Game Notebook: Haskins Posts Another Record-Setting Night In Indy



INDIANAPOLIS — Week by week, Ohio State sophomore quarterback Dwayne Haskins has seemingly set record after record. It's gotten to the point that he has to bump his own name down in the history books.

Against No. 21 Northwestern in the Big Ten championship game on Dec. 1, Haskins threw for a school-record 499 yards, breaking the single-game mark of 470 he had set earlier this season at Purdue. Haskins completed 34 of 41 passes for 499 yards and five touchdowns on his way to MVP honors at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

After the game, though, Haskins put more weight on the No. 6 Buckeyes winning another conference title than his huge individual day and falling just short of 500 yards passing.

"I mean, we got the one. That was the win. That's all that matters," he said after leading Ohio State to a 45-24 victory. "I could have thrown for 80 yards or 600 yards. All we needed to do is win the game. I'm proud of how we played today. Sure, one (more) yard would have been great. But we're Big Ten East champions, Big Ten champions. What else would you want to be?"

While the Buckeyes ended up as 21-point winners, the game was in question in the second half. Thanks to a pair of first-half touchdown passes to fifth-year senior Terry McLaurin, Haskins had guided Ohio State to a 24-7 lead at the break. In the third quarter, though, the Wildcats came out hot with 14 straight points to make it 24-21. Haskins responded by guiding a six-play, 60-yard drive that was capped with a 29-yard touchdown pass to freshman receiver Chris Olave.

Haskins, a Potomac, Md., native, added touchdown strikes to fifth-year senior wide receiver Johnnie Dixon and freshman running back J.K. Dobbins in the fourth quarter to ice the game.

Once the game was over, the big question came up early and often: is Haskins a Heisman candidate. The main competition for the award will likely be Alabama quarterback Tua Tagovailoa and Oklahoma signal caller Kyler Murray, but Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer stressed that his man should be in the mix.

"He's without question a Heisman candidate," Meyer said. "I've seen the statistics of the other two great players, and there's no doubt. Dwayne Haskins is a Heisman candidate, and he should be in New York City."

Young Leads Dominant Defensive Front

Ohio State's defense wasn't perfect against Northwestern. The Buckeyes allowed 418 total yards, including 267 through the air, and saw Northwestern running back John Moten IV bust through for a 77-yard touchdown.

The leaks were plugged when it mattered most, though, and that effort was often led by the defensive line – most notably sophomore end Chase Young.

Young, a Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic product, finished with three sacks and a forced fumble, but caused even more havoc in the backfield than those numbers suggest. Junior defensive tackle Dre'Mont Jones added four tackles and a sack, while freshman defensive tackle Taron Vincent had the first sack of his career as well.

After the game, Young noted that the Buckeyes had a directive from defensive coordinator Greg Schiano to go after Northwestern quarterback Clayton Thorson throughout the game.

"Coming in, we knew he was a real good quarterback, and NFL pro-style type of quarterback," Young said. "And Coach Schiano said we have to get after him. We ran certain blitzes to block the storm press. And today, we just won. And we followed what Coach Schiano said and we got the win."

Bucks Bounce Back From 3rd-Quarter Letdown

As mentioned above, the third quarter opened on a low note for the Buckeyes. Northwestern took the kickoff and marched 75 yards in just five plays, capped by an 18-yard touchdown run from Thorson. After a quick Ohio State punt, the Wildcats then sustained an 11-play, 85-yard drive on their way to another score – this one a 2-yard pass from Thorson to Cameron Green. That made it 24-21 with 8:03 to play in the third quarter.

Jones, who was animated and energetic during postgame interviews, admitted that Northwestern got the best of Ohio State for a quarter, but said the Buckeyes played a complete game on defense otherwise.

"I felt like you take out that big run, we take out that third quarter, and we had a complete game," Jones told BSB. "I mean, they got going on us a little bit in the third quarter, we found a way to manage it and bring it back and have control over the game."

It was Ohio State's ability to respond to that adversity on defense that helped propel the Buckeyes to the win.

After Green's touchdown, Northwestern scored just three more points. Apart from that field goal, the rest of the Wildcats' drives ended with an interception, a punt, a punt, a turnover on downs and another punt.

For a defense that had at times been reeling throughout the season, the ability to hold on was

important. Jones even admitted that the team might not have responded in a similar fashion even a month ago.

“I’m not going to lie – no,” he said when asked if the Buckeyes could have bounced back from such a rough third quarter earlier in the year. “Because early in the season we were hot, middle of the season we got a little fuzzy in our defense and then towards the end of the season we’re starting to show how we are.”

Davis Makes 1st Start On Championship Stage

Continuity along the offensive line is key – there’s a reason teams don’t rotate in more than five players very often.

For the Buckeyes against Northwestern, though, complete continuity wasn’t an option. Fifth-year senior right guard Demetrius Knox suffered a Lisfranc injury against Michigan, meaning redshirt freshman Wyatt Davis lined up for his first career start in the Big Ten title game.

Overall, the line play was solid as Ohio State racked up 607 yards of total offense, including 108 on the ground, but the Buckeyes also allowed Haskins to be sacked four times.

Davis was optimistic after the game, saying he has plenty of room for improvement as his career kicks off.

“You know, I feel like overall as an offensive line I feel like we played pretty good,” Davis said. “Obviously for me personally, I felt like there’s still stuff I can fix and now I’ve got some game experience, I know what a game’s like. I feel like the only thing I can do now is just get better and watch film and learn from the mistakes that I made.”

The Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco product noted that his week of preparation was “very intense,” but he felt he was ready for the stage.

“I mean, there was no room for mistakes – we’re playing for the Big Ten championship,” Davis said. “I’m expected – we always have the saying, ‘Next man up,’ and I felt like that was my role, being the backup for Meech (Knox), to come in and not let there be any drop off and just to play hard and have confidence in myself. This week in practice I was going as hard as I could and I felt like that helped me in the game.”

Ohio State Overcomes Penalties, Turnovers

Taking care of the ball on offense and avoiding penalties are always two of the main focuses for a football team, especially when it comes to trying to win championships. Against the Wildcats, both of those areas were issues for Ohio State – but it didn’t end up mattering.

Haskins threw one interception and the Buckeyes lost a fumble by junior running back Mike Weber on offense, but they were able to tally a pair of interceptions themselves – one from Damon Arnette and

another from Shaun Wade – while recovering a Northwestern fumble as well.

Ohio State also committed nine penalties for 90 yards compared to just three for 15 yards by the Wildcats. The penalties have been a persistent issue this season – win or lose – but the Buckeyes were able to stay disciplined in the biggest moments.

The Buckeyes also fared well in the field-position battle, downing two of four punts inside the 20-yard line as sophomore Drue Chrisman averaged 54.8 yards per boot.

News & Notes

- Ohio State's victory over Northwestern marked its third Big Ten championship game win and 37th Big Ten title overall. The Buckeyes improved to 3-1 in Indianapolis, adding to victories in 2014 and 2017, which both came against Wisconsin. Ohio State fell to Michigan State in the conference title bout in 2013.
- The Buckeyes (12-1) reached 12 wins in a season for just the eighth time in school history and for the second year in a row. Ohio State finished 12-2 last season after beating USC in the Cotton Bowl.
- The win marked Ohio State's seventh in a row against Northwestern and the Buckeyes lead that series, 62-14-1.

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