

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 36, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 14, 2017



SONNY BROCKWAY

MISFIRE – Quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) and the Ohio State offense struggled against Clemson on the way to a shutout loss in the Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 31, 2016.

## Offensive Staff Changes Quickly Follow Fiesta Bowl Loss

Day Replaces Beck As OSU Quarterbacks Coach

By TIM MOODY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Although the Ohio State offense was statistically prolific for the vast majority of the 2016 season, it had a tendency to stall in the biggest games – especially when it came to the downfield passing attack.

Those concerns were never highlighted more than against Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl, a College Football Playoff semifinal bout that left Ohio State with its first shutout loss since 1993. The offense, led by junior quarterback J.T. Barrett, managed just 215 total yards. On the surface the play-calling seemed to lack diversity – in the first half, Ohio State threw the ball 19 times while attempting just 11 rushes. Of those nine runs, five were by Barrett – totaling minus-6 yards – and just one was by starting running back Mike Weber. Instead of a balanced attack – which was the plan, head coach Urban Meyer said after the game – the Buckeyes leaned on short passes to the flats or screens and struggled to move the ball.



Ryan Day

Not long after the game ended in a 31-0 loss, Meyer said the Buckeyes would be focusing on improving the offense throughout the offseason – suggesting that changes could be coming.

"I'm going to take a hard look at some things when we get back," Meyer said during his post-game press conference. "And obviously there were some great things this year, some great things.

"I go back to Norman, Oklahoma, and some other great things. But anytime you struggle a little bit, you always take a hard look."

The longest and hardest look might come where it concerns the passing game, which Meyer insisted would improve.

"We will become a good passing team, we will," he said. "Next year."

It didn't take long for some of the proposed changes to come to light after the Buckeyes left the Phoenix area to return to Columbus.

Ohio State and Clemson faced off on New Year's Eve, a Saturday. By the following Tuesday morning, Jan. 3, HornsDigest.com, sister site of BuckeyeSports.com, first reported that Ohio State

## Offense Struggles In 31-0 Loss To Clemson

By TIM MOODY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

First, it was "The Chase."

Banners hung in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for two years bearing Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer's motivational motto. That one worked – the Buckeyes were crowned national champions in 2014-15.

After that, Meyer switched to "The Grind." It really ended up being a grind as Ohio State ended up with a 12-1 record in 2015-16, though that included blowing the doors off Michigan and Notre Dame to end the season.

Ever the motivational master, Meyer had a few tactics this season, starting with "The Land of the Wolves." By the time bowl season rolled around and the No. 3 Buckeyes were preparing to face No. 2 Clemson in the College Football Playoff, a couple of new signs hung in the WHAC while some specific words were played on repeat on the video board overlooking the team's indoor practice facility.

It was pretty simple – the signs and video boards referenced a countdown. Not specifically how many days remaining before the Fiesta Bowl against Clemson, but how many days remaining for the Buckeyes to become nine units strong.

Long one of Meyer's main sticking points, being nine units strong means every position group on the team is playing at the highest level.

Finally, the countdown hit zero, and everything fell apart for the Buckeyes – at least when it comes to results on the field. Against the Tigers, Ohio State was demolished 31-0 and knocked out of the playoff. It marked the first shutout loss for the Buckeyes since a 28-0 shellacking at the hands of Michigan in 1993.

"We were not nine units strong," Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett said after the loss. "It's real simple."

So, between the time Ohio State started counting down and the time the clock hit zero, what happened? At least offensively, the Buckeyes were systematically outplayed by Clemson. Ohio State managed just 215 total offensive yards – and that number would have been much lower if not for a late 64-yard run by junior H-back Curtis Samuel. The Buckeyes saw Barrett sacked three times in the game and in the first half called just 11 running plays that totaled just 8 net yards. Starting running back Mike Weber – who topped the 1,000-yard mark on the ground this season – received just one of those carries.

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## Play-Calling Was Exposed In Loss To Clemson

Disasters often have consequences, and the dominoes are beginning to fall in the wake of Ohio State's 31-0 Fiesta Bowl loss to Clemson.

Goodness knows something had to be done after what passed for an offensive game plan was exposed for what it was – an unimaginative, toothless scheme that resulted in OSU's first postseason shutout loss in nearly a century.

Give credit where credit is due. Clemson entered the game featuring one of the most active defensive fronts in college football, and the Tigers were every bit as good as advertised. They attacked the Buckeyes from a variety of angles, and despite boasting a pair of first-team All-Americans, Ohio State's offensive line simply was not up to the task.

Of course, blaming the players barely scratches the surface when trying to dissect why the Buckeyes suffered so many offensive struggles in 2016 against active, athletic defenses. Even the most elaborate of offensive playbooks rely upon flawless execution by the players, but when the coaching staff cannot or does not tailor its attack to the talents of the particular players on the roster, success is rarely if ever achieved.

And it wasn't just that there seemed to be no adjustments made throughout the game against Clemson. The offensive staff did not seem to make adjustments throughout the season based upon their own personnel.

It didn't take very long to figure out the Buckeyes had no deep threat at wide receiver, yet a large chunk of the season was spent calling for the same types of patterns and hoping receivers could get open down the field. They rarely did, and that became pretty evident early in the season.

Here's a bit of a mind-boggler for you. Ohio State ran a total of 992 offensive plays from scrimmage in 2016, and only 13 pass plays (exactly 1.3 percent) accounted for 30 yards or more. Of those 13 plays, only four went to wide receivers – two each to Noah Brown and K.J. Hill – and just two of those four resulted in touchdowns.

Ohio State's passing game, which appeared to be no more imaginative than what schoolboys draw up in the dirt, often seemed predicated on short flips or pop passes to H-backs and tailbacks with the hopes they could make something good happen.

On a handful of occasions, Curtis Samuel did exactly that, such as during the season opener against Bowling Green when the junior speedster gathered in a 9-yard pass from J.T. Barrett and turned it into a 79-yard touchdown romp.

Opposing defenses were quick to catch on, however, more often than not neutering Ohio State's passing game. As a result, after throwing for 417 yards in the opener against BG, the Buckeyes failed to throw for more than 152 yards in six of their final 12 contests. There were two games along the way when the team didn't even crack the century mark through the air, and the passing game accounted for no touchdowns in the final 11 quarters of the season.

Samuel was the team's No. 1 threat as far as the passing game was concerned, and that was evidenced by his 74 receptions, more than double the total of anyone else on the squad. But it is also telling that only four of Samuel's catches went for 30 or more yards – and half of that total came in the opener against Bowling Green. Meanwhile, 14 of Samuel's catches gained 3 yards or less. Four of those 14 receptions actually wound up in lost yardage.

I'm not suggesting for a second that Samuel is to blame. Sometimes the blocking

wasn't there, sometimes the H-back made the wrong cut. More often than not, however, play-calling was the culprit. If I never again see that long, strung-out pass behind the line of scrimmage to the boundary, it will be too soon. Opposing defenses from high school to the NFL have seen that slow-to-develop play enough times to know when it's coming, and teams that cannot stretch the field vertically have no business even trying that throw.

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Two years ago, when the Buckeyes were marching to the national championship, they had a pair of deep threats with Devin Smith and Michael Thomas, guys who made Cardale Jones look better than he really was. But that team also had Ezekiel Elliott, who rushed for 220 yards and two touchdowns against Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, 230 yards and two scores against a supposedly impenetrable Alabama defense in the College Football Playoff semifinal, and 246 yards and four touchdowns against Oregon in the title game.

The way the offensive staff called plays during this year's Fiesta Bowl, it begs the question whether Elliott would have gotten the chance to play the kind of role he played during the 2014 title march.

Mike Weber, a 1,000-yard rusher in his first season as a college running back, didn't get his first carry against Clemson until midway through the second quarter on his way to 24 yards on just five carries. Five carries? Are you kidding me? Yes, I know Clemson's defensive front was having its way with the OSU offensive line, but the Buckeyes never even tried to establish Weber in the running game.

I kept hearing what a great game the Rose Bowl was between Penn State and USC. Exciting, yes. Great? Certainly not if you happen to like a little defense. The Nittany Lions and Trojans combined for 101 points and 1,040 yards of total offense, and while that's wildly entertaining to the casual fan, you're not going to win a national championship if you can't control the line of scrimmage and keep the other team from scoring points by the boatload.

That's why I couldn't understand why Ohio State never even tried to establish a power running game in the Fiesta Bowl. The best way – the only way, really – to neutralize an attacking defense such as the one Clemson brought to the desert is to run straight at it. Then again, the last time the Buckeyes were embarrassed in Arizona, they stubbornly refused to try to establish a power game against Florida. We all know how that game turned out.

In the wake of the latest Fiesta Bowl loss, the spirits of Ohio State fans have been buoyed somewhat by the hiring of new quarterbacks coach Ryan Day and the persistent rumors that former Indiana head coach Kevin Wilson will soon be named offensive coordinator. Day worked with Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan while Ryan was setting records at Boston College, and Wilson ran the offense at Oklahoma from 2002-10, coaching a pair of Heisman Trophy-winning quarterbacks – Jason White in 2003 and Sam Bradford in 2008 – along the way.

Barrett returns to Ohio State in 2017 although Samuel, Brown and Dontre Wilson will not, robbing the Buckeyes of their top

three pass-catchers from this past season. That trio combined for more than half of the team's total receptions and receiving yardage in 2016, so you might say the new offensive coaches will be starting with a clean slate. Maybe that's a good thing.

Here's hoping, however, that while Wilson and Day stay up nights trying to devise ways to get the ball into the hands of Hill, Terry McLaurin, Parris Campbell, Binjimen Victor and other young receivers, the new offensive brain trust also remembers they have Weber, a guy who averaged 6.0 yards per carry when he got the chance.

It might not be flashy, but championship football remains rooted in controlling the line of scrimmage and exerting control over one's opponent with a power running game. Unless Ohio State keeps that in mind and becomes a truly multidimensional offense, I'm afraid the future might hold more disastrous outcomes such as the one we saw in Arizona.

### Reasons Or Excuses?

Back when dinosaurs still walked among us and college football games kicked off at 1:30 in the afternoon, any Ohio State season was deemed a success if it included a win against Michigan.

In recent years, however, the bar for determining a successful season has been raised somewhat.

Since victories against the Wolverines have now become something that is expected by the fan base each year, can a season in which the Buckeyes did not win a Big Ten championship and got summarily squashed in a College Football Playoff semifinal game truly be considered a successful one?

Yes, there were 11 wins with the youngest roster among the so-called Power 5 conferences. But is inexperience the reason the Buckeyes failed to bring home any championship trophies for 2016, or is that an excuse?

Ohio State wasn't the only team that lost a lot of players to the NFL off last year's team. Alabama returned only 11 starters and had to use a true freshman at quarterback, but the Crimson Tide ran through 13 opponents unabated to another national title game appearance. For that matter, Clemson returned only 12 starters, including just four on that defensive unit that made the Buckeyes look so bad.

So, was it youth or was it something else?

When Ohio State won the 2014 national championship, Urban Meyer seemed to have pulled himself even with Nick Saban as the top two coaches in college football. During the last two seasons, however, Saban has clearly pulled back in front with Dabo Swinney of Clemson now threatening to make it a three-man race.

There is no doubt that Meyer's overall record of success speaks for itself. But I'm beginning to think I've seen this movie before. After the 2002 season, Ohio State fans thought Jim Tressel could walk on water. Then came failures at the 2006 and 2007 national championship games, and "In Tress We Trust" suddenly became a cocktail party punchline.

The point I'm trying to make is that times have changed. If Meyer continues to recruit five-star prospects at his current pace, beating Michigan every year – which the current generation of Buckeye boosters considers a birthright – is no longer going to be enough to assuage Ohio State fans.

Sooner or later, bottom-line results are going to have to come close to fitting unrealistic expectations.

Is that fair? Probably not, but whoever said life – or college football – was fair?

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Charter Member

COVER STORY

# Meyer Had Confidence Going Into Fiesta Bowl

Continued From Page 1

Ohio State instead focused on a short passing attack that resulted in 12 completions on 19 attempts but just 79 yards before halftime.

All in all, things didn't go as planned. When asked about running the ball so few times for so few yards in the first half, Meyer admitted the Buckeyes got away from their game plan.

"Our game plan was to be balanced and certainly not, whatever the stat you just said, that wasn't our game plan," he said in response to the query. "We just didn't execute very well on offense.

"That was not the game plan. I think we kind of got taken out of the game plan a little bit. But no, that was our plan, to be balanced. We didn't follow the plan."

Not only did Ohio State diverge from its original strategy, the one it ended up with wasn't executed at the highest level. Weber, for example, fumbled on two of his first three carries of the game, losing one. Barrett completed 19 passes in the game, a solid number, but he also threw two picks and gained just 127 yards through the air. That's good for just 3.8 yards per attempt. Clemson, on the other hand, averaged 7.2 yards per pass attempt despite a strong showing from the Ohio State defense.

"I mean, we just didn't execute really on offense," Barrett admitted. "It wasn't really like we were surprised by the looks that we had. I think we prepared really hard and coaches did everything they could as far as like throwing us the different looks that

we thought we were going to get, and we just didn't execute it anywhere on offense, really."

After the game, many fans were quick to point fingers at the coaching staff, while others blamed Barrett, the offensive line and the receivers for the poor play. The quarterback himself chose to keep the blame on the players.

"I thought we had good plays," Barrett said. "We just didn't execute those plays and that's what happens."

### Never Saw It Coming

Going into the game, Ohio State – as is typical for the Buckeyes – seemed to have plenty of confidence. It was the same team that had gone 11-1 and beaten top-10 opponents such as Oklahoma, Wisconsin and Michigan during the regular season, after all.

But whatever clicked in those three wins never materialized against Clemson. Not even close. The loss itself might not have been a shocker – Clemson was the higher ranked team, after all – but the manner of losing was far from expected according to Ohio State players and coaches alike.

Asked if there was any sign during practice that such a loss was on the horizon, Meyer stressed that he was expecting to be getting ready for a trip to Tampa, Fla., to play in the College Football Playoff National Championship, not a trip back to Columbus to try to figure out where it all went wrong.

"I expected a much better performance," Meyer said. "Some guys played their tails off.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**NO GOOD** – Clemson players celebrated two missed field goals by Ohio State during the first quarter of the Fiesta Bowl.

Some other guys we didn't execute very well ... But, no, I didn't anticipate that."

Barrett agreed. "I didn't see that coming by any means," he said. "We expected to win the game and that was what happened."

There was a time, though, when Ohio State wasn't expected to make it to the playoff, let alone compete for a title. The Buckeyes going into the year had the youngest roster in the Football Bowl Subdivision.

With just six returning starters – three on offense, three on defense – even Meyer said during fall camp that his team might be a year away from competing on the national stage.

But then, in week three, Ohio State topped Oklahoma before going on a one-loss run in the Big Ten and sealing a spot in the playoff. After seeing what his team was capable of, Meyer said he no longer thought the Buckeyes were a year away.



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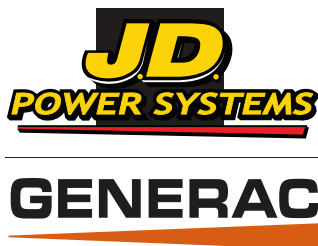
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COVER STORY

"I mean, I thought that in the beginning of the year," he said when the youth of his team was mentioned. "(Now) I thought we were going to go compete for the national championship in 10 days or whatever it is. I really did.

"I think we have a bunch of good players, a bunch of good guys, and our anticipation is to get back here next year and take a good swing at it and realize we've got a lot of work to do, obviously. But that comment I made was prior to the season, not today. When you said that a year away, no, shoot, I thought we were ready to go and didn't anticipate this at all."

Since the Buckeyes did perform so well for much of the regular season, expectations morphed as the year went on.

At first, with a roster composed mostly of freshmen and true freshmen, nobody, including Meyer, knew exactly what to expect. Then, after big wins against some

of the best teams in the nation, expectations rose. For Meyer, that made it all the more frustrating to see his team lose the way it did.

"Most frustrating (thing about the loss)? That I had a group of players, played our tail off. And the same group of guys went to Norman, Oklahoma, and played and won, and went to Madison, Wisconsin, and won in overtime, and then against our rivals, two overtimes," Meyer said. "And we got beat."

Turning It Around

In his career as a head coach, Meyer had never experienced what happened against

Clemson. The three-time national champion had never seen his team blanked on the scoreboard.

Sure, the Buckeyes had suffered a couple of tough losses – mainly against Michigan State – during Meyer's first few years in Columbus, but nothing like the Fiesta Bowl had happened yet. Nothing like it happened when he was at Florida, Utah or Bowling Green, either.

That means Meyer has to find a way to fix something he's never had to fix before. The offense, against Clemson, wasn't good enough. Meyer, widely considered an offen-

sive genius, had his fingerprints all of the game plan.

Now, with the offseason under way as soon as the game ended, Meyer said the Buckeyes would waste no time in figuring things out.

"So we're going to move on quickly, and my respect for the football players, our team, has not changed," he said. "Identify things that have to get better and we will. That's what we do. Ohio State is not used to this. I'm not used to this and we will not get used to this. That's not going to happen again. So we'll get things worked out."

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# Herman Defends Hiring Of Beck At Texas

Continued From Page 1

co-offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Tim Beck was set to be hired by Texas head coach and former Ohio State assistant Tom Herman to be his offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach. Beck, who replaced Herman when he left Ohio State to become the head coach at Houston following the 2014 season, was set to have full control of the Longhorns' offense, according to the report.

Though his deal with Texas might have been in place at the time, or at least begin-

ning to take shape, Beck told members of the media after the Fiesta Bowl that he wasn't sure what his future would hold.

"I don't know," Beck said when asked if he'd be back in Columbus for the 2017 season. "That is Coach Meyer's decision. I thought I worked really hard and felt good about it. We didn't finish the way we wanted to. We didn't play a very good game all the way around offensively and I am a big part of that. I am one of the leaders of the offense. I have to do a better job."

That question answered itself more completely just days later, and news of Beck's

replacement quickly followed suit. On Jan. 3, mere hours after news of Beck's departure broke, reports surfaced that Ohio State was going to hire Ryan Day as his replacement. Official confirmation by the school followed soon after.

Ohio State's press release, which came before Texas had confirmed Beck's hire, stated, "Day replaces Tim Beck, who is pursuing other opportunities."

Day, who previously had worked as a graduate assistant under Meyer at Florida in 2005, most recently served as quarterbacks coach under Chip Kelly in the NFL.

The duo of Day and head coach Kelly spent last season with the San Francisco 49ers and the previous year with the Philadelphia Eagles. Day also spent time as a collegiate assistant before making the jump to the NFL. He was receivers coach under Al Golden at Temple in 2006 and spent five seasons in that same position with Boston College (2007-11). He was also the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach under Steve Addazio, another former Meyer assistant, in 2012 at Temple and 2013 and 2014 back at Boston College.

The departure of Beck and the hire of Day was met with great fanfare from many of the Buckeye faithful, as fingers were often pointed at Beck throughout the past two seasons whenever the offense struggled. Some, though, were left wondering why Herman would hire Beck, if he really had done a poor job at Ohio State.

Herman, though, came to the fierce defense of his coordinator quickly. He even said the blame on Beck was misplaced by Ohio State fans.

"I was really surprised because it was very well known that Tim Beck didn't call plays at Ohio State," Herman said when asked about the negativity surrounding Beck's hire. "I think the negativity was misplaced on him."

Herman said he felt confident enough to make the hire after talking to Meyer, Barrett and former Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones about Beck.

"They think the world of him," Herman said. "Tim Beck was extremely successful when he was a play caller at Nebraska. So chalk that one up to a lot of misinformation on social media. I will never buy any of that because we're privy to a lot more information than what 'Joe Fan' is."

Since Beck was not the play caller at Ohio State - the duties were more often placed on offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Ed Warinner's shoulders, while Meyer had input as well - his departure wouldn't necessarily change the scheme for Ohio State's offense.

But Day isn't the only new offensive staff member joining the Buckeyes, according to a report posted by Fox Sports college football reporter Bruce Feldman on Twitter.

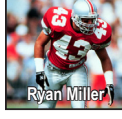
"Former #Indiana HC Kevin Wilson is expected to become #OhioState's new OC, source tells @FoxSports," Feldman wrote in a tweet on Jan. 3. "Meeting w/OSU today."

As of press time, news of Wilson's hire had not been confirmed by Ohio State, and Warinner's status on the coaching staff was unclear. Cleveland.com reported that Warinner was staying with the Buckeyes, but his role could change, while other rumors suggested that Warinner could be leaving the Buckeyes altogether.

Wilson, who was most recently the head coach at Indiana, is widely considered one of the greatest offensive minds in the game, and his Hoosier teams often gave Ohio State and Meyer issues in recent seasons.

Under current rules, though, Division I programs are allowed only nine assistant coaches. A vote will take place in April that could allow for a 10th assistant, but for now another coach would need to leave Ohio State's staff in order for Wilson's hire to be made official.

As the 2017 Ohio State offensive staff continues to take shape, check back with [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com) for further updates or see the electronic BSB Quickly set to be posted on Jan. 17.



# OH-IO

## 10TH ANNIVERSARY

# BUCKEYE

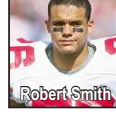
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# OSU Defense Plays Well Despite Blowout Loss

Defense had been Ohio State's strong suit all season, so it should come as no surprise that while the offense struggled, the Buckeye defense for the most part stood tall against Clemson.

Taking on a Tiger attack that featured the Heisman Trophy runner-up in quarterback Deshaun Watson, the Buckeyes forced the signal caller to throw two interceptions and sacked him twice in a 31-0 Fiesta Bowl loss on New Year's Eve in Glendale, Ariz.

## GAME NOTEBOOK

James Grega

The first interception came on Watson's first pass attempt of the night when junior cornerback Gareon Conley stepped in front of a pass intended for Mike Williams to set Ohio State up in excellent field position, something it could not cash in on.

Ohio State sophomore defensive end Sam Hubbard, who told BSB he would return to Columbus for the 2017 season after the game, said the defense would not point fingers at the offense despite the shutout.

"No, none at all. I saw guys out there on the offense spilling their guts," Hubbard said. "It just didn't happen. So it's nothing they did wrong, we've just got to get better all around. There's a lot that we could have done, too."

The defense didn't stop at Conley's inter-

ception, as safety Malik Hooker nabbed yet another pick against Clemson, giving him seven on the season.

Hooker, a third-year sophomore who has elected to enter the 2017 NFL draft, said that he never felt discouraged throughout the game because of the way the defense played.

"We weren't frustrated at all," Hooker said. "We just looked at it as we've just got to go out there and keep fighting. Just going out there and keep fighting, even though you know you're about to lose."

Hooker's interception came in the corner of the end zone on a pass that looked as though it would extend Clemson's already big lead. The play raised the eyebrows of most in the stadium, including Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney, who is now 2-0 in his career against head coach Urban Meyer and Ohio State.

"Just an unbelievable play," Swinney said of Hooker's interception. "The ball was perfect. He put the ball, you couldn't have made a better play. But that guy just kind of outcompeted (Hunter) Renfrow for the ball right there. Give him credit, he made a very competitive play."

As for his vantage point, Hooker said he had seen Clemson run a similar play on film and in game prep and diagnosed it with the ball in the air.

"Just preparation, I've seen that play a million times, had over a thousand reps on Clemson's offense overall so it was like I just pictured it," Hooker said. "I knew it was my chance to make an opportunity to change the game. Made the pick, I felt like

it was a little bit of momentum change and just wanted to make a play so I could get everybody going."

Even with the Hooker interception, the Ohio State offense failed to put up any points as the Buckeyes were shut out for the first time since a 28-0 loss to Michigan in 1993.

### Durbin Fails To Convert

Against Michigan, Ohio State kicker Tyler Durbin failed to convert on his first

two field-goal attempts that could have given the Buckeyes a win in regulation before knocking through his third and final attempt to send the game to overtime.

In the Fiesta Bowl, Durbin was called on to try for three points twice in the first quarter but failed to convert on two kicks of 47 yards each, pushing the first wide right and pulling the second wide left.

Durbin, a walk-on and former soccer player at James Madison, transferred to

## Game Analysis

### What Worked Well

The early field-position battle. Although Ohio State never ended up scoring against Clemson, the Buckeye defense and special teams repeatedly put the offense in great starting positions. First, on the opening kickoff, sophomore wide receiver Parris Campbell returned the ball 32 yards to give the Buckeyes the ball at their 33. Three plays later, Ohio State punted and senior Cam Johnston's boot pinned Clemson at its own 17. Then, on the second play of that drive, Gareon Conley intercepted Tiger quarterback Deshaun Watson at the Clemson 33. Once again, though, the offense did nothing with the strong starting position. Ohio State's very next drive began in Clemson territory once again (this time the 42) after a 54-yard return from Campbell. That led to another missed field goal from 47 yards as the Buckeye offense stalled once again.

### What Didn't Work

The downfield passing game. While, in reality, almost nothing worked for the Ohio State offense, the Buckeyes truly struggled to get the ball downfield via the pass attack. Although the running game didn't garner much success either, that was partially due to a game plan that focused on short and intermediate passes – including many screens and throws to the flats – rather than deep throws or running plays. In total, Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett completed 19 of 33 pass attempts – respectable, as far as percentages go – but that accounted for just 127 total yards. Barrett averaged just 6.7 yards per completion and 3.8 yards per attempt while, in contrast, Clemson averaged 11.0 yards per completion and 7.2 yards per attempt.

### The Turning Point

In a game that ends 31-0, the turning point probably came early on. There are a few different spots that stand out, but you could even go all the way back to Ohio State's first drive to find out when things seemed unlikely to go well for the Buckeyes. After Campbell's solid return, Barrett hit junior Curtis Samuel for a 4-yard pass before finding him again for a loss of 2 yards. On third-and-8, a third straight short pass play was called and Barrett found running back Mike Weber for what likely would have been a first down, but the ball slipped out of his hands, forcing a punt. With just 1:23 off the clock, the writing was already on the wall for Ohio State.

– Tim Moody

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OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON



SONNY BROCKWAY

**MOMENT OF HOPE – Ohio State cornerback Gareon Conley (8) intercepted Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson on the Tigers’ second play from scrimmage, but the Buckeye offense failed to capitalize.**

Ohio State in 2015 and earned the starting kicker job in 2016, partially due to Sean Nuernberger’s lingering injury issues.

Entering the Michigan game, Durbin had missed just one kick, converting on 16 of 17 attempts with the only miss coming against Penn State when his kick was blocked and returned for the game-winning score.

The senior finished his only season as the Buckeyes’ kicker 17 of 22, missing four of his final five kicks. He was named a third-team All-Big Ten selection by both the media and coaches following the 2016 regular season.

**Weber Tallies Just 5 Carries**

After becoming just the third freshman running back in Ohio State history to rush for more than 1,000 yards in a season, Mike Weber saw his touches diminish greatly over the last two games of the season.

Weber notched just five carries in the loss to Clemson, including only one in the first half. When he did carry the ball, however, he struggled to hold on to it, fumbling twice, one of which was recovered by Clemson.

“It was real frustrating because it is something I don’t do,” Weber said of his two fumbles. “I am not going to sit up here and make excuses. They hit the ball at the right spot at the right time. It is unfortunate, but I tried my best for the team.”

Weber finished the season with 1,096 yards and nine touchdowns, but in his final two games against Michigan and Clemson, he carried the ball a combined 16 times for 50 yards and one score.

**Injuries Bite Buckeyes**

For a team that was relatively healthy

all season, the injury bug came up and bit the Buckeyes on multiple occasions against Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl.

It started when freshman left guard Michael Jordan injured his ankle early in the first quarter and was replaced by reserve guard Demetrius Knox. Knox struggled when he was inserted, getting out of his

stance so slowly on one play that a Tiger defender blew by him untouched to make a tackle for loss on a critical third-and-1.

Jordan was in and out of the lineup later in the game but appeared to be a step slower after getting his ankle taped and treated by trainers on the sideline.

“It was pretty tough,” Jordan said after

the loss. “But I had to play for my offensive line brothers.”

Junior Billy Price, who announced after the game that he would be returning for his senior season, said he was impressed with Jordan’s ability to fight through the pain of the injury and finish the game.

“That’s a tough dude,” Price said. “That is a dude right there. I looked at him and asked, ‘Are you going to be able to do this?’ And he fought. He fights hard and he goes hard.”

In addition to Jordan’s injury, sophomore cornerback Marshon Lattimore missed extended reps with what appeared to be leg cramps throughout the game. Early on while Lattimore was being treated, Denzel Ward took his place and was guarding Williams on multiple occasions. The star Clemson receiver made a couple of big plays with Ward covering him and finished with six catches for 96 yards in the win.

**Watson, Ferrell Take MVPs**

After dominating the Buckeyes, it came as no surprise that Watson and Clemson defensive end Clelin Ferrell were awarded offensive and defensive MVP honors for the Fiesta Bowl.

Watson, a two-time Davey O’Brien Award winner as the best quarterback in the country, finished the Fiesta Bowl with 259 passing yards and three total touchdowns, two of which came on the ground. He also added 57 rushing yards.

Ferrell recorded a sack and a game-high three tackles for loss in the win for Clemson and said he was honored to be given the award, especially after not playing much in 2015 as a part of the Tigers’ run to the national title game.

“Last year I was a part of the team but I wasn’t playing,” Ferrell said. “And to see them – those guys like Shaq (Lawson) and Kevin Dodd, I look up to as big brothers –having their opportunity and taking advantage of it last year, and then this year when we’re coming in being a starter playing against the Ohio State, it’s kind of crazy that I got to come out here and perform at a high level.”

With the win, the Tigers advanced to the CFP title game for the second straight season to take on Alabama, a team they lost to in that championship game 45-40 in 2015-16.

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## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

# Tigers Blank Buckeyes In Playoff Semifinal

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's dream of winning a second national title in three years was emphatically ended Dec. 31 as No. 2 Clemson completely stifled the Buckeye offense in the Fiesta Bowl to defeat No. 3 OSU 31-0 in the College Football Playoff semifinal played before 71,279 fans at the University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz.

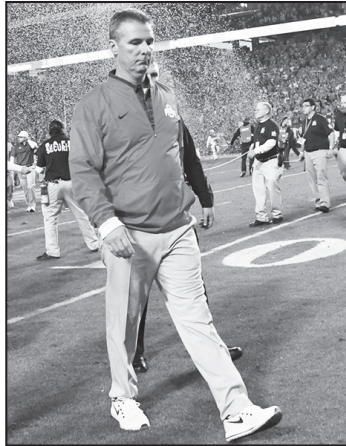
The Tigers (13-1) advanced to play No. 1 Alabama, which had recorded a 24-7 win over No. 4 Washington earlier in the day, for the CFP championship.

It was the first time in 194 games as head coach that OSU's Urban Meyer had been shut out, and it was Ohio State's largest margin of defeat since a 63-14 loss to Penn State in 1994. The Buckeyes had not been blanked since Nov. 20, 1993 (28-0 vs. Michigan).

Ohio State (11-2) could muster just 215 total yards, 64 of which came on just one play, a Curtis Samuel run in the fourth quarter when the game was already pretty much out of reach. The Tigers, meanwhile racked up 470 yards with a balanced attack that featured 265 yards passing and another 205 on the ground.

Deshaun Watson, the Heisman Trophy runner-up this season, ran for two scores and passed for another along with two interceptions for Clemson. He was 23 of 36 for 259 passing yards and rushed for 57 yards on 15 carries.

Running back Wayne Gallman had 85 yards and a TD on 18 rushes, and Mike Williams had 96 receiving yards on six catches.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FIRST TIME - An Urban Meyer-coached team had never been shut out before Ohio State fell to Clemson, 31-0, in the Fiesta Bowl.**

Clemson led in first downs (24-9) and plays (85-56).

The Buckeyes had 88 yards on the ground and 127 in the air. OSU junior quarterback J.T. Barrett was 19 for 33 for the 127 yards and two picks, and Samuel, a junior, rushed for 67 yards on six carries while freshman Mike Weber had 24 yards on five rushes, losing one of his two fumbles.

## How It Happened

Clemson led 10-0 after the first quarter even though the Buckeyes had two of their first three drives start in Tiger territory only to end in a pair of missed 47-yard field goals by senior Tyler Durbin, who finished his career making one of five tries in the final two games.

His first miss came on the Buckeyes' second possession following an interception by junior cornerback Gareon Conley at the Clemson 33.

The Buckeyes faced a third-and-1 at the 24 after a Terry McLaurin reception for 7 yards, but freshman left Michael Jordan was injured and replaced by sophomore Demetrius Knox. On the next play, Clelin Ferrell blew by Knox, who was late coming out of his stance, to tackle Barrett for a 6-yard loss, and Durbin missed to the right of the upright.

The Tigers got the ball and used a 37-yard catch by Williams to set up a 45-yard field goal by Greg Huegel with 9:16 left in the first quarter.

Sophomore Parris Campbell returned the ensuing kickoff 54 yards to the Clemson 42. On a third-and-6 from the 38, Barrett scrambled out of the pocket and hit Samuel along the right sideline for 16 yards to the 22, but the drive stalled when Samuel had a reverse lose 8 yards. A run by Barrett for no gain and an incomplete pass gave Durbin another try, but the kick sailed left.

Clemson took advantage and went 70 yards in 10 plays in 3:43 for a 10-0 lead with 2:16 left in the first quarter. Williams had a 26-yard catch and Hunter Renfrow had two receptions for 22 yards before Watson ran in from the 1.

While Ohio State continued to struggle on offense, gaining 32 total yards on its next two drives which resulted in two Cameron Johnston punts, the Tigers threatened to add to the lead in the second quarter. But facing a third-and-7 from the OSU 37, Watson was intercepted in the end zone by Malik Hooker for the seventh interception of the sophomore's season. The Buckeyes couldn't capitalize, gaining 17 yards to their own 37 before another Johnston punt.

The Tigers took over on their 17 and wouldn't be denied. They needed eight plays and 3:44 to march the 83 yards for a 17-0

lead with 2:21 left. Watson finally unleashed his running ability and escaped a half-dozen would be tacklers for a 33-yard gallop to the OSU 33.

Watson then went back to his arm to hit running back C.J. Fuller on a wheel route in the end zone for a 30-yard score three plays later.

The second half started poorly for the Buckeyes. They forced a three-and-out to start the half, but Weber fumbled at the OSU 41 on the second snap after the Clemson punt. The Ohio State defense held after Clemson drove to first-and-goal from the 2, thanks to a 10-yard sack of Watson by junior linebacker Raekwon McMillan, and Huegel missed a 31-yard field goal with 9:02 left in the quarter.

Later in the third, after two more Johnston punts, Clemson capped a 40-yard drive when Watson scored from 7 yards on third down for a 24-0 lead with 2:06 remaining against the tiring OSU defense. The field was shortened for the Tigers when McLaurin was called for interfering with Clemson punt returner Artavis Scott, a 15-yard infraction.

On OSU's next possession, Barrett took to the air, and consecutive pass-interference calls moved the ball 30 yards to the Clemson 35. Weber then ran for 10. Although he fumbled, it was recovered by redshirt freshman tight end A.J. Alexander at the 27 for the Buckeyes. But on the next play Barrett overthrew Samuel at the 1 and Cordrea Tankersley made the interception and returned it to the Clemson 19 with 56 seconds to go in the third.

OSU's complete futility and frustration were on display after its one shining moment early in the fourth quarter. Held to a mere 111 total yards as a team to that point, Samuel ran 64 yards on a counter play to the Clemson 16.

The Buckeyes then had a false start to drop back to the 21. After an incompletion, Barrett was taken down for a 2-yard loss on a run and then was sacked for 10 more yards. On fourth-and-27, he threw the ball into the end zone where Van Smith intercepted it 3 yards deep and returned it 86 yards. A personal foul on OSU put the ball on the Ohio State 7. After Watson was stopped for no gain, Gallman ran in from 7 with 8:51 left to put the score at its final margin.

Ohio State had one more legitimate possession and moved from its own 28 to the Tiger 25 with Corey Smith grabbing two Barrett passes for 27 yards. But on fourth-and-1, Weber was stopped for a 2-yard loss and the Buckeyes turned the ball over on downs.

Clemson got as far as the OSU 30 in the final minute but turned the ball over on downs, and Weber had a 7-yard run to end the game.

The outcome left the Buckeyes stunned. "I thought we were going to go compete for the national championship in 10 days or whatever it is," Meyer said. "I really did."

The Ohio State defense put up a fight for much of the game before finally wearing down as the Buckeye offense continued to force the stop troops back on the field.

Linebacker Chris Worley, who was second on the team with 10 tackles, wouldn't put the blame on his teammates on the other side of the ball, however.

"I hear a lot of questions about the offense, things like that," Worley said. "But the defense didn't execute as well as we could either. And it comes down to complementary football, and we didn't play that today and we lost."

McMillan led the Buckeyes with 15 tackles, including two for loss and a sack. Hooker had seven stops and Conley six to go along with their interceptions.

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— Urban Meyer

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# The Numbers Game

## Clemson 31, Ohio State 0

Dec. 31, 2016 – University Of Phoenix Stadium; Glendale, Ariz.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	0	0	0	0
CLEMSON	10	7	7	7	31

### First Quarter

**CLEM** – Huegel, 45 yard field goal, 9:16; 7 plays, 42 yards, 2:36 TOP.  
**CLEM** – Watson, 1 yard run (Huegel kick), 2:16; 10 plays, 70 yards, 3:43 TOP.

### Second Quarter

**CLEM** – Fuller, 30 yard pass from Watson (Huegel kick), 2:21; 8 plays, 83 yards, 3:44 TOP.

### Third Quarter

**CLEM** – Watson, 7 yard run (Huegel kick), 2:06; 5 plays, 40 yards, 2:03 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

**CLEM** – Gallman, 7 yard run (Huegel kick), 8:51; 2 plays, 7 yards, 0:34 TOP.  
 Att. – 71,279.

Weather – Indoors.

### Team Statistics

	OSU	CLEM
First Downs	9	24
Rushing	3	12
Passing	4	12
Penalty	2	0
Rushes-Yards	23-88	48-205
Passing Yards	127	265
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	19-33-2	24-37-2
Offensive Plays	56	85
Total Net Yards	215	470
Third Down Efficiency	3-14	8-17
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-2	0-1
Punts-Avg.	7-49.7	5-41.2
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	0-0
Penalties	8-72	5-60
Time of Possession	22:47	35:51

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU:** Samuel 6-67; Weber 5-24; TEAM 1-(-1); Barrett 11-(-2). **CLEM:** Gallman 18-85; Watson 15-57; Schuessler 1-19; Choice 4-16; Feaster 3-12; Scott 3-8; McCloud 2-8; Fuller 1-3; TEAM 1-(-3).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU:** Barrett 19-33-2-127-0. **CLEM:** Watson 23-36-2-259-1; Schuessler 1-1-0-6-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU:** Samuel 9-43; Weber 3-4; C. Smith 2-27; Brown 2-17; Victor 1-21; K. Hill 1-8; McLaurin 1-7. **CLEM:** Williams 6-96; Renfrow 5-50; McCloud 4-29; Fuller 3-45; Scott 2-16; Gallman 1-10; Cain 1-9; Williams 1-6; Leggett 1-4.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU:** Johnston 7-49.7-61. **CLEM:** Teasdall 5-41.2-67.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** Samuel 1-(-1). **CLEM:** Scott 2-16.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** Campbell 3-105; Alexander 1-17; K. Hill 1-6. **CLEM:** None.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – OSU:** Durbin (47, 47). **CLEM:** Huegel (31).

**FORCED FUMBLES – OSU:** None. **CLEM:** Joseph, Smith.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** None. **CLEM:** Wilkins 1-0.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** Conley 1-0; Hooker 1-0. **CLEM:** Smith 1-86; Tankersley 1-18.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** McMillan 1.0-10; Lewis 0.5-4; Hubbard 0.5-3. **CLEM:** Watkins 2.0-11; Ferrell 1.0-12.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU:** McMillan 2.0-12; Hubbard 1.0-4; D. Jones 1.0-2; Baker 1.0-1; Lattimore 1.0-1; Lewis 0.5-4; Hooker 0.5-0. **CLEM:** Ferrell 3.0-26; Watkins 2.0-11; Joseph 1.0-3; Edmond 1.0-3; Pagano 1.0-2; O’Daniel 1.0-2; Wilkins 1.0-2; Smith 0.5-1; Boulware 0.5-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU:** McMillan 12-3-15; Worley 8-2-10; Hooker 5-2-7; Conley 5-1-6; D. Jones 4-1-5; Hubbard 3-2-5; Baker 3-1-4; Bosa 3-1-4; Webb 3-1-4; Lattimore 3-0-3; Burger 2-0-2; M. Hill 2-0-2; Lewis 0-2-2; Clark 1-0-1; Ward 1-0-1; Hamilton 1-0-1; Arnette 1-0-1; Weber 1-0-1; Fuller 1-0-1; Turnure 1-0-1; J. Jones 1-0-1. **CLEM:** Joseph 8-0-8; Smith 4-2-6; Boulware 4-1-5; Ferrell 4-0-4; Tankersley 4-0-4; Johnson 3-1-4; Wilkins 3-1-4; Watkins 2-1-3; O’Daniel 2-0-2; Edmond 2-0-2; Bryant 2-0-2; Scott 1-0-1; Pagano 1-0-1; Carter 1-0-1; Skalski 0-1-1; Mullen 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OHIO STATE:** Offense, J. Jones, Jordan, Elflein, Price, Prince, Bauch, Barrett, Weber, Samuel, Brown, McLaurin, Durbin, Defense, Hubbard, D. Jones, M. Hill, Lewis, Worley, McMillan, Baker, Conley, Hooker, Webb, Lattimore, Johnston. Reserves, Victor, Fuller, C. Smith, K. Jones, Cooper, Arnette, Cornell, Holmes, Ward, Berry, K. Hill, Glover-Williams, Campbell, Turnure, Fada, Burger, McCullough, Hamilton, Landers, Trout, Lisle, Bowen, Knox, Clark, Alexander, Bosa. **CLEMSON:** Offense, Hyatt, Hearn, Lamar, Crowder, Pollard, Leggett, Williams, Watson, Gallman, Renfrow, Scott, Huegel, Defense, Wilkins, Watkins, Lawrence, Ferrell, O’Daniel, Joseph, Boulware, Carter, Johnson, Smith, Tankersley, Teasdall. Reserves, Schuessler, Mullen, Overton, Fields, McCloud, Guillermo, Falcinelli, Cain, Wallace, Johnson, Powell, Muse, Choice, Fuller, Feaster, Edmond, Davis, Davis, Smith, Williams, Skalski, Pagano, Cervenka, Estes, Morris, Anchrum, Simpson, Richard, Smith, Ryan, Bryant.

## Season Statistics

2016 Game-By-Game				Scoring						
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS	
Sept. 3	(6) BOWLING GREEN	W, 77-10	107,193	Tyler Durbin	–	63-65	–	–	–17-22	114
Sept. 10	(4) TULSA	W, 48-3	104,410	Curtis Samuel	15	–	–	–	–	90
Sept. 17	(3) at Oklahoma (14)	W, 45-24	87,979	J.T. Barrett	9	–	–	–	–	54
Oct. 1	(2) RUTGERS	W, 58-0	105,830	Mike Weber	9	–	–	–	–	54
Oct. 8	(2) INDIANA	W, 38-17	107,420	Noah Brown	7	–	–	–	–	42
Oct. 15	(2) at Wisconsin (8)	W, 30-23 (OT)	81,541	Dontre Wilson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Oct. 22	(2) at Penn State	L, 24-21	107,280	Demario McCall	4	–	–	–	–	24
Oct. 29	(6) NORTHWESTERN	W, 24-20	107,296	Malik Hooker	3	–	–	–	–	18
Nov. 5	(6) NEBRASKA (10)	W, 62-3	108,750	Terry McLaurin	2	–	–	–	–	12
Nov. 12	(5) at Maryland	W, 62-3	48,090	Marcus Baugh	2	–	–	–	–	12
Nov. 19	(2) at Michigan State	W, 17-16	73,303	Parris Campbell	1	–	–	–	–	6
Nov. 26	(2) MICHIGAN (3)	W, 30-27 (2OT)	110,045	Joe Burrow	1	–	–	–	–	6
Dec. 31	(3) Clemson (2)**	L, 31-0	71,279	Johnnie Dixon	1	–	–	–	–	6

\*OSU's gameday College Football Playoff ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name. (AP ranking used through Northwestern game)  
 \*\* PlayStation Fiesta Bowl (CFP Semifinal) at Glendale, Ariz.

Team Statistics		OSU	Opp
First Downs		312	200
Rushing		176	88
Passing		116	104
Penalty		20	8
Average Per Game/Rush		245.2	124.5
Average Per Game/Pass		213.9	172.2
Total Offense		5,969	3,858
Total Plays		992	882
Average Per Game		459.2	296.8
Average Per Play		6.0	4.4
Penalties-Yards		82-658	59-536
Fumbles-Lost		17-5	14-6
Third Down Efficiency		93-199	64-199
Percentage		47%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency		13-21	8-23
Percentage		62%	35%
Sacks-Yards		28-202	28-150
Time Of Possession Avg.		33:05	26:49

FG Distance		OSU	Opp		
0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total	
Tyler Durbin	6-7	9-10	2-5	0-0	17-22
OSU Totals	6-7	9-10	2-5	0-0	17-22
OPP Totals	8-9	6-8	2-2	0-0	16-19

Punting		No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Cam Johnston	56	2,614	46.7	0	70	
TEAM	1	0	0.0	1	0	
OSU Totals	57	2,614	45.9	1	70	
OPP Totals	83	3,356	40.4	0	67	

Interceptions		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Malik Hooker	7	181	25.9	3	48	
Marshon Lattimore	4	61	15.2	1	40	
Gareon Conley	4	0	0.0	0	0	
Jerome Baker	2	90	45.0	1	68	
Rodjay Burns	1	75	75.0	1	75	
Damon Webb	1	36	36.0	1	36	
Chris Worley	1	0	0.0	0	0	
Damon Arnette	1	0	0.0	0	0	
OSU Totals	21	443	21.1	7	75	
OPP Totals	7	209	29.9	1	86	

Punt Returns		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Dontre Wilson	17	107	6.3	0	27	
Curtis Samuel	6	19	3.2	0	12	
Demario McCall	3	14	4.7	0	15	
Corey Smith	1	-9	-9.0	0	0	
OSU Totals	27	131	4.9	0	27	
OPP Totals	14	55	3.9	0	16	

Kickoff Returns		No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Parris Campbell	21	584	27.8	0	91	
Dontre Wilson	3	62	20.7	0	25	
A.J. Alexander	2	17	8.5	0	17	
K.J. Hill	1	6	6.0	0	6	
Joe Burger	1	13	13.0	0	13	
OSU Totals	28	682	24.4	0	91	
OPP Totals	52	984	18.9	1	97	

Def. Leaders		Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Raekwon McMillan	49	53	102	7.0-20	2.0-12	
Jerome Baker	45	38	83	9.5-42	3.5-26	
Malik Hooker	43	31	74	5.5-22	0.5-7	
Chris Worley	43	27	70	4.5-13	–	
Damon Webb	32	25	57	2.0-9	–	
Dre’Mont Jones	22	30	52	4.0-13	–	
Sam Hubbard	21	25	46	8.0-42	3.5-31	
Marshon Lattimore	20	11	41	1.0-1	–	
Jalyn Holmes	12	21	33	8.5-32	2.0-19	
Nick Bosa	17	12	29	7.0-36	5.0-32	
Tyquan Lewis	17	12	29	10.5-61	8.0-55	
Gareon Conley	21	5	26	–	–	
Denzel Ward	12	11	23	–	–	
Damon Arnette	11	10	21	–	–	
Michael Hill	9	12	21	3.0-6	–	
Erick Smith	9	7	16	7.0-2	–	
Robert Landers	11	5	16	7.5-27	1.0-7	
Joe Burger	5	9	14	0.5-1	–	
Malik Harrison	10	3	13	1.0-3	1.0-3	
Jordan Fuller	7	4	11	–	–	
OSU Totals	484	394	878	87-357	28-202	
OPP Totals	550	474	1,024	66-251	28-150	

Receiving		Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Curtis Samuel	74	865	11.7	7	79	
Noah Brown	32	402	12.6	7	37	
Dontre Wilson	27	352	13.0	5	43	
Marcus Baugh	24	269	11.2	2	29	
Mike Weber	23	91	4.0	0	15	
K.J. Hill	18	262	14.6	1	47	
Parris Campbell	13	121	9.3	0	16	
Terry McLaurin	11	114	10.4	2	19	
James Clark	6	47	7.8	0	12	
Corey Smith	6	34	5.7	0	18	
Johnnie Dixon	6	26	4.3	0	10	
Demario McCall	4	84	21.0	1	36	
Binjimen Victor	4	64	16.0	1	25	
A.J. Alexander	4	27	6.8	0	9	
Austin Mack	2	15	7.5	0	8	
Alex Stump	1	8	8.0	0	8	
OSU Totals	255	2781	10.9	26	79	
OPP Totals	196	2239	11.4	11	64	

Fumbles Forced: 7 – Tyquan Lewis (3), Raekwon McMillan (2), Jalyn Holmes, Chris Worley.  
 Fumbles Recovered: 6 – Jalyn Holmes (2), Joshua Alabi, Jerome Baker, Terry McLaurin, Hamilton.

OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

# BSB Quotebook: Clemson 31, Ohio State 0

**Ohio State junior quarterback J.T. Barrett on Clemson's pressure:** "They did a good job being disruptive, the D-line did. I mean, there were times I could have done a better job getting the ball out, as far as seeing my reads faster."

**OSU head coach Urban Meyer on getting shut out:** "I'm not used to it. We're not used to it. And that's not going to happen again. So go to work."

**Barrett on being shut out:** "It wasn't anything they did, I don't think. That was a great team. They played hard. We were getting a lot of opportunities on offense. That's what happened. On offense, I truly believe that we got the best looks we could, plays. You could have a scheme and all these different plays set out. You could have everything on the grease board, but you've still got to go play the game and execute the plays we have. And we didn't do that."

**OSU junior H-back Curtis Samuel on what went wrong offensively:** "I mean, we had a good game plan going. It was just one-on-one matchups and we just didn't take advantage of those one-on-one matchups. We didn't win those battles, and it just sucks because I don't feel like I did what I was supposed to do."

**Barrett on OSU freshman left guard Michael Jordan's injury:** "When he went down, it was – I mean, we always believe in the next man up. As far as being competitively excellent with our game reps and mental reps, the guy behind him should be ready to go when his number's called."

**Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney on Ohio State's performance:** "Listen, that's a tough night for Ohio State. But you can't let one game define your season. Ohio State is an incredible team. They've got a lot of young players. Coach Meyer will be the first one to tell you. They're a great football team. But tonight was just our night. Our guys were prepared. They were ready. They seized the moment."

**OSU sophomore safety Malik Hooker on the**

**season overall:** "Just a wild ride. We came into the season and a lot of people thought we were a young team. A lot of young guys, first-year starters. I feel like it was just a great ride. A lot of guys just grew up, myself included. I didn't expect for me to have the season that I've had. But I feel like we just bought into the culture and we just love each other so much that we want to go out there and make big plays and do our job for the guys that we're playing with. So it wasn't like I didn't expect it to happen because of how we graded in the offseason."

**OSU junior linebacker Raekwon McMillan on putting the season in perspective:** "Nah, we're not happy with just making it here. That's not one of the things at Ohio State. The guys before us didn't want it to be that way, and the guys after us hopefully don't think that way. Just making it to somewhere and being happy with it is not what we're about. We're about winning it and being the best program in the nation."

**OSU fifth-year senior center Pat Elflein on his time at OSU:** "What are you going to do now about what just happened? You can't change it. You can try and think about what happened. I just appreciate the gifts we are given to be able to play this game at Ohio State. The seasons, coaches and teammates we have had here have been incredible, and this place at Ohio State is unlike any other place. We are just incredibly blessed to play at this university and be a part of this team with these coaches and an incredible leader like J.T. He is unlike any other player or person I have ever seen or been around."

**Hooker on the play of Clemson quarterback Deshaun Watson:** "He's a competitor, leader of their team. A very effective quarterback, can throw the ball 60 yards, run the ball. I feel like he just did a great job of leading them

and keeping his composure when we got a momentum change."

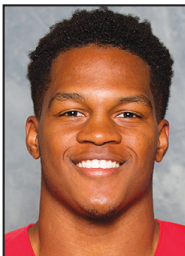
**Swinney on Watson's performance:** "That's why he's the best player in the country. He's a winner. He's 31-3. And he's hard to beat, hard to beat, because he just handles everything with such great poise."

**Watson on throwing two interceptions:** "I'm a quarterback. So if I throw a pick or make a mistake I'm not going to shy away and not just going to throw it. I'm going to take my chances, take my shots. I feel like the bigger the risk, the bigger the reward. I have guts and have that trust in my arm and my receivers. I try to do that. Mike (Williams) slipped on that one. (Gareon Conley) made a good play.

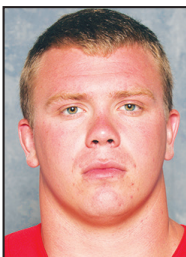
On the other one, we've been practicing that all week and No. 24 (Hooker) and (Hunter) Renfrow were both there, and 24, he wanted it more, and he grabbed it. So it could have went either way, but at the same time, I just go out there and play ball and don't worry about mistakes. The great ones make mistakes, too."

**OSU junior linebacker Chris Worley on the defense getting two interceptions:** "When we make plays like that, of course we expect that part and we expected to play that way. And I hear a lot of questions about the offense, things like that. But the defense didn't execute as well as we could either. And it comes down to complementary football, and we didn't play that today and we lost. That's what happens when you don't play nine strong and everyone doesn't complement each other. So we've got to get better. It is what it is."

**Samuel on his 64-yard run in the second half:** "I wasn't excited because it just took me too long to get that run. I feel like I had a bunch of opportunities. I just played bad this game, man. I feel like I could have done much more for my team."



Raekwon McMillan



Pat Elflein



Chris Worley

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# Manner Of Loss Was Surprising, Not The Result

I have to say the same thing following Ohio State's recent Fiesta Bowl debacle as I did following the Buckeyes' improbable thrashing of Wisconsin in the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game: Nobody saw that one coming, and if they claim they did, they are just lying.

I thought the Buckeyes could lose to Clemson. But there is just no way I thought it would be the ugly blowout it turned out to be.

My belief that Ohio State could win initially had to do with Buckeye coach Urban Meyer. With ample time to prepare and with the fact that the Tigers had defeated Meyer's Buckeyes in the Orange Bowl three years previously surely gnawing at the coach, I figured he would have Ohio State more than ready. I certainly believed that the Buckeyes had a defense that could keep the team in the game long enough for the offense to do something to secure the victory.

What I started to focus in on in the days leading up to the game was what the offense needed to do to make it a successful night for the Buckeyes.

I figured that if J.T. Barrett could hit some passes, that would do the trick. Some successful pass plays – not screen or swing passes, but forward passes – would open up the vaunted Ohio State run game, the defense would at the least slow down the Clemson offense, and in the end everyone in Buckeye Nation would go home happy.

There were unfortunately three things that kept Barrett from making that happen and some – perhaps all three – were common throughout the season.

First, and possibly foremost, we have to acknowledge that Barrett is not the best passer in college football. That's not to say he's not a great quarterback. He does all sorts of other things that make him a winner. But you couple his passing ability with the other two things that stifled the Buckeye passing attack and you've got problems.

The best passer will have little success if his receivers can't get open, which Ohio State's didn't against Clemson and others during the season. And when Barrett's receivers did get open and he hit them, they frequently dropped the ball. Strike one, two and three.

But there's another issue that has been discussed by fans and observers all season. I think back to something my friend Tommy Maher, proprietor of the popular High Beck Tavern in Columbus' Brewery District, once said about raising children. I think he may have been talking about losing control of kids in the grocery store, of all things.

"You can't put your kids in a position to fail," Tommy said.

I keep wondering, as have many, if the Ohio State coaching staff put Barrett and his offensive mates in a position to fail.

I keep thinking back to Ohio State's game with Northwestern this season. Wildcat receiver Austin Carr was running free the entire afternoon and ended up with eight receptions for 158 yards in the 24-20 Buckeye win. And that was against an Ohio State defense deemed to be one of the best in the country. I don't recall a Noah Brown or even a Curtis Samuel ever being consistently open like that. That's not to say Carr is a slouch. He had 12 receptions for 132 yards against Wisconsin this year and another 11 catches for 130 yards against Michigan State.

But is he that much better than the guys running routes for the Buckeyes or did his coaches look at the Ohio State defense and devise a plan to allow him to roam free among some of the best defensive backs in the nation? Did the Ohio State coaches put their quarter-

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

back and receivers in a position this season to succeed or fail?

I feel like Barrett has become completely discombobulated through the season. Despite all the complaints that the coaches run him too much, there are times when he drops back to pass that the seas part in front of him and he holds onto the ball, looking, looking – usually unsuccessfully – for a receiver to come open when, in my mind, he would be better served by just taking off and gaining the sure yards.

Of course it was suggested to me recently that one of the reasons that Barrett has struggled with his passing accuracy is that it is harder to pass when you have been banged around so much on all those runs. Could be. And by the way, what's with all those batted-down passes?

As I tell Buckeye fans I speak to all the time, if you and I can see a problem with the Buckeyes, you can bet that Meyer sees it. When the team struggled on defense in his first two years in Columbus, he made changes to his staff. Now, after two straight seasons of inconsistent offense, he appears to be making changes again. Let's hope the results of his staff tinkering on the offensive side of the ball are as successful as the changes on defense.

"We will become a good passing team, we will," Meyer said after the game. "Next year."

One thing I found encouraging with the passing game was that some potentially reliable receivers emerged later in the season. K.J. Hill had 14 of his 18 receptions in the final five games of the year, and Binjimen Victor, whom we had been hearing about all season, had one of the few highlights in the Buckeye passing attack against Clemson with a nice 21-yard reception, Ohio State's longest pass play of the game.

Despite all the talk about the passing game, the vaunted OSU rushing game didn't fare much better against Clemson.

When the Buckeyes did not give the ball to Mike Weber, their first 1,000-yard freshman runner, during the first five possessions of the game, I began to wonder if the coaches were worried about his ball security. Whether that was the case or not, when he finally did get the ball he promptly fumbled on two of his five carries, losing one.

It seemed in the early going that the staff was consumed with getting the ball to Samuel, who for the most part didn't fare much better than Weber. News flash. The Tigers knew Ohio State would look to Samuel. He did catch four passes in the time before Barrett finally gave the ball to Weber, but they were good for just 21 yards, 16 of which came on one reception. In that same time, Samuel ran the ball three times with a net of minus-1.

Samuel finally ripped off a 64-yarder, but by that time Ohio State was trailing 24-0 and the Buckeyes proceeded to waste the gallop by losing 17 yards before throwing an interception.

Take away the long run and Samuel had five carries for 3 net yards, a poorer showing than Weber's five carries for 24 yards. It has been the view from this corner that the Buckeye offense has been at its best when both Weber and Samuel were featured.

I looked into that feeling a little deeper and found that in the six games in which the duo

were within three touches – to use the word they use nowadays – of each other, the Buckeyes averaged 52.2 points, including 77 against Bowling Green, 62 against both Nebraska and Maryland and 58 against Rutgers.

In the five games where there was the widest difference between the pair's touches, the Buckeyes averaged 21.2 points. This included both losses on the season, to Penn State and Clemson, as well as the nail-biter at Michigan State, games in which Ohio State averaged 12.7 points.

I understand why the coaches wanted to get the ball to Samuel. He is a long gain or touchdown waiting to happen. But they shouldn't have forgotten Weber, who averaged only 11.2 carries a game over the final six contests. Backs like Weber need to be given the ball to get in sync with their offensive line and get in a groove. When they get in a groove, that groove wears down defenses and makes it easier for playmakers like Samuel to break off the long ones, be it on the ground or via the pass.

Going back to the passing game, one thing that would help is, even if they can't connect, the Buckeyes would at least show the long ball once in a while. Clemson obviously had no fear that the Buckeyes were going to beat them that way and clogged things up to stop the run and short passing game that Ohio State futilely tried to execute.

When the Buckeyes finally, late in the third quarter, threw the ball long they helped prove my point of a couple of issues back – that when you throw long only four things can happen and only one of them is bad and one is a wash and that Barrett's inaccuracy can actually work in his favor. The bad thing that can happen is an incomplection. An interception on a long pass is often no worse than a punt. A completion is the best outcome, but Barrett's inability to hit a receiver in stride can often lead to the receiver and defender getting tangled, resulting in a pass interference call.

The Buckeyes drew the flag twice when Barrett finally went deep at the Fiesta Bowl, riding the penalties to a first down at the Clemson 35. Weber rushed for 10 yards and then the drive ended with a Barrett interception.

Rich Exner made an interesting point in his column on page 53 of this issue. He pointed out that in the championship season of 2014, Ezekiel Elliott had his best games – averaging 232.0 yards against postseason-caliber competition – with the rifle-armed Cardale Jones at quarterback. Jones' penchant for the long ball loosened up the defense for Elliott.

As far as the defense in the Fiesta Bowl, when years from now people look at the score of the game, they will think the stop troops failed. I do not believe that to be the case. The score was as close as 17-0 until late in the third quarter. The defense kept the Buckeyes in the game as long as it could, but it is not surprising that the defenders finally wore down, as they had little time to recharge or adjust.

Ohio State's drives averaged 4.4 plays in the first half, not counting a one-play possession to run out the clock before the break. The Buckeyes' longest march in terms of time in the first 30 minutes was just 3:07. It was even worse in the second half as the Buckeyes aver-

aged 2.8 plays on their first four drives with 1:51 the longest they could keep their defense on the bench. Even the most conditioned unit would wilt under that workload.

Clemson and star quarterback Deshaun Watson's biggest weakness coming into the game appeared to be the QB's penchant for throwing interceptions. He had thrown 15 interceptions heading into the game, and the Buckeye secondary did its job, picking off two more.

In fact, Gareon Conley intercepted Watson on Clemson's second offensive play of the game, giving the Buckeyes the ball and, presumably, momentum at the Tiger 33. The Buckeyes gained a net of just 3 yards, and Tyler Durbin missed a 47-yard field-goal attempt. A touchdown there might have changed the trajectory of the game.

In the second quarter, Clemson was leading just 10-0 but driving. The Tigers had marched from their own 26 to the Buckeye 37 when Watson threw a long pass to the end zone. Malik Hooker made an athletic interception to kill the drive.

Ohio State had used defensive plays like that to change the momentum of games all season. This time the Buckeyes could muster but 17 yards, and Cameron Johnston was forced to punt.

That was pretty much OSU's last gasp. On the next drive Watson moved his club 83 yards on eight plays, capping the march off with a 30-yard touchdown pass for a 17-0 lead, a lead Ohio State was not going to overcome on this evening.

### Special Teams Mixed Bag

Much has been made of Durbin's two missed field goals. Frankly, the 47-yarders were probably a bit out of Durbin's range. His long for the season was 45, and he also missed once from that distance. While his misses were unfortunate, Durbin was the best kicker the Buckeyes had and his performance did not merit the type of fan diatribe that is chronicled in the "Buckeye Insider" section of this issue. While that critic indicates Durbin's parents should be embarrassed, no, the writer's parents should be embarrassed.

The question is whether Durbin making those attempts would have had an impact on the game. One thing is for sure, the game would not have been a shutout.

But would those six points have been enough to help hold off Clemson on this particular night? Doubtful, but we'll never know.

The field goals could possibly have given the Buckeye offense a little momentum. But with that game plan, maybe not. Don't forget, however, that one of the reasons Ohio State was able to defeat Wisconsin and Michigan this season despite being outplayed for much of those games was that, despite poor play, the Buckeye always kept those games close. They never trailed by more than 10 in those games. Against a quality team like Clemson, 17 points proved a tough margin to overcome.

The other thing that stood out to me on special teams was the play of kick returner Parris Campbell. He had returns of 32 and 54 yards against Clemson – field position that was squandered by the Buckeyes – to continue to add to his résumé as a return man. Add those to a 91-yarder earlier in the season and Campbell found himself ranked 11th in the country with a 27.8-yard average after the Fiesta Bowl.

Campbell is a definite long-ball threat. He needs to work on hanging on to the ball when he is working from his receiver position.