

Knowles: 'We Didn't Finish The Journey'



For all the strides Ohio State's defense made from last year to this one, improving in every major defensive category, it fell flat when it mattered most.

As had happened a month prior against Michigan, the Buckeyes were gashed by big plays against No. 1 Georgia and ultimately lost, although in a much closer contest.

"We didn't finish the journey," Ohio State defensive coordinator Jim Knowles said. "We certainly had a great plan, and adjustments worked in the third quarter. But they didn't work in the fourth."

While many of the Wolverines' big passes or runs came against Buckeye blitzes, the Buckeyes mainly stayed back in coverage against the Bulldogs. Lapses in those coverage alignments and playmakers on the opposite side meant that OSU still allowed the most explosive plays it had all season, counting a big play as 20 or more yards.

"We played defense to prevent the big plays," Knowles said. "We didn't do much blitzing today. We really didn't. We were pretty basic, gave our guys a chance to play. So it wasn't the aggressiveness, we just missed on a couple."

The most productive segment of the contest for Ohio State was the third quarter.

It in fact pitched a shutout the entire 15-minute frame, allowing its offense the space needed to create a two-touchdown lead for the final period. A field goal finally broke the second-half ice for the Bulldogs' offense with 10:14 remaining in the contest.

"We started fitting things differently against the run, we were able to control the line of scrimmage better," Knowles said. "Played a little bit tighter in our coverages, started disguising some things better. I think that threw them off-balance. (The adjustments) all worked in the third quarter but they didn't work in the fourth."

Down 38-27 with 8:41 remaining and starting a drive at its own 24-yard line, things still looked pretty bleak for Georgia midway through the fourth quarter. Even if it allowed a touchdown, a prolonged scoring drive against Ohio State's defense meant the clock could have put the Bulldogs in dire straits. It didn't play out that way.

On the first play from scrimmage that possession, Georgia wide receiver Arian Smith lined up in the slot

with Ohio State safety Lathan Ransom overtop of him. Ransom was responsible for a quarter of the field deep, but Smith closed the distance between them, and as he turned outside to streak up the sideline, Ransom slipped and he was left wide open for a 76-yard touchdown.

Following a Buckeye field goal, Georgia jaunted 72 yards in five plays to score what proved its game-winning touchdown in 1:49.

“They made plays (the last drive). They executed,” Knowles said. “We switched coverages probably three or four different times to throw them off balance. But they executed, they got it done, we didn’t. That’s the bottom line.”

The inability of the Ohio State defense to finish the team’s journey to the national championship will haunt Knowles throughout the offseason, he said.

“Everything will bother me. Everything. Every play we didn’t make has to be analyzed by me. You’ve got to think, not just about the call, you’ve got to think about who’s in what position and just how I can do it better. Because it’s not the players’ fault, it’s my fault, I’ve got to get them in the best position to win the game. I thought we did that at times, but not enough.”