

Talented QB Was On Hand For Three Classic Games In Rivalry

# Michigan Battles Stand Out In Kern's Mind

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Winning or losing the Ohio State-Michigan game has often had a direct bearing on the outcome of the Big Ten championship.

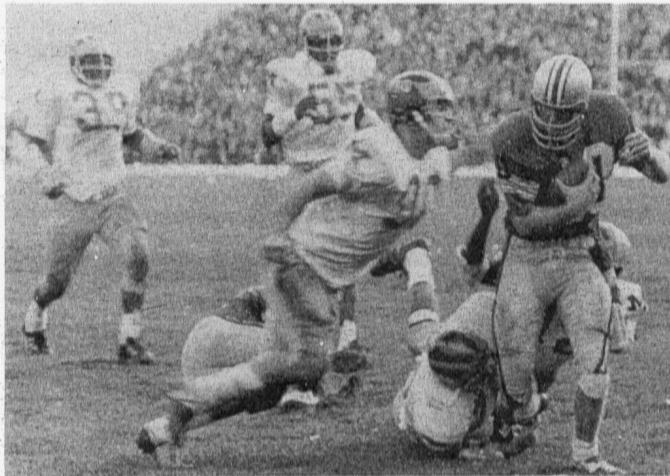
But in 1968 and 1969 the game took on even more meaning. Winning or losing that game had a direct bearing on the national college championship.

"In 1968, our win over Michigan helped us be ranked number one in the nation," said former Ohio State quarterback Rex Kern. "We beat Michigan 50-14, which I think still stands as the biggest margin of defeat in the history of the rivalry."

Actually, Michigan's 86-0 win in 1902 stands as the most lopsided game in the series history, but Kern can be forgiven for not knowing much about a game that was played nearly 50 years before he was born.

"What I really remember going into that sophomore year game was that Michigan was a very good football team and we were a very good football team," Kern said. "It was a hard-fought game from the very beginning through the end of the first half."

"At the beginning of the second half, we made some adjustments. Even as we



**ABSORBING THE HIT** — Ohio State quarterback Rex Kern drags a couple of Michigan defenders with him while preparing to get hit by Tom Stincic (90) of the Wolverines.

were far ahead of Michigan, I still felt like we were in a very close football game."

That 1968 contest was a good one for Kern as he completed five of eight

passes for 41 yards and ran the ball eight times for 96 yards.

The Buckeyes went on to play in the Rose Bowl and defeated Southern Cal, earning the national championship for 1968. That season's OSU-Michigan game was the final one for Wolverine head coach Bump Elliott. The following year, Bo Schembechler took over as head coach, taking the rivalry to even newer heights as Schembechler and Woody Hayes battled one another.

OSU had its sights set on another national title in 1969 and entered the Michigan game unbeaten again, riding a streak of 22 straight victories.

But the Buckeyes lost to the Wolverines by a score of 24-12 and, in those days, if a Big Ten team did not go to the Rose Bowl, it did not go to any post-season game at all. So instead of a second national championship in as many

years, OSU's season suddenly ground to a halt.

That made the 1970 contest, Kern's last in Ohio Stadium, even more important to him.

"The game in 1970 had more emotion than any other game I participated in, either at the high school, college or professional level," he remembered. "In our three years, we had only lost one game in the Big Ten, the Michigan game the year before, and we were very much keyed up for that football game."

The Buckeyes were keyed up enough to win the game 20-9 and get to their second Rose Bowl in three years. According to Kern, getting to play in the rivalry during the first two seasons Hayes and Schembechler opposed one another made it even more special.

"Let's not take anything away from the history of the rivalry," he said. "There was always that strong rivalry. Woody and Bo just added to it and made it even bigger. It had its place before, but they brought it to a higher level."

Kern, who now resides in California, is not sure the game has as much at stake as it did when he was playing. He said the reason for that is the principals who made the game the premier college football game of the 1960s and 1970s are now gone.

"I know Woody is no longer there and Bo is no longer there," he said. "But I'm sure somewhere there has to be some tradition that is carried on. Is it as intense as it once was? That I don't know."

"But I do know this: When you came to Ohio State, you prepared to beat Michigan. If you didn't win another football game all year, you'd better beat Michigan."

"There's not any animosity or any begrudging of Michigan. Woody had the greatest amount of respect for the University of Michigan, not only from a football standpoint, but from quality of education. So it was a strong, strong, respectful rivalry."

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Otis Carried Piece Of OSU Memorabilia During '68 Michigan Game

# Strap Crossed Wolves' Goal Line Eight Times

By MARK REA  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Former Ohio State fullback Jim Otis owns a place in the history of the OSU-Michigan rivalry. He also owns a piece of it.

Otis keeps an old chin strap he had from the Michigan game in 1968 when he scored four touchdowns and the Buckeyes whipped the Wolverines 50-14.

But the chin strap wasn't the one Otis wore that day. It was one that was already steeped in tradition when he received it from a fan the night before his big game.

"We had an old-fashioned pep rally the night before that game and somebody came up to me and gave me the chin strap that Bob Ferguson had worn when he scored four touchdowns against Michigan in 1961," Otis said. "Now, when I was a little kid, Bob Ferguson was one of my heroes. So of course I thought getting that chin strap was the greatest thing.

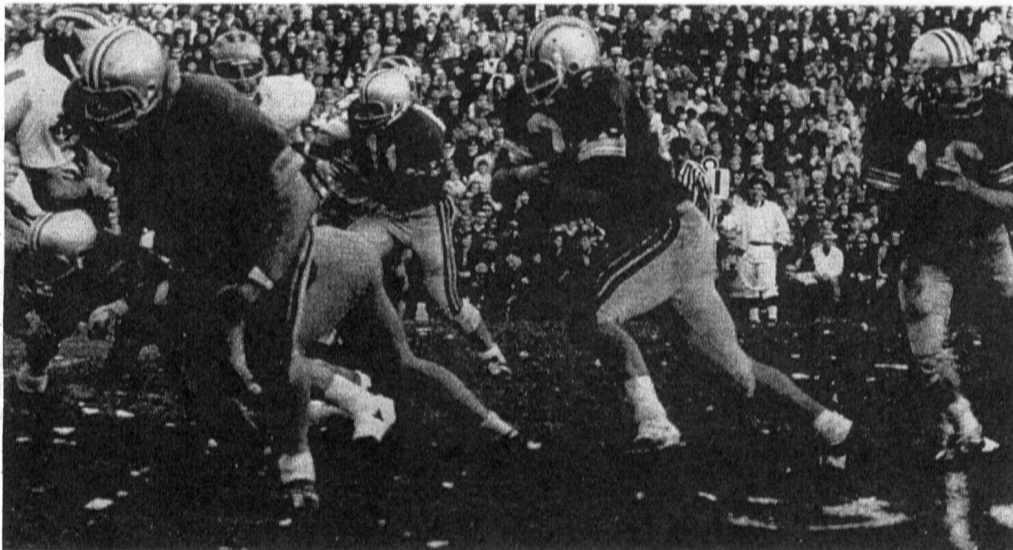
"I really wanted to wear it, but it had deteriorated somewhat over the years and I couldn't wear it on my helmet. But I did tape it under part of my shoulder pads, and, like him, I scored four touchdowns against Michigan. That chin strap crossed the goal line eight times against Michigan."

Otis, who played for the Buckeyes from 1967-69, rushed for 143 yards and tied a school record that day with his four TDs. That record has since been broken — Pete Johnson scored five times against North Carolina in 1975 and Keith Byars equaled that against Illinois in 1984.

But the fact that Otis got to score a fourth touchdown in 1968 was unusual.

"My fourth touchdown came really after I was out of the game," he said. "You know, you looked at the final score and it looks like a blowout, but it was a heckuva game in the first half, a real see-saw battle.

"But we put it away in the second half. We were beating them pretty soundly and near the end of the game,



**ON HIS WAY TO PAY DIRT** — Getting a lead block from offensive tackle Dave Foley (70), Ohio State fullback Jim Otis (35) begins to lower his head and move toward another touchdown against Michigan. Otis rambled for 143 yards and four touchdowns in the game, leading the Buckeyes to one of their biggest offensive displays in the long rivalry.

one of our backup tailbacks, Ray Gillian, made about a 50-yard run and got the ball inside the five-yard line. We tried to put it in but couldn't do it.

"I was standing on the sideline real close to Woody and I said, 'Coach, do you want that touchdown?' He said, 'Yeah. Go in and get it.' I asked him, 'What play?' and he looked at me and said, 'You call it.'"

Otis said he didn't have time to think as he was running back onto the field.

"I got out there in the huddle and I was the only upperclassman out there," he said. "I looked over and saw (offensive tackle) Dave Cheney, who was a sophomore that year, and said, 'Dave, Coach Hayes wants this touchdown and we're coming right over you.' We called the infamous '27' play. I ran right over

Dave and that was my fourth touchdown that afternoon."

After Otis finished his Ohio State career, he went on to a distinguished 10-year career in the NFL. Despite his accomplishments in the pro ranks, though, he said he never played in a bigger game than "The Game."

"It's the greatest college game in

football," Otis said. "I don't know if these kids who are playing right now understand it, but this is bigger than the Rose Bowl. This is the biggest game in college football. They won't ever play in a bigger game. That's why they're so damn lucky — they get to play in it every year. It's just the greatest college game there ever was."

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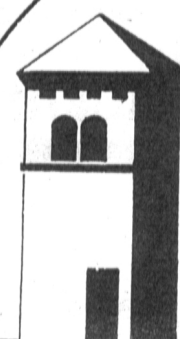
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