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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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Sacked And Shocked

OSU's National Title Aspirations Snuffed By MSU

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The sentiment and the statement were familiar, and the meaning was not lost.

"We shocked the world!" Michigan State tailback Sedrick Irvin exclaimed as his teammates tore up pieces of sod from Ohio Stadium's south end zone moments after the Spartans did the unthinkable, upsetting heavily favored and No. 1-ranked Ohio State 28-24.

On a day when Ohio Sen. John Glenn returned to earth after nine days aboard the space shuttle and news trickled out that House Speaker Newt Gingrich announced his resignation, the upstart Spartans — and certainly, less willingly, the Buckeyes — found themselves as legitimate front-page news.

The defeat all but kills any hopes that Ohio State, the front-runner in both major college football polls since the preseason, will earn its first national championship in 30 years.

The reality of the situation was hard for the Buckeyes to accept moments after a golden scoring chance was denied: The Buckeyes failed to score on four pass plays after earning a first down at the Spartans' 15-yard line with 1:29 left.

"Every day since last summer, every time we've broken it down, we say, 'National champs,'" OSU flanker Dee Miller said. "Today all we could say was 'Hard work.'"

"That hurt a lot. We've put in so much hard work and we've worked hard year in and year out. There was just a missing element today that we didn't have, and we took an 'L.'"

Tough November defeats of this magnitude have become the rule rather than the exception for the Buckeyes in recent years. Four times in five years it has been a team from the state up north, namely archrival Michigan, that has done the honors.

Losses to UM since 1993 have cost highly ranked Ohio State teams two Big Ten championships, three Rose Bowl bids and three shots at a national championship.

But this time it was the Spartans' — Michigan's other Big Ten entry — turn to register the knockout blow. OSU



JEFF BREHM

KNOCKED BACK TO EARTH — The ball isn't the only thing going thud as Cedric Henry bats a ball intended for OSU's Dee Miller to the ground. Ohio State's loss to Michigan State shocked the college football world and left the Buckeyes again wondering what might have been.

coach John Cooper was left to try to pick up the pieces.

"I just got through telling our football team we'll find out what we're made of now," Cooper said. "We'll try to regroup this week, go to Iowa and try to win that game."

"Then we'll come back here and play Michigan, and obviously Michigan will be the best football team we'll play this year."

Ohio State committed five turnovers in the loss, paving the way for MSU's upset. Quarterback Joe Germaine, a

Buckeye hero coming off an unprecedented four straight 300-yard passing games, found himself as the unlikely goat after his two fumbles led to key MSU field goals and his interception with 1:12 left sapped OSU's last gasp.

"We're very disappointed, and we have a reason to be," said Germaine, who was sacked a season-high five times. "We felt we had a great team this year, and I still feel that we do."

"But right now we can do one of two things. We can learn from this, go on and finish the season strong, or tuck

our tail, put everything in the bag and do that."

"We're going to find out what we're made of."

The Buckeyes (8-1, 5-1 Big Ten) fell from first to seventh in both the ESPN/USA Today coaches poll and The Associated Press media poll. More important, the Buckeyes were expected to tumble at least that far when the Bowl Championship Series rankings —

Continued On Page 10

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OPINION

Damage Control, Please Report

If you care enough about Ohio State — and particularly Ohio State football — to pick up or subscribe to our newspaper, I feel bad for you today.

You have my sympathy and my condolences.

As our commander-in-chief would say, "I feel your pain."

I am writing this column just over one day after OSU's devastating defeat at the hands of Michigan State, and I must admit I am still somewhat in a state of shock over the developments.

Having said that, I will try to articulate some of what I am feeling on a variety of topics:

• **The offensive play-calling at crunch time** — It's funny, I didn't hear many complaints prior to the Michigan State game about how OSU's play-calling was unimaginative or vanilla. I guess when you're rolling up 510 yards every week everybody is on your side.

Yet some people say they were looking for Joe Hollis in the press box late in this game (we know he wasn't there because that was his Arkansas State team that got torched by Louisiana Tech).

They say it was shades of Michigan in 1996 and Michigan in '97 with all of the running plays on OSU's next-to-last drive. Then, as OSU neared the goal line, there was too much passing. Maybe, they think, a draw play, a sweep or a swing pass would have gotten the ball into the end zone.

I agree to an extent, especially about the ill-fated "all running play" drive. It's like I said a year ago when OSU had a first down at the Michigan 40 and went to the Pepe Pearson well once too often. After setting it up so well, they never pulled the trigger, went play-action and threw one toward the goal line.

I don't have many problems with what happened on the final drive at the MSU 15. Mike Jacobs and, ultimately, John Cooper decided to put the ball in Joe Germaine's hands and let him try to find David Boston and Dee Miller. But two would-be touchdowns were batted away and a third was intercepted.

• **The game was lost** — It's my humble opinion that this game was lost up front — on both sides of the ball.

For all the stunting and blitzing, OSU's front seven is still trying to locate Bill Burke. He had five, six, seven seconds at some points to find receivers.

On the receiving end, Ahmed Plummer, Antoine Winfield and others looked bad for giving up big plays. But, I'm sorry, covering receivers for several weeks on end and nobody pressures the quarterback is not in their job description.

On the other side of the ball, Michigan State was pumped up. The Spartans defensive line was more than OSU could handle. To steal a Bobby Knight line, just who in the heck is Julian Peterson, and why isn't he playing at Ohio State?

Germaine looks bad with the fumbles — OK, he should have dumped the one — but he needed some help. At one point, ABC went to its obligatory Florida State-oblivious-Germane montage to draw comparisons.

• **Breaks go the other way** — It's outlined throughout this edition, but it's hard to expect to win a game when literally every meaningful break goes against you.

You name it, it went MSU's way in the second half.

• **The crowd wasn't loud** — I have been on record for chastising the Ohio Stadium crowds in the past. Several people whom I trust told me the crowd made no noise as MSU mounted its comeback.

ABC's Dan Fouts termed the "Shoe" a

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

(Part 1)

with

Steve Helwag

great place for visiting teams to play because there is no noise."

I will stop short, however — and you can hold your letters — of blasting the crowd at this game. Ohio State made blunders that would make a pee-wee football team proud. The Buckeyes, it is my contention, took their own crowd out of this game.

I'm looking for both the Buckeyes and the crowd to rebound at the next home game.

• **The bowl picture** — Honestly, Ohio State could go to any one of five bowls — the Citrus, Sugar, Orange, Rose or, yes, even the Fiesta.

We could debate the possibilities until the cows come home.

Let's just say this: Heaven and earth have to move for OSU to reach the Fiesta Bowl. We'll know much more about this one after Michigan plays Wisconsin, Kansas State tackles Nebraska and Tennessee plays Arkansas Nov. 14.

If OSU wins out and somebody beats Wisconsin, the Buckeyes will likely be in the Rose Bowl. I know, it's not where they wanted to go. But beggars can't be choosers.

If Wisconsin and OSU both win out, UW could draw into the Fiesta Bowl and OSU would go to the Rose. If an unbeaten UW team doesn't qualify for the Fiesta through the BCS, the Badgers would get the Rose and OSU would likely be back in the Sugar or at the Orange.

A loss to Michigan could send OSU hurtling out of the sky to the Citrus, a free fall that fans of last year's Penn State team would recognize.

• **The future** — I know, it's hard to even think about 1999 when this year — the year everybody pinpointed as the one — has gone down the tubes.

And I wish I had something pleasant to reassure you that Ohio State will at least be in the title hunt next year. But I can't.

OSU will lose both quantity and quality after this season. Newcomers at quarterback, both wide receiver spots, tight end, linebacker and in the secondary will have to step up quickly.

Steve Bellisari is the morning line favorite to replace Germaine, although nothing is etched in stone. I see no wide receivers — OK, maybe Reggie Germany — ready to become steady threats. The newcomers on defense are also largely untested because, even in a year where OSU has dominated its opponents, the backups have hardly played.

I may be offering a pessimistic viewpoint and, it should be noted, players like Nail Diggs will rise from obscurity to become the next Dee Millers or Jerry Rudzinskis. But I don't see many David Bostons — or Andy Katzenmoyers-in-waiting on that sideline.

Ohio State lost serious star power after 1995 and still contended for the national title in '96, so nothing is out of the realm of possibility.

But I think we may have to face reality that this was OSU's best shot at going all the way.

• **The coach's future** — I am like you. I have heard the rumors. Everything from three more years to gone after this season, win or lose. There is even one making the rounds that OSU's operatives are already searching.

But it's my position currently that this is Cooper's call and Cooper's call alone — unless he pulls a you-know-who and continues jerking facemasks like he did Nate Clements' after his personal foul.

And, honestly, I think it should be that way. Read this carefully: He has earned that right.

I've said this time and time again: Do you want to end up like Oklahoma, constantly recycling coaches and getting nowhere? Or do you want to stay the course, stay in the hunt and hope the Buckeyes break through sometime soon?

But some will still say he faces a must-win situation when Michigan arrives in town on Nov. 21. Who knows, they may be on to something.

Other Odds 'N Ends

• I do not like to criticize OSU's collection of uniforms known as the Red Coats. I know they have a thankless job, so anything I say here needs to be construed as constructive criticism.

Why is it so hard to allow people into St. John Arena's mezzanine and balcony to watch the Skull Session? I understand it is important to regulate traffic so those seated can enjoy the show. But this isn't exactly the opera.

Also, why isn't the balcony fully open — every stairway and every seat — to serve as overflow?

And another thing, seat license holders and suite owners at the Schottenstein Center paid huge sums of money to help erect that new palace. Yet, the paint isn't dry and I'm already fielding complaints from people on how they can't go here, aren't allowed to go there.

When people pay money for something, they want service with a smile. If that means hiring all new people to work the arena, then so be it. What worked at St. John Arena, somewhat effectively I might add, will not work at The Schott, especially when they roll out the red carpet downtown for "arena patrons" in a few years.

You can put a Red Coat in a maroon vest, but without proper training you have not accomplished much. Don't get me wrong, most of these people are the most devoted bunch of OSU backers you will ever meet. But a few bad apples sometimes spoil the bunch.

• **Parking at the new arena** is a complete disaster. One reporter said it took him 40 minutes to get from Kenny and Lane into an arena lot a half-mile away.

Once you got near the building, an OSU police officer stationed at Fred Taylor and Arena, staring at a half-empty lot, had the gall to say it was full and waved us by. Maybe I missed a meeting, but if I have a pass for a lot and it's half-empty, I expect to be able to park in it. Again, we go back to service with a smile.

I guess those attending arena events should be forewarned: Go early, expect to stay late and/or use the Ackerman exit to the new Fred Taylor Drive or prepare for major hassles.

All in all — and again, this is constructive criticism — we have to expect that OSU needs time to work out a few kinks. Everybody concentrated on getting the building done, they had no time to sit down and plan how they would handle actual events.

That's OK, I'll do them a favor and let them know how they're doing from time to time.

• This is just the first installment of Editor's Notebook in this edition.

My annual attempt to outline OSU's men's basketball fortunes is on pages 42-43. See you at the Oakland game, and I don't mean the Raiders.

COVER STORY: SACKED AND SHOCKED

Buckeyes Can Only Regroup At This Point

Continued From Page 1

the formula used to pick the top two teams for the Fiesta Bowl — were released at midday Nov. 9.

"I don't know if we have a chance to win the national championship," Cooper said. "I mean a lot of things have to happen for us to get back in the Fiesta Bowl picture. There's no question about that. Tennessee's got to lose, Kansas State's got to lose, UCLA's got to lose."

"I don't know how far we'll drop this week."

Anatomy Of A Defeat

A sellout crowd of 93,595 watched and gasped as the Buckeyes essentially self-destructed before their eyes.

Ohio State twice held two-touchdown leads, at 17-3 in the first quarter and at 24-9 after safety Damon Moore returned an interception 73 yards for a touchdown in the third.

But besides Germaine's three turnovers, OSU cornerback Nate Clements was struck with an MSU punt while trying to block for return man David Boston. The Spartans recovered the loose ball and drove for a touchdown. Then, moments later, tailback Michael Wiley fumbled. That set up a 49-yard Paul Edinger field goal, one of his five on the day, which allowed Michigan State to keep the pressure on.

"When we started making some plays in the second quarter, the players started thinking they could win," said MSU coach Nick Saban, whose team was a 28-point underdog. "We pretty much dominated play after that except for the interception they returned for a touchdown."

Aside from his team's miscues,



JEFF BREHM

DEFLATING DEFEAT — OSU safety Gary Berry (1) leaves the Ohio Stadium field as Michigan State players and cheerleaders celebrate in the background. The Spartans ended OSU's run as the nation's top team, downing the Buckeyes 28-24.

Cooper noted how Michigan State had enough talent — namely quarterback Bill Burke, who victimized OSU's stellar pass defense for 323 yards — to pull off the upset.

"This week I thought Michigan State was a good football team," he said. "I thought we'd have to take their best shot, and I think we took their best shot today. It was good enough for them to win the game. I don't have any clue how far we'll drop."

Although Ohio State was judged as the nation's best team coming in, the players admitted that doubts had crept into their minds.

"As a player, it's always in the back of your mind," said tailback Joe Montgomery. "But you never think about it."

"But we were the No. 1 team in the country. You can't sit here and get nervous about it. Play the football game."

"We've played great up until this ball game. I still think we played a decent ball game, but in the end I think they wanted it a little bit more than we did."

Dealing With The Pain

After so many close calls over the past five seasons, this was supposed to be the year Cooper and the Buckeyes finally ascended to the top spot and stayed there for the duration.

But this 60-minute dose of reality will likely leave OSU on the outside looking in. The Buckeyes even need help — either Michigan or Penn State must knock off unbeaten Wisconsin — to get a piece of a Big Ten title.

"All losses hurt, but I think this one especially hurt us," Germaine said. "It was quiet after the game, and it should be. We had great feelings and aspirations for this team."

Offensive tackle Tyson Walter summed up the disaster.

"It's a shock, and it hurts more than any fan will ever know," he said. "It happens. It's part of the game. It's what makes winning so enjoyable."

For OSU's 15 seniors, it was hard to mask the disappointment.

"We all dream of winning the national championship," said tight end John Lumpkin, who hauled in a 41-yard touchdown pass. "All dreams don't come true. Hopefully the young guys will learn something from this."

"I'm a senior and this was my last shot at it. If anyone should be real sad, it should be me. This is three times since I've been here that we've been in position to win it all and then we lose a game. One

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COVER STORY: SACKED AND SHOCKED

day Ohio State is going to pull through."

Added classmate Dee Miller, "This one hurts the most. We had everything lined up. We didn't play well today. We were outcoached and outplayed. They wanted it more than we did today."

Another senior related the defeat to the loss of his scholarship due to Prop 48 rules several years ago.

"It's like I say, when somebody takes \$17,000 out of your bank account," Montgomery said, "you find out who that person was and you get PO'd about it."

Back To The Future

To a man, the Buckeyes say they must regroup from this calamity and focus on winning their final two games, Nov. 14 at Iowa and at home with Michigan on Nov. 21.

"We have to come back from this," Miller said. "We have a lot of seniors here. We have two more games left to play. We still have a Big Ten championship to play for. Hopefully something will happen to Wisconsin down the road and everything will be all right."

"Realistically, we are probably out of the national title scene. You want to leave a little bit of hope. But realistically, that's probably out of the picture."

"There are two ways we can go," Germaine added. "We'll see which way we go."

This is no time for the Buckeyes to back away from the challenge, Montgomery said.

"We're going to have to play aggressive and play physical," he said. "We need to play with a big-time attitude."

"There is a lot to still accomplish. What are we going to do, kick ourselves in the butt and go home and cry about it? We have two ball games left. We have to make the most of it."

"This will test the character of our football team. We'll see what happens Saturday."

Cooper was asked whether this

loss added more pressure to defeat Michigan, a school his OSU teams have beaten just once in 10 tries.

"Well, it's always important, obviously, and it makes it even more important now, I imagine, because if we don't beat Michigan, we've ruined what could be a great season," Cooper said.

"It could have been a fabulous season. We had a chance, as you know, to play for the national championship, and we probably now don't have that opportunity. But we can play for the Big Ten championship. We can play for a great year."

"But we've got to play better than we played today."

Now trailing several teams in the polls, OSU's Fiesta Bowl hopes seem severely limited. The Buckeyes would need several of the nation's top unbeaten teams, namely Kansas State, Tennessee and UCLA, to fall.

But the winner of the Nov. 21 Florida-Florida State game — a battle of two once-beaten teams — seems primed to capitalize first if that would happen.

If Ohio State can win out and somebody knocks off Wisconsin, the Buckeyes would likely be ticketed for the Rose Bowl as a Big Ten co-champ. But if the Badgers survive their next two games unscathed, OSU could be looking for an at-large bid to the Orange Bowl or Sugar Bowl.

At this point it appears a loss to Michigan could drop the Buckeyes from consideration for any of the four BCS bowls and leave them in Orlando for the Citrus Bowl.

"We can play for the championship, we can play for maybe the Rose Bowl or whatever comes if we win this league," Cooper said.

"I'm not exactly sure of what all can happen, but all we can do now, guys, is try to regroup and beat Iowa next week and then come back here and do something we haven't done in quite a while — that's beat Michigan."

Charting OSU's Biggest Upsets

Michigan State's 28-24 win over the then No. 1-ranked Ohio State Buckeyes Nov. 7 will go down among the biggest upset defeats in OSU history.

Ohio State was a 28-point favorite to dismantle the unranked Spartans. That may be the largest margin OSU has ever been favored by yet failed to at least win the game.

OSU football historian Jack Park detailed several other memorable upsets:

• **Michigan 24, Ohio State 12: Nov. 22, 1969, at Ann Arbor, Mich.** — The top-ranked Buckeyes were a 17-point favorite against No. 12 Michigan.

"I always felt that was the most agonizing and most difficult loss in Ohio State history," Park said. "That was Bo Schembechler's first year and that game broke Ohio State's record 22-game winning streak."

"It denied the Super Sophs their second consecutive national championship. Bo had his team mentally prepared to win that game."

Without a bowl to play in, OSU ended up 8-1 and ranked fourth nationally.

• **UCLA 23, Ohio State 10: Jan. 1, 1976, at Pasadena, Calif. (The Rose Bowl)** — The No. 1-ranked Buckeyes were favored by 20 points over the 11th-ranked Bruins, Park said.

"That was Archie Griffin's senior year," Park said. "Ohio State had beaten UCLA 41-20 earlier in the year and was all set to win the national title."

OSU finished 11-1 and ranked fourth.

• **Michigan 13, Ohio State 9: Nov. 23, 1996, in Columbus** — The No. 2-ranked Buckeyes were favored by 17 points prior to this loss to No. 21 Michigan.

"That was a game Ohio State lost in the first half when it settled for three field goals and a 90-yard punt," Park said.

Michigan receiver Tai Streets capitalized on a slip

by OSU corner Shawn Springs to score on a 69-yard touchdown.

"Michigan had taken away OSU's bid for the Rose Bowl and a national championship with a (31-23) win there the year before," Park said.

"Ohio State had already sewn up the Rose Bowl before the Michigan game in '96, but I think to most fans that wasn't as important as finally beating Michigan. And this was a Michigan team that had lost four times, including one to Purdue."

The Buckeyes rebounded with their Rose Bowl win over Arizona State to finish 11-1 and ranked second.

• **Illinois 9, Ohio State 7: Nov. 22, 1919, in Columbus** — This season-ending upset cost OSU a third straight Western Conference title.

"This was Chic Harley's last game at Ohio State, and he was the guy who most feel first put Ohio State football on the map," Park said. "He had come in and won everything for three years except this last game."

"Ohio State was ahead 7-6, but Illinois kicked a field goal with eight seconds left to win the game at old Ohio Field."

• **Others Of Note** — Park also cited the 1977 Oklahoma game, won by the visiting Sooners 29-28 on Uwe von Schamann's 41-yard field goal with three seconds left, as well as Michigan State's 16-13 win in 1974 in East Lansing.

In that game, the top-ranked Buckeyes appeared to win the game on a Champ Henson touchdown run as time expired. But after a 25-minute debate — including a discussion with Big Ten commissioner Wayne Duke — the officials penalized OSU for illegal procedure and negated the touchdown.

— Steve Helwagen

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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE

Upset In The 'Shoe

Heavy Underdog MSU Devastates Top-Ranked OSU

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Michigan State, despite a handful of enigmatic performances this season, came into Ohio Stadium Nov. 7 as a dangerous, talented team.

"We came in here with the attitude that we were the squirts in the neighborhood who had to go up and pick a fight with the bully — not that we wanted to pick one," said Michigan State coach Nick Saban.

"It was on the schedule, so we had to do it."

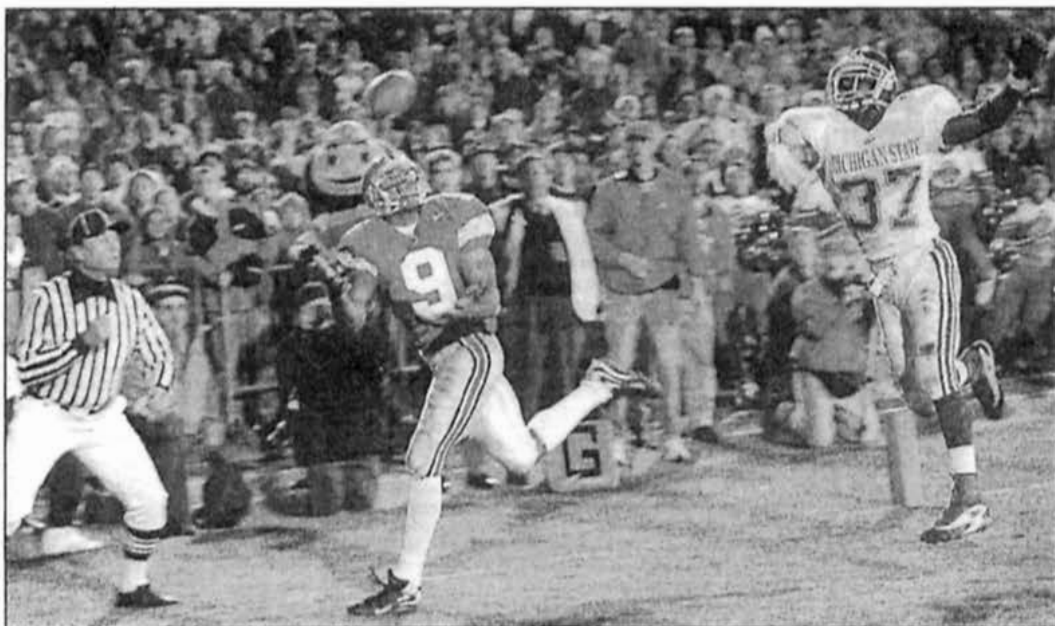
Saban's Spartans did it, all right.

Michigan State, a four-touchdown underdog, registered one of the all-time upsets in the history of the Horseshoe as it toppled top-ranked Ohio State 28-24 before 93,595 stunned fans.

"They outcoached us, they outplayed us, their defense was better than ours, their offense was better than ours, their kicking game was better than ours and, of course, they came away with the victory," OSU coach John Cooper said in assessing the loss that likely will kill any national championship hopes for his Buckeyes (8-1, 5-1 Big Ten).

MSU (5-4, 3-2) twice trailed by margins of two touchdowns. But the Spartans rallied and more than held their own on both sides of the ball. MSU scored the upset by capitalizing on four key OSU fumbles and stopping an OSU scoring threat at the 15-yard line with a little over a minute to play to score the win.

"It was obviously a great win for Michigan State University," Saban said. "I'm very proud of the way our players competed



JEFF BRIDGMAN

WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN — OSU split end David Boston (9) tries to collect a Joe Germaine pass in the end zone after Michigan State's Cedric Henry deflected it. The ball fell incomplete on this first down play with 1:29 left. Three plays later, MSU had turned OSU away and preserved a 28-24 win.

today.

"Ohio State's got a great football team. Our players competed. We got behind in the game, and I think it showed a lot of character and maturity on their part to play their way back into the game after the first quarter. They played at the end of the game to win it."

All season, quarterback Joe Germaine has been one of the key cogs in the OSU machine. But his string of 300-yard passing

performances was stopped at four. His two fumbles led to important MSU field goals, and his interception to Spartans cornerback Renaldo Hill with 1:12 left killed OSU's comeback bid.

"We had some opportunities," said Germaine, who finished 16-of-34 passing for 239 yards. "We came very close. But we didn't take advantage of our opportunities and, in a game like this, that will beat you."

The Spartans pressured Germaine throughout the day, sacking him five times and hitting him on a number of other occasions. When he did have time, MSU's secondary was equal to the task.

"They had a great scheme," he said. "They challenged us with some bump-and-run coverage and they blitzed us. Overall, they outplayed us."

Cooper said. "Sometimes we didn't make the right adjustments, sometimes we didn't throw the right pass. You know, give them credit."

On the other side of the ball, Saban's devil-may-care attitude was more than apparent. While the Buckeyes limited MSU standout tailback Sedrick Irvin to 52 yards on 26 carries, largely untested quarterback Bill Burke made plays when he needed to.

Burke completed just 18 of 46 passes, but those passes went for 323 yards and a touchdown.

"We threw a bunch of passes and they defended a bunch of them, but we made a few plays," Saban said. "We made enough to win."

The Spartans averaged nearly 18 yards per catch, hitting eight plays for 20 or more yards against one of the nation's stingiest defenses. Burke did most of his damage with lanky receivers Plaxico Burress (four catches, 125 yards) and Gari Scott (six for 88).

"They made some big plays," said OSU cornerback Ahmed Plummer, who had a busy night covering the large MSU

receivers. "I give them credit for it. We found ourselves in some positions we didn't want to be in. They took advantage of it."

As The Ball Bounces

Ohio State held comfortable leads of 17-3 after one quarter and 24-9 early in the third.

But things began to unravel when an MSU punt hit OSU's Nate Clements while he was trying to block for punt returner David Boston. After a mad scramble, MSU's Scott Ehrnsberger recovered the loose ball at the Spartans' 49.

With new life, the Spartans moved 51 yards in five plays to their first touchdown. Burke hit Scott for a 28-yard gain before hooking up with Lavarie Richardson on the 23-yard TD pass over Plummer. Paul Edinger's PAT kick was wide, but the Spartans had cut the lead to 24-15 with 6:02 left in the third quarter.

Ohio State then held the ball for just two plays before tailback Michael Wiley, who finished with 100 yards on 22 carries, was hit by MSU's T.J. Turner. Pete Govens recovered Wiley's fumble for the Spartans, who were in business at the OSU 34.

Although MSU failed to pick up a first down, Edinger's 49-yard field goal, which barely cleared the crossbar, trimmed OSU's lead to 24-18 with 4:55 left in the third.

As the third quarter wore into the fourth, the Spartans earned their next touchdown. MSU put together the longest scoring drive against the Buckeyes of the season, going 92 yards in eight plays. Burke was the main culprit again, going to Scott for a 12-yard gain, Burress for 37 yards, and tight end Chris Baker for 23 more down to the OSU 12.

Three plays later Irvin went over left tackle, taking OSU linemen Joe Brown and Mike Collins with him, on a 3-yard touchdown run that gave MSU its first lead at 25-24 with 14:20 left.

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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE

Just over three minutes later, things went from bad to worse for Ohio State. On third-and-3 at the MSU 47, Germaine was hit by Spartan end Julian Peterson and fumbled. MSU's Josh Shaw picked up the loose ball and returned it 22 yards to the OSU 18.

"I was trying to do too much on that play," Germaine said. "That's the play that really shot us in the foot. That gave them the momentum. It's my fault. Next time I just have to throw it out of bounds. All I can do is just learn from it and go from there."

Again, MSU failed to pick up a first down. But Edinger's 42-yard field goal attempt was true and the Spartans now had a 28-24 cushion with 9:26 left.

"Julian stripping that ball from Joe was the difference in the game because that gave us the field goal that gave us a four-point lead and made them have to score a touchdown to beat us," Saban said.

Ironically, Peterson was playing in place of starter Robaire Smith, who suffered a broken fibula in the first half. He ended up with two sacks and three tackles-for-loss.

"Peterson made some great plays today," Saban said. "He had to play almost the entire game when Robaire got hurt."

Ohio State had two possessions after that point but could not put the ball in the end zone to reclaim the lead.

On the first one, OSU kept the ball exclusively on the ground, mixing Wiley and backup Joe Montgomery. The strategy worked to a point as OSU picked up 55 yards in 12 plays. But on fourth-and-1 at the MSU 26, Montgomery slammed into the middle of the line and Turner, Courtney Ledyard and Sorie Kanu turned him back for no gain.

"When I saw the free safety (Kanu) come

up, I knew it was going to be hard," Montgomery said of the play that gave MSU possession with 3:33 left. "Mike (Wiley) said nobody came off on the Mike (middle) line-backer. I'm already six yards deep, so it's going to be kind of hard."

MSU picked up a first down on the ensuing possession, but the Buckeyes eventually forced a punt with 1:39 left. Boston returned the kick 26 yards and the Buckeyes were in business at their own 49-yard line.

Ohio Stadium was rocking as visions of Germaine's Rose Bowl heroics from two years prior danced in the heads of the OSU faithful. He drilled passes of 16 yards to Boston and 20 more to John Lumpkin, giving the Buckeyes a first down at the OSU 15.

Although Ohio State had exhausted all of its timeouts on defense, Saban stopped the clock himself to regroup with 1:29 left.

"When we were playing zone, they went through us like Grant took Richmond," Saban said. "When they got it to the 15, we knew we had to stiffen up and put the pressure on them. Our corners came through with flying colors."

Germaine tried to pick on MSU's Cedric Henry first, going to Boston in the end zone on first down. Henry batted that pass away. On second down, Germaine threw behind Boston incomplete.

Now it was Hill's turn. He batted down a crossing pass to Dee Miller at the goal line. Finally, on fourth down he stepped in front of Miller and intercepted Germaine's floater at the MSU 2 to end the OSU threat.

"I had to throw it earlier than I wanted to, so I had to put some air under it and let him try and run under it," Germaine said. "He made a good play on it. That's just how the game goes."

Miller added, "It was a post corner route. He had been getting some pressure all day and the timing wasn't there today. That showed on that last play."

"The ball was underthrown. That was basically it."

Nobody was happier than Saban to see his corners stand up to the test against OSU's vaunted passing attack.

"They went at the two corners four times in a row," Saban said. "We full blitzed on every one of those plays. We played bump-and-run. Cedric knocked down two and Renaldo had the next two. Those two guys did a great job to save the game at the end."

MSU took over at its own 2 and needed to simply run two plays to kill the remaining 1:12.

Fast Start For Naught

The Buckeyes felt that if they could get MSU down, the Spartans would fold. After all, that's what happened in MSU's previous losses to Oregon and Michigan.

But despite grabbing a 17-3 lead, the Spartans never gave in.

"When you're backed into a foxhole and nobody expects you to win, you can play loose and make some plays," Burke said.

OSU opened the scoring on Dan Stultz's 20-yard field goal with 12:26 left in the first quarter. That play was set up by Germaine's 35-yard sideline pass to Wiley.

MSU answered with Edinger booting a 33-yard field goal to make it 3-3 with 8:12 left in the first.

Ohio State then jumped ahead 10-3 as Germaine hit a wide-open Lumpkin down the middle of the field on a 41-yard TD with 6:25 left in the first.

The Buckeyes capitalized on an MSU turnover when cornerback Antoine Winfield

blitzed Burke, forced a fumble and recovered it at the MSU 12-yard line. Four plays later, Wiley vaulted over the top for the score from one yard out, making it 17-3 with 39 seconds left in the first.

Edinger's 43-yard field goal with 13:31 to play in the half and 22-yard field goal with 11:22 left led to a 17-9 OSU advantage at halftime.

The Buckeyes extended their lead to 24-9 after safety Damon Moore intercepted a Burke pass and returned it 73 yards for a touchdown with 9:51 left in the third.

Game Notes

- The loss snapped OSU's 11-game home winning streak dating to the 1996 Michigan game.

- MSU improved to 3-12-1 in games against the nation's No. 1-ranked team. One of the other wins came against the Buckeyes, a 16-13 decision in East Lansing that dropped OSU from No. 1 to No. 4 in November 1974.

- The Spartans' other win over a No. 1-ranked team was also notable. Prior to this game, MSU was the last unranked team to defeat a No. 1, disposing of Michigan in 1990.

- OSU's record as the No. 1-ranked team dropped to 51-8-1 (.858). The loss ended OSU's nine-week stint as the No. 1 team — the second-longest tenure in the top spot in OSU history.

- OSU faced a fourth-and-39 predicament late in the first half. The Buckeyes dug that hole as a Germaine screen pass to full-back Matt Keller lost eight yards. OSU was then penalized five yards for having an ineligible receiver downfield. After a second-down incompletion, Germaine was sacked for a 16-yard loss.

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Miscues Abound As MSU Upends Buckeyes

The signs were there all season. Fumbles here and there, penalties in crucial situations, an inability to protect the passer.

It was all there, out in the open. But even so, Ohio State players and fans never saw this one coming.

Their dream turned into a nightmare. The Buckeyes became their own worst enemy, limiting themselves offensively and failing to convert on all but two of their third-down chances. OSU was also hampered by four fumbles, all recovered by Michigan State.

That was a microcosm of OSU's woes and a sign that, as OSU head man John Cooper is so fond of saying, "Things don't catch up with you until they catch up with you."

OSU had been churning out 500-yard games the way Steven Spielberg turns out Oscar winners, but this day was different as the Buckeyes finished with just 353 yards. Things were off-kilter, some caused by Michigan State and some by Ohio State's own hand.

"We didn't get our rhythm going after the first quarter," offensive coordinator Mike Jacobs said. "The second quarter we had some opportunities, but we gave up some sacks. We came out in the second half and go three-and-out the first possession, and it was strange after that. We intercept it and run it back for a score, then they punt and it hits our kid in the back. That's an odd situation."

Even more odd was the fact OSU knew Michigan State was going to blitz, yet seemed powerless to stop the Spartans. MSU pinned its ears back and got to Joe Germaine five times, once causing a fumble that resulted in the game's final points, a 42-yard field goal by Paul Edinger.

"There was nothing we hadn't seen," Jacobs said. "It may have looked like we hadn't seen it, but we knew they were going to come with the free safety blitz, which they did repeatedly. We knew that they'd take a blitz attitude on us. We didn't make very many third-down conversions today."

INSIDE THE OFFENSE with Jeff Rapp

Michigan State coach Nick Saban has seen his team go through tribulations and exultations, so he didn't quite know which group would show up.

But when he saw the Buckeyes open the game throwing the football, he put his plan into motion.

"We played like we had nothing to lose," Saban said. "We blitzed the quarterback and tried to pressure him. I think we affected Joe a little bit in the second quarter. That helped us a lot."

The Buckeyes had been better in recent weeks about picking up the blitz, but Michigan State was relentless in its pressure.

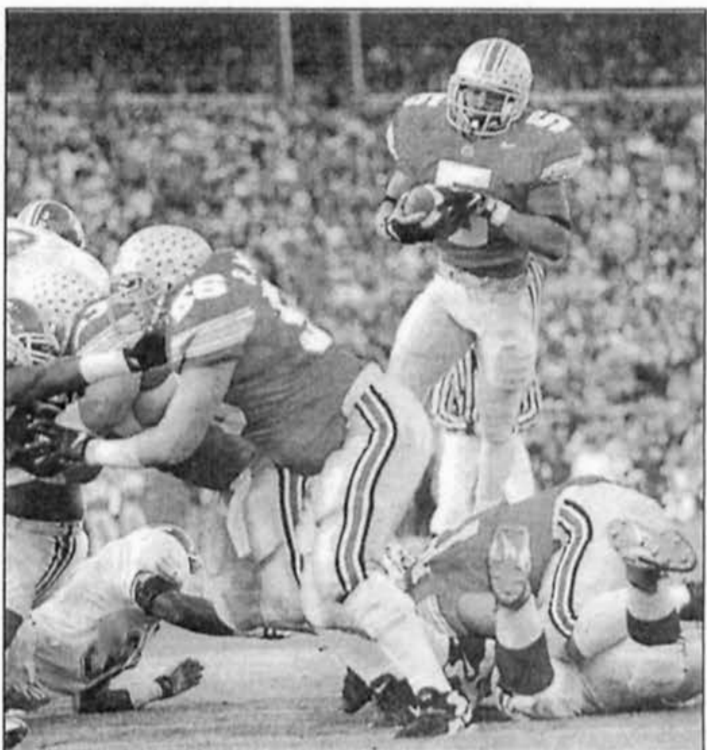
"They're going to blitz," tight end John Lumpkin said. "We've been throwing the ball so much against people that they're going to try to stop that. It's our job to pick up the blitzes, and on occasions we didn't do that. We didn't sight adjust, and some things happened to us and we gave up sacks."

Especially big was Spartan reserve Julian Peterson, in the game because starter Robaire Smith suffered a broken leg in the first half. Peterson had nine tackles, all solos, three for lost yardage and two sacks. He also caused two Germaine fumbles, including the one that turned the game.

"We knew about him, but Robaire is who we prepared for," Cooper said. "Our linemen were aware of him."

Nearly Awoke The Echoes

As Ohio State's final drive unfolded and the Buckeyes trailed by four, flashbacks to a foggy evening in Pasadena were evident. Players spoke about it, knowing they had been in a situation similar to this against Arizona State. They truly thought the outcome would be the



SOARING FOR SIX— OSU tailback Michael Wiley leaps into the air on a 1-yard touchdown run as teammates Rob Murphy (56) and Tyson Walter (77) provide an opening. Wiley finished the game with 100 yards rushing.

same.

"We knew we had been up against it before," Germaine said. "We thought about it, but it really wasn't the same situation."

Germaine threw six passes on the final drive against MSU, the first two complet-

ed for first downs. On first-and-10 from the MSU 15, Germaine's pass to Boston on a flag route was overthrown. Second down was also to Boston, also incomplete.

On that down, there were some questions about OSU's play selection. A draw might have worked, especially since the Spartans were being so aggressive and were looping their linemen outside. With over a minute to play, even a stuff on a running play would have left plenty of time to go for the end zone.

A pass over the middle on third down was behind Miller and knocked away by Renaldo Hill, bringing up the crucial fourth-down play.

The pass again went to Miller, who ran his third consecutive post corner route. Hill stepped in front of Miller and picked off the pass, sealing the win.

Miller was a little unhappy his number wasn't called on first down because he was basically uncovered.

"Wide open the first time we ran it, but we ran it again and he caught on," Miller said.

OSU was inside the MSU 30 twice in the fourth quarter but came away with zero points.

"We had some opportunities," Germaine said. "We came close, but we didn't take advantage of our opportunities. In a game like this, that's going to beat you."

Running On Empty

Though the statistics say Michael Wiley rambled for 100 yards on 22 carries, it may have been the quietest 100 in Ohio Stadium history.

Wiley fumbled once and, aside from a

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25-yard jaunt in the first quarter, wasn't assertive when picking a hole. It didn't help that his line was getting manhandled by Michigan State's front, but all the same, it wasn't a game to remember.

Turning in another solid performance was Joe Montgomery, who broke off 41 yards on 11 carries. He was stopped for no gain on a fourth-and-1 on the Buckeyes' next-to-last drive, turning the ball over to the Spartans. He had been on the bench for much of the time previous to that drive.

If he was bummed about it, he sure wasn't letting on.

"During the course of the game I'm not going to sit there and bug the coaches," Montgomery said. "I rely on the coaches to make great decisions. I can't sit there and bug them while the game was going on."

He was very succinct when asked about the fourth-down carry.

"Nobody blocked the free safety," Montgomery said. Actually, linebackers T.J. Turner and Courtney Ledyard came in unfettered on the backside, smacking Montgomery just short of the marker. But it wasn't the who that mattered. It was the what, and in this case the what was OSU turning the ball over on downs.

Ohio State finished with just 114 ground yards, and though 53 of 60 lost yards came on sacks, the guys up front weren't too thrilled with their day.

Prior to Montgomery getting stuffed, the Buckeyes stayed exclusively on the ground in that drive, churning out 11 straight rushing plays.

"We got a chance to drive it down and take over," tackle Tyson Walter said. "We were confident we could do it, but maybe we went to the well one too many times. I don't know. It was good play-calling if everyone executes their assignments."

Third And Forever

Championship teams convert when necessary, and that's one reason Ohio State is sitting with a 1 in the loss column. OSU converted just 2 of 15 third downs, giving Michigan State's defense more and more hope as the game wore on.

"We didn't convert third-down situations and we turned the ball over," Jacobs said. "We also had a couple penalties that hurt us, so those things we've been talking about all year caught up with us today."

This was the first time all season OSU had been outgained in yardage, so some of the onus has to fall on the defense. Top-notch stop units don't allow foes to drive 92 yards in the fourth quarter.

That said, it was up to the Buckeyes to punch the ball in when it counted. They didn't.

"We were not very consistent," Jacobs said. "On the outside, if you're getting a lot of pressure sometimes you can't shake free. We had to do a better job winning some of those battles."

A lot of factors played into the defeat, but a big one has to be the play of the offensive line.

Machine-like the past four games, OSU's front broke down on numerous occasions, allowing white jerseys to get to Germaine well before he was able to

throw a precise pass.

Walter said he wasn't sure what the real problem was, only that the Buckeyes were dazed by MSU's repeated defensive success.

"I don't know what the difference was," Walter said. "Anyone who tells you at this moment that they know what the difference was is a liar. It's too early to tell. We're out on the field and every time we came off we're looking at each other and saying, 'What's going on?' We don't know what happened. We got blindsided by this."

It was, simply put, a Spartans team that came in ready but was also allowed to stay in the game by OSU's repeated miscues.

"The line was coming real hard," Miller said. "They were playing deep Cover-2, the corners and the safety. He (Saban) had his club all on one page, and it showed today."

As the Buckeyes were seemingly seizing momentum, leading 24-9 almost midway through the third quarter, thoughts circulated that Michigan State might finally lie down. After all, the Spartans had quit against Oregon and Minnesota earlier this year, so why not now?

"We figured they were going to go away real early, like when we had a 17-point first quarter," Walter said. "From their history, we were surprised they hung with it. They've had an MO of giving up when the going gets rough, but they didn't. It's a big step for their program."



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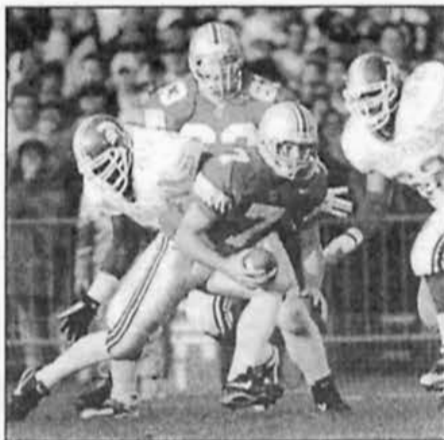
Michigan State coach Nick Saban, whose team was a 28-point underdog, on why games aren't played on paper: "Funny things happen in football, and that's why we play these games. When a team plays possessed and is inspired about what they can do ... we have good football players and they have good players; they probably have more than we do, but ours made enough plays today to win."

OSU cornerback Ahmed Plummer on how hard it will be to get back into the national title race: "Usually with losses this late in the season it's hard to jump back up there to the No. 1 spot. We can keep believing. We still have to play hard. We're still Ohio State Buckeyes. We can't hang our heads."

OSU linebacker Jerry Rudzinski also assessed the national picture: "It looks like the national champion might go undefeated, and we hate the fact that we might not be able to compete for that this year, but we've still got a chance to win the conference."

OSU quarterback Joe Germaine on his team's missed scoring opportunity after having a first down at the MSU 15 with 1:29 left: "We've been in positions like that before. We got close and had some momentum. We never doubted that we were going to do it. I guess you win some and you lose some."

OSU defensive end Rodney Bailey, who stopped MSU's Sedrick Irvin for a 3-yard loss to give the Buckeyes the ball back with 1:39 left: "I felt it was more than enough time for us to get the ball in the end zone. We did what we could."



JEFF BREYER

FIRST DOWN, OHIO — OSU quarterback Joe Germaine dives ahead for extra yardage as teammate Kurt Murphy (63) and a pair of Michigan State defenders look on.

OSU flanker Dee Miller said the Buckeyes appeared ready to score the game-winning touchdown before MSU's Renaldo Hill intercepted a fourth-down pass with 1:12 left: "The last play, that's what did it. Dave (Boston) had a big catch and Lump (John Lumpkin) had a big catch. I felt like we were about to put the ball into the end zone. Unfortunately, it didn't happen."

OSU tackle Tyson Walter credited the Spartans for not quitting after twice falling behind by two touchdowns: "We figured they were going to go away after our 17-point first quarter. Considering their past history, we were surprised they hung in there with it. They had an MO of giving up when the going gets rough. They didn't. That's a good step for their program."

MSU's Irvin on the win: "It just shows you that hard work pays off, believing in each other. There was no one person who made all the plays. It was a team effort. Nobody believed in us. Most people turned their backs on us."

Plummer said the Spartans earned the win: "They just outplayed us in every area of the ball game. We worked in practice — I don't think we took them lightly. It just so happened it was their day today."

Saban on MSU quarterback Bill Burke, who threw for 323 yards — one yard shy of his career high — in the upset win: "Bill had a great game today. We really planned to do the three series thing with the two quarterbacks. But Bill was doing a good job, so we stuck with it. He had an outstanding game."

OSU defensive coordinator Fred Pagac on the task at hand for the Buckeyes: "It's our job to come back next week. I think the character of our team will show then. We'll come back out and play, and try and win out the rest of the season."

Miller believes OSU will rebound from this defeat: "That's just going to have to do with the leadership. We have two more games and a bowl. We just have to be men and move on."

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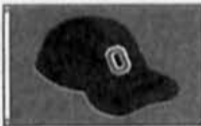
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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE

MSU Finds Way To Beat Stingy OSU Defense

Certainly a lot more than a game was lost when the Buckeyes fell at home to Michigan State. For starters, OSU was stripped of its No. 1 ranking, its undefeated season and, most likely, its shot at a national title.

But the Ohio State defense took a powerful blow to the gut as well. Fred Pagac's mighty defenders entered play as the only Division I team to not allow 20 points in a game this season, and most — including oddsmakers, who installed the Buckeyes as a four-touchdown favorite — figured that trend would continue.

Sure, the Spartans were dangerous and had a shifty running back in Sedrick Irvin, a mobile quarterback in Bill Burke and lanky receivers in Plaxico Burress and Gari Scott. But hadn't OSU proven it could handle such challenges week after week?

Delivering again and stopping all facets against a team that apparently had its antenna back up was what turned out to be too demanding.

"We gave a lot up today," Pagac said. "We didn't play very well. Credit them. I think their players played pretty well today. I think we shot ourselves in the foot a little bit, a roughing penalty, the ball hitting us in the head on the punt."

But more than the mistakes, OSU wasn't able to muster enough of a pass rush and fell to an old nemesis rarely seen in the Pagac era — the big play.

In fact, Michigan State produced eight plays of 20 yards or more on the day — all on passes — including a 23-yard Burke scoring strike to split end Lavaile Richardson that put MSU squarely back in the fray at 24-15.

Instead of trying to stay in the game by pounding Irvin, the Spartans employed a game plan that called for several deep passes with hope of hitting just enough. It was a tactic that couldn't be illustrated any better than the perusal of Burke's final statistics: 18-of-46, 323 yards, one touchdown and one interception.

INSIDE THE DEFENSE with Jeff Rapp

"I think they did a few things differently than what they've done before and it kind of surprised us a little bit, but I thought we prepared well for what we saw on film," OSU defensive end Brent Johnson said. "They capitalized on a few of our mistakes, and that's what gave them the edge."

"Everyone would love to go back, but that's what we were dealt today."

Burke, who hails from Warren, Ohio, made a crucial mistake when his lone interception was returned 73 yards for a touchdown by safety Damon Moore. But to his credit, he led MSU on four straight scoring drives after the Spartans recovered a punt that struck OSU blocker Nate Clements.

In that key stretch, Burke was dialed in.

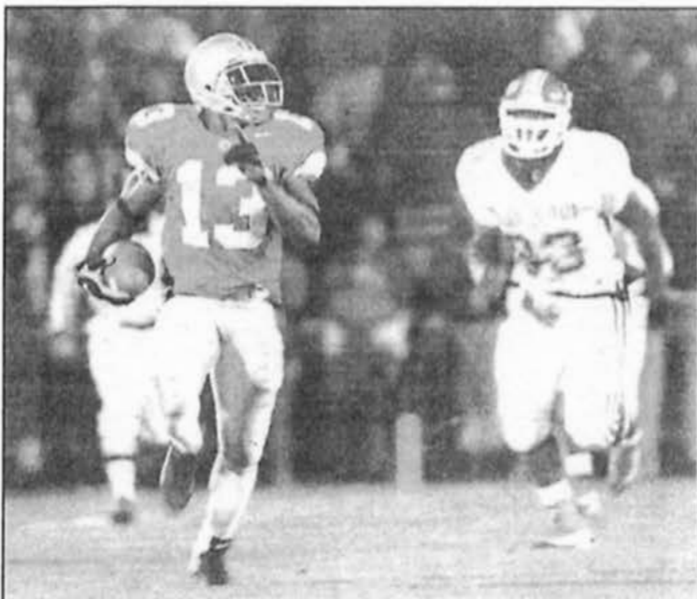
"It was a great deal of fun," he said. "The game and the stage couldn't have been any better for a quarterback or a passing game. We had some players who could make some plays, and we wanted to take advantage of that."

"Our offensive line did a good job of pass protection. Ohio State is still a solid defense. They were flying around and blitzing me a lot."

Burke Was Elusive Moving Target

Simply put, the MSU passing game wasn't supposed to be good enough to beat OSU. But the Spartans took OSU out of its element with some early connections to receivers, and the Buckeyes responded with more zone coverage and less blitzing than normal to keep sight of pass catchers.

"We were planning on them blitzing a



JEFF BROWN

DAMON DOING MOORE — Ohio State senior Damon Moore timed this play perfectly, stepping in front of Michigan State tight end Chris Baker and returning the interception 73 yards for Ohio State's final points in a 28-24 loss to the Spartans.

lot," MSU center Jason Strayhorn said. "They did blitz a lot, but not as much as we expected them to do. Everybody stayed on their man and did what they were supposed to do."

With less to worry about in the way of blitzes, the Michigan State line gained confidence as the game wore on and Burke did the rest, moving out of the pocket and eking out of trouble at just the right times.

"They moved the pocket on us and

went to a dash pattern, and they got some key blocks," Pagac said. "We gave them a little more time than we wanted to, and then we had some opportunities to tackle him and we just didn't get it done."

"He did a real good job of avoiding pressure, sidestepping us and making a few plays. In my mind, at least, there were five, six, seven different times we had a shot at him. We gave their receivers that much time to get open, and he hit them."

Defensive end Rodney Bailey shared in the frustration despite logging three tackles-for-loss.

"We're about there and we're just missing," he said. "They had some blocking schemes that countered our blitzes, but we just need to get to the quarterback no matter what."

"From my standpoint, I and we gave him too much time. We're just going to have to work on it."

With Burke buying all the extra time, he cashed in by waiting patiently for receivers to break off patterns and come free.

"Of course, that makes it very difficult," cornerback Ahmed Plummer said, "because now you have to be concerned with the quarterback rolling out and you have receivers just roaming around. That makes it even harder to cover."

OSU had success early on by bringing linebackers into the face of Burke. But the Buckeyes sacked the 6-5 lefty only one time, courtesy of OLB Jerry Rudzinski, and the MSU line gave a decent line of sight for the most part.

"Their line did a good job of picking up our stunts," Johnson said. "We were getting to him a little late. They were getting the ball off pretty quick, too. All of that added up."

The members of the defense weren't about to question a game plan that had worked so many times in the past, so they

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chalked it up to a lack of execution and a top-shelf day by the Spartans.

After all, OSU held Irvin, one of the top rushers in the conference, to 52 yards in 26 carries.

"We think that if we stop the run, we're going to win the game," Rudzinski said. "Today we did a decent job against the run, but (Burke) went out and just flat-out beat us when he had to. I give him credit, and he had some great talent around him."

"He came into the Horseshoe for the first time, stepped up and beat us."

DBs Can't Reach MSU Heights

With Antoine Winfield standing 5-9 and Plummer a listed 6-0, the Ohio State cornerbacks often find themselves looking up at opposing wideouts. But that's rarely become a factor in the last two seasons as Winfield has played at an All-American level and Plummer has come through with deflections and interceptions seemingly in every game he's been thoroughly tested.

But Pagac admitted concern with the MSU receivers, especially Scott (6-1) and the imposing Burress (6-6).

Scott, who burned OSU's secondary for a deep touchdown last season, finished with six catches for 88 yards while Burress, who actually dropped a couple of easy ones, amassed 125 yards on four over-the-top connections.

"They made some big plays, and I give them credit for it," said Plummer, the main defender on the Richardson score. "We just found ourselves in positions we didn't want to be in and they took advantage."

"We knew they were sound in the passing game, and they came out today and proved it."

Winfield and Plummer played sides or a particular man depending on the defensive call, and Michigan State often looked for Burress on fades when Winfield was the defender.

Moore, who tallied a team-high 11 tackles along with his TD, did his best to help out, but the touch of Burke and the lack of pressure by the front seven left the corners in tough spots.

"The defensive backs are the heart and soul of our defense," Rudzinski said. "They were last year and they are this year. Pass defense is a team defense. You need linebackers helping out, a good push from the defensive linemen, and the defensive backs doing the job. I don't think any one group played good enough to go out and win the game today."

"But they had some great skill people, maybe the best we've seen yet."

MSU Takes Long Saturday Drive

The defense was playing well enough to keep the Buckeyes in the lead until allowing Michigan State to forge an eight-play, 92-yard drive that produced a 25-24 lead. That was the longest such drive against OSU all season.

The Buckeyes actually allowed six drives of 75 or more yards last season, but only once did they let a team go over 90 yards of field for a score. That came in the opener with Wyoming on Aug. 28, 1997, as the Cowboys' only TD came off a 10-play, 93-yard march. The Buckeyes were understandably rusty in that game and were breaking in a defense that had lost starters Mike Vrabel, Matt Finkes, Luke Fickell, Greg Bellisari, Ryan Miller, Shawn Springs, Ty Howard and Rob Kelly.

Perhaps the most alarming defensive showing in the Pagac era came at Penn State in the middle of last season as the

Buckeye defenders couldn't wrap up running backs Curtis Enis and Aaron Harris in a 31-27 loss.

There had not been a performance close to that one — until now. The Buckeyes were sure-handed with Irvin

but whiffed on Burke repeatedly in the pocket and let MSU receivers slip away on occasion.

"It was pretty frustrating," Bailey said. "You want to balance it out and stop both facets of the game."



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Cooper Faces Music After Rare Home Defeat

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

COOPER: "It seemed like anything that could have happened to us today did happen to us, and like they say in coaching, in football it doesn't catch up with you until it catches up with you. It caught up with us today. Turnovers obviously were a big part of the ball game, particularly in the second half.

"They took the ball and went 92 yards for a touchdown against our defense, they made big plays — I thought their wide receivers did a great job in jump ball-type situations against

us — and offensively we did not do a very good job of handling the pressure. They brought pressure, pressure, pressure, particularly the last time we got the ball inside their red zone. They were coming after us every down with everybody, and you've got to make plays when that happens.

"You've got to give max protection and adjust your route, read their coverage and get the ball to the open guy, and we didn't do that.

"The kicking game was a factor in the game. The punt that hit our guy in the back, I really don't know what you do in that situation. It was a bad kick and our guy was trying to block and it hit him in the back and, of course, they caught the ball. That was a big play in the game."

Q: The last two drives of the game offensively, Joe Montgomery comes in and you pound it four or five plays in a row and you have about five minutes to go. Did you think about maybe going to play-action? And then on the last drive with about 1:30 left you had the ball on the 15-yard line, was there consideration after throwing it exclusively to go to play-action?

COOPER: "Well, that's real good second-guessing. Looking back now, I wish I would have done that because what we did didn't work. Obviously we thought about it, but we didn't have any timeouts left at the end of the ball game. We thought about running a sweep because they were blitzing everybody. I thought about a draw play even."

"But we thought we could get the ball to either David (Boston) or Dee Miller, and we had gone right down the field throwing the football. The series before, we made a decision that, hey, let's pound at them, and with fourth down and a half-yard to go we run our base play and they stuff us, so that's a case where we didn't do a very good job of handling them up front."

Q: What was the defensive mix-up when Randy (Homa) was coming off the field and Clinton (Wayne) was coming on and you had to take a timeout?

COOPER: "We went with the goal-line defense and we thought we had 12 people on the field and we did not. That was our mistake."

Q: Did they blitz that much from what you had seen?

COOPER: "No. They had blitzed some this year, but not as much as they did today. It's a situation where if they blitz and you pick it up, they don't blitz anymore. Obviously they're well coached and they're going to keep doing that."

"Sometimes we didn't make the right adjustments, sometimes we didn't throw the right pass. You know, give them credit."

Q: Was Joe (Germaine) shaken up at all? It looked like he was over on the sideline rubbing his head at one point.

COOPER: "I did not notice if he was shaken up or not. I didn't see him take any real hard shots. He could have been, but I didn't think he was during the game."

Q: The irony of throwing for 300 yards four straight games and today they throw for 300 yards, can you talk about that?

COOPER: "They made plays and we didn't. When we were blitzing them, they were throwing the ball down the field, and their wideouts made great plays against our defensive backs today."

"It seemed like we didn't have the ball at all in the third quarter. We make the interception for the touchdown and the next series I think the ball hit us in the back and they got the ball. Our defense was on the field almost the entire third quarter, yet we were lead-

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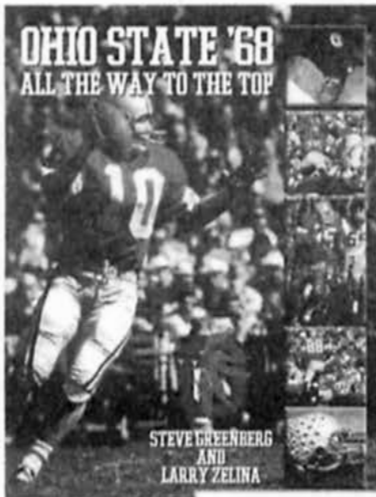
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ing in the ball game.

"The key play in the ball game, obviously, was when Joe Germaine fumbled the football there on the third-down play, and we were lucky they didn't pick the ball up and run it for a touchdown. I think Tyson Walter made a nice play and they end up kicking a field goal, and now we've got to score a touchdown to win the game and we weren't able to do that."

Q: How impressed were you with their offensive line?

COOPER: "I thought their offensive line did a pretty good job inside. We couldn't rush them inside, and I thought they did a good job of protecting the quarterback inside. They mixed it up, they got their quarterback outside quite a bit and ran some plays where they got the ball outside."

Q: Was any of their success today related at all to them making drastic changes in anything you did not expect?

COOPER: "No, I don't think so. They didn't do anything we didn't expect."

Q: Did you see (Julian) Peterson that much, 98? Had he shown up that much in scout films you had seen? It seemed he made play after play.

COOPER: "Today he probably played his best ball game. Their best lineman (Robaire Smith) got hurt early in the ball game and went out, and sometimes that'll fire you up. "Again, we let them live too long.

Instead of putting them away when we had some opportunities, we let them live, and of course it caught up to us."

Q: What are your thoughts on their defense?

COOPER: "I thought their defense did a good job. Again, they kept us off-balance. They did a lot of blitzing and we did not execute as well today as we

have in past ball games."

Q: Did you sense any of this coming at all in practice this week, or were you sharp in practice?

COOPER: "No, I thought we had

some good practice sessions this week. I don't think it had anything to do with lack of preparation or lack of practice or anything like that. We just didn't make plays."

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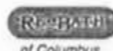


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The Numbers Game

Michigan State 28, Ohio State 24

Nov. 7, 1998 — Ohio Stadium; Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
MICHIGAN STATE	3	6	9	10	- 28
OHIO STATE	17	0	7	0	- 24

First Quarter

OSU — Stultz, 20 field goal 12:26; 8 plays, 72 yards, 2:34
 MSU — Edinger, 33 field goal 8:12; 11 plays, 60 yards, 4:14
 OSU — Lumpkin, 41 pass from Germaine (Stultz kick) 6:25; 5 plays, 80 yards, 1:47
 OSU — Wiley, 1 run (Stultz kick) 0:39; 4 plays, 12 yards, 1:36

Second Quarter

MSU — Edinger, 43 field goal 13:31; 7 plays, 33 yards, 2:08
 MSU — Edinger, 22 field goal 11:02; 7 plays, 23 yards, 1:37

Third Quarter

OSU — Moore, 73 interception return (Stultz kick) 9:51
 MSU — Richardson, 23 pass from Burke (kick failed) 6:02; 5 plays, 51 yards, 3:38
 MSU — Edinger, 49 field goal 4:55; 4 plays, 2 yards, 0:50

Fourth Quarter

MSU — Irvin, 3 run (Edinger kick) 14:20; 8 plays, 92 yards, 2:53
 MSU — Edinger, 42 field goal 9:26; 4 plays, -7 yards, 2:40

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Team Statistics

	MSU	OSU
First Downs	16	21
Rushing	21	11
Passing	13	10
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	34-48	47-114
Passing Yards	329	245
Passes (Att.-Comp.-Int.)	47-19-1	33-15-1
Offensive Plays	81	81
Total Net Yards	377	353
Third Down Efficiency	6-20	2-15
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-2	2-4
Punts	6-38.0	7-38.6
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	4-4
Penalties	2-14	5-64
Time of Possession	30:38	29:22

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — MSU: Irvin 26-52; Clemons 2-3; Burke 6-7. OSU: Wiley 22-100; Montgomery 11-41; Keller 4-7; Boston 2-1; Germaine 9-41.

PASSING (Att.-Comp.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — MSU: Burke 46-15-1-323-1; Irvin 1-0-0-60. OSU: Germaine 33-15-1-245-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — MSU: Scott 6-88; Burrell 4-125; Baker 4-59; Richardson 1-23; Haygood 1-18; Irvin 1-8; Burke 1-2; Clemons 1-2. OSU: Miller 5-74; Boston 4-49; Lumpkin 2-61; Wiley 2-43; Keller 2-18.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) — MSU: Jarrett 5-39.8-50; Team 1-29.0-29. OSU: Bartholomew 7-38.6-47.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — MSU: Scott 3-38. OSU: Boston 4-51.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — MSU: Haygood 3-62. OSU: Rambo 5-97; Keller 1-11.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES — MSU: Shaw 2; Ernsberger, Govens. OSU: Winfield.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) — MSU: Hill 1-2. OSU: Moore 1-73.

SACKS — MSU: Peterson 3-29; Ledyard 1-16; Turner 1-8. OSU: Rudzinski 1-7.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) — MSU: Peterson 5-39; Ledyard 1-16; Turner 1-8; Morris 1-6; Hill 1-6; Thornhill 1-2; Saylor 1-2; Govens 1-2. OSU: Bailey 3-7; Diggs 2-10; Winfield 1-8; Rudzinski 1-7; Brown 1-3; Pickett 1-2; Wayne 1-2; Collins 1-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) — MSU: Thornhill 12-2-14; Morris 9-4-13; Turner 7-5-12; Peterson 9-0-9; Kanu 6-2-8; Hill 6-2-8; Marshall 4-2-6; Ledyard 3-3-6; Saylor 2-3-5; Truitt 1-2-3; Newsome 2-0-2; Henry 2-0-2; Ernsberger 2-0-2; Haygood 1-1-2; Shaw 1-0-1; Wright 1-0-1; Neal 0-1-1; Newkirk 0-1-1; Govens 0-1-1; Baker 0-1-1. OSU: Moore 9-2-11; Diggs 6-2-8; Plummer 6-0-6; Winfield 3-3-6; Brown 3-2-5; Bailey 3-2-5; Katzenmoyer 4-0-4; Berry 3-1-4; Rudzinski 3-0-3; Pickett 3-0-3; Clements 3-0-3; Bellisari 2-0-2; Johnson 1-1-2; Cotton 1-1-2; Wayne 1-1-2; Collins 0-2-2; Bartholomew 1-0-1; LaVar 1-0-1; Simpson 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME — MICHIGAN STATE: Starters: Defense, Saylor, Newkirk, Govens, R. Smith, Ledyard, Thornhill, Turner, Marshall, Morris, Kanu, Hill, Offense, Burrell, Scura, Harker, Strayhorn, Jensen, Robinson-Randall, Baker, Scott, Burke, Gould, Irvin. Reserves: Edinger, Haygood, Guess, Richardson, Truitt, Jarrett, Foster, Flowers, McFadden, Wright, Newsome, Greene, Clemons, Henry, Franklin, Ernsberger, Neal, Thomas, Bonito, Myers, Rainko, McCoy, Rance, Shaw, Peterson. OHIO STATE: Starters: Offense, Boston, Walter, R. Murphy, K. Murphy, Gilbert, Burris, Lumpkin, Germaine, Keller, Wiley, Miller, Defense, Bailey, Pickett, Brown, Johnson, Diggs, Katzenmoyer, Rudzinski, Winfield, Berry, Moore, Plummer. Reserves: Mitchell, Rambo, Bellisari, Cooper, Garcia, King, Clements, McClellion, Westbrooks, Wells, Ott, Montgomery, Simpson, Ross, Martin, Bartholomew, Kirk, Stultz, LaVar, Cotton, Bentley, Elford, Germany, Wisniewski, Payne, Houser, Wayne, Wilson, Homa, Collins.



Season Statistics

1998 Game-By-Game					
Date	Opponent (AP Rank*)	W/L	Score	Crowd	
Sept. 5	(1) at West Virginia (11)	W	34-17	68,409	
Sept. 12	(1) TOLEDO	W	49-0	93,149	
Sept. 19	(1) MISSOURI (21)	W	35-14	93,269	
Oct. 3	(1) PENN STATE (7)	W	28-9	93,479	
Oct. 10	(1) at Illinois	W	41-0	46,390	
Oct. 17	(1) MINNESOTA	W	45-15	93,183	
Oct. 24	(1) at Northwestern	W	36-10	47,130	
Oct. 31	(1) at Indiana	W	38-7	52,049	
Nov. 7	(1) MICHIGAN STATE	L	28-24	93,595	
Nov. 14	at Iowa				
Nov. 21	MICHIGAN				

*Number in parentheses before opponent's name is OSU's game day AP ranking; number after opponent's name is opponent's game day AP ranking.

Team Statistics	OSU	Opp
First Downs	220	116
Rushing	100	44
Passing	115	63
Penalty	5	9
Avg. Per Game/Rush	198.2	79.6
Avg. Per Game/Pass	296.2	173.3
Total Offense	4450	2276
Total Plays	714	606
Average Per Game	494.6	252.9
Average Per Play	6.2	3.8
Penalties-Yards	74-699	43-365
Fumbles-Lost	24-10	11-6
3rd Down Efficiency	60-145	33-148
Percentage	.414	.223
4th Down Efficiency	10-16	5-16
Percentage	.625	.313
Sacks	21-131	23-164
Time of Possession Avg.	31:31	28:29

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	110	95	63	62	330	36.7
Opponents	16	50	15	19	100	11.1

Attendance	Games	Total	Avg.
Home	5	466,675	93,335
Away	4	213,918	53,479
Total	9	680,593	75,621

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Michael Wiley	154	966	6.3	9	70
Joe Montgomery	88	510	5.8	5	30
Jonathan Wells	33	142	4.3	2	14
Matt Keller	27	104	3.9	1	12
Derek Combs	29	77	2.7	0	12
Dee Miller	3	17	5.7	0	10
Jerry Martin	6	13	2.2	0	7
Jerman Jackson	2	8	4.0	0	4
Jerry Westbrook	1	3	3.0	0	3
Charlie Sanders	1	3	3.0	0	3
David Boston	2	1	0.5	0	7
Brent Bartholomew	1	-4	-4.0	0	0
Mark Garcia	6	-13	-2.2	0	7
Joe Germaine	43	-43	-1.0	0	22
OSU Totals	396	1784	4.5	18	70
OPP Totals	279	716	2.6	3	35

Receiving	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	Long
David Boston	59	950	16.1	9	53
Dee Miller	51	791	15.5	2	42
Michael Wiley	19	129	6.8	1	35
John Lumpkin	15	254	16.9	4	41
Reggie Germany	12	195	16.3	3	47
Matt Keller	12	103	8.6	0	26
Jerry Martin	5	68	13.6	0	17
Ken-Yon Rambo	4	68	17.0	0	39
Jimmy Redmond	2	25	12.5	0	15
Danik Warnke	2	21	10.5	0	17
Kevin Griffin	1	14	14.0	0	14
Chad Cacchio	1	11	11.0	0	11
Jonathan Wells	1	11	11.0	0	11
Kevin Houser	1	10	10.0	0	10
Jerry Westbrook	1	7	7.0	0	7
Joe Montgomery	1	5	5.0	0	5
Steve Wisniewski	1	3	3.0	0	3
Derek Combs	1	1	1.0	0	1
OSU Totals	189	2666	14.1	19	53
OPP Totals	150	1560	10.4	6	60

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPP	EPR	FG	PTS
Dan Stultz	0	40-41	—	—	10-18	70
David Boston	10	—	—	1	—	62
Michael Wiley	10	—	—	—	—	60
Joe Montgomery	5	—	—	—	—	30
John Lumpkin	4	—	—	—	—	24

Reggie Germany	3	—	—	—	18
Dex Miller	2	—	—	—	12
Jonathan Wells	2	—	—	—	12
Derek Combs	1	—	—	—	6
Matt Keller	1	—	—	—	6
Joe Cooper	1	—	—	—	6
Na'il Diggs	1	—	—	—	6
Central McClellan	1	—	—	—	6
Damien Moore	1	—	—	—	6
Jerry Rudzinski	1	—	—	—	6
Joe Gersmiano	0	—	1-2	—	0
OSU Totals	43	40-1	1-2	110-18	330
OPP Totals	10	8-9	0-1	010-11	100

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	INT	TD	Rating
Michael Wiley	1	1	1.000	15	0	0	226.0
Joe Germaine	175	288	.608	2459	5	18	149.6
Mark Garcia	10	22	.455	168	0	1	124.6
Steve Bellisari	3	5	.600	24	0	0	100.3
Austin Mohrman	0	1	.000	0	0	0	0.0
Jonathan Wells	0	1	.000	0	0	0	0.0
OSU Totals	189	318	.594	2666	5	19	146.4
OPP Totals	150	327	.459	1560	14	6	83.4

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Dan Stultz	4-4	4-6	2-6	0-2	10-18
OSU Totals	4-4	4-6	2-6	0-2	10-18
OPP Totals	2-2	3-4	5-5	0-0	10-11

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	BL	Long
Brent Bartholomew	45	1860	41.3	1	57
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	46	1860	40.4	1	57
OPP Totals	79	3313	41.9	3	66

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Ahmed Plummer	3	0	0.0	0	0
Damon Moore	2	73	36.5	1	73
Central McClellion	1	60	60.0	1	60
Steve Bellisari	1	19	19.0	0	19
Na'il Diggs	1	18	18.0	0	18
Clinton Wayne	1	17	17.0	0	17
Brent Johnson	1	11	11.0	0	11
Percy King	1	3	3.0	0	3
Tim Cheatewood	1	0	0.0	0	0
Nate Clements	1	0	0.0	0	0
David Mitchell	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	14	201	14.4	2	73
OPP Totals	2	2	0.4	0	2

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Ken-Yon Rambo	19	128	6.7	0	24
David Boston	15	200	13.3	1	70
Gary Berry	15	65	4.3	0	13
Percy King	1	8	8.0	0	0
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0
Joe Cooper	0	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	45	401	7.9	1	70
OPP Totals	28	199	7.1	0	30

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Ken-Yon Rambo	9	187	20.8	0	26
Michael Wiley	4	105	26.3	0	34
Jonathan Wells	3	63	21.0	0	23
Matt Keller	2	16	8.0	0	11
Reggie Germany	1	14	14.0	0	14
OSU Totals	19	385	20.3	0	34
OPP Totals	42	723	17.2	0	29

Defensive Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Damon Moore	43	15	58	5-16	1-1
Na'il Diggs	46	12	58	12-63	4-27
Antione Winfield	45	12	57	5-34	2-17
Andy Katzenmoyer	45	8	53	9-29	1-6
Jerry Rudzinski	26	13	39	8-38	3-24
Gary Berry	26	8	34	2-9	1-5
Ahmed Plummer	30	3	33	3-10	—
Brent Johnson	18	11	29	5-22	4-17
Joe Cooper	14	9	23	1-3	—
Joe Brown	10	8	18	4-15	1-6
Central McClellion	7	9	16	—	—
Ryan Pickett	12	3	15	3-11	1-3
Steve Bellisari	10	4	14	—	—
Matt Keller	8	6	14	2-5	1-3
Clinton Wayne	7	7	14	1-2	—
Tim Cheatewood	6	7	13	1-3	—
James Cotton	8	4	12	3-11	1-7
Percy King	7	5	12	—	—
Nate Clements	10	1	11	—	—
Rodney Bailey	7	4	11	6-20	2-12

Fumbles Forced
 1 — Joe Cooper, Jerry Rudzinski, James Cotton, Na'il Diggs, Antione Winfield.

Fumbles Recovered
 1 — Tim Cheatewood, Ahmed Plummer, Jerry Rudzinski, Na'il Diggs, Gary Berry, Antione Winfield.

Blocked Kicks
 1 — Steve Bellisari, Percy King, Derek Ross.

golden corral

ALMOST TOO GOOD TO BELIEVE

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Buckeyes Failed To Respond In Tough Spot

First of all, my apologies to Nick Saban. I've been ragging on him all season and his Michigan State team came into Ohio Stadium and appeared well-coached and — perhaps more important — well-motivated. His Spartans knocked off the No. 1 team in the country, fair and square.

I still think the Buckeyes may have the best team in college football, and I certainly think they are better than Michigan State. I don't think even Saban would argue that.

I think a lot of us, however, including team members, got a little caught up in the euphoria of beating up on some pretty lame football teams over the past few weeks. We were spending too much time worrying about travel plans and BCS standings with a lot of football left to be played.

Some of the mistakes that the Buckeyes were getting away with against teams like Illinois or Northwestern came back to haunt them against MSU. All those fumbles that bounced the Buckeyes' way early in the season bounced toward the Spartans on this Saturday. And the OSU offensive line, suspect at times this year, didn't establish a strong ground game for the Buckeyes, nor did it do a very good job of protecting quarterback Joe Germaine.

Many had worried about Ohio State's frequent inability to convert on short-yardage situations. The Buckeyes hadn't been in a situation where that inability had made a difference. Against the Spartans, when they needed a yard on fourth down to continue a potentially game-winning drive, the big guys couldn't control the line of scrimmage for Joe Montgomery.

The good news, if you can call it that, is that when Michigan State's Paul Edinger kicked his fifth field goal, he put the Spartans up by four points. Thus, the Buckeyes had to go for a touchdown to win the game. Given the way everything else went for OSU, the results of trotting out poor Dan Stultz to try to win the game with a field goal would have been fairly predictable.

The Buckeyes were better off taking their chances in the waning moments with Germaine, who earned his stripes leading the Buckeyes to victory in a similar situation at the Rose Bowl a couple of years back. I'm sure the Buckeyes and most of their fans thought he could lead them back when OSU took over with 1:39 to play. And they probably thought he would lead them to victory when he quickly marched the Bucks down to the Spartan 15.

It was not to be this time.

The game was not lost on that final drive, however. The Buckeyes should have never let MSU back in the game after jumping to a 24-9 lead on Damon Moore's interception return. After weeks and weeks of Fiesta Bowl talk, the Buckeyes, consciously or subconsciously, probably figured they would coast from there. But the Spartans just kept coming.

My big quibbles about the way the game was played are no different than those of many.

First of all, I wonder why the Buckeyes let Montgomery languish on the bench for so long. He's been playing as well as or better than Michael Wiley over the past few weeks. More important, he always provides a spark for both the team and Buckeye fans when he comes in. And the Buckeyes definitely needed a spark against the hard-charging Spartans.

And, while I was thrilled that the Bucks went to the power game on their second-to-last drive, everyone knows that diversity is the strength of their offense. Those runs should have been used to set up the passing game that had clicked for over 300 yards for four weeks in a row.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

As Cooper said, though, it's easy for us to second-guess. On the other hand, he's paid the big bucks to make the right calls and take the heat if those decisions fail.

The Fiesta Bowl is not completely out of the picture just yet. Other teams are sure to lose and the Buckeyes might sneak in. And a team coming out of another bowl game might still have a shot at the national crown if a bunch of teams end up with one loss.

Unfortunately, the reality is that this was probably Ohio State's best chance at the national crown in years and, perhaps, for several years to come and they've pretty much blown it. We'll see what the team is made of as it tries to rebound from this devastating loss. There's plenty left to play for — a win over Michigan, a Big Ten crown, a high national ranking.

If the Buckeyes do win out, thousands of Buckeye fans will remain ecstatic, pointing out how their team does great in recruiting, is in contention for the national championship often, and sends lots of players to the NFL. At some point, however, you have to jump up and grab the brass ring.

In sports, success is measured by championships, not by number of times contending. Maybe there's a reason the Buckeyes' stadium is nicknamed "the Horseshoe."

It's a place where, for many, close counts.

We're Still Giving A Trip Away

Our Buckeye Bowl Bonanza continues, despite the Ohio State loss. We will be giving away a bowl trip for two, and though it probably won't be to the Fiesta Bowl, these trips are always first-class regardless of destination. A trip for two to the Rose Bowl is certainly still a possibility.

Don't forget that you can also get two gift subscriptions to Buckeye Sports Bulletin for the price of one and be automatically entered in the contest. See the ad on page 34 for details or call (614) 486-2202 for more information.

Dissenting Voice From The Balcony

While everyone heaps praise on the new Schottenstein Center, let me be one of the few people who have reservations about the arena. All right, I'm just whining because my seats are horrible.

I'm sure I'm in the same boat as many longtime ticket holders who didn't fork over thousands of dollars for seat licenses. I had good — though not spectacular — seats at St. John Arena for the last 13 years. That gave me 78 priority points, which left me in the corner of the balcony at the new arena.

The problem at the Schottenstein Center is that it's so big that if you're in the balcony you are way removed from the action. This is a really big building, folks.

I know there are some other longtime Buckeye basketball fans out there who have bought their season tickets through thick and thin who, after wiping the blood from their nose, felt the same way I did after getting to their new seats. But seat licensing is the way of sports these days and if I wanted better seats I should have anted up the money.

With the whining out of the way, let me say that I was extremely impressed with the condition of the Schottenstein Center on opening night. I feared the worst, expecting to find construction areas, dust and assorted disarray. But the building

was in excellent shape.

As someone who has sat with his feet in pop on any number of occasions, my favorite feature of the new arena is the cup holders on the backs of the seats. The thing I missed the most from St. John Arena is the player scoring totals that were listed on the old scoreboard, as well as other frequent statistical updates. Sources say that will be addressed with those totals posted on the corner matrix boards soon.

As for my first look at the basketball team, Scoonie Penn seems to be the player advertised. And Michael Redd was Michael Redd — outstanding. The player who really jumped out at me was Boban Savovic. He finished with eight points, but more impressive was his six assists, second only to Penn's eight. Mark my words, this guy will be a fan favorite, as will Penn.

It will be interesting to see how the new arena holds noise and fan enthusiasm once it's filled and the Buckeyes find themselves in a tight game. Will the place rock or will the clamor be lost in the massiveness of the building? Some of the fancy passing that was displayed by the Buckeyes against the One World All-Stars is bound to fire the crowd up.

Rating The New Voice

Several of our letter writers this week mentioned Ohio State's new radio voice, Paul Keels. I try to monitor the radio broadcasts and I offer these thoughts on Keels as compared to the longtime radio voice of the Buckeyes, Terry Smith.

I think Keels has a great radio voice. He has more of a sense of humor than Smith and is less of a "homer." Keels makes a lot of mistakes, however, mistakes on players, downs, distance and the like. One thing about Smith, he did his homework. Keels probably does, too. Maybe he just needs to slow down on the call and be sure of what he's saying.

Speaking of letters, I'm sure we'll be get-

ting plenty in the next few days. Gary Gerken's been pretty positive so far this season. I'm sure he's banging out a letter as I bang out this column. Do you want to wager whether he mentions OSU's offensive line?

The Facts Man Poll

As people rush to John Cooper's doorstep ready to place the blame for the Michigan State loss squarely on his shoulders, they should take a step back and realize that Cooper didn't fumble a single time or miss a crucial block that might have freed a running back.

He also wasn't a senior quarterback making a freshman mistake by not tucking the ball or hitting his fullback in the back. But the head man is ultimately responsible, and Cooper was stand-up after the defeat.

Michigan State came in with a great strategy — throwing jump balls over OSU's short corners — and neutralized Buckeye linebackers. Aside from a big hit in the backfield, Andy Katzenmoyer was a nonentity. And Na'il Diggs made eight of the quietest tackles you're ever going to see.

So where does that leave the national title race? Squarely in SEC country, where Tennessee seizes the top spot and Florida still has an outside shot. And don't discount Florida State, which dismantled Virginia. The winner of that Sunshine State tussle Nov. 21 could be the Vols' opponent, assuming UCLA loses (it will) and Nebraska kicks Kansas State (it might).

1. Tennessee (8-0)
2. Kansas State (9-0)
3. Florida State (9-1)
4. UCLA (8-0)
5. Texas A&M (9-1)
6. Florida (8-1)
7. Ohio State (8-1)
8. Arizona (9-1)
9. Texas (7-2)
10. Wisconsin (9-0)

Watch for the following to happen on Nov. 14 — Kansas State ends its 29-year misery and beats Nebraska, making OSU followers miserable; Wisconsin loses to Michigan; and untested Arkansas gets taken out to the woodshed by Tennessee.

— Mike Wachsmann



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