

Predictions: Buckeyes Continue To Roll In Cotton Bowl



Ohio State has been on a roll in its first two games of the College Football Playoff, beating Tennessee and Oregon by a combined 45 points. Now the Buckeyes move on to the Cotton Bowl where they match up against former Buckeye Quinn Ewers and the Texas Longhorns.

The game is set to kick off at 7:30 p.m. Eastern on ESPN with the two teams vying for a spot in the first ever 12-team College Football Playoff National Championship where they will meet either Notre Dame or Penn State.

Here's how the BSB staff sees the game going:

Patrick Engels: Ohio State Keeps Train Moving Against Texas

It's certainly not a bold take, but Ohio State is simply a well-oiled machine right now that is clicking on all cylinders. This Buckeyes' team is a tough one to beat, and I think everyone has them as the unquestioned national title favorites, for good reason.

However, as our own Bobby Gorbett pointed out in his "Gorbett's Orbit" column, perhaps the one and only team left in the College Football Playoff field that has a chance at dethroning the Buckeyes is big, bad Texas. The Longhorns may be the only team in college football that has as much talent as the Buckeyes — they have seven All-SEC selections and a pair of first-team All-Americans — and they are elite on both sides of the ball.

I do believe Ohio State matches up well with the Longhorns on defense, as Steve Sarkisian's offense — led by former OSU quarterback Quinn Ewers — has seemed a bit "off" at times. Take the last game against Arizona State as a prime example, where they threw enough to squeak out a victory but rushed for just 53 yards on 30 carries.

If Ewers and the Longhorns' talented pass catchers can play their best game of the season and make explosive gains — I certainly think they are capable of doing so — they can certainly win this game. But I just don't think the unit has shown enough during these last weeks to convince me that they can hang with Ohio State's incredible top-ranked defense.

That means perhaps Texas' only chance at winning is to turn this into an ugly battle, where they use

their own vaunted defense to limit Will Howard and the Buckeyes' offense as best as they can. The Longhorns might have the best secondary in the nation, with Jim Thorpe Award winning cornerback Jahdae Barron and safeties Andrew Mukuba and Michael Taafee powering the group, and their defensive line also has a ton of NFL-ready talent.

But I just don't think the Longhorns have faced an offense that is this explosive and this talented as Ohio State's. Like I said earlier, this offense is clicking at the right time, and it seems like nobody can stop them — especially Jeremiah Smith.

I picked Oregon to beat Ohio State in the Rose Bowl last week. I'm not making that mistake again. I think the train will keep rolling and the Buckeyes will advance to the national title game with a relatively easy double-digit win. **Ohio State 31, Texas 20**

Bobby Gorbett: OSU Handles Texas

Ohio State is now in its third week of the playoffs and at least to me this feels like the stiffest challenge yet. The Buckeyes have already gotten through a solid SEC team in Tennessee and the most accomplished team in college football in Oregon, rather easily.

The question now becomes will Ohio State find itself in a close game in the second half this time around. Even more so than Ohio State's previous playoff opponents, Texas has the talent that should make for a tight game on Friday. I don't foresee Ohio State losing the edge that it has played with throughout the postseason play, so what the game will come down to is Texas' ability to find that next gear to reach Ohio State's level.

At least through 15 games, there's no evidence that Texas will get to that level. Ohio State, one of the most talented college football teams in years, has simply reached its sky-high potential for the last two weeks, Texas has reached its potential for a couple of quarters this year, but a quarter or two of great play won't be good enough in the Cotton Bowl.

Ultimately, both teams' defenses are similarly loaded and accomplished units, that rank among the best defenses in the country statistically. The major difference between the two teams is that while Ohio State also possesses an offense that has been the best in the playoffs, Texas has been hit-or-miss at best on offense in big games.

While Ohio State is undoubtedly the best team in college football to me, I see Texas moving the ball. Even in its 22-19 loss to Georgia in the SEC championship game, Ewers threw for over 350 yards. Cornerbacks Denzel Burke, Davison Igbinosun and Jordan Hancock have been much improved since a mid-season loss to Oregon, but Ewers has four or five legitimate receivers to throw to, who can have a huge impact on a game in a hurry, and that doesn't even include All-SEC tight end Gunnar Helm.

The area where the Buckeyes will have the advantage is defending the run. At times the quarterback run game has given the Buckeyes some issues, but otherwise, they've been pretty great all year against the run. And unless the Longhorns use redshirt freshman quarterback Arch Manning a lot more in this game than they have in their previous playoff games, I don't anticipate their quarterback run game to be a factor.

If Ohio State stops the run, it will be able to turn potential touchdowns into field goals, when the inevitable big play from Texas strikes.

On the other end, Ohio State's offense is maybe facing the toughest defense it has played all season. Texas has incredible depth on its defensive line, a superstar linebacker in Anthony Hill Jr., Jahdae Barron, the Thorpe Award Winner at cornerback, and a pair of standout safeties on the back end.

In some ways, it feels like all of that doesn't matter that much though. If Ohio State keeps the same offensive strategy, Jeremiah Smith is inevitably going to make a big play or two or three, and as a whole, the unit is going to score plenty of points. I don't know if Ohio State will have another 34-0 lead in the first half like it did against Oregon, but I still see Will Howard and this passing offense having another productive day.

As they've done in their previous playoff games, I think the Buckeyes will get out to a great start. Texas will miss a couple of key fourth-down attempts in the first half, and Ohio State will make a big play or two on offense to take a double-digit lead into halftime.

Texas may make a game out of it late, but I think Ohio State will show it's the best team in college football with another huge win. **Ohio State 31, Texas 24**

Cameron Moone: Buckeyes Blow Out Longhorns

Stopping a runaway train is never easy, but that'll be the task on hand for No. 5-seed Texas while it takes on said-train Ohio State on Friday in the Cotton Bowl.

The Buckeyes have come out swinging in both playoff games this season, leaving both contests with nary a black eye while leaving the opponent black and blue. Jumping out to leads of 21-0 (Tennessee) and 34-0 (Oregon) have myself and Ohio State faithful intrigued by what this post-Michigan loss Buckeye team can do when playing aggressive.

Obviously, all of the storylines are there: Quinn Ewers taking on his former team, will it or won't it be a home game for Texas fans making the short trip to Arlington, Texas, and can this Ohio State team keep its foot on the gas for eight more quarters of football?

With a potent passing attack that often sets up the run later in games, first year offensive coordinator Chip Kelly has the Ohio State offense firing unlike anything that's been seen all year, so Texas will need to rely on its defense that has forced 30 turnovers through 15 games this season if the Longhorns wish to keep their horns up after the Cotton Bowl. **Ohio State 35, Texas 17**

Greg Wilson: Ohio State Tames Longhorns

When you get down to a 12-team playoff that is, in theory, supposed to be the best teams in the country, every game is going to be against another great team. But the Buckeyes might have had the toughest path through the CFP than any other team has to this point, needing to get through the Volunteers and Ducks.

Those two teams had the ability to beat anyone in college football on any given night, with Oregon coming into the Rose Bowl as undefeated Big Ten champions and the No. 1 team in the country, but the Buckeyes had no issues steamrolling both teams and getting out to big, early leads before halftime.

Setting the tone early on is going to be a big part of this game, whether the Buckeyes will be able to kill the spirits of the Longhorns early on like they were able to with their last two opponents. If Texas wins

the coin toss, the Longhorns might even decide to take the ball first to try to slow the game down early on and try to control the momentum on their own first, a strategy that has been somewhat effective against this Buckeye team before.

But whether Texas is able to slow the game down or not, if this Ohio State team is firing on all cylinders like it was in those previous two games, nothing the Longhorns do is going to matter. It might be tougher to get going the same way against an elite defense like Texas boasts, but if the game plan is as good as it has been, the Buckeyes have too many weapons to stop.

The OSU defensive unit has also been at its best in the past two games, with 12 total sacks (eight against Oregon) in the CFP and 18 passes broken up. They are forcing opposing offenses into passing the ball by getting early leads, getting quick pressure on the quarterback, and the secondary is doing its job by being great in coverage.

Not a single part of this Buckeye team has faltered in the last two games, and while they might not go up 34-0 on Texas, I still expect it to be more of the same in the Cotton Bowl. This team has the momentum and they seem to have the right attitude to keep this up. I might be getting too caught up in what this team has done the last two games and am forgetting about the previous 12 when it wasn't this great, but with the roster this team has, I think this is sustainable for another game. **Ohio State 38, Texas 24**