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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.

• **Where 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 while 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 his obligatory Florida State-oblivious-Germaine 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 peewee 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 Oldahoma, 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 ushers 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.

OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE

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 got three-and-out the first possession, and it was strange after that. We intercepted 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.

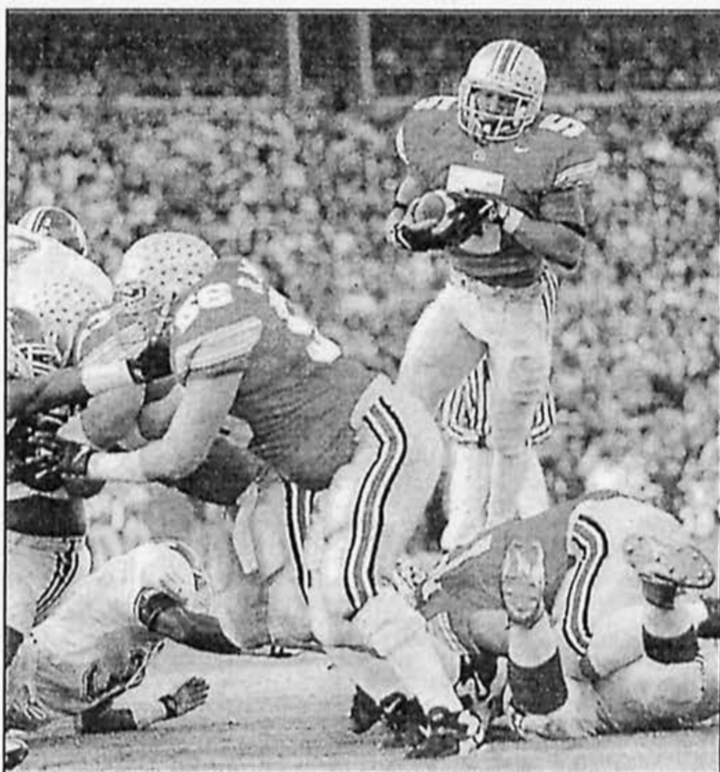
"They're going to blitz," tight end John Lumpkin said. "We've been throwing the ball so much against people that they're going to try to stop that. It's our job to pick up the blitzes, and on occasions we didn't do that. We didn't sight adjust, and some things happened to us and we gave up sacks."

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 ramblod 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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OHIO STATE VS. MICHIGAN STATE

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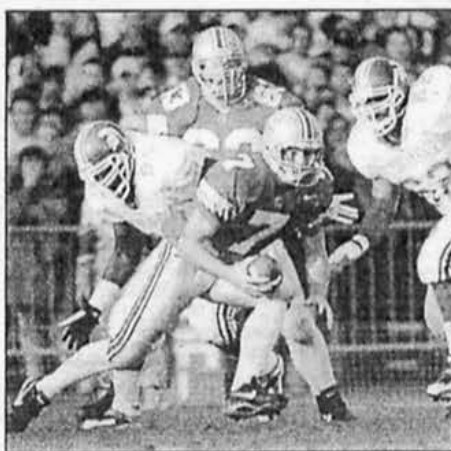
Michigan State coach Nick Saban, whose team was a 28-point underdog, on why games aren't played on paper: "Funny things happen in football, and that's why we play these games. When a team plays possessed and is inspired about what they can do ... we have good football players and they have good players;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



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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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.

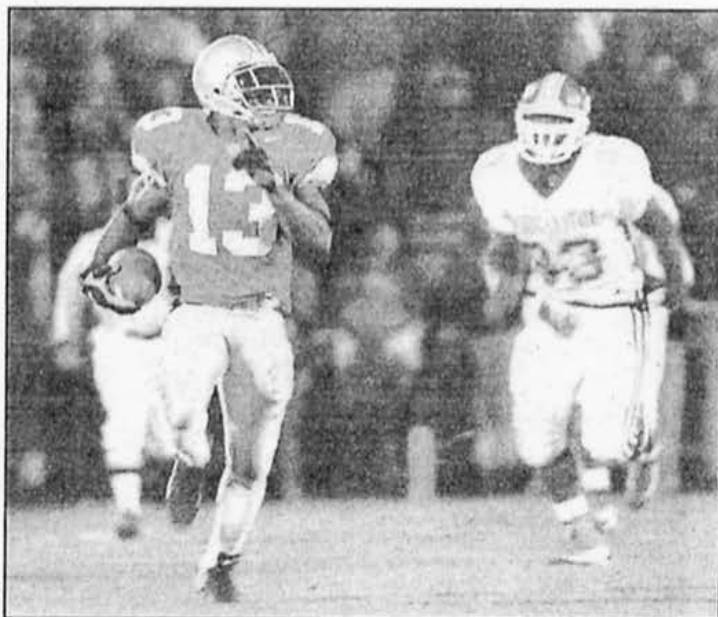
"It was a great deal of fun," he said. "The game and the stage couldn't have been any better for a quarterback or a passing game. We had some players who could make some plays, and we wanted to take advantage of that."

"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 BREHM

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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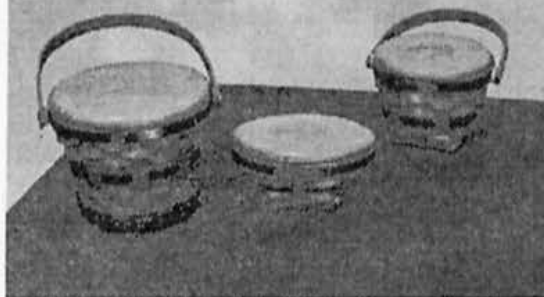
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Cooper Faces Music After Rare Home Defeat

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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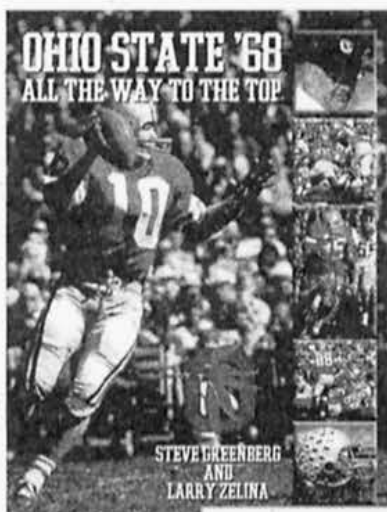
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ing in the ball game.

"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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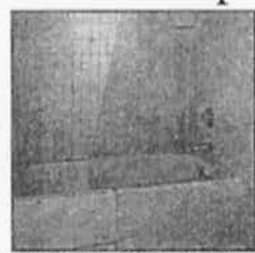
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