

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is published 30 times a year (weekly September through November and January through mid-March, biweekly mid-March to mid-May and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1350 W. Fifth Ave., #25
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202

Second class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. USPS 705-690. ISSN 0883-6833. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. Subscription rates: \$40 per year for 30 issues.

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Interpreting Writing On The Wall

I was making my way to the post-game interview room at Ohio Stadium after Ohio State had just lost a heart-breaker to Illinois.

Making my way through some of the crowd that was filing out of the stadium, I heard a woman make what could be in the running for understatement of the year.

"Oh well," she said. "Into every life, a little rain must fall."

This lady must have thought that the Johnstown Flood was just a little sprinkle, that the San Francisco Earthquake was just a little jolt, and that Hurricane Andrew was just a little blow.

The sun certainly came up for Ohio State head coach John Cooper after that loss to Illinois. But in his life, it must be raining big-time right now.

It's been pretty much the rage for going on five years now to find fault with Cooper. I've done it myself on occasion, although I believe I have been firmly in his corner much more often than not.

Unfortunately, I have spent a lot of time over the past couple of years defending Cooper. I guess I'm doing that again in the wake of his fifth straight loss to Illinois.

The reason that "I guess" part of that statement is in there is because while I will defend Cooper to the point that you cannot blame the Illinois loss on him, I am beginning to see the writing on the wall.

Most people have found fault with Cooper this year for not properly preparing his team for battle. The lackluster performances against Louisville and Bowling Green were greeted with boos and catcalls from the fans in Ohio Stadium, prompting several players to wonder aloud if it might not be good to get away for a while.

That did them some good at Syracuse as the Buckeyes played what appears to be their game of the year so far. But they seemed to revert to their old ways of ill-preparedness against Wisconsin last week and they got beat. The apparent lack of emotion on both offense and defense led the team's critics to trace the reason for the loss back to Cooper. He didn't prepare the team well enough; therefore, it lost.

But the Buckeye team that played Illinois was not the same one that played Wisconsin the week before. It was a much more inspired team, ready to erase the bad memories of the loss to the Badgers and just as eager to erase four years of bad memories against the Illini.

But things were simply not meant to be for Ohio State. Eddie George fumbled near the goal line in the first quarter and the Illini scooped up the ball and ran it back for a touchdown. Now honestly, how many times do you see that happen?

The Buckeyes gave up a safety in the second quarter when an Illinois defensive lineman made an excellent play. George fumbled a second time on the goal line, this time in the fourth quarter. Tim Williams missed a 31-yard field goal right before halftime, right after he had kicked a 50-yarder. Williams later missed a 44-yarder that would have won the game in the final minute of play.

Were any of those plays Cooper's fault? The really diehard critics can point to the breakdowns on the field

Editor's Notebook with Mark Rea

and say they are the result of poor fundamentals. That's grasping at straws. Sometimes things are just not meant to be, and perhaps beating Illinois — no matter the talent levels of the squads — is not meant to be for Cooper while he is at Ohio State.

And that brings us to something else. With the loss, the Buckeyes are now 0-2 in the conference. With Michigan playing the way it is playing, the Wolverines are as close to anything there is today as a sure thing to go to the Rose Bowl.

But there are two other bowls to play for this year, since the Big Ten now sends its second-place team to the Citrus Bowl and its third-place finisher to the Holiday Bowl. Realistically, Ohio State must quickly right the ship because any more than three losses in the conference is not going to produce a second or third-place finish.

Four conference losses would give

the Buckeyes a 7-4 overall record and, what's worse, would send them to some bowl game of lesser stature.

What that would do to Cooper's status as head coach of the Buckeyes is anyone's guess. True, he just signed a new four-year contract that, in principle, would keep him in Columbus through the 1995 season. But the fact remains there is a buy-out clause in that contract.

I certainly don't advocate a change, but coaches with long-term contracts have been dismissed in the past and more will assuredly be dismissed in the future.

Any thoughts of a Big Ten championship and trip to the Rose Bowl are now gone. But all is not lost for the 1992 season. The Buckeyes still have time to right their ship. Just as one victory against Syracuse didn't make a whole season, two straight defeats don't ruin a whole season, either.

But members of the team have to bear something in mind as they prepare for their final six regular-season games. Not only are they playing for personal pride and the bowl trip of their choice, but they might just be playing for the future of their head coach as well.

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Miss Spoils Performance Which Included Three Other FGs

Williams' Potential Game-Winner Sails Wide

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Tim Williams had often talked about being in a situation where he would be called on to win a game with a field goal.

The Ohio State junior place-kicker finally got his wish against Illinois Oct. 10 in front of a national television audience and nearly 94,000 fans in Ohio Stadium.

But the scenario did not turn out the way Williams had envisioned it time and time again in his mind. The snap was good, the hold was good, and the kick was a good one, too.

But Williams' field goal try from 44 yards out with 53 seconds left in the game sailed a few feet outside the left upright, leaving the kicker face down on the stadium turf and the Buckeyes with an 18-16 loss to the Fighting Illini.

"I was wanting that situation to happen," a soft-spoken Williams told reporters after the game. "I was very, very confident that I was going to make it. I mean, I was extremely, extremely confident, and I was not overconfident at all. I was extremely confident."

"I went out there and was very relaxed. I was more tense on the 31-yarder that I missed earlier; so I was not nervous at all. I hit the ball and I hit it well. You saw the ball travel. I don't know if it hit the net or not, but I hit the ball well. I just played it wrong."

Williams appeared to be kicking with a 13-mph wind at his back. But while the flags on top of Ohio Stadium indicated that, it was a different story on the field.

"The wind was coming left to right a little bit; so I thought the wind would help it move right a little bit," Williams explained. "I kicked it left and thought the ball would come back to the right, but it never did."

"The wind changes every play. At one point, the wind was blowing toward the open end, and another time it



Ohio State junior place-kicker Tim Williams (23) rises dejectedly from the Ohio Stadium turf after missing a 44-yard field goal attempt in the final minute of an 18-16 loss to Illinois. Williams had earlier kicked three field goals in the game, including a 50-yarder in the first quarter.

wasn't. You get screwed sometimes if you start playing the wind. But I kicked it as well as I thought I could kick it. It just wasn't there for me."

It was the culmination of a bit-tersweet day for Williams. For the first time in his life, he converted three field goals in a game, booting kicks of 25, 29 and 50 yards.

The 50-yarder came in the first quarter and tied a kick he had at Michigan last season as the second-longest of his career. He kicked a 52-yarder as a freshman against Boston College.

"That was a great moment for me," Williams said of the 50-yarder. "It's kind of hard to look back right now and

tell how happy I was.

"I thought I was going to have a great day. In warm-ups, I didn't miss any kicks. I came out and hit a 50-yarder right away. Then, this is the first time I've ever kicked three field goals in a game, high school or college."

But the game came down to a try from 44 yards in the final minute of

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play. It would have topped off a drive by Ohio State that would have answered a 15-play, 86-yard march by Illinois which resulted in the Illini taking the lead with a 21-yard field goal by Chris Richardson.

Williams looked as though he might not get a chance at the game-winner when the Buckeyes were faced with fourth down and 10 at the Illini 43. But OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit scrambled 11 yards for the first down, and then the Buckeyes used three straight running plays to put the ball in the middle of the field for Williams' attempt.

Ohio State head coach John Cooper said he thought his team had won the game at that point.

"I thought Timmy would make the field goal," Cooper said. "We kick nine field goals every day in practice and I know what his range is. He kicked a 50-yard field goal against the wind. I never thought he wouldn't make the kick."

Before Williams had a chance, though, Illinois called timeout to try to ice him.

"That didn't bother me at all," Williams said. "It gave me another chance to go to my (practice) net, which was what I needed to do."

"It was just one of those days. I kicked the ball and hit it really, really well. It would have gone 60 yards; it just didn't go between the goal posts. The snap, the hold, everything was fine. It just didn't go through for me. I kept thinking it would come back to the right

and it just never did.

"I really thought I had made it when I kicked it. Before I brought my head up, I thought, 'Gosh, this is a great feeling.' Then I brought my head up and the only thing to do then was start praying for it to go to the right a little bit, but it didn't."

Williams fell face down on the turf in disbelief. Then finally, after making his way to the bench, he appeared inconsolable on the sideline.

"The players and the coaches were great," he said. "They supported me, but of course, they're all going to come up to me and say, 'It wasn't your fault' and 'We didn't make a play here.' 'A guy didn't make a catch here.' 'A guy fumbled here.'"

"But that's not what people are going to remember. That's not what I am going to remember. I'm going to remember that last play. The coaches and players tried to make me feel better by saying stuff like that, and I appreciate it and it shows me that I have their support and they have confidence in me, but as far as I'm concerned, I lost the ball game."

It was an especially tough loss for the Buckeyes in light of losing to Illinois the four previous seasons. But for Williams, it was like a lifelong dream had been dashed.

"This is the first time I've ever been in this situation," he said. "I started four years in high school, this is my third year starting here, and this is the first time I've ever had a game come

down to me. I didn't know what the feeling was like. Like I said, I wasn't nervous. I know what it's like now and I'll learn from this."

Asked what he could learn, Williams replied, "I guess I'll learn from the feeling afterward, I'll learn that I shouldn't feel like that after a kick, I'll learn to

take it a little better. I don't know if I'll learn anything about the kick itself because, again, I kicked it really well.

"Really, I don't know if I'll learn anything except that I don't want this feeling again. I'm going to take this really hard. But, hopefully, it makes me a better place-kicker."

Despite Another Loss To Illinois, Cooper Retains Lots Of Support

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After five straight losses to Illinois, Ohio State head coach John Cooper may have lost fan support, but he has not lost the support of his assistant coaches and players.

Following the Buckeyes' 18-16 loss to the Illini in Ohio Stadium Oct. 10, many fans left the Horseshoe shouting epithets at the five-year coach.

In fact, during the game, when the scoreboard showed an advertisement for Cooper's weekly call-in radio show, the crowd responded with a lusty boo.

But one of the principals in the loss to Illinois said that kind of fan reaction is misguided.

"It's bad enough to lose, but it's even tougher to hear the boos from the home crowd," said OSU place-kicker Tim Williams, whose 44-yard field goal attempt to win the game went wide left of the uprights with 53 seconds left in the game.

When a reporter suggested to Williams that the fans were not booing the team but rather Cooper, he replied, "Well, they shouldn't boo the coach. The coach didn't lose the damn game. Us players lost the game."

"Coach Cooper is a great coach. He's done a helluva job since I've been here. He gave me a chance to kick here; he's recruited some great athletes to come to Ohio State. I wish they would get off his back."

"He's a great coach; he has great coaches behind him. If the players don't execute, obviously, you don't win. We didn't execute; so we didn't win. It's a bunch of crap that everyone boos the coach because he does a helluva job."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Bill Young echoed Williams' sentiments.

"I've been with John Cooper for 13 years and there's not a better football coach, there's not a better person, and there's not a better boss in the country," Young said.

"I feel bad for him, but I feel worse for our football team. But John is a fighter and our team is a bunch of fighters. We'll regroup and we'll come back."

Through 52 games as head coach at Ohio State, Cooper now has a record of 30-20-2 and a Big Ten mark of 18-14-2.

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Wilkinson Registers Three Sacks Among His 10 Total Tackles

'Big Daddy' Stars On Defense For Buckeyes

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Illinois quarterback Jeff Kinney had enough to worry about in his first collegiate start, trying to keep himself together in front of 93,982 people jammed into Ohio Stadium.

Actually, Kinney did pretty well with all of those people except one — Ohio State defensive tackle "Big Daddy" Dan Wilkinson.

Kinney managed to complete 12 of 25 passes for 139 yards against the Buckeyes, helping his team to an 18-16 victory. But he could never quite shake Wilkinson.

The 6-5, 299-pound redshirt freshman for Ohio State sacked Kinney three times during the day and pressured him into bad passes on countless other occasions.

For the afternoon, Wilkinson tallied 10 total tackles to go along with those three sacks — the only times the Buckeyes got to Kinney all day — and received *Big Bear Buckeye of the Week* honors.

With the performance, Wilkinson climbed into a tie with Derrick Foster for the season team lead in sacks with four. His 10 overall tackles also matched his total production from the team's previous four games.

Blistered for its play in an upset loss against Wisconsin the week before, the defense had a goal to stop Illinois this week, Wilkinson said.

"In this one, we knew we had to play all-out, lights-out ball," he said. "That's the way I looked at it. Last week against Wisconsin, I probably was kind of lackadaisical, taking things for granted. I'm talking about myself. I didn't do that today. That was probably the difference."

During the Wisconsin game, the Badgers took control of the game with two long touchdown drives in the third quarter, turning the Buckeyes' 10-3 halftime lead into a 17-10 deficit from



TIM CARSON

With help from teammate Greg Smith, Ohio State defensive tackle Dan Wilkinson (72) wraps up Illinois quarterback Jeff Kinney. Wilkinson registered a career-high three sacks in the game.

which the Bucks never recovered. In that contest, OSU never seemed to be able to corral Wisconsin quarterback Darrell Bevell.

But it was a different story against the Illini and Kinney. The senior quarterback did not appear as mobile as teammate Jason Verduzco, the man he replaced in the starting lineup, and that allowed the Buckeyes to get some more penetration up front.

"Kinney was a good quarterback, but we had made a goal to get more penetration up front today," Wilkinson said. "I think we did that. We got to him a couple of times, and other times he got the ball away, but he paid the price."

On one particular play late in the second quarter, Kinney paid a particularly high price. Holding a 15-10 lead in

the final minute before halftime, the Illini moved near midfield and appeared to be driving for another score.

On a first-down play, though, Wilkinson blew in through an Illinois blocker and blew through Kinney as well. It wasn't really a tackle; more like a cross check in hockey that sent the 6-4, 200-pound QB to the turf.

According to Wilkinson, he stayed on his feet for a reason.

"I didn't see the ball, but I was hoping Kinney had it up," he said. "I was hoping just to run through him and get to the ball, but he tucked it back under his arm. I was thinking maybe if I knocked the ball loose, I could pick it up and run with it. But he tucked it back in and just went down."

On the next play, Wilkinson came in on Kinney again, narrowly missing him. But it appeared on television replays that the OSU lineman was being held on the play. Wilkinson said it wasn't an illusion and that he was being held other times as well.

"They were holding me all day," he

said "I told the ref about it, but he told me a hold is only when they take me all the way down, completely down to the ground. So I guess they figured they could hold me better than block me."

"When he told me that, though, I went over to our offensive linemen and told them to start holding more and add it to their list of things to do because they never called it. They never did call a holding penalty the whole game. But that's part of the game. I just forgot about it."

While the Illini put 18 points on the scoreboard, only half of them were given up by the Ohio State defense. Illinois' defense accounted for two scores with a touchdown on a fumble return and a safety. But it was a late drive by the Illini offense that led to the victory. After Ohio State fumbled away a possession on the one-yard line, Illinois drove 86 yards, chewing up eight and a half minutes, for the game-winning field goal by Chris Richardson.

That drive was eerily reminiscent of the long marches used by Wisconsin against the Buckeyes. It was also the Illini's only really long, sustained drive of the afternoon.

"They really didn't change anything then," Wilkinson said. "They tightened their split ends up a little bit and tried to run the ball. That's all they did. They moved it on us pretty well, but we still managed to hold them to a field goal. That wasn't very good, but at least it wasn't a touchdown and still gave us a chance to win it at the end."

But the Buckeyes could not win the game at the end, snuffing out any realistic chance they had to win this year's Big Ten championship. Much of the team took the loss hard, including Wilkinson.

"It's tough. We're depressed, and some of us are crying," he said. "It's especially hard when your defense plays its heart out and your offense plays its heart out."

"But we just made too many mistakes. You can't win like that. When the offense gets down on the goal line and fumbles, you can't beat anyone like that. You can't beat a high school team like that."

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Defense Victimized By Another Late March

By MIKE WACHSMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The teams were different, but the way they defeated Ohio State was the same.

After allowing Wisconsin three second-half scoring drives of 78, 58 and 66 yards in a 20-16 loss Oct. 3, the Buckeye defense could not make the pivotal stops against Illinois on a fourth-quarter drive the following week, allowing the Illini to drive 86 yards for a 21-yard field goal that provided the final margin of victory in an 18-16 decision.

Unfortunately for the OSU defense, it was in a position to have to stop the Illini in that situation. With the exception of that final drive, the Buckeyes played well defensively against Illinois, allowing just nine points on a touchdown and a field goal. The other nine points came on a 96-yard fumble return by the Illini defense and a safety.

The Buckeyes limited Illinois to just 270 yards for the game and only 3.9 yards per play. But on the final scoring drive the Orange and Blue ate up almost one third of their total for the day. In addition, Illinois took a huge chunk out of the fourth quarter — eight minutes and 29 seconds — executing the drive.

The success the Illini had on that 15-play drive did not sit well with OSU defensive coordinator Bill Young.

"That scoring drive, we have them first and 15 and they pick up 27 yards," Young said. "That kind of set the tone for that drive. We were missing tackles some, but they were running hard and making the plays. We felt even when they scored the field goal, we had kept them out of the end zone and we could win the game."

Senior cornerback Bryan Cook was at a loss to describe the loss, especially

when almost all the numbers pointed in the Buckeyes' direction.

"There is no justification in my mind," Cook said. "We were the better team. I'll tell anybody that. We were better than Illinois. We should have won the game."

That seems true when glancing at the statistics.

The Buckeyes picked off one Jeff Kinney pass, blocked a punt and limited Illinois to just 14 first downs.

However, on the final drive, Illinois had three plays go for more than 10 yards and converted three straight third-down plays. After picking up only 175 yards in their previous 10 possessions, the Illini switched to a formation that featured two split outs, two tight ends, and only one running back — the same formation Wisconsin ran with success a week prior.

"That formation spreads the field out and gets your linebackers more spread out than you want them to be," Cook said. "From the secondary standpoint, I don't know what was going on up front, but we just weren't getting the job done."

With the lack of success the OSU offense was having denting the scoreboard, it was up to the defense to keep the Illini out.

But, according to sophomore safety Walter Taylor, members of the defensive unit never get upset when the offense fails to convert in scoring situations.

"We never have a letdown feeling if the offense doesn't produce because we're all a team and we have to play as a team," said Taylor, who finished the game with two tackles, a blocked punt and a fumble recovery to his credit. "We can't say the offense didn't do it or the defense didn't do it. It's a team thing."

Even after Ohio State missed a game-winning field goal in the final

minute of play, Young did not give up hope.

"I thought on the last drive we were on defense, if we could stop them on that first down play, we might still have had a chance," he said. "We had all three timeouts left. But they made six yards on first down, then seven on second down. That really didn't help us."

The loss hit Cook especially hard because he will never experience a win over the Illini in his five years of being

a Buckeye. But he also knows there are six games left in this season.

"Our main goal is just to sleep this one off," the senior cornerback said. "Just let it pass. There's a lot more football to be played this season. We just have to rally together and finish the season out on a positive note."

"We'll regroup. We'll just go to bed, sleep it off, and come Monday morning, come in and get ready for Northwestern."

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Illini Dominance Over OSU Baffles Tepper

By JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Lou Tepper has been at Illinois as long as John Cooper has been at Ohio State and, like Cooper, Tepper remains perplexed by the Illini's five-year jinx over the Buckeyes.

Tepper was an assistant coach under John Mackovic as the Illini beat OSU and Cooper four straight times, and Tepper kept the tradition alive Oct. 10, escaping Ohio Stadium with a mysterious 18-16 win.

"To our fifth-year seniors, going out and beating Ohio State five years in a row, I know it meant a lot to them. But it wasn't something that we particularly played upon," Tepper said. "I don't know how many times it has been done, but when you consider the quality of Ohio State's program, it says a lot."

Only Michigan, which defeated the Buckeyes nine straight times in the first decade of this century and added six straight wins in the 1920s, has mastered OSU better. The Wolverines are currently working with a four-game win streak over the Buckeyes.

Tepper, whose team was coming off a disappointing 18-17 loss at Minnesota, a game in which it lost a 17-3 lead in the second half, had no explanation for Illinois' recent dominance over OSU. But just moments after his first Big Ten victory, he related to the dismay he was sure Cooper felt.

"I can empathize a great deal for John Cooper," he said. "I was there a week ago under the same conditions. I don't know if one side was coached better or if one side played better than the other, but we came out ahead."

"Last week, I really felt that we did a lot of great things in the kicking game and I thought that our young defense progressed, but very few people wanted to hear about that simply because we lost. All of the things you hear are negative things."

"I think Ohio State can go on and have a very fine year; so I empathize with him very much and I respect the effort. I don't think the Buckeye fans have anything to be disturbed about with the effort that their team gave today."

Ohio State appeared ready to gain the upper hand right away with an efficient opening drive to the Illini one-yard line. But the tide turned when defensive back Jeff Arneson helped stand up OSU tailback Eddie George, caused a fumble and scooped up the ball and ran for a 96-yard touchdown.

"(Linebacker) Dana (Howard) and I came up and made the hit," Arneson said. "I don't know which one of us popped it out, but I saw it come out and I just ran after it. (Defensive back) Derrick (Rucker) ran over there and tipped it up in the air and I just grabbed it and ran."

"I didn't look back until the last 30 yards. I just looked straight ahead and ran my butt off. When I looked back and saw just my teammates, I kind of strutted in, but that was mostly because I was tired. I was carrying a refrigerator on my back."

Tepper made sure the play would stand before joining his players in celebration.

"I was looking back for any yellow material. That's what concerned me the most," the Illini head coach said. "He ran a lot of time off the clock, I know that."

The unlikely score spotted new quarterback Jeff Kinney a lead without touching the ball. Tepper named Kinney to call signals the week of the game, opting to bench regular Jason Verduzco, and stayed with Kinney throughout.

Tepper had ample opportunities to replace Kinney — who finished 12-of-25 passing for 139 yards and one interception — with Verduzco early in the game, but he never did. However, the Illini head coach did admit the thought crossed his mind late in the game.

"One of Jason's real strong points is the two-minute offense and that's something we may have done," Tepper said. "Had (OSU's) field goal been good, there's a possibility we might have gone with Jason."

Illinois offensive coordinator Tom Beck named Kinney the starter days before the game with the Buckeyes and said his fifth-year senior did a good job in his first collegiate start.

"I think he did a very credible job," Beck said. "I think a lot of people made a lot out of the decision and I think Jeff responded very well."

"He made some errors out there, like everybody else did, but he came through. He made some key passes, he got hit, he made a good decision on an option and scored a touchdown, and Ohio State has an outstanding defense."

Kinney was more critical of his performance.

"I didn't play a very good game at all," he said, "but I'm not out here to win a game for myself. I'm really proud of this team. It was a total team effort and when we needed the offense to go down there and score, we did."



Ohio State flanker Greg Beatty gives chase, but he will not catch Illinois linebacker Jeff Arneson (43), who scooped up an OSU fumble and returned it 96 yards for a touchdown in the first quarter. The play helped propel the Illini to an 18-16 win.

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Ohio State head coach John Cooper's assessment of the game: "You can't make the mistakes we made today and expect to beat a pretty good team like Illinois. We fumbled the ball away twice on the goal line and missed two field goals. If we score on any one of those plays, it's a different outcome — we win."

Illinois head coach Lou Tepper's assessment of the game: "This was a very big victory for us. I think we are making progress each week and that is what we're seeking. I'm sure it is a great thrill for our seniors to have beaten Ohio State five years in a row. It's a great thrill for us to beat any program that has the stature of Ohio State."

OSU senior cornerback Bryan Cook on experiencing his fifth straight loss to the Illini: "There is no justification in my mind. We were the better team. I'll tell anybody that; we were better than Illinois. We should have won that game."

OSU sophomore safety Walter Taylor on the mood inside the Buckeye locker room after the game: "It's very quiet in there. Everybody is down, a little mad, a little sad. The seniors are upset because they haven't won over Illinois since they've been here. That's a hard feeling to deal with."

OSU junior place-kicker Tim Williams on his two missed field goals: "I'm more mad at myself for the 31-yarder I missed at the end of the first half than I am about the one at the end. On that one, I just opened up too quick and hooked it. On the last one, I thought it was good. I hit it real well; it just started out left and never came back for me. Good kickers miss field goals. It just so happened that one was to win the game. I didn't come through."

Illinois sophomore place-kicker Chris Richardson on the empathy he felt for Williams: "I feel bad for him. I've never been in that position yet, and he missed two today. He could have said if he made either that Ohio State would have won. But kicking in front of 90,000 people is a tough way to live."

OSU offensive coordinator Joe Hollis on the 44-yard field goal attempt Williams missed at the end of the game: "We shouldn't have been in that situation to begin with. But we were. We turned the ball over three times. We don't turn the ball over three times, we're not in the position to have to kick a field goal to win it."

Illinois junior safety Jeff Arneson on his first-quarter fumble recovery and 96-yard touchdown run: "It was their first drive and they were pretty much blowing us off the ball. They had fire in their eyes. But the fumble sucked the life out of them and put life into us."

Cooper on the same play: "Something like that has never happened to me in my whole career. We're down on the one-yard line, driving for a touchdown, and the other team causes a fumble and takes it all the way back for a touchdown. Instead of being ahead 7-0, we were behind 7-0. That's a big, big 14-point swing in a matter of seconds."

Tepper on the same play: "That was just an isolation play, which is essentially linemen on linemen and the fullback on the linebacker. It's a brutal play. (Illini linebackers) Dana Howard, John Holeccek and Aaron Shelby and the Ohio State fullbacks are probably all a half-inch shorter right now than they were before the game. It's a man's play; it's not for the faint-hearted and there are some real collisions. We were fortunate enough to make the play and get the takeaway. It was a big play for us."



John Cooper



Bryan Cook



Tim Williams



Steve Tovar

Arneson on the criticism that had been leveled against the Illinois defense prior to the game: "I think maybe our defense is underrated because we're so young. We have a lot of young players who are going to be great. In the rest of the season, I think we're going to prove some people wrong and make some plays like we did today."

Illinois freshman defensive back Tyrone Washington on his hit in the fourth quarter that caused OSU running back Eddie George to fumble for the second time: "From the way I felt after the hit, I was hoping the ball was coming out. But any time I tackle, I'm surprised if it doesn't come out. That's the way I try to hit."

Illinois junior tight end Kraig Koester on playing in front of the Ohio Stadium crowd of 93,982: "It was fun. It definitely feels good against Ohio State and coming in here in front of 90,000 people and seeing what you can do. It's only 62 of us against 90,000, and we won."

Illinois senior quarterback Jeff Kinney on his performance in his first collegiate start: "I was a little pumped up, but I didn't think I played all that well. But we won, and that's the most important thing. I have a lot of room for improvement, but that's one of the good things about athletics. There's always another game."

Cook on the performance of Kinney: "We did a good job containing him for the most part. He scrambled a couple of times and completed a couple of passes he shouldn't have, but on the main points, defensively, I thought we played OK. I thought we played well enough to win the game. I really expected (former Illini starting QB Jason) Verduzco to come in the game, but I guess they felt Kinney was doing the job. He did all right."

Tepper on the play of OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit: "I've got a lot of respect for Herbstreit. There were a lot of quarterbacks who would not have played on the ankle he had. I was most impressed with him. In fact, he was the only Ohio State player I sought out after the game to talk to."

OSU defensive coordinator Bill Young on the notion that the team could collapse in wake of two straight losses: "We may lose another game; we may lose two or three more. I don't know. But I do know that we won't fold our tents. There's too much character on this team for that to happen. I just know that won't happen."

OSU senior middle linebacker Steve Tovar's reply when asked by a reporter if there was anything he could point to as the reason for the Buckeyes' five consecutive losses to Illinois: "There is no reason for it, at least in my mind. That's all I've got to say."

Cook's reply when a reporter asked him what there was left to play for with any realistic chance to go to the Rose Bowl gone: "You play because you're a football player. You never play to lose; you play to win. There's still a remote chance we can get to the Rose Bowl. But, regardless of that, we play to win and that's our goal."

Cooper's final thoughts on the loss: "It was a very, very tough ball game to lose, as you might imagine. I saw some bright spots out there today. I thought we moved the ball pretty well on offense and we played pretty well on defense for the most part. But our mistakes killed us. We obviously had high hopes when we started this season, and we're not in a very good position right now as far as the Big Ten season is concerned. But we're going to come back. We're going to fight back and work through this."

Cooper Figures His Team's Rose Bowl Chances Are Now Remote

Coach Admits Mistakes Cost Bucks Dearly

EDITOR'S NOTE: This football season, *Buckeye Sports Bulletin* will publish excerpts from Ohio State head coach John Cooper's post-game press conference. Here is what Cooper had to say after the Buckeyes' loss to Illinois.

COOPER: "As you all can imagine, it's a tough one to lose. It's a tough one to lose. We beat ourselves. Illinois played hard, but it was a game of mistakes. I tell our team every day that the team that makes the fewest mistakes wins. You can't turn the ball over twice on the goal line, and get the ball down on their end of the field like we did, and come away without any points and expect to beat a good football team, or a pretty good football team like Illinois."

"They played hard. After we turned the ball over the second time, they take the ball and drive the length of the field and, of course, kick the winning field goal. Then we come back and miss ours; so that's the way the game goes."

"Any questions?"

Q: Realistically, what does this loss do to your team's chances in the Big Ten race?

COOPER: "Well, realistically, it doesn't put us in very good position at all. You know that. I mean, Wisconsin has to lose three times now. The other good teams in the league have to lose two. I don't see anybody beating Michigan twice, to be honest with you, unless somebody slips up on them."

Q: Can you describe what happened when Eddie George fumbled in the first quarter near the goal line?

COOPER: "We got in our goal-line

set, and of course Eddie is our running back in that situation and he's done a good job for us all year. He's scored touchdowns for us and had three in one game against Syracuse. We put him back in and he put the ball in the end zone. It was obvious for us to put him back in on the call that we ran. We had a sweep called on the goal line and we didn't block the linebacker. The linebacker hit Eddie and it resulted in a fumble."

Q: On the last possession, after the final first down, was it your strategy to run the ball up the middle and set it up in the middle of the field for a field goal attempt?

COOPER: "Once we got the ball in field goal range, absolutely. We were trying to put the ball in the middle or the right hash mark. That's where (special teams coach) Mike Stock coaches the kickers and that's where we wanted the ball for Timmy (Williams). There wasn't anything wrong with the distance. He just hooked it. Once you get the ball in field goal range, I didn't want to take a negative play."

"Some people — the fans, I guess — would expect me to throw the football, but they were blitzing. The one thing we didn't want to do was lose seven, eight, nine or 10 yards and then, all of a sudden, be out of field goal range. So we had the ball in field goal range and we didn't want to risk being out of range. It was just one of those deals. We make the field goal, we win the game. If you miss it, you lose ... and take your lumps."

Q: Have you ever had a play turn around like the one in the first quarter

when you were driving for a touchdown, fumbled and they took it the other way for a touchdown?

COOPER: "I don't think I've ever had that play happen before because up until this year you couldn't advance a fumble. We're going in for a touchdown and, all of a sudden, boom. That's a 14-point swing. Instead of us scoring and being up 7-0 early in the game, all of a sudden we're down 7-0. But that's why they put the rule in. It's a good rule and I like the rule, to be honest with you. We just haven't made those breaks ourselves."

Q: Did you sense at any point in the game that your team had taken control?

COOPER: "I thought one of the keys came in the second half. We wanted to come out and play hard in the second half because, during the last two ball games, we haven't done much in the third quarter. So we came out and stopped them and got the ball. As I recall, we had to settle for a field goal, but I thought we had a little momentum there."

"I thought we were going to win the game. I thought Timmy would make the field goal. We kick nine field goals every day in practice and I know what his range is. He kicked a 50-yard field goal against the wind and, in the second half, it was their choice to take the ball to start the second half, and we took the wind in the fourth quarter. I don't know if you noticed that or not. We had the wind at our backs, thinking that it may come down to this kind of ball game. Again, there was nothing wrong with the distance. He had plenty of distance; he just hooked it."

Q: Did you say anything to Williams when he missed the field goal?

COOPER: "No, I didn't say anything. Well, you know. I asked him how wide it was. It looked like when he hit it, it was good."

Q: It didn't appear your defense was much at fault today. It allowed only nine points in the game. Did you think it made the adjustments from last week's loss to Wisconsin?

COOPER: "The defense played hard. The only fault I had with the defense was, after Eddie fumbled a second time, Illinois did take the ball the length of the field for the winning field goal. But, you know, you can understand sometimes why that happens. I'm sure they had a big letdown. We had just blocked a punt. It was just one of those things. If ifs and buts were candy and nuts, what a merry Christmas it would be. We blocked a punt, and most of the time a punt is going to go backwards, we scoop it up and score. And it turned out, it came this way. Kirk (Herbstreit) made a nice play to Jeff (Cothran) to put us first and goal at the one or one and a half yard line. Then, the next play, we fumbled."

Q: Most of the week, the report was that Robert Smith would see action only in an emergency situation. Yet, he played and played early in the game. Did you really plan all along to play him anyway?

COOPER: "No. Robert didn't practice all week, but when he warmed up, he told us he wanted to try it and was ready to play. You saw what he did when he was healthy. He ripped off a big gain. Then, on the safety, he got

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hurt again. He came back and tried to play after that but couldn't do it. That's why we played Eddie and Raymont (Harris) the rest of the way at the tail-back spots."

Q. With the exception of the Syracuse game, this offense has not scored a lot of points. Has that been a surprise to you?

COOPER: "Well, I think our inability to score when we get the ball down in the red zone has hurt us as much as anything. Again, today we turned it over twice down there. You put two more touchdowns on the board and you have 30 points."

Q. When the team focuses on goals of winning the Big Ten championship and going to the Rose Bowl, and now it looks like those goals are not going to be reached, how do you avoid a total collapse?

COOPER: "The only thing we can do, the only thing I talked to our squad about, was that we're going to have a lot of people out there on our backs, a lot of

people on my back right now, obviously, and it's a no-win situation. The only alternative we have is to circle the wagons, be a close-knit football team, fight back, have a great week of practice and hopefully win next week, try to regroup and have the best kind of season we can have. If you're a competitor, you do that."

"I think we have competitors on this football team, particularly our seniors. Our seniors are very devastated right now because, obviously, we had high hopes to start the season. As we talked about before, our chances of going to the Rose Bowl are probably pretty slim because of two losses. I don't know if a team has ever lost its first two conference games and come back and gone to the Rose Bowl."

Q. What was your evaluation of Illinois quarterback Jeff Kinney today?

COOPER: "He did some good things. Dan Wilkinson got after him a few times and got a lot of pressure on him, but I thought Jeff played a pretty good ball game."

Q. Did you keep looking at their sideline, expecting Jason Verduzco to come into the game?

COOPER: "No. I don't have any control over their football team. I'm not worried about who their quarterback is. I'm sure they have a reason for doing what they're doing. They have a plan and I'm sure they're going to stay with that plan."

Q. You're now 0-5 against Illinois. Is there any way to explain that?

COOPER: "Yeah, we've gotten beat five years in a row. That's the best way to explain it."

Q. Some weird things have happened during the last two games. How can you put these things into perspective?

COOPER: "There's nothing easy for me these days. It's almost like it wasn't meant to be. We got the ball down on the goal line and, for the first time ever in my career, we fumble the ball like we did, first and goal, and they pick it up and run it back for a touchdown. After we get a fumble, we fumbled the ball again and they pick it up. I don't know; it was just one of those days."

Q. Were there any bright spots for your team today?

COOPER: "Yeah. I'm proud of our

football team. I didn't think we ever quit in the ball game. I thought we played hard. I thought Danny Wilkinson played a heckuva football game. Herbie did some nice things. The offense is certainly banged up, and I'm sure they'll get their share of criticism this week, but I can't fault guys like Alan Kline and Jason Winrow who are living in the training room all week and playing injured on Saturday and doing the best they can. I thought (Brian) Stablein played a good ball game. Some others guys on defense, I'm sure, played a good ball game."

Q. After the Syracuse game, could you have ever dreamed the next two games would have turned out like they have?

COOPER: "No. I thought we'd win the game today. I thought we had a good week of practice and I thought we'd come back home and win today. I never go into a game thinking I'm going to lose. I've never been in a ball game yet that I didn't think we had a chance to win. Obviously, I never went to Wisconsin thinking they'd beat us and certainly didn't go out there today thinking we'd lose the ball game."

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The View From 15th and High

By Frank L. Moskowitz, Publisher

Perhaps The Time Has Come For OSU To Explore Its Options

Sometimes it's easy to blame a football coach for a loss. Maybe the team was not properly motivated or the game plan was poorly conceived. Maybe the coach made a bad decision at some critical point during the contest to cost his team a victory.

In Ohio State's 18-16 loss to Illinois, I'm not sure John Cooper was to blame. The team looked much more motivated than against Wisconsin. The game plan seemed effective, both on offense and defense. Cooper didn't fumble the ball. He didn't miss any field goals.

But there is no escaping the fact, whether it was his fault or not, that the game marked an unprecedented fifth straight loss to Illinois and left the Buckeyes alone in last place in the Big Ten conference. Most likely, the Rose Bowl will again have to wait another year. And there is no escaping the fact

that John Cooper is in trouble.

If you've met Cooper, you know he's a nice guy. His career record would seem to indicate he's a good football coach who runs a clean program. Yet sometimes, for whatever reasons, things just don't work out. Sometimes the chemistry for a person and a job just isn't right.

Over the last four-plus seasons, Cooper has been painting himself into a corner. And now, whether he was to blame for the loss to Illinois or not, he seems to have his back against the wall.

Cooper's relationship with the average fan is quite definitely strained. It's getting harder and harder to point to improvement on the field or in the standings as a justification for his continued stay at OSU.

There is plenty of football left to be played this season, and Cooper and his team can definitely still salvage something positive from this campaign. Unfortunately, more losses, especially a fifth straight defeat at the hands of Michigan, are also still possible.

Sure, the decision to retain or remove Cooper ultimately lies with athletic director Jim Jones and OSU president Gordon Gee, not fans or members of the media. But Jones and Gee have to look at the relationship between Cooper and the fans and media in evaluating his situation.

If things continue the way they are going this season, there is no reason to wait for donations and recruiting to suffer. There is also no reason to base a decision on what the press or people across the country might think if the administration makes a move. What's important is what the OSU alumni and the people of Ohio think, and many of them don't think too well of the Ohio State football program right now.

I think the powers that be at OSU need to at least start exploring their future options.

WHILE WE'RE talking about Cooper, let's talk about his accusers a little bit, as well.

After the loss to Wisconsin, many of the Cooper-bashers pointed to the fact that Raymond Harris, not Eddie George, was in on the failed two-point conversion attempt against the Badgers. Well, George was in on goal-line situations against Illinois and coughed up the ball twice. Who's to say he would have done

better than Harris against Wisconsin?

I was also surprised at how many Buckeye fans were critical of Cooper's use of sore-ankled Kirk Herbstreit over Bob Hoying in the Wisconsin game.

There are a lot of reasons that the Buckeyes lost to the Badgers — and to the Illini for that matter. But Kirk Herbstreit was not one of them.

It's hard to complain about a quarterback who is completing 60 percent of his passes. And on a team in desperate need of leadership, Herbstreit is definitely a leader.

There is no question, however, that the offense is more effective when Herbstreit is more mobile, like he was against Illinois. There is also no question that the Buckeyes need to get Hoying some game action. Perhaps the opportunity will present itself against Northwestern. Then again, with the way the Bucks have been playing, they better not be taking that opportunity for granted. After all, the Bucks currently trail Northwestern in the standings.

JUST AS it was difficult to find someone who didn't play well against Syracuse, it was difficult to find a lot of people who didn't make mistakes against Illinois. The Bucks are proof that you win as a team and you lose as a team.

I am troubled by the way opponents have been able to drive the ball against the OSU defense, the team's strength.

In the Louisville game, the Cardinals marched 67 yards on 12 plays at the end of the game and, but for a failed two-point conversion, would have won. Wisconsin had three long scoring drives in the second half of its victory.

Illinois ate up over eight minutes in the fourth quarter on its 86-yard scoring march following George's second fumble. Not only did the Illini score the winning points, but they also kept the OSU offense, an offense that had moved the ball much of the day, off the field. The Bucks ended up with only one opportunity to score the winning points, an opportunity that ended with Tim Williams' missed field goal attempt.

During drives like the ones mounted by Louisville, Wisconsin and Illinois, somebody on the OSU defense has to step up and make a big play. That's what winning football is all about.

ONE PLAYER who appeared to be

making the plays on defense was "Big Daddy" Dan Wilkinson. Buckeye fans may be watching the birth of a star as they watch Big Daddy. It's probably been since the days of Jerome Foster that the Bucks have had as dominant an interior defensive lineman as Wilkinson is shaping up to be.

But before Buckeye fans get too euphoric, they should remember that the last colorful defender OSU had, Alonzo Spellman, never really equaled his freshman efforts and was off to the NFL following his junior campaign.

Hopefully, the Bucks will get more out of Big Daddy than Zo-Man.

Another star in the making might be Chris Sanders. As mentioned in this space previously, Sanders is helping fill the big-play void left by the injured Joey Galloway. Sanders had a 23-yard reception against the Illini and also ran for 24 yards on a reverse, bringing back memories of Galloway's 50-yard scoring jaunt against Louisville. Should Galloway recover from his knee injury, he and Sanders could make a dynamic double threat for the Bucks next year.

WITH OSU seemingly out of the Rose Bowl race, there was some question as to how the Buckeyes would be able to get motivated the rest of the season.

I would hope that playing for pride would be motivation enough for the Bucks.

TOLEDO AREA Buckeye fans will have a chance to show their spirit when the OSU Marching Band comes to Oregon Clay High School Oct. 23.

"The Best Damn Band In 'The Land'" will perform under the direction of Dr. Jon Woods in the school gymnasium at 6 p.m. and then will perform before the Clay-Fremont Ross football game, as well as at halftime.

As a special treat, the band will perform the famous "Script Ohio" during the pregame festivities.

The event is sponsored by the OSU Alumni Club of Lucas County, with proceeds going to the club's scholarship fund for area students. Tickets are \$6 for the concert and \$4 for the game and may be purchased at Collins & Parker, 2514 Woodville Road in Oregon, or by contacting Kevin Kwiatkowski at (419) 691-5684.

Contest Winners Are Announced

Harry Reed of Wellsville, Ohio, was the winner of BSB's Subscribers' Special Contest and its prize of an OSU-Illinois football weekend.

Reed won two tickets to the game, as well as two nights at the beautiful Courtyard by Marriott. He also won dinner for two at the popular Houlihan's in The Continent, and dinner for two at Ricardo's, serving fine Italian food since 1949.

Earlier this season, Harry Huskey of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, was chosen the winner of the Football Fantasy Trip #1, sponsored by Big Bear and BSB.

Huskey won a trip for two with Buckeye Boosters to the OSU-Syracuse game that included tickets, air fare, hotel and more.

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