

My Thoughts: Ohio State Gets Sweet Revenge In Sugar Bowl But National Title Would Be Even Sweeter



Be honest. Did anyone see that coming? I sure didn't.

Ohio State thoroughly dominated Clemson in Friday night's Sugar Bowl, something that felt impossible after the Buckeyes surrendered 491 passing yards to Indiana quarterback Michael Penix on Nov. 21 and subsequently struggled to do anything offensively against Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 19.

Quarterback Justin Fields had two of his worst performances in the last three games, throwing five interceptions against the Hoosiers and Wildcats, with a win over Michigan State sandwiched in between. He was also dealing with a thumb injury and hadn't practiced much with his go-to target, wide receiver Chris Olave, who returned to action earlier this week following a positive coronavirus test.

To say I expected him to bounce back with six touchdown passes and only six incompletions would be a lie.

That's not to say I didn't think he had it in him. I mean, I'd seriously consider taking him with the No. 1 overall pick over Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence in this spring's NFL draft. But nothing he's done over the last month and a half suggested he'd suddenly be able to turn the switch back on.

Silly me for doubting him. Or head coach Ryan Day. Or offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson. That trio worked to perfection on Friday night, as the two coaches put their star quarterback in a position to succeed over and over again against a really good defense. He completed passes to seven different receivers, throwing three touchdowns to two different tight ends and showing off his deep ball on numerous occasions.

The only bad pass Fields threw all night was tipped at the line of scrimmage and intercepted in the back of the end zone. And unlike last year's game, that pick meant very little in the grand scheme of things.

You can thank Ohio State's defense for that.

After giving up an easy touchdown on the opening drive of the game and falling behind 14-7 midway

through the first, the defense buckled down. Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence threw for 134 of his 400 yards in the first quarter but was just 3 of 5 for 18 yards in the second quarter. More importantly, the Tigers didn't score in that frame, as the Buckeyes turned a 14-14 tie into a 21-point halftime lead.

It was clear, at that point, that Ohio State wasn't going to suffer the same fate as last year's Fiesta Bowl. The Buckeyes let that loss to the Tigers motivate them in everything they did this season, and minor stumbles throughout the season had more to do with having a hard time getting up for games against lesser opponents than it did with the team being deficient in any particular area.

As easy as it would be for Ohio State to hang its hat on this win, an even tougher task is ahead. A loss to Alabama in the national championship will make this win for naught, no matter how sweet it feels right now.

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