

Ohio State's Top 10 Plays Of 2019



This season, Ohio State won its eighth straight game against Michigan, knocked off Wisconsin for its third consecutive Big Ten championship and, for the first time since 2016, has punched its ticket to the College Football Playoff.

But before the second-ranked Buckeyes take on No. 3 Clemson in the PlayStation Fiesta Bowl on Dec. 28 (8 p.m. on ESPN), the staff of Buckeye Sports Bulletin takes a look back at the 10 plays that helped Ohio State get to this point – just two wins from a national title in head coach Ryan Day's first season.

10. Wilson's Acrobatic TD - Miami, Ohio - Sept. 21

With nine minutes left in the third quarter of Ohio State's 76-5 win over Miami (Ohio) and the Buckeyes leading the RedHawks by 44 points at the time, backup quarterback Chris Chugunov dropped back and launched a 38-yard pass to true freshman wide receiver Garrett Wilson, who was streaking down the sideline toward the end zone.

The ball was a bit underthrown, but Wilson – a former five-star prospect from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis – leaped into the air and pulled the ball down with one hand over the outstretched arms of the trailing cornerback. Wilson bobbled the ball on his way to the ground, which popped it in the air, and then caught the ball once again while lying on his back in the end zone.

It marked the second touchdown catch of the season for Wilson, who has 26 receptions for 385 yards and five touchdowns through 13 games while splitting time with senior wideout Binjimen Victor.

Garrett Wilson is a true freshman, somehow pic.twitter.com/UmJwYgCKR2

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) September 21, 2019

9. Dobbins Breaks Free - Michigan State - Oct. 5

Ohio State's first true test of the season came against a Michigan State defense that entered the Oct. 5 matchup ranked fourth in the nation, allowing just 55.8 rush yards per game.

While the Spartans limited the Buckeyes to just 16 total yards in the first quarter, they could not contain running back J.K. Dobbins for the remainder of the game. With Ohio State leading 17-10 late in the second quarter, Dobbins – a junior from La Grange, Texas – took the handoff from quarterback Justin Fields up the middle behind right guard Wyatt Davis and right tackle Branden Bowen and raced 67 yards for a touchdown, shaking off a last-ditch tackling effort from cornerback Josiah Scott at the 15-yard line.

Dobbins finished the game with 172 yards and one touchdown on 24 carries, while the Buckeyes finished with 323 total yards on the ground in the 34-10 win – more than the Spartans had allowed in their first five games combined (279).

JK Dobbins from 67 yards. Buckeyes up 24-10 pic.twitter.com/H1Yq0mUxou

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) October 6, 2019

8. Okudah's Acrobatic INT - Nebraska - Sept. 28

Ohio State junior cornerback Jeff Okudah waited 30 games before hauling in his first career interception in the aforementioned 76-5 win over Miami (Ohio).

He topped that the next week, picking off two passes in a 48-7 win at Nebraska. And while the first came on the Cornhuskers' opening drive and set up a 15-yard touchdown run for Fields just a few plays later, it was his second that ended any hope for an upset bid.

Trailing 14-0 late in the first quarter, Nebraska was threatening to cut into the lead with its first sustained drive of the evening. Quarterback Adrian Martinez dropped back and lofted a pass just outside the reach of wide receiver Wan'Dale Robinson, who tipped the ball up into the air. Okudah, who was downfield covering wide receiver J.D. Spielman, slid across the turf and snagged the ball out of the air while lying on his back at the 4-yard line.

Jeff Okudah can't stop snagging interceptions. He has his second of the quarter
pic.twitter.com/R1jQHSrbCU

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) September 29, 2019

7. Hilliard's Clutch Pick - Penn State - Nov. 23

Having dealt with a litany of injuries throughout his career – including tearing both biceps, his meniscus and his Achilles tendon – few expected Ohio State fifth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard to make an impact for the Buckeyes this season.

But with just over 10 minutes remaining in Ohio State's 28-17 win over Penn State and the Nittany Lions driving on the Buckeyes' side of the field, Hilliard stepped in front of a pass from quarterback Will Levis to thwart the upset bid.

Hilliard, who did not participate in Senior Day festivities that afternoon after applying for a sixth year with the NCAA (which has since been approved), saw additional playing time that week as Ohio State turned to a four-linebacker package against Penn State's pro-style offense. Up to that point, he had recorded a modest seven tackles in 10 games (two starts) on the season.

"How about Justin Hilliard, somebody who spent a lot of time in this program, put his heart and soul into it," Day said after the game. "And to have the play of the game with that interception, I couldn't be happier for him. We had a lot of guys who made a lot of great plays in this game, but he was one that really stuck out to me."

Justin Hilliard with a huge interception to end a Penn State drive pic.twitter.com/rF0jJP6OPD

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) November 23, 2019

6. Haubeil's Career-Long Kick - Northwestern, Oct. 18

With just 59 seconds to play in the second quarter of Ohio State's 52-3 win over Northwestern on Oct. 18, junior punter Drue Chrisman pinned the Wildcats at their 1-yard line. And while the Buckeyes could have been content with heading into the locker room with a 25-point halftime lead, Day was aggressive and countered three straight runs with three timeouts of his own.

That forced Northwestern to punt out of the back of its own end zone, giving Ohio State the ball at the 36-yard line in plus territory. The Buckeyes actually went backward 2 yards over the next three plays, which put Day in quite the predicament - throw a Hail Mary in hopes that a receiver came down with it or ask junior kicker Blake Haubeil to attempt a career-long 55-yard field goal.

Day chose the latter, and Haubeil put it right between the uprights as his teammates erupted on the sideline.

"We had to make a decision," Day said of the field-goal attempt, which put the Buckeyes ahead 31-3 at the half. "He made one before the game, so we said we'll give him a shot to make it. It was good to see the team rally behind him like that.

"It goes to show you the confidence the team has in him and also just the chemistry of our team in general. I think it kind of put an exclamation point on the whole half."

Haubeil's kick tied Dan Stultz (1997) and Mike Nugent (2004) for the second longest in school history. It trails only Tom Skladany, who kicked a 59-yarder against Illinois in 1975.

A well deserved celebration for Blake Haubeil, who just drilled a 55-yard field goal to end the half. pic.twitter.com/7q82PYmc22

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) October 19, 2019

5. Olave's Shoestring Catch - Rutgers, Nov. 16

Ohio State entered the Nov. 16 matchup with Rutgers as a 53-point favorite, and it didn't take the Buckeyes long to jump out to an insurmountable lead thanks to the connection between Fields and sophomore wide receiver Chris Olave.

The two hooked up for 23 yards on Ohio State's first drive of the game, setting up an 18-yard touchdown run for running back J.K. Dobbins. It was more of the same two possessions later, when Olave slipped behind the secondary and hauled in a 58-yard bomb that led to another Dobbins score.

Then, with the Buckeyes leading 35-7 in the third quarter, Olave streaked along the Scarlet Knights sideline for a 42-yard circus catch despite an underthrown ball from Fields and defensive pass interference on senior cornerback Damon Hayes, catching the ball inches from the ground and pinning it on the back of his thigh as he fell to the ground.

The pass interference penalty was declined, of course, giving Olave his first career 100-yard game.

"I always tell (Fields) to just throw the ball. I'll make the play," Olave said after the game. "Early in the season, it wasn't working out for us, but we kept working on it, and today, it showed."

How in the world did Chris Olave catch this ball pic.twitter.com/nVHDNIRVA0

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) November 16, 2019

4. Arnette's Pick-Six - Indiana - Sept. 14

Ohio State fifth-year senior cornerback Damon Arnette nearly left school after last season to enter the 2019 NFL draft but had a last-minute change of heart and opted to return for one final year following a conversation with Hall of Fame wide receiver Cris Carter.

Arnette's decision was validated when he stepped in front of an ill-advised pass from Indiana quarterback Peyton Ramsey and returned it 96 yards for a touchdown, giving the Buckeyes a 51-10 lead over the Hoosiers.

"That's the biggest play I've made in my life," Arnette said after the game.

Arnette, who graduated from Ohio State in July with a degree in communications after taking 18 credit hours during both the spring and summer semesters, finished the game with two tackles and two pass breakups.

"I'm really proud of that kid," Day said. "You know, he's been through a lot. He had to pass a bunch of classes academically last spring and this summer (in order to graduate on schedule). And to press reset, he's given himself completely to Jeff Hafley. And now he's practiced really, really well. He's prepared well, and then to see him make that play was awesome."

"Just a few plays before he was out. He got banged around. And at that point in the game, he could have taken himself out, and he went right back in and makes that play. So I'm really happy for him. He

deserves that play. He's been through a lot, and it's great to get that play for him."

It's a touchdown pass from Peyton Ramsey, only to the wrong team. Damon Arnette from 96 yards out, Buckeyes lead 51-10. pic.twitter.com/5vLISViWE3

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) September 14, 2019

3. Young Sets Sack Record - Penn State, Nov. 23

In his first game back from a two-game suspension for accepting a loan from a family friend, Ohio State junior defensive end Chase Young set a new school record for sacks in a single season during the win over Penn State.

It didn't take long for Young - who entered the game with 13½ sacks on the season - to make his presence felt against the Nittany Lions, as he recorded a tackle for a loss and combined with linebacker Baron Browning for a sack on consecutive plays in the first quarter.

That tied him with Vernon Gholston's single-season mark of 14, which was set in 2007. Young then added another half-sack in the third quarter when he and fifth-year senior defensive tackle Jashon Cornell met at the quarterback, giving him sole possession of the school record.

"I was itching to get back on the field, just not being on there for two weeks," Young said after the game. "I just tried to give it all I had today, and we won the game, and that's all we care about."

Young finished the game with nine tackles, four tackles for loss, three sacks and two forced fumbles, bringing his season total to 16½ sacks.

"If there's a more dominant player on defense, bring me the tape," Hafley said. "We can watch it together."

Chase Young has the sack (with Jashon Cornell), and the school record for sacks in a season, at 14.5. pic.twitter.com/Hz8aPJem7m

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) November 23, 2019

2. Air Ruckert - Wisconsin, Dec. 7

Ohio State trailed 21-7 after two quarters of play in the Big Ten Championship Game against Wisconsin, the largest deficit the Buckeyes had faced all season.

The offense quickly marched down the field on the opening drive of the second half, however, as sophomore tight end Jeremy Ruckert capped a five-play, 75-yard drive with a one-handed, 16-yard touchdown reception in the back of the end zone to cut the lead to one score.

On the play, Ruckert lined up in a two-point stance outside of junior tight end Luke Farrell on the right

side of the line. He ran a crossing route but cut upfield and found himself all alone as Fields threw the ball. It was a bit high, but Ruckert pushed off with his left foot, leapt into the air and pulled the pass down with his right hand – somewhat reminiscent of basketball great Michael Jordan’s famous “Air Jordan” logo.

It was Ruckert’s only catch of the game, but it sparked Ohio State’s 27-0 second-half run.

“It was definitely a great feeling for the team in general,” Ruckert said after the 34-21 win. “You just want to help the team in any way you can. To do it like that, it’s very special.”

One hand for safety @Jeremy_Ruckert1 pic.twitter.com/OPGFqqAa2h

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) December 8, 2019

1. Fields Shakes Off Injury - Michigan, Nov. 30

For the second weekend in a row, Fields was down on the turf clutching his left knee as athletic trainers rushed to his side.

Ohio State was ahead 35-16 in the third quarter when Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson bull-rushed Farrell into Fields, who limped to the medical tent on the sideline.

There, Fields – who revealed after the game that he had suffered a sprained MCL in the win over Penn State one week earlier – was outfitted with a bulkier brace than the fabric version he was already wearing. He went back into the game after just seven plays, took the snap, rolled left and threw a 30-yard touchdown pass to Wilson to extend the Buckeyes’ lead over the Wolverines.

“I thought it was a magical moment,” Day said after the 56-27 win. “I thought it was a Heisman moment, for him to go down, take that injury, put the brace on and then come back out and make a throw that we didn’t design that way.

“You talk about tough? Wow. I’ve never been around a tougher quarterback than this guy. He’s competitively tough. He’s physically tough. Then to come in and make that play like that? That kind of throw? That was one of the best throws I’ve seen in a long time. In that spot, after taking that hit, after just putting a brace on? I don’t even know what to say.”

Fields completed 14 of 25 passes for 302 yards and four touchdowns in the win. He also added 25 yards on six carries, helping Ohio State capture its eighth straight victory in the series with Michigan.

Justin Fields, approximately two minutes after being seemingly seriously injured. Somehow.
pic.twitter.com/4hACn4xfuj

— Buckeye Sports Bulletin (@Buckeye_Sports) November 30, 2019