

My Thoughts: Michigan-Penn State Gave Glimpse Of What Buckeyes Will Deal With During Final Six Games



Entering Saturday's game between Michigan and Penn State, I expected to see two fraudulent top-10 teams give lackluster performances en route to one of the teams limping their way to victory. Penn State did not disappoint in that regard, but Michigan emerged from the win as one of the best teams in the country in my mind — on par with Ohio State, Georgia and Tennessee.

The Wolverines went to their bread and butter against the Nittany Lions — which boasted the No. 5 rushing defense entering the game, allowing just 79.6 yards per game — pounding the ground game for 418 rushing yards while running backs Blake Corum and Donovan Edwards each produced more than 160 yards, as well as a pair of touchdowns a piece. Michigan's gameplan against Penn State looked eerily similar to how the Wolverines dismantled the Buckeyes a season ago, relying heavily on their ground game and its Joe Moore Award — which is given to the best offensive line unit in the country — caliber offensive line.

Michigan's rushing attack looked devastating and the Corum/Edwards duo showed that they are in the same tier as Ohio State's committee of TreVeyon Henderson and Miyan Williams. As my colleague Andy Anders mentioned yesterday, this is the best offense that Jim Harbaugh has had since taking the reins in Ann Arbor. Quarterback J.J. McCarthy has left much to be desired in his first few starts, but the talent is clearly there and he has the weapons, in Ronnie Bell and Roman Wilson, to get this passing attack on its feet.

The Michigan defense looked elite as well, however, I believe this was primarily caused by Penn State's awful offensive display — particularly by quarterback Sean Clifford. But the proof is there, the Wolverines are within the same tier as the Buckeyes in the Big Ten and should be 11-0 entering the Nov. 26 matchup in Ohio Stadium.

Penn State, once again, has proved to be a paper tiger — a significant trend in the James Franklin era. Tell me if you've heard this story before: the Nittany Lions beat up on lesser opponents and get off to a hot start prior to playing either Michigan or OSU, they lose to one of those two and their season comes off of the rails. It's almost cyclical at this point.

It's been five years and somehow Franklin still can't see that Clifford is not the answer at quarterback, especially if he wants to contend with the Buckeyes and Wolverines in the Big Ten East division. Penn State was also bullied in the trenches by the Wolverines, further proving that the Nittany Lions are still a step behind the East elites in Michigan and Ohio State.

Now, how does this game affect the Buckeyes?

In terms of how they'll approach the road game at Penn State, not much. It showed that Ohio State's offense should not have any fear of the Penn State defense, and will likely have a big day at Beaver Stadium — both on the ground and through the air. The Buckeyes' defense should also have a solid outing, especially with Penn State's offensive shortcomings in the passing game and its weak offensive line.

When it comes to Michigan, though, the game may have given the Buckeyes an idea of how to attack the Wolverine offense on Nov. 26. Ohio State needs to make McCarthy beat them rather than allow Corum and Edwards to have big days. McCarthy will be making his 11th career start when he enters Ohio Stadium, and will not have faced an atmosphere like what will be waiting for him at the Shoe in his career. If Ohio State can jump on Michigan early and force the Wolverines to turn to their passing game, then it could be a long day for McCarthy and the Michigan offense.

Overall, the Michigan-Penn State matchup proved that both programs are trending in opposite directions and Ohio State can take plenty away from this game when preparing for either team.