

Buckeye Leaves: Nearly The Entire Two-Deep



Chase Brown, BSB: The Buckeye run defense excelled on Saturday afternoon, keeping Heisman Trophy contender Kenneth Walker III from making a significant impact for the Spartans.

Ohio State jumped out to an early lead over Michigan State, with quarterback C.J. Stroud connecting with Chris Olave for a deep touchdown. The Silver Bullets forced a stop on their first possession, allowing the Buckeye offense to extend its lead to 14-0. On the following Spartan drive, the defense made remained solid, and before you could blink, Stroud his team up 21-0.

From there, Ohio State kept Michigan State and its talented running back from finding any consistency, which led to a lopsided win for the Buckeyes in Columbus.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: The offense is going to earn the headlines for the Buckeyes, and for good reason, but I'd like to take my turn on the soapbox to give some shine to the defense, and specifically to cornerback Denzel Burke. The freshman from Arizona has drawn some tricky assignments this season, including back-to-back matchups against true No. 1 receivers, first in David Bell for Purdue and now against MSU's Jayden Reed.

Bell hauled in 11 receptions for 103 yards, certainly not a terrible showing, but Burke was largely able to keep him under wraps, especially as Ohio State dropped eight players into coverage on nearly every down to handle the Boilermaker passing attack. Against Michigan State and Reed, Burke had no such luxury, and still, he shone brightly as one of Ohio State's best defenders despite his age.

Reed was held on the day to only two receptions and 28 yards, and though his afternoon was cut short by an injury, Burke was excellent against every player than the Spartans offense threw at him. MSU quarterback Payton Thorne was only 14-of-36 passing for the game, and Michigan State's top receiver, Connor Heyward, wasn't Burke's responsibility. Give than freshman a sticker.

Braden Moles, BSB: Against a top 10 team, quarterback C.J. Stroud delivered one of the top passing performances in Ohio State history, throwing for 432 yards (fifth all-time), six touchdowns (tied for first), not to mention going 32 for 35 on his passing attempts, good for a 91 percent completion rate.

Stroud is no doubt assisted by his trio of game-changing receivers, but he put the ball where it needed to go on nearly every single throw against the Spartans - his three incompletions were courtesy of two drops and a miscommunication with his receiver.

He's had up and down performances this season, but Stroud solidified himself as one of the top quarterbacks in the nation as well as the frontrunner for the Heisman Trophy, putting on a flashy performance while fellow candidate Kenneth Walker III was eliminated from contention with just 25 yards on six carries.

You can't ask for a stronger performance to help Stroud build momentum as Ohio State enters the final stretch of its season.

Mark Rea, BSB: It would be easy to dump the entire box of Buckeye leaves in C.J. Stroud's lap after another 400-yard performance and an OSU record-tying six touchdown passes. But those passes didn't catch themselves, so I'll save some of my leaves for the Terrific Trio.

Chris Olave caught two touchdown passes to break David Boston's 23-year-old record for career receptions, Garrett Wilson caught two more TDs to give him five for the last two weeks, and Jaxon Smith-Njigba had 105 yards and moved into the third spot in OSU single-season receiving yards with 1,132.

For the game, the trio caught 24 passes for 371 yards and five TDs. And that raises their combined total for the 2021 season to 178 catches for 2,962 yards and 31 TDs ... so far.