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October 17, 1998

Passing Game Germaine For OSU Success

Senior Rewriting Record Book

By MIKE WACHSMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

It may have been a regular October football Saturday for most of the Ohio State Buckeyes in a 41-0 win over Illinois, but for quarterback Joe Germaine, it was a Stat-urday.

The senior signal-caller tied two school records against the Illini, throwing for 307 yards and three touchdowns. The yardage total gives him a pair of 300-yard games this season and three for his career, tying Art Schlichter for both marks.

Germaine now has 40 touchdown passes, good for third place in school history, just 10 behind Schlichter in second place. Bobby Hoying's 57 is the OSU standard.

Not bad numbers for a guy in his first year as a true starter.

Germaine has nine TDs and just one interception this year, a mark of his savvy, consistency and composure, and he's ranked among the nation's top 15 in passing efficiency. His name even popped up on ESPN as a Heisman Trophy candidate after the Illinois blistering.

"I like Joe Germaine," Buckeye coach John Cooper said. "I like his poise, I like his demeanor, I like the way he runs the offense.

"Obviously, he can throw the football and he has good accuracy."

Now that the job is a solo routine instead of a pairs competition, Germaine has been able to relax. He's throwing the ball well and is a determined leader, something the Buckeyes love.

Even with his gaudy numbers, he's not entirely satisfied.

"I felt comfortable (against Illinois), but I can get better," Germaine said. "We've got a really good scheme."

It includes throwing underneath the coverage to loosen things up before trying the home run ball. The Buckeyes had two of those against Illinois, a 30-yarder from Germaine to David Boston and a 37-yarder from Germaine to Reggie Germany for scores.

"We go into every game feeling we can hit a deep ball," said Germaine, named the *Big Bear Buckeye of the Week*. "Our receivers have done a good job getting their release and getting open downfield."

Ohio State's offense sputtered at times against the Illini, but Germaine was able to work through that. His opposite, Illinois true freshman Kurt Kittner, wasn't quite as lucky.

Experience may have spelled the difference for the two competitors.

"I think the quarterback offensively was the difference," Cooper said. "Both teams have similar philosophies defensively where they're going to try to force the other team to throw the football.

"I don't know if we attempted more passes than they did. If there are nine people up there, you've got to throw the football."

Buckeyes Well Armed

Germaine has a reputation for being a great passer on shorter plays, but not for having a major league arm.

That perception changed against the Illini with Germaine's two long TD passes. His arm is better than rumored, and his work in the film room adds another dimension to his skill — preparedness, something a good leader must have.

"He watches film and he always comes in ready," Boston said. "There's nothing that's going to surprise him."

He's also tough, as hits against Penn State, Missouri and Illinois have shown. Though he's bounced back to his feet every time, the coaches are a little worried about his penchant for getting smacked by defenders.

"Joe is a tough guy," Cooper said. "Sometimes he acts like he doesn't mind taking those shots. I don't want him to take those shots."

Germaine knows the quarterback position at Ohio State is a visible one, subject to much second-guessing and hand-wringing. But his play so far this season has allowed quarterbacks coach Tim Salem to sleep easier at night.

"We're lucky and fortunate to have a guy who has played so many games," Salem added. "But he is also in tune with the game. That is my job, making sure he's ready to go on Saturday."

"I program his mind. It's kind of like feeding a computer. Once I've got it programmed Monday through Friday, I just have to let him play on Saturday."

You'll never see Germaine yanking off



JEFF BREYER

AIR GERMAINE — A standout performance against Illinois vaulted Buckeye quarterback Joe Germaine up the record books. His 307 yards gave him two 300-yard games this year and three for his career, tying Art Schlichter on both counts.

his helmet, yelling at linemen or referees or, really, showing any outward signs of emotion on the field.

That gives him an edge on the field.

"That's a gift," Salem said. "Those are things you learn at a young age, growing up. To be able to stand in there almost like a statue and know that some guy is running in there to hit you underneath the chin and knock the wind out of you, that takes a special breed of cat.

"He definitely has that element in the game. That's something that the pro scouts come through like to see. You don't like to see your quarterback take hits like that, but he stays focused with his eyes on the routes downfield. He does not care who's coming at him or how many are coming at him."

Quiet Confidence

Germaine may indeed be a Heisman candidate in the eyes of the national media, but he'll never let on that he's excited about it.

When asked about tying Schlichter's records, he simply deflected the praise to his teammates.

"It's great to be part of something like that, but I have to put the ball out there for them to catch it," he said. "When the defense is trying to stop our running game, we can go back to the passing game. That worked a lot today, and we hit some big plays."

The truth is, Germaine is a fiery competitor who really is excited about the Buckeyes' success. But, again, he's not going to let his visage change from moment to moment on the field.

"He's got his own internal character that he is loose," Salem said. "But his definition of loose is sure the hell different than ours, which is good because he's got a great demeanor."

"The game is very important to him. His success and how he prepares himself, he takes a lot of pride in those things. It's good

Continued On Page 10

COVER STORY: JOE GERMAINE

Veteran Germaine Makes Huge Difference

Continued From Page 1

to coach a guy like that."

While other top-notch programs like Florida, Florida State and Nebraska have struggled with new quarterbacks this year, OSU plows forward with a tested veteran at the controls.

"I don't worry about Joe keeping his poise," Cooper said. "That's one thing I know he'll do. Some of these other teams like Florida or Penn State are trying to find a quarterback."

Offensive coordinator Mike Jacobs seldom has to worry about the play of his quarterback because he knows firsthand what Germaine can do. The offense has been tweaked a little this year, involving more rollouts and a moving pocket in front of Germaine, but the senior has grasped every concept.

"Certainly Joe gives you a different

dimension than a freshman QB," Jacobs said. "It's just a world of difference. If we can protect him and let him see the field like we did in the first half (against Illinois), he can burn you for a lot of yards."

The Buckeyes are No. 1 in the nation and getting it done a variety of ways — big plays, defense, special teams, the whole equation.

But it all starts with Germaine, who knows better than most that he's being watched like few quarterbacks at Ohio State have.

And he beams after each successive performance, happy with his play but not content with where he wants to go — back home to Arizona for a national championship battle in the Fiesta Bowl.

He'll gladly take a day like Illinois if it's going to get the Buckeyes to their ultimate goal.

"Anytime you play a good game, you

want to remember that," Germaine said. "You want to remember what you're feeling like. I did some good things today. I'm really close and I'm getting better each week. We'll have to

see what happens."

Probably the same thing that happens each time Germaine plays well — an Ohio State victory and a day of great numbers.

The Germaine File

Here are the career passing stats for senior Joe Germaine:

Year	GP-GS	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TDs	INTs
1996	12-1	80	147	54.4	1,193	15	4
1997	13-0	129	210	61.4	1,847	16	9
1998	5-5	83	136	61.0	1,182	9	1
Career	30-6	292	493	59.2	4,222	40	14
OSU Career Rank				1st	6th	3rd	

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OHIO STATE VS. ILLINOIS

Buckeyes Blank Illini

OSU Passes Maturity Test With 41-0 Win

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After conquering three ranked teams in its first four games, the challenge for Ohio State in its road trip to Big Ten doormat Illinois would be to see if it could maintain a high intensity level.

That question was answered quickly, though, as the top-ranked Buckeyes started and finished strongly in a 41-0 shutout of the Illini before a crowd of 46,390 Oct. 10 in Champaign.

"This is a game that tested our maturity," said OSU safety Damon Moore, a leader of the defense that held the Illini to just 43 yards rushing. "If we're a good, mature team, we can't take anybody lightly and come out here and barely win."

"We're going to put points on the board. The defense came out and got a shutout. Even the younger guys came in and fought hard. They didn't want to give it up, either."

OSU (5-0, 2-0) was never threatened in the win, jumping out to a 24-0 half-time lead and tacking on a defensive score on linebacker Na'il Diggs' 47-yard fumble return for a touchdown in the fourth quarter.

Illinois (2-4, 1-2), which had just 12 first downs and 199 yards total offense, didn't move across midfield until late in the first half. The closest the Illini came to scoring came with just under seven minutes left when they gave the ball up on downs at the OSU 15-yard line.

"You're happy anytime you shut out a football team," said OSU coach John Cooper. "I don't care how young they were."

The future is now for the Illini, who have rebounded nicely after a winless season a year ago. Illinois coach Ron Turner has put his team's offensive fortunes in the hands of two freshmen, quarterback Kurt Kittner and tailback Russell "Rocky" Harvey.

But the Buckeyes succeeded in stymying the youngsters. Harvey was held to 29 yards on 15 carries, while Kittner hit on just 19 of 43 passes for 156 yards.

"We just came out and wanted to execute our game plan and take care of business," said linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer, who joined Moore and cornerback Antoine Winfield in leading the Buckeyes in tackles with six.

"I was a little nervous toward the end when the two came out and let them drive down there a little bit. But I'll take a shutout any day of the week," he said.

Over on offense, OSU quarterback Joe Germaine enjoyed one of his best days as a Buckeye. He completed 17 of 28 passes for 307 yards and three touchdowns.

Between his team's inability to get much going offensively and OSU's aerial fireworks, Turner was impressed.

"That's what they do, they just keep coming after you," he said. "They hit



JEFF BREHM

MILLER BRINGS IT DOWN — Ohio State wideout Dee Miller cradles a Joe Germaine pass against Illinois Oct. 10, one of his five receptions on the day. OSU's air game accounted for over 300 yards against the Fighting Illini in a 41-0 win.

some big plays in the passing game. We were in some tight coverage and they made some nice catches in there."

Germaine's top targets were split end David Boston (five catches, 96 yards and one touchdown) and flanker Dee Miller (four catches, 99 yards).

"We knew we could take them deep," Boston said.

The Gory Details

OSU opened the scoring with Dan Stultz's 40-yard field goal on the game's initial possession. OSU moved 59 yards in nine plays to set up the kick, with the key play being Germaine's 33-yard pass to Miller. But after Germaine missed Michael Wiley on a third-down pass, OSU settled for Stultz's kick and a 3-0 lead with 11:32 left in the first quarter.

Two possessions later, the Buckeyes notched their first touchdown with a 13-play, 79-yard march. Germaine hit Boston for a 15-yard gain and tight end John Lumpkin for 19 more before the ground game took over. Joe Montgomery ripped off an 18-yard gain and Wiley followed with a 14-yarder, setting up first-and-10 at the Illini 11.

On second down there, Wiley carried for 9 yards down to the Illini 2. His run to the right side produced no gain, set-

ting up fourth-and-1 at the 2. Wiley leaped over the top and was shy of the goal line, touching off a premature Illini celebration.

The officials brought the chains in and found OSU had picked up the first down at the Illini 1. Scoring from there proved to be a struggle, too, as fullback Matt Keller and then Wiley were both stopped for no gain.

Finally on third down, Germaine faked the handoff and passed to Lumpkin in the back of the end zone for the 1-yard TD and a 10-0 lead with 2:52 left in the first quarter.

"We ran two plays off-tackle at the goal line and got snubbed," Lumpkin said. "So then we ran some play-action. We slipped two guys into the end zone. The guy took Matt Keller and I was open in the back. It was an easy throw and catch."

At face value, it looked like the Illini made the Buckeyes blink by having to resort to a pass. Germaine didn't see it that way, though.

"We're on the 1-yard line," he said. "We like to think we're tough enough and physical enough to punch it in there. But they did a good job of getting a stalemate at the line of scrimmage, and we weren't able to do it."

"We were lucky we got the first down there, and then we had a good play-action fake. They were expecting the run there."

OSU's next score came early in the second quarter, the result of a five-play, 70-yard drive. The big play was Germaine's 40-yard post pass to a diving Miller at the Illini 18.

OSU was backed up by a holding call, but three plays later Germaine hit Boston with a short slant. He avoided a tackle attempt by Illini safety Muhammad Abdullah and picked up a big block from teammate Reggie Germany on his way to the 30-yard touchdown, a play that pushed OSU's lead to 17-0 with 11:17 left in the second quarter.

"That's a play we work on a lot in practice," Boston said. "If the two linebackers blitz, you've got a slant route. I made the right read, Joe did too, and it worked out for us."

The lead went to 24-0 on OSU's next possession as the Buckeyes moved 63 yards in six plays. The key play was Germaine's 12-yard pass to fullback Jamar Martin to convert a third-and-6 at the Illini 49. On the next play, Germaine dialed up Germany on a 37-yard post pass for the score. The sopho-

OHIO STATE VS. ILLINOIS

more got behind Abdullah and easily hauled in Germaine's spiral at the goal line with 6:19 left in the first half.

"That was just a good ball by Joe," Germany said. "It was a play called for two people to run a post. Ken-Yon (Rambo) held up the one safety and Joe put the ball up top."

Illinois mounted its best offensive push against OSU's first-team defense just before halftime. Aided by an OSU penalty on Germany for roughing the punter, the Illini drove to the OSU 33 before losing the ball on downs with 56 seconds left in the half.

On OSU's first play, Germaine hit Boston for a 38-yard gain to the Illini 28. But a sack and an illegal procedure call shoved OSU back, and Stultz came up short on a 57-yard field goal attempt with 19 seconds left.

Although down 24-0 to start the second half, the Illini did not immediately fade. They forced punts on OSU's first two second-half possessions, and the teams played a scoreless third quarter.

Finally, the Buckeyes tacked on a field goal early in the fourth quarter. Stultz's season-best 46-yarder split the uprights after an eight-play, 22-yard possession stalled. Still, OSU increased the margin to 27-0 with 12:51 left in the game.

The OSU defense got into the scoring column for the second week in a row on Illinois' ensuing possession. Kittner dropped back to pass, but end James Cotton came unblocked and hit him to cause a fumble. Diggs scooped it up and rolled 47 yards for the touchdown and a 34-0 lead with 10:57 left in the game.

"It bounced right up, I picked it right up," Diggs said. "My first thought was get the touchdown and score. Every week the defense wants to score."

After the second-team defense turned the Illini away on downs with 8:13 left, OSU's second-team offense mounted an eight-play, 84-yard scoring march. The big play was backup quarterback Mark Garcia's 39-yard pass down the left sideline to a leaping Rambo. Four plays later, backup tailback Jonathan Wells punched it in from 2 yards out to make it 41-0 with 3:45 left.

Game Notes

• Germaine was whistled for a holding call on a reverse to Rambo.

"Can you imagine that? A holding penalty on a quarterback," he said.

When asked whether he was guilty, he smiled and replied, "Maybe a little bit, but it wasn't on purpose."

• Boston received an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for celebrating with fans behind the end zone after his TD catch.

"I shouldn't have done that," he said. "I should have given the ball back to the referee as soon as I scored and just celebrated with my teammates."

"You make a great play, you give the ball back and celebrate with your teammates. That's understood. I felt it shouldn't have been a penalty, but it doesn't matter what I think."

• Including those two penalties, OSU was flagged for 11 penalties worth 104 yards. The Illini were hit three times for 35 yards.

"We had way too many penalties," Cooper said. "We have kids continuing to make mistakes in the open field. We have to correct those mistakes."

• OSU captured the Illibuck trophy for the fourth consecutive year. The Buckeyes hold a 52-20-2 advantage in the Illibuck series since it started in 1925.

• Illinois fell to 3-13 in games against a No. 1 team. OSU was the first No. 1-ranked team to play in Memorial Stadium since Michigan in 1977.

• Illinois was shut out for the first time under Turner, its second-year coach. OSU was also the last team to shut out the Illini, winning 48-0 Nov. 9, 1996, in Champaign.

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OSU Discovers New Weapons At Illinois

Jamar Martin is only a freshman and part-time player on the Ohio State football team, but he's been around the program long enough to know the Buckeyes bear big goals each and every week.

Playing an overmatched Illinois team was reason for Martin and fellow members of the offense to expect, well, perfection.

"Our goals were to dominate on the offensive line, have no turnovers, score every time we touch the ball, and win," the burly product of Canton, Ohio, said without a wink.

Well, the Buckeyes did hang onto the ball and certainly scored enough points to win going away, but the unstoppable dominance everyone was looking for stayed back in Columbus.

OSU was just 7 of 16 on third-down conversions in the game and 1-for-4 on second-and-short (2 yards or less). The lone exception came when reserve tailback Jonathan Wells scored on second-and-goal from the 2 to produce the final score of 41-0.

That ended the game on a high note and kept the Buckeyes from leaving Champaign too concerned about the offense.

"That's pretty much a downhill play," said Wells, also a freshman. "I went to the middle and I was lucky enough to punch it in. Anytime you get in the game you want to score, and it was a nice exclamation point. Anytime you can score more points, it helps for the polls and all that stuff."

"We were disappointed more young guys couldn't get in earlier, but our offense will bounce back and regroup."

**INSIDE
THE
OFFENSE
with
Jeff Rapp**

Running Game Stalled

It sounds downright spoiled for an offense to lament a 41-0 win, but this is Ohio State, the No. 1-ranked team in the country, and 500-yard outputs and scoring explosions are expected anymore, especially against an outfit like Illinois.

The shutout certainly didn't hurt OSU's standing atop the polls, but Wells' touchdown was the only one via the ground all day, and the Buckeyes were held to 161 net yards rushing in 46 attempts for a very mortal average of 3.5 yards per play.

Starter Michael Wiley had to be licking his chops watching film during the week, but he was bottled up with 18 carries for 68 yards. Backup Joe Montgomery gained 58 yards in 11 totes and appeared to make better use of his blocking.

"I was a little disappointed, even though they were stacking against the run, because I thought we missed on opportunities when we had them," OSU running backs coach Tim Spencer said.

"I thought Joe ran the ball real well. I'm not going to pass judgment on Michael or anybody until I have a chance to review the film, but I thought we missed a few holes today."

Wiley, who had 500 yards rushing the first three games, has come back to earth in the Big Ten, but he'll still be the main man in the team's homecoming game with Minnesota.

"I don't see us doing anything different from what we're doing right now," Spencer said. "We have guys in there we think can make plays, but that doesn't mean you're always going to make them. But if the guys we have in aren't playing to the best of their ability, then we can always go to the next guy."

More alarming than the lack of big runs was the inability to pick up first downs in short-yardage situations. That problem was on prominent display in the first quarter when OSU ran four straight plays near the goal line for virtually no gain. The Buckeyes did, however, eke out a first down in the process and eventually scored on an over-the-top pass from Joe Germaine to tight end John Lumpkin.

"I thought we were down in the end zone with Matt Keller, personally," offensive coordinator Mike Jacobs said of the goal-line sequence. "I don't think it's a matter of being stubborn. If you can get first-and-goal at the half-yard line, we just figured it made sense to keep running it."

"We knew all along we could get a first down, so that was our thought process."

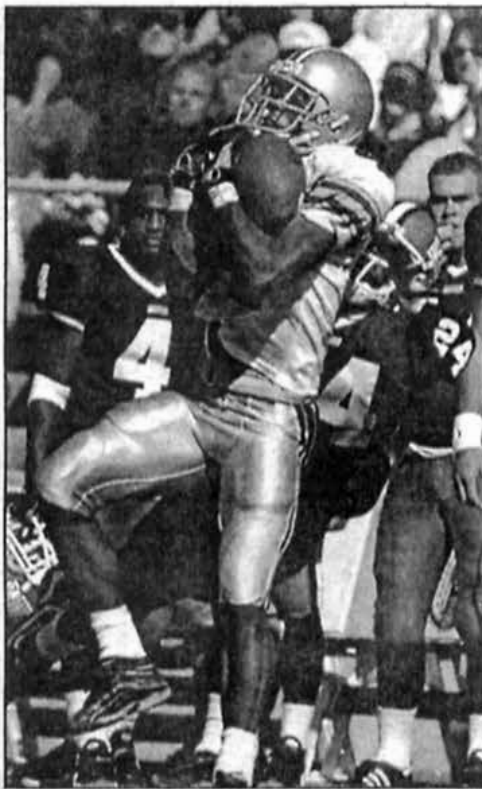
Fighting Line Regression

The coaching staff believes the offensive line is still making strides, but the group didn't exactly blow Illinois off the ball with regularity. The unit seemed particularly disinterested in the third quarter, when the Buckeyes were held scoreless and accomplished little offensively.

Jacobs, though, isn't so sure his front line took a step backward.

"I don't believe that was the case," he said. "I'd have to see the film before I make that kind of statement. We would have liked to have run the football a little better, especially in the short-yardage situations, but I'm not going to make an overall statement about the line."

Jacobs and the rest of the offensive coaches, however, weren't happy at all with OSU's 11 penalties, many coming



JEFF BREHM

KEN-YON RAMBO ILLINOIS — While not exactly a breakout performance, OSU sophomore Ken-Yon Rambo shows he can make the tough catches. He hauled in this 39-yard pass from Mark Garcia on the Buckeyes' final scoring drive at Illinois.

on illegal procedure calls. OSU also allowed three sacks for a loss of 24 yards.

"They had some good stunts with their front four," Germaine said in defense of the line. "That's kind of confusing. Sometimes they can get in there, and I understand that. We're not going to be perfect every time."

Germaine To The Rescue

With the running game up on blocks, the Buckeyes employed a well-conceived passing attack with Germaine spreading the wealth and finding the seams being given.

"We're not a one-dimensional team," said receiver Reggie Germany, who caught a pair of passes, one for a 37-yard score. "We can throw the ball when we can't run the ball. We just found another way to get first downs."

Involved early was Lumpkin, who had a season-high three catches for 32 yards, all in the first quarter.

"It's a good feeling for me to be able to get involved early and really contribute more as far as catching the ball," said Lumpkin, who had five catches for 91 yards in OSU's four previous games. "It's a confidence boost."

Lumpkin burned UI down the middle of the field as the Illini defensive backs elected to "bracket" OSU wideouts David Boston and Dee Miller in two-receiver sets.

"They were dropping their safeties out and pretty much giving us the middle," Lumpkin said. "They try to stop you from getting out with a linebacker, but usually I do a pretty good job of getting by those guys."

"You've got to read that on the move because you never know until the play starts. They could be in a four-pronged defense or a 4-2. When they bracket and the safeties split, you've got to read that because the whole route is different."

OSU had similar midseason success with Lumpkin and Steve Wisniewski last season when teams were beginning to concentrate on Boston and Miller.

"If they're going to let our wideouts catch the ball 15 yards

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downfield, then that is what we're going to go to time and again," Jacobs said. "If they start to bracket and do different things, then we have to go to running backs and tight ends. We knew that would become more prominent as the season went along."

Miscellaneous Notes

• OSU entered play with a whopping 16 fumbles, although only four had been lost.

That's why it was more than a little encouraging to the Buckeyes that they committed no such miscues against Illinois.

"That's the No. 1 thing we preach is to hold onto the ball," Spencer said. "We did a good job of that and we won the game, so I'm happy."

• Germaine completed passes to eight different receivers to confound the Illini. Boston and Miller drew lots of attention

from the Illini scheme but still managed to lead the team. Boston had five receptions for 96 yards and a touchdown, and Miller was right behind with four grabs for 99 yards.

Martin caught two balls, and both plays kept drives going with gains of 17 and 12 yards.

"I didn't do much of that in high school," said Martin, who played for Canton McKinley, last year's mythical high school

national champion. "We had a real tailback-oriented offense. But I like to surprise people and catch the ball."

• The Buckeyes amassed more than 500 yards of offense for the fourth time this season by totaling 518 vs. the Illini.

Backup QB Mark Garcia aided the passing total of 357 with 50 of his own on just a pair of completions. Four different receivers caught passes of 37 yards or more.

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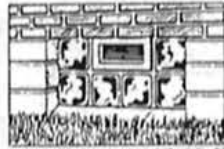
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OHIO STATE VS. ILLINOIS

Buckeye Defense Finally Enters The Limelight

A unit that has been stout all season long finally came out of the shadows.

Most people feel Ohio State's meal ticket this season has been the varied play of the offense, and early on that was true. But on a day when the offense racked up yardage yet hardly looked impressive, it was the defense that took center stage.

In its most impressive outing of the season, Ohio State held an overmatched Illinois offense to 199 yards of offense, just 43 on the ground, in a 41-0 victory. Illinois tailback Rocky Harvey, who entered the game averaging nearly 100 yards per contest, was held to 29 yards on 15 carries, which meant the Buckeyes could load up on quarterback Kurt Kittner, a true freshman starting just his third game.

"We had a job to do," safety Damon Moore matter-of-factly said. "We wanted to hold them under a certain amount of points and yards, and everyone came out and gave a tremendous effort. We didn't take them lightly. We have a job to do no matter who we play."

Shutouts and shutdowns of offenses are what make headlines for defensive units, and this second shutout of the year should vault the Buckeyes into the nation's consciousness.

"Good, mature teams don't take anyone lightly and barely win games they're supposed to dominate," Moore said. "We got some younger guys in, they fought hard, and they didn't want to give it (the

INSIDE THE DEFENSE with Mike Wachsman

shutout) up, either."

The more plays the defense makes, the more feared and known it will become.

"We had three goals," said cornerback Antoine Winfield, who finished with six stops and four pass breakups. "One was to win, the second was to hold them under 50 yards rushing, and third was to cause three turnovers. I don't know about the turnovers, but I think we got the other two."

There was a little more pressure coming into the season for OSU's stop unit, mainly because nearly everyone returned, including the entire secondary.

That veteran group wowed many observers last year, and they knew the scrutiny this season would be intense. So far they've stood up to it.

"It's a little bit different from last year, when we went into games with teams not knowing much about us," cornerback Ahmed Plummer said. "Now teams know that we're good, and they're going to attack us different ways. We always have to be on our toes for the unexpected."

Preserving the shutout — the second in a row for the Buckeyes at Memorial

Stadium (OSU won 48-0 in 1996) — should do wonders for a defense that prides itself on making life unbearable for opponents.

"We could have played a little better, but we did most of what we were supposed to do," said linebacker Na'il Diggs, who returned a fourth-quarter Kittner fumble 47 yards for a score. "We got a shutout, and that's always great for a defense."

Linebackers Taking It Back

For the second straight week, an Ohio State linebacker took one to the house. Diggs joined Jerry Rudzinski and Joe Cooper, who both scored in OSU's win over Penn State, in the scoring column.

Diggs is beginning to make a name for himself as a sophomore, becoming more savvy and understanding his role better than a year ago. The California native is soft-spoken off the field but speaks loudly with his play on it. His teammates have noticed.

"Right now Na'il is the first of the Silver Bullets getting to the ball," Moore said. "Everyone else is just trying to keep up."



JEFF BIRCHAM

AHMED ALMOST HAS IT — Cornerback Ahmed Plummer nearly came up with his third interception of the season against Illinois, but it fell just out of his reach. Secondary mate Antoine Winfield (11) and linebacker Jerry Rudzinski (35) look on.

Three defensive touchdowns in five games isn't too shabby, and Plummer says fans should look for it to continue.

"That's the mark of our defense," he said. "We don't want to just be known as a defense that can stop an offense, we want to be known as one that scores. That's a big part of this team, and it will be a big part of us continuing our success."

Rudzinski said the linebacking corps is letting the Buckeyes' much-publicized secondary know who holds sway.

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"We like to tease our defensive backs about the touchdown numbers this year," he chuckled. "They're supposed to be scoring, but we're getting the opportunities."

The Illini offense now has a 16-quarter TD drought against Ohio State, dating back to 1994, a 24-10 Illini win. Illinois scored a touchdown on a defensive fumble recovery last year at Ohio Stadium.

Keeping It Simple

Illinois will never be mistaken for Florida State offensively, running one of the most conservative offenses in the Big Ten.

The Illini came in with a plan — running the ball and passing only when necessary — and rarely deviated from it.

"They wanted to run first but keep us honest as DBs," Plummer said. "They threw a lot of hitches and a couple long balls here and there, but other than that it was pretty basic."

The Buckeyes continued their attack mentality on defense, blitzing at nearly every turn. Kittner, who went 19 of 43 but didn't get his team into the end zone, showed some confusion but also some resiliency, not backing down from the OSU rush.

He received praise from the Buckeyes, who said he could one day be a star in the conference.

"He's going to be a great quarterback in the Big Ten," Rudzinski said. "He showed a lot of poise and didn't have any fear in his eyes. We'd like a few more sacks, but he made some quick reads, took a three-step drop, and got rid of the ball in time."

There was some frustration shown by defensive coordinator Fred Pagac, even with the blanking. He knows the sacks aren't coming, and that's something that needs to change.

"(Kittner) avoided a few sacks, we missed a few sacks," Pagac said. "He stepped up and scrambled, and that made it tough for us. We'd like to get sacks, but they didn't score. That's pretty important."

Even with the shutout, there was some room for improvement.

"We expected their game plan," Rudzinski said. "We figured they were going to keep plugging away and let us make a mistake and, sure enough, we did that. We had some careless penalties and blown assignments. The big picture of this game was that we got a shutout, yet there was room for improvement."

Trying To Stay Tough

As Illinois was driving on its final drive of the first half, the Buckeye defense was doing its best to stay together. Illinois put together an 11-play, 32-yard drive that ate up over five minutes of clock, and even though the Buckeyes had a comfortable 24-0 lead at the time, things weren't all sunny on the sideline.

Andy Katzenmoyer, who had some problems wrestling the mobile Kittner to the ground, threw his helmet at the bench in disgust, and Moore, who finished with six stops, chided his mates, saying, "Come on, y'all, we've got to pick it up. That's 40 yards too many (that we've allowed)."

Illinois has not been known as a passing team, but they were able to eat up chunks of yardage through the air, something that wasn't making the Buckeyes too happy.

"We expected them to come in here throwing the ball," Winfield said. "We knew Rocky Harvey wasn't going to have a big day. They threw the ball better in the second half than the first, and they hit some plays. We were able to stay together when they started moving the ball."

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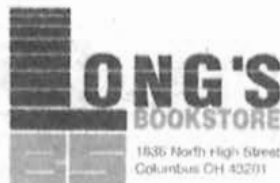
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OHIO STATE VS. ILLINOIS

Cooper Likes Way Defense Blanked Illini

Throughout the football season, BSB is publishing excerpts of Ohio State head football coach John Cooper's postgame press conferences. Here is what Cooper had to say following the win over Illinois.

COOPER: "We are very happy to get out of here with a 41-0 victory under the circumstances. We played a lot of players and as far as I know we didn't get any serious injuries. Kevin Houser got a sprained ankle, but he got back in, so it looks like he should be OK."

"They were a real scrappy defensive football team. They played us an eight- and nine-man front and pretty much forced us to throw the football, and we're thankful we've got a quarterback that can throw it and three or four wide receivers who can

get open and catch the ball. We also got the tight end a little bit more involved in the passing game today."

"They were playing us a little bit of bracket coverage or 5-under and 2-deep. In that coverage you've got to get somebody down the middle, and I thought John Lumpkin did a good job there in the first half of getting open. We tried to hit our halfback down the middle a time or two and didn't have the kind of success we were hoping for."

"Defensively, we played good, tough defense. Again, we were able to use our safeties in run support a little bit, and I thought both corners, Antoine (Winfield) and Ahmed (Plummer), played a good, solid football game. We were playing a pressure defense and blitzing quite a bit and trying to stop their running game."

"They were very conservative on the offensive side of the ball. They did try more passes today than we've seen in some of the other ball games they played, but it was a good, solid effort on defense, and we did what we had to do offensively."

"For the second week in a row, we scored a touchdown on the defensive side, so obviously we were very, very happy about that. James Cotton got a real good hit on their quarterback and, of course, Na'il Diggs picked the ball up and ran for a touchdown. That gave us a little bit of a spark in the second half."

"I thought we were a little bit lethargic in the third quarter. You look up and we only had three points on the board (in the second half), so that was a real break."

Q: Did you challenge your team when they were trying to put up a goal-line stand?

COOPER: "Absolutely. We knew we could get a first down, and that's the reason why we called the one play, and it did manage a first down."

"The first running play we ran (Matt Keller up the middle, and I thought he scored. I thought he had a little momentum there and possibly got the ball in the end zone. The official told me that the ball has to cross the goal line, like I didn't know that (laughter). I've been coaching for 37 years; I know the ball has to cross the goal

line."

"The two most disappointing things are we ran off tackle and we didn't gain an inch and then we had to throw the football. But again, if they're putting 10 people up there or 11 up on the line, there's going to be two or three people unblocked. It's a matter of your back being better than their defenders, because you can't block everybody."

Q: Can you tell us what the philosophy was on that pass play?

COOPER: "They were in what we call bracket coverage where they were taking both safeties and both corners and they were trying to take David (Boston) and Dee (Miller) out of the ball game. That leaves a linebacker or nickel back on your tight end or your back down the middle. The middle has been open a little bit more, and we've got to get John Lumpkin or the tight ends more involved in the passing game."

Q: How would you rate the offensive line today?

COOPER: "I thought they did some pretty good things. I thought they protected the quarterback fairly well. Obviously I'm disappointed in our inability to run the ball any more effectively than we did. I don't care if they put 11 people up there. You'd like to get a little more production out of your running game than we had today."

"I don't think we had any turnovers, but

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OHIO STATE VS. ILLINOIS

we did have way, way too many penalties. We had some holding calls and some penalties in the open field. Our offensive line, I think, is continuing to make progress. We played quite a few of those young players in the first half even. We were kind of sprinkling them in and out of the lineup. We didn't wholesale substitute. We got Tam Hopkins, Mike Gurr and Henry Fleming in the ball game in the first half."

Q: How much of a concern is it in the short-yardage situations to not have a real reliable power back?

COOPER: "That's an area of concern. Obviously we have to work on that in practice. But as I mentioned, if people are going to put that many folks up on the line, you can expect us to come with play-action passes, maybe even more so than we did today."

Q: How about Dan Stultz hitting two 40-yard field goals?

COOPER: "He hit the ball pretty well. Danny's a good kicker. Danny had a good week kicking for us in practice. I probably was a little foolish letting him try one from 57 or 58 yards. But he made two of those in warm-ups, and there were just a few seconds left to go in the half and the wind was at his back. If he hits the ball real good, he might have a chance to make it, but we went in at halftime with no points (on that drive)."

Q: You talked in your press conference earlier in the week about penalties and stuff. Are you getting concerned about that situation?

COOPER: "We're getting way too many penalties. We've had fewer penalties called (on opponents) against us than any team in our league by far, and absolutely I'm concerned about it. We've got some kids that continue to make some mistakes in the open field, and I'm concerned about it and will be concerned about it until we get it corrected."

"There's an old saying that it doesn't catch up with you until it catches up with you, so we can't continue to be ineffective in short-yardage offense and get as many penalties as we're having called on us, too."

Q: Speaking of that, what explanation did you get on the excessive celebration penalty (on Boston), because you didn't seem real satisfied with what you were being told by the referee.

COOPER: "I didn't see what happened. Obviously, if they call excessive

celebration, I guess it's the right call. The official told me that David was high-fiving the fans. Some of the players said the fans came on the field. I don't know if that happened or not."

Q: What's your view of that rule?

COOPER: "It doesn't matter what I think of it. A rule is a rule, and you cannot celebrate in college football. That's an area of emphasis every year in our conference. The players know you can't do that and that you should hand the ball back to the official and come on back to the sideline. Celebrate with your players if you want to celebrate, but you can't celebrate with the fans. David knows that."

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OSU safety Damon Moore on the importance of shutting an opponent out: "It means a lot to us. This is what we thrive on. This is going to help us out mentally and physically to get guys out in the third quarter. It's going to help us out as far as depth. Once the young guys get in a couple ball games and play, the coaches will have more faith in them."

OSU linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer admitted he missed an easy tackle on the Illini's Rocky Harvey, a diminutive 5-9: "I didn't think he was that short. It was the second play of the game, and I totally whiffed on him. I couldn't believe it."

OSU flanker Ken-Yon Rambo on the Illini's conduct while they covered punts: "They were trying to rough me up, but that goes with the territory when you return kicks. They could see my ankle was hurting me, and they tried to twist my ankles. Basically, they were coming down trying to get guys hurt and talk stuff to us."

Rambo on the goal-line pass play late in the game where he got tangled up with Illini cornerback Tony Francis: "No. 33 was holding me all by my shoulder pads. It was obvious, but I guess the refs wanted the game to get over with because we were killing them so bad. I think they just wanted to go home."

OSU linebacker Na'il Diggs credited defensive end James Cotton for causing the fumble by Illini quarterback Kurt Kittner that Diggs returned 47 yards for a score: "I was right behind him. He hit (Kittner) and the ball. He made a great play to cause the fumble. He would have got the sack if the guy hadn't fumbled, but he knocked it out at the same time. That was a great play by James."



Andy Katzenmoyer



Ken-Yon Rambo

OSU quarterback Joe Germaine on what his reads were on the 1-yard touchdown pass to tight end John Lumpkin: "Matt Keller was an option in the flat, and John was in the back of the end zone. I looked at Matt first, but one of their safeties jumped at him. John was wide open, nobody was on him."

OSU cornerback Antoine Winfield on his six-tackle, four-pass-deflection performance: "I was just out there trying to make something happen. I'll do anything to help this team win. I was just trying to make a big play."

Germaine said split end David Boston's burst of speed where he turned a simple slant into a 30-yard touchdown was not a surprise: "No, we've seen that a lot in practice. He's very explosive."

Boston, who in the past caught most of his touchdowns in the end zone, said he is adding the speed element to his game: "That's something I wanted to work on this season. I worked hard in the summer to make yards after the catch."

Illinois cornerback Asim Pleas on the OSU receiving corps: "They are just great athletes. They run good routes. They are not cocky. They know what to do and they know what it takes to win."

OSU tailback Joe Montgomery on playing in his home state: "It was real good to come home and see my family. I had a lot of thrills coming back here to play."

Illini coach Ron Turner on OSU's play: "They didn't make many mistakes, and they played the game like a team that has a lot of talented football players, which they do."

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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Who Can The Buckeyes Least Do Without?

Five games into the 1998 season and the Ohio State football team continues to find itself in the driver's seat as far as both the Big Ten and national championships. There's still a lot of football to be played, however, and funny things can happen on the march to the Fiesta Bowl. Funny things like injuries, for instance.

So here's a question for you. Who is the most indispensable Buckeye this season?

Is it Andy Katzenmoyer or Antoine Winfield on defense? Katzenmoyer has been outstanding but hardly dominant this year. And Winfield is part of a talented and deep secondary. Besides, with the defense playing as well as it is, it's hard to believe it couldn't overcome the loss of one player, even if it were a player of the magnitude of Katzenmoyer or Winfield.

On offense, is it David Boston or Dee Miller? The two have proven to be fairly interchangeable, as far as being Ohio State's primary aerial target, and if one of them were to go down, Reggie Germany and Ken-Yon Rambo are waiting in the wings for their chance to start.

Is Michael Wiley the most indispensable player on the team? He wasn't dominating against either Penn State or Illinois, and the Buckeyes still won each game convincingly. If he went down, Joe Montgomery, Jonathan Wells and Derek Combs would all simply move one rung up the ladder.

It's the view from this corner that the player whom Ohio State could afford the least to be without is quarterback Joe Germaine. He makes the team go, and his leadership and calm under pressure would be key in overcoming the loss of one of the previously mentioned Buckeye stars.

If the senior from Arizona were indeed lost, the Buckeyes would turn to a somewhat unknown commodity in Mark Garcia, who has yet to prove himself with a major college game on the line.

Which brings up an interesting situation.

As future opponents have more and more tape of the 1998 Buckeyes to view, they are going to realize that one possible way to slow down the Ohio State offensive machine is to put a lot of pressure on the quarterback. The OSU offensive line, while doing much better than most had expected, is still vulnerable to a strong pass rush. Germaine was sacked three times by a fairly hapless Illinois team.

So my question is, in a game like the one against Illinois, why not get Germaine out of there earlier? The longer you keep him in, the greater the risk of getting him hurt. And the quicker you get Garcia in there, the more experience he gets in case he does have to take over for an injured Germaine.

When the Buckeyes were ahead 24-0 at the half, it seemed pretty clear that Illinois wasn't going to make up much ground against the powerful Buckeye defense. And if they did score a touch-

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

down or two, coach John Cooper and staff could have always reinserted Germaine. But Germaine played on into the fourth quarter.

One thing about Germaine. He's proved time and time again that he's a tough player, and fortunately he has yet to be hurt this season.

You know a team's having a great year, though, when one of the few things you can quibble with is how quickly the coaching staff sends in the reserve quarterback in an impressive victory.

Few Areas Of Concern

Perhaps the biggest negative that stood out on the stat sheet from the Illinois game was the number of penalties against the Buckeyes. The Bucks continue to look sloppy at times this season, with too many penalties and fumbles.

Following the game, Cooper came up with an "old saying" I had never heard before: "It doesn't catch up with you until it catches up with you." It sounds like something Yogi Berra would say, but it's a truism.

So far the Buckeyes have had little problem overcoming the drops and flags (they didn't fumble against the Illini). But a key penalty here and a lost fumble there and suddenly it's caught up with you. While Ohio State has been the class of the conference and country so far this season, they haven't always played as crisply as a championship-caliber team.

I don't make as much of the fact that the Buckeyes were unable to punch the ball in on the ground at the goal line against the Illini as some have. Sure you'd like to power it in. The reality is that Ohio State may be a better passing team than running team this year, and the way Illinois was bunched up on the line, the pass was probably a better call. You take what the defense gives you. The bottom line is the Buckeyes scored.

Many would argue, though, that Ohio State's inability to punch out the tough yardage might come back to haunt them, just as the fumbles and penalties might.

We'll see.

Lumpkin Steps Up

It was good to see John Lumpkin have a solid game against Illinois. Coming into the contest, I would have listed the big tight end as one of my disappointments on the team. His first four games had been marred by several dropped passes and offside calls.

If there's a defense down the road with the ability to shut down both Miller and Boston, the Buckeyes will need to have the confidence to throw to Lumpkin. He

proved a worthy target against Illinois with three receptions for 32 yards and a score.

With Lumpkin back in my good graces, who are my disappointments right now?

In some ways I'd say Katzenmoyer. He's having a solid season — no doubt. Given all the negative publicity he generated heading into the season, however, I was hoping he would be some kind of one-man wrecking crew, putting all the negatives in the rearview mirror.

Yet Katzenmoyer seems to be playing within OSU's defensive scheme, and you can't complain about the results posted by the Buckeye stop troops. It's probably better that Katzenmoyer didn't come out trying to do everything himself to make up for his preseason problems. Overaggressive play by the Buckeye middle linebacker might have caused problems for the team-oriented defense.

I'm also waiting for Ken-Yon Rambo to live up to his press clippings. True, he caught a pass for 39 yards against Illinois, but it was his first reception in three games, and his punt return average of 6.7 yards and kickoff return average of 22.5 are not spectacular. With the way Rambo dominated headlines during his recruitment, you keep waiting for him to break one.

One play that went somewhat unno-

ticed in the Penn State game may have been Rambo's biggest play of the season. He returned a punt 24 yards against the Lions to give the Buckeyes good field position on their way to a pivotal touchdown in the final two minutes of the first half.

What are my biggest surprises so far this season?

I'd say the play of the defensive line and the quick emergence of big fullback Jamar Martin. No one defensive lineman stands out to me. They've all been solid, and I'm talking seven or eight deep.

As for Martin, if you look at Buckeye history, seldom has an OSU team done well without a strong fullback. Incumbent Matt Keller has been outstanding and is a fan favorite for his hustle, but he's not the prototype Buckeye fullback like Martin, clearly the starter of the future, is.

Turning On The Jets

Cooper and staff have put a tremendous emphasis on recruiting players with speed and not just at the skill positions.

One player who got to show off his wheels against Illinois was defensive end James Cotton. He came from nowhere to catch Illini receiver Michael Dean from behind, holding Dean to 21 yards on a play that could have gained more. A couple of plays later, Cotton forced the fumble that Na'il Diggs returned 47 yards for a touchdown.

It wasn't a bad afternoon for Cotton or Diggs, who had four unassisted tackles, including one for a loss, and the touchdown.



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