barrett and raced 15 yards into the end zone to wake a sleepy Ohio Stadium crowd. Nuernberger's PAT knotted the game with 11:40 left in regulation.

Virginia Tech silenced the crowd, however, by immediately driving for the go-ahead touchdown. Clinton hit the ensuing kickoff out of bounds, allowing the Hokies to start the march at the VT 35. It took Virginia Tech six plays to drive down the field, with Brewer capping the march with a 10-yard touchdown pass to tight end Bucky Hodges. Slye's PAT gave the Hokies a 28-21 advantage with 8:44 remaining.

Ohio State had three shots to tie the game in the final minutes. The Buckeyes had their first possession after the Hodges touchdown end with a three-and-out and a punt. After Ohio State forced the Hokies into a three-and-out, Barrett had a pass intercepted

with 4:47 remaining. Virginia Tech missed a field goal on its next drive, but any hopes of a Buckeye comeback ended when Barrett threw his third interception of the night with 46 seconds remaining.

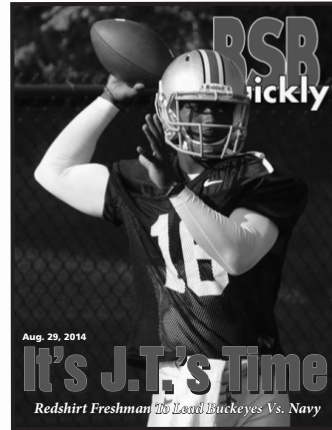
VT cornerback Donovan Riley picked off that pass and returned it 63 yards for a game-icing touchdown.



JOSH WINSLOW

BIG WIN – Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Brewer (12) threw two touchdown passes in the Hokies' 35-21 win, including the game-winning score on a 10-yard strike to Bucky Hodges with 8:44 remaining.

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OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

Buckeyes Out Of Bullets On Third Down

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

This season the Ohio State defense returned to a scheme similar to the one that earned the unit its Silver Bullets moniker in the late 1990s. Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, in their first matchup this season against a traditional offense, they didn't have enough bullets in the chamber in the Sept. 6 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech.

Ohio State consistently forced Virginia Tech into third downs but fired blanks on the most critical down as the Hokies converted 9 of 17 third-down opportunities while the Buckeyes gave them a 10th conversion by penalty.

It started out innocuously enough on the first drive of the game when Hokie quarterback Michael Brewer took the snap from Caleb Farris at his own 27-yard line. The junior felt pressure, scrambled out of the pocket and hit tight end Bucky Hodges for an 11-yard pickup and a first down.

Converting a manageable third down on the game's first drive was not the reason Virginia Tech topped Ohio State, but it served as a precursor to the damage the Buckeye defense would allow throughout the evening.

"We have to get off the field," safety Vonn Bell said. "That's the money down. We've got to make plays. We have to execute those. We'll get back to the drawing board and we'll get better. You just have to watch film and see what's wrong. We have to look at the details and execution of the play. We can't go pointing fingers."

The Buckeyes were close to cashing in on that money down throughout the game (and Bell did once with an interception), but Brewer consistently eluded pressure to find men running free down the field. The Texas Tech transfer converted all five of his first-quarter third-down attempts, allowing the Hokies to surge to a 14-7 edge after the first 15 minutes of play.

He continued to dodge bullets throughout the game, finishing 10 of 14 for 92 yards with one interception on third down. Though he was sacked one time, he converted two third downs with his legs, as well. His favorite target on the evening, tight end Ryan Malleck, caught three of those third-down completions for 41 yards.

Most of the conversions came on obvious passing downs. Six of Virginia Tech's nine conversions came when it needed 5 or more yards while the average distance-



JOSH WINSLOW

WIDE OPEN – Virginia Tech converted 9 of 17 third downs against Ohio State, including a diving 10-yard reception by Willie Byrn (82) during the Hokies' first touchdown drive.

to-go on its successful third downs was nearly 7 yards.

"That's something you never want as a defense is you get them to third-and-long and then they convert it," linebacker Joshua Perry said. "It's just something we've got to tighten up. We've got to look at what we're doing, make corrections and put it on everybody to do their responsibility."

Twice those responsibilities were missed when the Hokies were pinned inside their own 10-yard line. The first of those costly mistakes came on a third-and-17 at the Virginia Tech 4 in the second quarter, what should be point-blank range for the bullets to reach their target. Defensive tackle Michael Bennett nearly did so, but Brewer

again escaped pressure to find receiver Isaiah Ford running an out pattern along the left sideline for an 18-yard gain.

It was more of the same to start the second half as Brewer completed a 16-yard pass on third-and-9, again from his own 4. Both of those drives ended in punts, but the conversions deep in its own territory allowed Virginia Tech to flip field position and avoid giving the Buckeyes' offense a much-needed short field.

Considering the passing success the Hokies had on third down, it would be easy to lay blame with the secondary, but Perry said the front seven is equally responsible.

"You've got to get to the quarterback," he said. "If it's a third-and-long situation it's going to be a deep route which means there is more time for the rush to get there so that's got to be a lot on the linebackers, the front guys to get there. We know that some of the stuff we are running, we're really aggressive so we are putting those guys in a little bit of a tough situation to cover so we all have to do our jobs."

Perry did his job at least once on third down, sacking Brewer for a 12-yard loss on a third-and-17 early in the second half. That sparked a run of three successful stops by the Buckeye defense on third down, but by that point the damage had largely been done as the Hokies were 5 for 5 on third down on their three first-half touchdown drives.

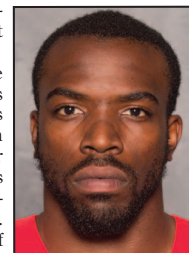
"We made some mistakes and mental mistakes, especially in the first half," cor-

nerback Doran Grant said. "We should have played better, we could have. We just didn't. We didn't play well in the first half. We came out strong in the second half, but it wasn't enough to win the game."

The second half was not immune to the defense's third-down struggles, however. After the Buckeyes' offense converted a short field to tie the game at 21, the defense forced Virginia Tech into a third-and-7 on its own 38. Brewer's pass fell incomplete, but on arguably the biggest play of the game Eli Apple was called for pass interference, extending a drive that would end in the Hokies' go-ahead touchdown.

The growing pains of the new defensive scheme were highlighted by the Hokies in third-down situations throughout the game, but defensive coordinator Luke Fickell said that was no excuse for the inability to get off the field. Fickell was a member of the defensive line during the first iteration of the Silver Bullets but couldn't pinpoint what went wrong on third down for the 2014 unit.

"They made some plays, and we lost leverage," he said. "It's not like we weren't pressuring. We were coming after him and hitting him. They rolled the pocket a bit and made some plays on us. Ultimately, that's what killed us. It's not like they were third-and-2 or third-and-3. We're talking third-and-8, third-and-10, third-and-12. We were in the ideal position you would want to be in, and we didn't execute."



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OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

Buckeye Game Analysis

Play Of The Game

Making his second career start, Vonn Bell made plays out of his safety spot for the second consecutive game – including an interception – but the one he was unable to make served as Virginia Tech's game-winning play in the home-opening loss Sept. 6.

Redshirt freshman Bucky Hodges entered Virginia Tech as a quarterback but has become a versatile target for the Hokies as a tight end/wideout. In particular, he proved he was a tough red-zone matchup at 6-6, 244 pounds when he caught a short-yardage touchdown in the Hokies' opener with William & Mary, and he was able to use his size and skills to outmuscle Bell for the winning score.

The Hokies came out for second-and-goal at the 10 with two receivers split out to the far side of the field on the left, including Hodges in the slot with Bell in man coverage as part of the new quarters defensive scheme implemented by Ohio State in the offseason.

Hodges began the play by running up the hashmark right at Bell as Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Brewer dropped back to pass. Ohio State rushed four and couldn't get to Brewer, leaving Bell in single coverage.

As he hit the goal line, Hodges cut outside to the left, and Brewer threw the ball where only his target could make a play on it. As Hodges cut across the "B" in the "BUCKEYES" end-zone font, the pass lofted softly into his arms as he fell to the turf, with the ball just going by the outstretched arms of Bell.

The ensuing PAT gave Virginia Tech a 28-21 lead with 8:44 to go, and the Buckeyes could never tie the score in the 35-21 loss.

Hidden Plays Of The Game

Ohio State had tied the score at 21 when two critical mistakes helped Virginia Tech regain momentum.

With the stadium rocking after the Buckeyes knotted things up with 11:40 to play, Kyle Clinton came on to boot the kickoff back to the Hokies and instead kicked it out of bounds, giving Virginia Tech great field position at the OSU 35-yard line.

It didn't look like it would matter, though, as the Buckeyes forced Virginia Tech into a third-and-7 after a pair of short runs. The Buckeyes brought pressure against Brewer with linebacker Darron Lee making an attempt to get to the quarterback, and he was forced to throw quickly, unleashing an out pass to wideout Joshua Stanford on the left side.

Redshirt freshman cornerback Eli Apple had single coverage on Stanford and had his hands on the Hokies wideout as he made his break toward the sideline. Apple tried to pull his hands away as the ball sailed wide of its intended target, but it was too late, as the flag hit the ground for pass interference to give the Hokies a first down at their own 49.

On the very next play, Virginia Tech running back Deon Newsome ran 24 yards over the right edge to get the ball into Ohio State territory, and three plays after that the Hokies were in the end zone with the game-winning score.

What Worked Well

- **Beating Cover-0:** The Ohio State coaching staff made a big deal about Virginia Tech's Cover-0 defense – essentially playing without any deep safeties – and the difficulties it provided, but OSU did hit two deep passes over the top against the scheme and Michael Thomas took a simple slant to the house as well. That forced the Hokies to put a deep safety on the field at times, and J.T. Barrett twice threw interceptions to that deep man, and the lack of the big play against that look helped doom the OSU offense.

What Didn't Work

- **Inside running:** Ohio State's base run play is the inside zone run, something that was so effective a season ago when Carlos Hyde was toting the rock. But Virginia Tech took that away all day by stacking the line and clogging the middle with a bunched formation and numerous blitzing linebackers. That was one reason Buckeyes Ezekiel Elliott, Curtis Samuel and Dontre Wilson combined for just 15 rushes and 53 net yards.

- **Getting home:** Ohio State faced 41 dropbacks on the day from Virginia Tech and finished with only two sacks. Brewer was able to get away from the OSU pass rush and



JOSH WINSLOW

OFF TO THE RACES – Ohio State made several big plays in the passing game, including a 53-yard touchdown that was caught by sophomore Michael Thomas (3).

scramble three times in passing situations, as the Buckeyes just weren't able to finish the play and get the Hokies quarterback on the ground. Ohio State mixed blitzes and rushing just four but despite some good individual efforts didn't get home enough, especially on third down where the Hokies were 9 for 17.

- **Capitalizing on opportunities:** Ohio State had six forays into Virginia Tech territory end without points, including three in a row in the first half that came to a close with a pair of missed field goals as well as a punt after the team took over at the Hokies' 34-yard line. In fact, two of three OSU drives that began in Virginia Tech territory ended without points, the kind of thing that just can't happen to win a football game.

Inside The Numbers

1.6: The average number of yards gained when Ohio State tried to pass on first down. Barrett finished 2 for 11 for 28 yards on first down while also being sacked once.

5: Ohio State's home night-game winning streak ended at five. The Buckeyes hadn't lost under the lights in Ohio Stadium since the 2009 game vs. USC – which was also OSU's second game of the season after opening with Navy.

6.7: The average length of the nine third downs converted in the game by Virginia Tech, including successful conversions of a pair of third-and-9 plays as well as a third-and-17.

25: The loss ended Ohio State's national-best regular-season winning streak at 25 and served as head coach Urban Meyer's first in Ohio Stadium.

49: Freshmen and sophomores have scored 49 of Ohio State's 55 points through the first two games. The only six points not included were scored on a touchdown catch by senior Devin Smith on a pass thrown by redshirt freshman Barrett vs. Navy.

Reviewing The Matchups

Ohio State rush offense vs. Virginia Tech rush defense: Ohio State finished with just 108 net yards, a number dulled by the seven sacks of Barrett, but no matter how you slice it, it wasn't a great day on the ground for the Buckeyes. The team never was able to establish its inside game against the Hokies' stacked front, though a positive

is that Barrett was able to showcase his wheels a couple of times. **EDGE: Virginia Tech**

Virginia Tech rush offense vs. Ohio State rush defense: This was a game of give and take throughout the day. Five different Hokies had rushes of at least 10 yards, and at least two VT scoring drives were keyed on by the ground game. On the other hand, the Buckeyes were stout otherwise, keeping the Hokies to 3.0 yards per carry. **EDGE: Even**

Ohio State pass offense vs. Virginia Tech pass defense: The numbers for Barrett ended up downright ugly – just nine completions in 29 attempts – but with Virginia Tech's aggressive style, Barrett was always going to have a low completion percentage. He should get credit for some balls that were delivered nicely into tight coverage while under pressure. Overall, you can't get a passing grade with 20 incompletions and seven sacks, though. **EDGE: Virginia Tech**

Virginia Tech pass offense vs. Ohio State pass defense: The Hokies didn't hit a single big play on the day – the longest completions were a pair of 18-yarders – but they were able to keep the chains moving when need be. Brewer has to get credit for his ability to evade what was a pretty consistent pass rush and make something out of what appeared to be nothing, and his tight ends and fullbacks were dependable targets all day. **EDGE: Virginia Tech**

Special teams: Virginia Tech won this category by not doing much, as Ohio State continually shot itself in the foot. VT's Greg Stroman did have a 35-yard punt return to set up one score, but Ohio State didn't help itself with a number of mistakes including two missed field goals, a number of poor kick returns, a shanked punt that set up a score and a penalty that gave the Hokies great field position. **EDGE: Virginia Tech**

Intangibles: You can't argue with the fight – the Buckeyes battled back from a two-touchdown deficit and Barrett in particular showed a lot of guts while taking a licking – but Ohio State simply made too many mistakes to win the game. Virginia Tech, meanwhile, played like a team with a chip on its shoulder, one that wanted to show it again belongs in the conversation among the national elite. **EDGE: Even**

– Jeff Svoboda

OHIO STATE VS. VIRGINIA TECH

BSB Quotebook: Virginia Tech 35, Ohio State 21

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer on the game and the play of his offense: "How much of a surprise is this performance? A little bit surprised. I thought our skilled guys would perform better. I thought we'd protect a little better. I'm a little bit disappointed. I don't know, coaches don't get surprised, coaches get disappointed. And obviously we've just got to work a little harder, and I still have confidence."

Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer after the win: "If we don't take anything off of it and build off of it, it doesn't mean anything. It's not a conference game. It's a big game. It's a national game. But we need to take this and keep on building. And I think with as many young guys as we've got, we can keep on taking steps. So we'll see. That's the goal right now."

Ohio State defensive lineman Adolphus Washington on the loss: "I feel like as a whole team, we just didn't play well when we needed to play well. We had spurts where we did well, but it just wasn't at the time that we needed it."

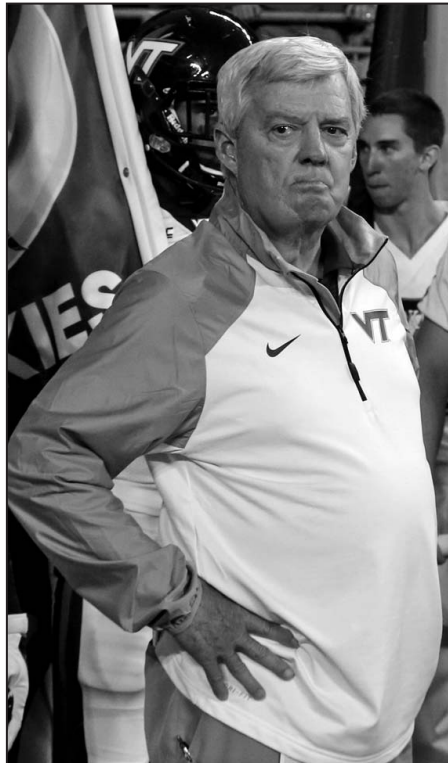
Cornerback Doran Grant on the same subject: "We lost the game. We're not used to losing around here. Get through it, regroup and get back to work tomorrow."

Ohio State senior right tackle Darryl Baldwin on the postgame vibe: "Nobody likes losing and Coach Meyer just talked to us. Keep our heads up and we're not down yet. We're not out either, by any means. We've just got to keep going and get better."

OSU linebacker Joshua Perry on the mood in the locker room after the game: "Guys are positive in terms of looking ahead. Guys want to make corrections and want to get better, which is a good thing. But obviously the locker room after a loss is not a place you really want to spend a lot of time being. You just go about your business, talk to your guys and make sure everyone is on the same page and keep it moving."

Ohio State offensive coordinator Tom Herman when asked about the struggles of the skill position players: "I don't think you can point the finger solely there. I think that was a contributing factor at times, and obviously we weren't very accurate at times at the quarterback position. We didn't look the proper way at times at the quarterback position. There were times when we were looking the right way and the receiver actually got open and the protection let us down. It was from myself on down to the players. It was certainly not one position, one thing that you can say was the reason."

Tight end Jeff Heurman on the role of the tight ends during the game: "We



JOSH WINSLOW

HUGE WIN – Virginia Tech head coach Frank Beamer wants his Hokies to build on his team's victory at Ohio State.

pretty much pass protected the whole night, but we're doing what it takes to help the team win and that was our job tonight, to pass protect. We did it to the best of our abilities, and unfortunately it didn't work out the way we wanted it to."

Baldwin on the lack of focus on the running game: "The run game opens up the entire offense. You start play-action and drop-back passes they're not ready for. It really just opens up everything. We just weren't able to get it started."

Baldwin on allowing seven sacks to Virginia Tech: "Seven sacks is clearly unacceptable, but we'll get it fixed. We just need to prepare more."

Virginia Tech defensive back Donovan Riley on his game-clinching pick-six: "What was going through my mind was 107,000 fans getting quiet and Hokie Nation getting in an uproar. I live for moments like that, and my teammates live for moments like that. To come

in as an underdog and end a streak that started before I was even born – I'm very appreciative. I thank my teammates, my coaches and Hokie Nation for being there to support me."

Grant on what he was thinking after Virginia Tech's repeated third-down conversions: "We're thinking next play. We've got to make stops, we've got to play better as a unit."

Grant on Virginia Tech's game-winning scoring drive, which included a reverse: "They brought out some trick plays that we obviously weren't expecting, but we just have to react to it. We've just got to play better."

Virginia Tech quarterback Michael Brewer on what he told the team after losing a fourth-quarter fumble that allowed OSU to tie the game: "I told the guys to just keep plugging away, let's keep riding the waves. That's a tough defense, and things like that are going to happen against a tough defense. We knew that coming in, and it's all about how are you going to respond. You can't get down. You can't get too high. You can't get too low. I think we did a good job of that and staying even-keeled throughout the game."

Grant on the play of Brewer, who was making just his second career start: "It's scholarship ball, he's on scholarship too. It doesn't matter how many games he's played, he can still play quarterback, obviously. They won in our house. You've got to give them credit."

Perry on the goals for the rest of the season: "It's a long season, anything can happen. There are a lot of games to be played throughout America. We've got to just wait and see, and we've got to get out there and play Buckeye football. If we do that, we'll put ourselves in a good situation for something."

Perry on his 11-tackle performance: "I know I made my share of mistakes and had a handful of them. I'll be up all night and I won't be able to sleep, but I'll put on the film and see what I need to work on. It's not about individual stats, especially after a game like this."

Perry on the defense: "My teammates, one really positive thing about the guys on defense that I'm out there with is everybody plays hard. We keep a pretty good demeanor when the situations get tough. I don't see guys with their heads down and that kind of stuff. We'll keep moving from here. We'll see what we need to correct and keep going."

Washington on how the team will respond: "We didn't have a real good Tuesday practice last week, so I just feel like we have to go out there and give it our all Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Just go out there and practice hard at all times."

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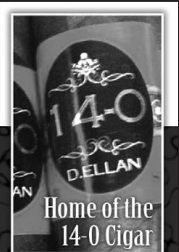
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The Numbers Game

Virginia Tech 35, Ohio State 21

Sept. 6, 2014 – Ohio Stadium; Columbus, Ohio

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|----|---|---|----|----|
| Score by Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | F |
| VIRGINIA TECH | 14 | 7 | 0 | 14 | 35 |
| OHIO STATE | 7 | 0 | 7 | 7 | 21 |

First Quarter

VT – McKenzie, 2 yard run (Slye kick), 7:05; 10 plays, 43 yards, 4:50 TOP.

OSU – Barrett, 2 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 3:51; 7 plays, 83 yards, 3:09 TOP.

VT – M.Williams, 14 yard run (Slye kick), 0:19; 9 plays, 58 yards, 3:26 TOP.

Second Quarter

VT – Rogers, 10 yard pass from Brewer (Slye kick), 0:52; 8 plays, 61 yards, 1:09 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Thomas, 53 yard pass from Barrett (Nuernberger kick), 3:01; 6 plays, 86 yards, 2:26 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Elliott, 15 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 11:40; 2 plays, 15 yards, 0:12 TOP.

VT – Hodges, 10 yard pass from Brewer (Slye kick), 8:44; 6 plays, 65 yards, 2:56 TOP.

OSU – Riley, 63 yard interception return (Slye kick), 0:46.

Att. – 107,517.

Weather – 68 degrees, partly cloudy; wind NW 8 mph.



Team Statistics

| | VT | OSU |
|--------------------------|---------|--------|
| First Downs | 21 | 19 |
| Rushing | 7 | 9 |
| Passing | 12 | 7 |
| Penalty | 2 | 3 |
| Rushing-Yards | 40-121 | 40-108 |
| Passing Yards | 199 | 219 |
| Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.) | 23-36-2 | 9-29-3 |
| Offensive Plays | 76 | 69 |
| Total Net Yards | 320 | 327 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 9-17 | 4-16 |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 0-0 | 1-1 |
| Punts-Avg. | 6-44.7 | 6-39.7 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 1-1 | 1-0 |
| Penalties | 10-103 | 7-62 |
| Time of Possession | 33:30 | 26:30 |

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – VT: Newsome 4-38; Rogers 1-17; Brewer 10-16; M.Williams 11-16; Coleman 3-16; Hodges 2-8; McKenzie 7-7; Stanford 1-6; I.Ford 1-(-3). **OSU:** Barrett 24-70; Elliott 8-32; Samuel 5-26; Wilson 2-(-5); TEAM 1-(-15).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – VT: Brewer 23-36-2-199-2. **OSU:** Barrett 9-29-3-219-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – VT: Malleck 6-64; Byrn 5-51; Rogers 5-23; I.Ford 2-26; Hodges 2-21; Stanford 2-14; Coleman 1-0. **OSU:** Thomas 6-98; D.Smith 1-58; Wilson 1-40; C.Smith 1-23.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – VT: Hughes 6-44.7-54. **OSU:** Johnston 6-39.7-63.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – VT: Stroman 2-35; Fuller 1-(-3). **OSU:** Wilson 3-24.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – VT: Newsome 2-43; Knowles 1-20. **OSU:** Wilson 5-90; Elliott 1-16.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – VT: Slye (46). **OSU:** Nuernberger (40, 27).

FORCED FUMBLES – VT: None. **OSU:** Bosa.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – VT: None. **OSU:** Frazier 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – VT: Jarrett 2-35; Riley 1-63. **OSU:** Bell 1-0; Apple 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – VT: Nicolas 2.0-16; Di Nardo 2.0-12; Clarke 1.0-9; Fuller 1.0-9; Ch.Williams 0.5-4; Ekanem 0.5-4. **OSU:** Bosa 1.5-18; Perry 0.5-6.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – VT: Nicolas 3.0-17; Clarke 2.0-14; Di Nardo 2.0-12; Fuller 1.0-9; C.Clark 1.0-3; Alford 1.0-1; Ch.Williams 0.5-4; Ekanem 0.5-4. **OSU:** Bosa 2.0-19; Perry 2.0-11; C.Grant 2.0-7; Washington 1.0-4; McMillan 1.0-3; Lee 1.0-2; Bennett 1.0-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – VT: C.Clark 9-2-11; Clarke 5-5-10; Ch.Williams 2-5-7; Fuller 5-0-5; Jarrett 3-2-5; Ekanem 1-2-3; Di Nardo 2-1-3; Nicolas 3-0-3; Frye 2-0-2; Facyson 2-0-2; Dooley 0-2-2; Hodges 1-0-1; Bonner 1-0-1; Trimble 1-0-1; McKinnon 1-0-1; Dyer 1-0-1; Huelskamp 1-0-1; Alford 1-0-1; Maddy 1-0-1; N.Williams 1-0-1; Edmunds 0-1-1; Newsome 0-1-1; Slye 0-1-1. **OSU:** C.Grant 6-7-13; Perry 7-4-11; Lee 4-3-7; Bell 4-2-6; Powell 3-2-5; Washington 1-3-4; Frazier 2-1-3; D.Grant 3-0-3; Apple 2-1-3; Bosa 1-2-3; Conley 2-0-2; Bogard 2-0-2; Bennett 1-1-2; Thomas 1-0-1; McMillan 1-0-1; Heuerman 1-0-1; D.Smith 1-0-1; Elliott 1-0-1; J.Marshall 1-0-1; Tanner 1-0-1; Lewis 1-0-1; S.Miller 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **VIRGINIA TECH:** Offense, Gibson, Wang, Ca.Farris, Conte, McLaughlin, Malleck, Hodges, Brewer, M.Williams, Rogers, Phillips, Slye. Defense, Nicolas, C.Marshall, Maddy, Ekanem, Ch.Williams, Clarke, Fuller, Bonner, Jarrett, Facyson, C.Clark, Hughes, Reserves, I.Ford, Riley, Stroman, Coleman, Stanford, Edmunds, Caleb, Newsome, Reavis, McKenzie, D.Greene, Frye, G.Jones, Trimble, Redman, McKinnon, R.Vandyke, Dyer, Di Nardo, Dooley, Moss, Keihn, Huelskamp, Teller, D'Antuono, Baron, Hansen, Knowles, Byrn, Meyer, Alford, J.Haynes, N.Williams. **OHIO STATE:** Offense, Decker, Efflein, Boren, Price, Baldwin, Heuerman, Spencer, Barrett, Elliott, Wilson, Thomas, Nuernberger. Defense, Bosa, Washington, Bennett, S.Miller, Lee, C.Grant, Perry, Apple, Powell, Bell, D.Grant, Johnston. Reserves, Samuel, McMillan, R.Smith, D.Smith, Burrows, Frazier, J.Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Reeves, Bogard, Worley, Fada, Clinton, B.Haynes, Rock, Hale, Munger, Ca.Williams, Ch.Farris, Lewis, Carter, Underwood, Vannett, C.Smith, J.Greene, Schutt.

Season Statistics

| 2014 Game-By-Game | | | | Scoring | TD | EPK | EPR | EPRC | FG | PTS |
|-------------------|-------------------|-------------|---------|--------------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Date | Opponent | Result/Time | Crowd | | | | | | | |
| Aug. 30 | (5) Navy** | W, 34-17 | 57,579 | Sean Nuernberger | - | 7-7 | - | - | 2-4 | 13 |
| Sept. 6 | (8) VIRGINIA TECH | L, 35-21 | 107,517 | Ezekiel Elliott | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Sept. 13 | KENT STATE | Noon | | Michael Thomas | 2 | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Sept. 27 | CINCINNATI | 6 p.m. | | Devin Smith | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Oct. 4 | at Maryland | TBA | | Darron Lee | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Oct. 18 | RUTGERS | 3:30 p.m. | | J.T. Barrett | 1 | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| Oct. 25 | at Penn State | 8 p.m. | | OSU Totals | 7 | 7-7 | - | - | 2-4 | 55 |
| Nov. 1 | ILLINOIS | 8 p.m. | | OPP Totals | 7 | 7-7 | - | - | 1-3 | 52 |
| Nov. 8 | at Michigan State | 8 p.m. | | FG Distance | 0-29 | 30-39 | 40-49 | 50+ | Total | |
| Nov. 15 | at Minnesota | TBA | | Sean Nuernberger | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 2-4 |
| Nov. 22 | INDIANA | TBA | | OSU Totals | 1-2 | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0-0 | 0-0 | 2-4 |
| Nov. 29 | MICHIGAN | TBA | | OPP Totals | 0-0 | 1-2 | 0-1 | 0-0 | 1-3 | |

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

Team Statistics

| | OSU | Opp |
|-------------------------|-------|--------|
| First Downs | 38 | 43 |
| Rushing | 21 | 28 |
| Passing | 14 | 13 |
| Penalty | 3 | 2 |
| Average Per Game/Rush | 151.0 | 245.5 |
| Average Per Game/Pass | 222.5 | 109.5 |
| Total Offense | 747 | 710 |
| Total Plays | 124 | 143 |
| Average Per Game | 373.5 | 355.0 |
| Average Per Play | 6.0 | 5.0 |
| Penalties-Yards | 9-82 | 13-123 |
| Fumbles-Lost | 1-0 | 3-2 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 6-24 | 13-29 |
| Percentage | 25% | 45% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 2-3 | 1-1 |
| Percentage | 67% | 100% |
| Sacks-Yards | 4-40 | 8-63 |
| Time Of Possession Avg. | 27:02 | 32:58 |

Score

| By Quarters | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | OT | Tot. | Avg. |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|----|------|------|
| Ohio State | 10 | 3 | 21 | 21 | - | 55 | 27.5 |
| Opponents | 14 | 14 | 7 | 17 | - | 52 | 26.0 |

Individual Statistics

| | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| J.T. Barrett | 33 | 120 | 3.6 | 1 | 25 |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 20 | 76 | 3.8 | 2 | 20 |
| Curtis Samuel | 12 | 71 | 5.9 | 0 | 16 |
| Dontre Wilson | 8 | 38 | 4.8 | 0 | 15 |
| Jalin Marshall | 3 | 7 | 2.3 | 0 | 6 |
| Rod Smith | 2 | 6 | 3.0 | 0 | 3 |
| TEAM | 2 | -16 | -8.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 80 | 302 | 3.8 | 3 | 25 |
| OPP Totals | 103 | 491 | 4.8 | 4 | 67 |

| Passing | Comp. | Att. | Pct. | Yds. | TD-INT | Effic. |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| J.T. Barrett | 21 | 44 | 47.7 | 445 | 3-4 | 137.00 |
| OSU Totals | 21 | 44 | 47.7 | 445 | 3-4 | 137.00 |
| OPP Totals | 25 | 40 | 62.5 | 219 | 2-2 | 114.99 |

| Receiving | Rec. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Michael Thomas | 9 | 137 | 15.2 | 2 | 53 |
| Devin Smith | 3 | 152 | 50.7 | 1 | 80 |
| Dontre Wilson | 3 | 86 | 28.7 | 0 | 40 |
| Evan Spencer | 2 | 24 | 12.0 | 0 | 19 |
| Jalin Marshall | 2 | 19 | 9.5 | 0 | 10 |
| Corey Smith | 1 | 23 | 23.0 | 0 | 23 |
| Curtis Samuel | 1 | 4 | 4.0 | 0 | 4 |
| OSU Totals | 21 | 445 | 21.2 | 3 | 80 |
| OPP Totals | 25 | 219 | 8.8 | 2 | 18 |

| Punting | No. | Yds. | Avg. | Bk | Long |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Cameron Johnston | 8 | 349 | 43.6 | 0 | 63 |
| OSU Totals | 8 | 349 | 43.6 | 0 | 63 |
| OPP Totals | 11 | 496 | 45.1 | 0 | 54 |

| Interceptions | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Eli Apple | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Vonn Bell | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 2 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OPP Totals | 4 | 98 | 24.5 | 1 | 63 |

| Punt Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Dontre Wilson | 6 | 48 | 8.0 | 0 | 13 |
| OSU Totals | 6 | 48 | 8.0 | 0 | 13 |
| OPP Totals | 3 | 32 | 10.7 | 0 | 35 |

| Kickoff Returns | No. | Yds. | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-------------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|
| Dontre Wilson | 7 | 143 | 20.4 | 0 | 35 |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 1 | 16 | 16.0 | 0 | 16 |
| OSU Totals | 8 | 159 | 19.9 | 0 | 35 |
| OPP Totals | 7 | 127 | 18.1 | 0 | 26 |

| Def. Leaders | Solo | Asst. | Tot. | TFL-Yds. | Sacks |
|--------------|------|-------|------|----------|--------|
| Joshua Perry | 12 | 8 | 20 | 3.0-11 | 0.5-6 |
| Curtis Grant | 9 | 11 | 20 | 3.0-8 | 1.0-11 |
| Tyvis Powell | 11 | 7 | 18 | - | - |
| Darron Lee | 9 | 5 | 14 | 3.0-5 | - |
| Vonn Bell | 9 | 4 | 13 | - | - |

| Individual Statistics | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long |
|-----------------------|------------|------------|------------|----------|-----------|
| J.T. Barrett | 33 | 120 | 3.6 | 1 | 25 |
| Ezekiel Elliott | 20 | 76 | 3.8 | 2 | 20 |
| Curtis Samuel | 12 | 71 | 5.9 | 0 | 16 |
| Dontre Wilson | 8 | 38 | 4.8 | 0 | 15 |
| Jalin Marshall | 3 | 7 | 2.3 | 0 | 6 |
| Rod Smith | 2 | 6 | 3.0 | 0 | 3 |
| TEAM | 2 | -16 | -8.0 | 0 | 0 |
| OSU Totals | 80 | 302 | 3.8 | 3 | 25 |
| OPP Totals | 103 | 491 | 4.8 | 4 | 67 |

| Individual Statistics | Att. | Net | Avg. | TD | Long | |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| J.T. Barrett | 21 | 44 | 47.7 | 445 | 3-4 | 137.00 |
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|----------------|------|-----|------|----|------|
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| Dontre Wilson | 3 | 86 | 28.7 | 0 | 40 |
| Evan Spencer | 2 | 24 | 12.0 | 0 | 19 |
| Jalin Marshall | 2 | 19 | 9.5 | | |

Despite Defeat, Season Far From Over For OSU

You know you are getting old when you find yourself longing for the bygone days.

Throughout all the clamor over the last two decades or more for a national football champion being determined on the field, spawning first the Bowl Alliance followed by the Bowl Championship Series and now the College Football Playoff, I was one of the few people perfectly content to keep things the way they were with Big Ten and then-Pac-10 teams battling it out to go to the Rose Bowl and not worrying about much else. Others conferences had their bowl tie-ins, and many teams and their fans ended each season happy.

Under the various championship scenarios that have followed, fans of perennial powers such as Ohio State seem satisfied only if their team goes all the way, as was proved in 2006 and 2007 when the Buckeyes played for the national title but lost. Good seasons no longer seem enough if there is not the ultimate prize at the end.

Which brings us to the devastation expressed by many Buckeye fans after Ohio State's loss to Virginia Tech.

Though there are as many as 12 games left to be played including games with Penn State, Michigan State and archrival Michigan, a chance to win the Big Ten championship and even a remote shot at the playoff still remaining for the Buckeyes, many fans seem to have already conceded the season based on this one outcome.

What I think that fans of any college football program should look for, first and foremost, is whether a team improves over the course of a season. Former Buckeye coach Earle Bruce has always said that September is for pretenders, November is for contenders. And I always believed that the hallmark of Jim Tressel-coached teams was that they improved over the course of the season, peaking in the month for contenders and archrivals.

What we learned from Ohio State's game with Virginia Tech is that there are a lot of areas in need of improvement. Whether the Buckeyes improve in these areas is what is important and what will determine how successful they ultimately are this season.

Before itemizing what went wrong with the Buckeyes, I think we need to give Virginia Tech its due. As John Cooper used to say, "Sometimes we don't give enough credit to the other team. Their players are on scholarship, too."

The Hokies came in well-prepared and played hard, and what they did right had as much to do with their victory as what Ohio State did wrong.

While I am sure that the lasting vision many Buckeye fans will have of the game is Hokie defenders streaming through the Ohio State line and sacking quarterback J.T. Barrett six times in the fourth quarter, this game was lost well before that. Through their own mishaps, the Buckeyes had put themselves in the position to be overwhelmed in the decisive final quarter.

First of all, this game vividly illustrated why coaches like Tressel and Urban Meyer put so much emphasis on special teams.

A rare poor punt by Cameron Johnston helped facilitate Virginia Tech's first touchdown, setting the Hokies up in OSU territory. Later in the half, Johnston boomed a 63-yarder to the VT 4, but the coverage team allowed a 35-yard return, taking the Hokies out of danger. Eight plays later, Virginia Tech had its third touchdown and a 21-7 lead.

In between those punting miscues, the Hokies had another field shortened when

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Ron Tanner tackled Deon Newsome well out of bounds on a kickoff return, giving Tech 15 additional yards and a starting spot at their own 42. The Hokies turned that field position into a touchdown as well.

Meanwhile, Buckeye kicker Sean Nuernberger was missing a pair of makeable field goals. An additional six points in the first half certainly could have changed things.

All these special teams games – there was yet another in the fourth quarter when Kyle Clinton sent a kickoff out of bounds to help set up another Hokies TD – helped Tech gain confidence and momentum, and perhaps most importantly they made the record-setting Ohio Stadium crowd a nonfactor for much of the contest.

But the thing I will remember most about the game is the incredible number of dropped passes by the Buckeyes. I don't know that I remember a more butter-fingered performance out of an Ohio State team.

Dontre Wilson and Corey Smith dropped Barrett's first two passes of the game, and it never really got better. Any number of potential catches, including a miss in the end zone by Smith, who struggled much of the evening, could have altered the direction of the game, possibly eliminating the Hokies' defensive assault in the fourth quarter. A couple of additional catches would certainly have improved Barrett's 9-for-29 passing line.

You also have to juxtapose Ohio State's inability to reel in catchable passes with several difficult catches turned in by Hokies receivers, especially when Virginia Tech was converting 7 of 10 third-down opportunities in the first half.

You put all these things together and Virginia Tech was in position to tee off on Barrett in the final 15 minutes, and tee off the Hokies did.

And here is an added note for something to keep tabs on as the season progresses.

Offensive coordinator Tom Herman has been presented as somewhat of an offensive guru, and Braxton Miller and Carlos Hyde helped him look as such during his first two years in Columbus.

With those two offensive spark plugs no longer available, many were looking for a more varied attack this season, utilizing the speedsters that the OSU staff has been stockpiling in its first three recruiting classes. That attack didn't materialize against the Hokies defense, though when Curtis Samuel broke out with a couple of bursts in the third quarter, it led to a six-play, 86-yard scoring drive that was capped by a 53-yard touchdown reception by Michael Thomas.

I thought the Buckeyes had turned the corner at that point, but it wasn't to be.

Whether Ohio State's offensive woes were caused by outstanding defensive play by Virginia Tech, a struggling OSU offensive line, an inexperienced quarterback, poor play-calling or, most likely, all of the above, Hokies defensive coordinator Bud Foster got the best of Herman on this evening.

Football is like a chess game, and I kept waiting for the Buckeyes to make a move to counteract what the Hokies were doing, something to try to overcome or hide the young Buckeyes' deficiencies. It reminded me, ironically, of the national champion-

ship game following the 2006 season, when Meyer's Florida defense overwhelmed the Buckeyes and Ohio State was helpless in making changes to stop the Gators. You have to try to put your troops, inexperienced or otherwise, in a position to succeed.

Herman admitted as much after the game.

"The guys we have are the guys we have and we can't go out on the waiver wire and get any, and I wouldn't want to," the coach said. "I'm proud of the way they battled. We have to do a good job coaching them, and we have to do a good job of protecting their deficiencies while continuing to improve them until they're strengths."

Herman also pointed to the series featuring Samuel and Thomas as a high point yet all but admitted that the Buckeyes lost the battle of adjustments.

"I thought when we hit Mike on the slant for the touchdown and we popped a couple of speed options and we popped a speed option for a touchdown, I thought we had some things going our way and then they changed a few things," Herman said. "We had to adapt and change. They're good at what they do. They've been doing it there for a long, long time and historically been tremendous on defense. They weren't going to keep giving you the things that you got, so we had to adjust and didn't execute there late."

It will be interesting to see how the offense improves as the season progresses.

While he obviously didn't have the game coaches and fans had hoped for, Barrett proved he is a gritty customer, battling until the end despite the beating he took in the fourth quarter. And he showed some Miller-esque running ability against the Hokies that Herman and crew might utilize more in the future, though you would hate to overexpose Barrett given Ohio State's thin ranks at quarterback.

As far as the offensive line, I remain optimistic that the big guys will improve with experience. Line coach Ed Warinner worked wonders with a group that had produced mediocre results before his arrival, and don't forget that Taylor Decker, the rock of the current offensive line, looked lost in his first outing as a starter against Buffalo last year.

As for the defense, the new, more aggressive scheme obviously didn't work up to expectations in its first real test (playing against the quirky Navy offense was little preparation for the rest of the season). Tech quarterback Michael Brewer is hardly Johnny Unitas, but he picked apart the Buckeyes on 23-of-36 passing for 199 yards and a pair of scores – though he did toss two interceptions – and his ability to avoid Buckeye pressure was a thorn in the side of the defense all night.

Ohio State should look for plenty more passing as the season progresses because the Buckeyes were pretty solid against the run against the Hokies, allowing just a 3.0-yard average on 40 carries.

One thing I have been impressed with so far in the early going is the talent and depth at linebacker, two things that were somewhat lacking in that unit in the first two years of the Meyer era. Hopefully, with experience, the results from the defense will improve.

Let's put this game in the rearview mirror, just as the Buckeyes must do, and see how the season plays out before writing 2014 off.

Not As Bad As It Looks

Much was made of the fact that the loss to Virginia Tech was the first for Ohio State in a home opener since a 190 loss to Penn State in 1978.

It should be noted that the Hokies are one of the toughest opponents the Buckeyes have faced in a home opener since the No. 5 Nittany Lions of Joe Paterno came to Ohio Stadium 36 years ago.

After the loss to the Lions in Art Schlichter's debut as a freshman, it wasn't until 1995 that Ohio State faced a ranked team in a home opener, defeating No. 18 Washington by a 30-20 score. The Buckeyes also opened at home against No. 14 UCLA, a 42-20 win, in 1999 and again beat a ranked Huskies squad 28-9 in 2003 when Washington came to town ranked No. 17. That's it as far as ranked teams.

Further padding the home-opening win streak since 2000 were two games against Miami (Ohio), two against Youngstown State and other openers against Akron, Cincinnati, Northern Illinois, Marshall and Buffalo.

True, Virginia Tech was not ranked when it invaded Ohio Stadium – it is now – but everyone knew it would be a tough out.

Revisiting 1984 Opener

In our Sept. 5 electronic BSB Quickly, we ran several reprints from the Sept. 15, 1984, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, which recapped Ohio State's season-opening 22-14 win over visiting Oregon State.

Buckeye tailback great Keith Byars kicked off what most Buckeye fans believe was a Heisman Trophy-worthy season by rushing 34 times for 182 yards and a pair of touchdowns in the game. He also caught a pass for 9 yards.

The game also marked the debut of a ballyhooed freshman linebacker named Chris Spielman, who barely played in the first half but caught the attention of the Ohio Stadium crowd of 88,072 after intermission as he wreaked havoc on the Beaver offense and finished the game with 10 tackles, including two for loss, and forced a fumble.

"I've never not started a football game in my life," the 6-2, 223-pound Spielman said after the game. "It was hard to accept at first, but I've got to understand I'm not in high school. I'm playing with men. I'm playing with big guys that shave every day."

"But when they called my name to go in there, I got that bold feeling back. My body started to tingle and I said, 'It's time to play football.'"

In an interesting note about that game back in 1984, the Buckeyes went into their opener without their veteran starting quarterback, just as they did this season. Senior Mike Tomczak was still feeling the effects of a broken leg.

Sophomore Jim Karsatos led the Buckeyes and completed 9 of 16 passes for 102 yards with a pair of interceptions and no scores. It certainly helped the QB to have Byars as well as Roman Bates (11 carries for 57 yards) and John Woodridge (seven carries for 55 yards) in the backfield. Ohio State ran the ball 56 times for 268 yards in the game.

Stories about Byars, Spielman, Karsatos, Tomczak and more from the game are available for free to BSB print subscribers in the Sept. 5 BSB Quickly. If you have not signed up for this exciting free service, see the instructions on page 5 of this issue.

By the way, the '84 Buckeyes were given up for dead after a difficult loss to Purdue that season but picked themselves up, beat Michigan and went to the Rose Bowl.