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Sugar Much Sweeter This Time Around

Buckeyes Bounce Texas A&M, Finish Second In Major Polls

By STEVE HELWAGEN
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The Ohio State Buckeyes made their case for at least a piece of the national championship in the Sugar Bowl.

It is too bad, though, the jury never got a chance to deliberate on the matter.

No. 3 Ohio State stopped Texas A&M 24-14 in the Sugar Bowl Jan. 1, then held its breath as the nation's top two teams, Tennessee and Florida State, battled it out in the first-ever Bowl Championship Series title game in the Fiesta Bowl.

A shaky Florida State win might have opened the door for Ohio State (11-1) to back-door its way to at least a piece of the school's first national championship in 30 years.

But that did not happen as unbeaten Tennessee (13-0) cruised to a 23-16 win over the Seminoles (11-2) Jan. 4 to stake its claim as the nation's undisputed champion.

"I think it all depends on what hap-

pens Monday night in the Fiesta Bowl," OSU coach John Cooper said after his team's win. "If Tennessee wins, I don't have an argument."

Instead of that argument, the Buckeyes do have their second No. 2 final ranking in three years, joining the 1996 OSU team that finished behind Florida after winning the Rose Bowl.

The win capped perhaps the best season in Cooper's 11-year reign. The Buckeyes matched their 11-1 record from that 1996 Rose Bowl season.

And, for good measure, OSU defeated Michigan and won a bowl game in the same season for the first time since 1982.

This marked just the sixth time in OSU history that the Buckeyes have turned that elusive feat. Besides 1982, OSU did it in 1954, '57, '68 and '81.

"It's a great feeling because it's been so long since an Ohio State team has won a Michigan game and a bowl game to finish out the year," said quarter-

Continued On Page 7



STEVE HELWAGEN

HAPPY MOMENT — OSU senior defensive backs Damon Moore (13) and Antoine Winfield (11) are all smiles moments after the Buckeyes defeated Texas A&M 24-14 at the Sugar Bowl. The seniors helped OSU post a 43-7 mark over the last four years.

Clarke, McNutt Commit; Big Weekend Set

By STEVE HELWAGEN
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

With just a month left before national signing day, the Ohio State football staff will be looking to close out its 1999 recruiting campaign on a high note.

The Buckeyes took two big steps forward Dec. 19 when OSU coach John Cooper secured verbal commitments during visits with Shaker Heights, Ohio, offensive lineman Adrien Clarke and Park Forest (Ill.) Rich East defensive back Richard McNutt.

That pair gave Ohio State 15 verbal commitments in this year's class. Counting scholarships promised to a pair of 1998 high school graduates (offensive lineman Ivan Douglas and defensive back Ziyier Walker), the Buckeyes have used 17 of their available 18 schol-

arships — by BSB's unofficial count.

It should be noted, however, that total could rise if and when players leave the program, either for the pros or because of injuries or academics. According to sources, OSU figures to be able to accept as many as five or six more players in this class before signing day.

The Buckeyes will begin the stretch drive with a powerhouse weekend of official visits Jan. 8-10.

A number of the nation's top prospects — such as Georgia wide receiver Reggie Brown, Michigan line-



Adrien Clarke

backer T.J. Duckett, Maryland defensive lineman Darnell Dockett and Florida offensive linemen Bryce Bishop and Vernon Carey — are expected among a group that could number 25 prospects.

Clarke, McNutt Come Aboard

With OSU taking a day off from bowl preparation, Cooper was able to make a whirlwind trip to lock up two key prospects in Clarke and McNutt.

There were rumors that Clarke (6-5, 315, 5.1) had committed to Ohio State while making an unofficial visit for the Michigan game.

But he had opted to keep his plans secret until the time was right to make it public. With OSU coach John Cooper and assistants Mike Jacobs and Tim

Continued On Page 8

Buckeyes Accept Another No. 2 Final Rank

Continued From Page 1

back due to Germaine. "That was in the back of our minds."

Germaine was asked after the game if the Buckeyes, who celebrated after the game almost halfheartedly, can consider themselves a national championship-caliber team.

"I think we can," he said. "I'm very confident in this team. We're the same team right now as when we were ranked No. 1 for nine weeks."

"Hopefully with the fast start and a win over a very good football team, we've proven that."

Moreover, Germaine hopes OSU's second major bowl win in three years helps erase the myth that the Buckeyes cannot win the important games.

"We win big games," he said. "There's been a motto on us that we can't win the big one. This team, this group, this class has proven we can win games like that."

Sophomore receiver Reggie Germany, who caught a key touchdown pass in the win, believes the Buckeyes regained some respect in New Orleans.

"I think we had some mental let-downs," he said. "With those, it's hard to be a national champion. But deep down, a lot of people know we should be considered one of the best teams in the nation."

The Buckeyes fell behind eighth-ranked A&M (11-3) 7-0 early before striking for three quick touchdowns to grab a commanding 21-7 lead. But OSU didn't seem to put the Aggies, champions of the Big 12 Conference, away until the game's waning moments.

Former Buckeye quarterback Kirk Herbstreit, speaking after the game in his role as an analyst for ESPN, believes the Buckeyes missed a golden opportunity. He sounded the death knell on OSU's national title hopes.

"Ohio State had an opportunity to make a case for themselves," Herbstreit said, swallowing his OSU pride. "They were up early 21-7, then fell apart. It's obvious the game played here (in Tempe) Monday night will be for the championship."

OSU's national championship bid actually fell horribly off course Nov. 7 when the Buckeyes did the unthinkable — they lost to 28-point underdog Michigan State 28-24 in Ohio Stadium.

College Bowl Results

Bowl	Scores, Records
Las Vegas	North Carolina (7-5) 20, San Diego State (7-5) 13
Motor City	Marshall (12-1) 48, Louisville (7-5) 29
Jeep Aloha	Colorado (8-4) 51, Oregon (8-4) 43
Oahu	Air Force (12-1) 45, Washington (8-4) 29
Insight.com	Missouri (8-4) 34, West Virginia (8-4) 31
Musix City	Virginia Tech (9-3) 38, Alabama (7-5) 7
Micro PC	Miami (Fla.) (9-3) 46, N.C. State (7-5) 23
Timbers Square Alamo	Purdue (9-4) 37, Kansas State (11-2) 34
Humanitarian	Idaho (9-3) 42, Southern Miss (7-5) 35
Calligan Holiday	Arizona (12-1) 23, Nebraska (9-4) 20
AAA/Equitable Liberty	Tulane (12-0) 41, Brigham Young (9-4) 27
Norwest Sun	Texas Christian (7-5) 28, Southern Cal (8-5) 19
Chuck & A Peach	Georgia (9-3) 35, Virginia (9-3) 33
Sanford Independence	Mississippi (7-5) 35, Texas Tech (7-5) 18
Outback	Penn State (9-3) 26, Kentucky (7-5) 14
Southwestern Bell Cotton	Texas (9-3) 38, Mississippi State (7-5) 11
Toyota Gator	Georgia Tech (10-2) 35, Notre Dame (9-3) 28
CompuUSA Florida Citrus	Michigan (10-3) 45, Arkansas (9-3) 31
Rose	Wisconsin (11-1) 38, UCLA (10-2) 31
Nokia Sugar	Ohio State (11-1) 24, Texas A&M (11-3) 14
Fed Ex Orange	Florida (10-2) 31, Syracuse (8-4) 10
Fiesta	Tennessee (13-0) 23, Florida State (11-2) 18

National College Football Notes

• **Game Of The Week:** No. 1 Tennessee won its first national championship since 1950 with a sloppy 23-16 win over No. 2 Florida State in the Fiesta Bowl Jan. 4.

The win (13-0) got a 54-yard interception return for a score by Deane Gooch and put FSU (12-2) away with Tim Martin's 70-yard touchdown pass to Preston Price with 9:17 left.

The game was marred by penalties and turnovers on both sides.

• **Final Polls:** As of press time, the complete final polls were not available.

But Tennessee was tops in The Associated Press poll, followed by Ohio State, Florida State, Arizona and Florida.

The Vols were also the unanimous pick in the USA Today/ESPN coaches poll, followed by Ohio State, Florida State, Arizona and Wisconsin.

Florida State extended its string of consecutive top-four finishes to 12 years.

• **Making A Point (Or Many):** The name of the game this bowl season was score and score often. More than ever, scoreboard operators went overtime trying to keep up with increasingly sophisticated offenses.

Florida-Syracuse and Ohio State-Texas A&M actually played two of the lower-scoring games, with the Gators winning 31-10 and the Buckeyes triumphant by a 24-14 tally.

Others were hard to keep up with, though, with Michigan and Arkansas combining for 76 points in the Citrus, Wisconsin and UCLA going back and forth before a 38-31 Badgers Rose Bowl win, and Idaho and Southern Mississippi actually staging an entertaining Humanitarian Bowl, the Vandals pulling out a wild 42-35 victory.

Missouri beat West Virginia 34-31 in the Insight.com, Georgia Tech upended Notre Dame 35-28 in the Gator, and Georgia and Virginia played a doozy in the Peach as the Bulldogs endured a Cavaliers missed field goal as time ran out to win 35-33.

We'd be remiss if we didn't point out Purdue's 37-34 Alamo Bowl win over Kansas State, the Wildcats growing about their lot in the bowl parade instead of shifting up the BCS pecking, they pooled and let Purdue come back for the win.

All in all, a pretty wild bowl season.

• **Heisman Watch:** Yes, we know, Ricky Williams already won the coveted award and now has his sights set on the green of the National Football League. But we wanted to point out that Williams reversed a trend of Heisman winners not faring well in bowl games.

Williams almost single-handedly beat Mississippi State in the Cotton Bowl, rambling for over 100 yards in the fourth quarter alone. He finished the afternoon with 203 yards and two scores.

• **Poetic Justice:** See Kansas State note above.

The Wildcats were miffed about their fate, mainly because the Big 12 allowed Nebraska to accept a Holiday Bowl bid and Texas one to the Cotton Bowl, assuming K-State would beat Texas A&M in the Big 12 title game. When that didn't happen, KSU was locked out of the process.

Maybe if coach Bill Snyder decides to schedule some real live teams in the future — Indiana State and Northeast Louisiana don't count — this won't happen again. Snyder also kept QB Michael Bishop away from the media for four weeks prior to KSU beating Nebraska, then allowed his star to talk — only to ESPN and Sports Illustrated, eschewing local media outlets.

Perhaps this was the bowl fates telling Snyder to shape up.

• **That's Why There's PlayStation:** Tulane, a 41-27 winner over Brigham Young in the Liberty Bowl, joined Tennessee as the only unbeaten yet never got a sniff from the BCS. QB Shaun King would love to face the Volunteers, saying, "I think it would be a good game."

• **Quotable:** Wisconsin's Ron Dayne set one record in the Rose Bowl — 246 yards rushing — and tied another — four touchdowns, helping his Badgers to an unexpected win.

After he scored the game's opening touchdown, Dayne had an unexpected surprise.

"I got so hyped up after our first touchdown that I threw up," he said.

— Mike Wachsmen

able — they lost to 28-point underdog Michigan State 28-24 in Ohio Stadium.

The crushing defeat dropped OSU from first to seventh in the polls.

But OSU rallied with convincing wins over Iowa and rival Michigan to end the regular season and fairly well dominated A&M in the Sugar Bowl.

"We had the goal of going to the Fiesta Bowl," said linebacker Jerry Rudzinski. "But we suffered a team loss in the Michigan State game. We bounced back and showed what kind of character we have."

"We will all look back at this as a big year. I can promise you that."

Rudzinski was not about to let a bit of poll politics rain on his Bourbon Street parade.

"This win is every bit as sweet as the Rose Bowl two years ago," he said. "Both of these games, we've beat a good football team and propelled ourselves into one of the top couple of spots in the polls."

"It was neat to represent Ohio State in the Rose Bowl. The next best thing is to come to a bowl in the BCS system and beat a good football team."

Seniors Celebrate

OSU's senior class leaves with a four-year record of 43-7 — the most wins by a class in school history.

"I'm very happy for our football team," Cooper said. "Our senior football players leave Ohio State as the winningest class in Ohio State football history, and obviously I'm very proud of those guys."

Split end David Boston, courageously playing on a gimpy ankle, dedicated his performance to OSU's departing players.

"I'm happy for these seniors to go out with a win," he said. "They're the winningest class in Ohio State history and I love those guys."

It was that type of sentiment that bound this OSU team together, Rudzinski said.

"It was a special day for us seniors," he said. "We all wanted to step up and make something happen, and sure enough, a lot of us did."

"It was a good feeling with the underclassmen picking us up and real-

ly commenting that we meant a lot to them. They made it special for us."

Last Year, Next Year

Everywhere the Buckeyes went in the days leading up to the Sugar Bowl, they were reminded of the 31-14 whipping inflicted by Florida State during last year's contest.

"They were determined to make this prime-time TV appearance memorable because of their play."

"I wanted to come out here and play hard and redeem ourselves for last year," Boston said.

Added Germaine, "Last year left us with a bad taste in our mouth. I think we used that as determination and fuel for the fire for this season."

"We were determined to 'not let something like that happen again.'"

Major bowl wins like this one do not come easy, reminded OSU senior Kevin Griffin, who returned a blocked punt for a touchdown in his final game.

"It's a credit to our program," he said. "The coaches have worked hard to bring quality athletes into our program. Unfortunately, we had that one misfire against Michigan State."

"But I think this sets a good tempo for next year and I think the guys will do even better next year."

All-American cornerback Antoine Winfield shone as well in his final game as a Buckeye. Afterward, he lamented what might have been and, as hope always springs eternal in the college game, cast an eye toward the year ahead.

"We had our opportunity to finish No. 1," he said. "All we had to do was run the table. We slipped up. We didn't do that. I'm happy with No. 2. I'm happy to go out with a win."

"Hopefully next year they'll be back here and win a national championship."

IN AN UPCOMING EDITION: OSU will take an early look at the 1999 OSU football team as well as a peek at the team's opponents and the prospects for the Big Ten for next season.

Five Of Nation's Top 25 Due In This Weekend

Continued From Page 1

Spencer in his home. Clarke said the coaches he was ready to go public and pick the Buckeyes over Michigan State and Illinois.

"They were very happy," Clarke said of the OSU coaches' reaction. "Coach Cooper was like, 'You finally decided to make it public. We're glad to have you as part of the family.'"

"Now I know I'm going to be playing down there. They have a right tackle job open (with Brooks Burris leaving). They really showed they cared about me and my family."

"It was an honor to be recruited so heavily by the No. 1 team in the country."

Clarke, who benches 370 pounds, is determined to qualify academically — although both his GPA, in the 2.1 range, and test score need work.

He helped lead Shaker Heights to a 10-1 mark and a Division I playoff berth. This year he led the way as teammate Derrick Tatum rushed for over 1,500 yards. He had 35 pancake blocks and 100 finished blocks.

"I like to pound the ball at people," he said. "The running game is probably my strong point."

Clarke was ranked Ohio's seventh-

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Football players who have issued verbal commitments to play college football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	High School
Tim Anderson	DL	6-4	280	Clyde, Ohio
Adrien Clarke	OL	6-5	315	Shaker Heights, Ohio
Curtis Crosby	DB	5-11	185	Columbus Eastmoor
Mike Doss	DB	6-0	190	Canton (Ohio) McKinley
Ben Hartsock	TE	6-4	260	Chillicothe (Ohio) Unioto
Jesse Kline	RB	6-2	215	Upper Arlington, Ohio
Craig Krenzel	QB	6-4	215	Utica (Mich.) Ford
Maurice Lee	WR	5-10	160	Cleveland South
Kelton Lindsay	RB	6-1	190	Lebanon, Ohio
Richard McNutt	DB	6-0	170	Park Forest (Ill.) Rich East
Pat O'Neill	LB	6-4	215	Cuyahoga Falls (Ohio) Walsh Jesuit
Fred Pagac Jr.	LB	6-2	230	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman
B.J. Sander	P	6-3	190	Cincinnati Roger Bacon
Matt Wilhelm	LB	6-5	240	Elyria (Ohio) Catholic
Matt Zahn	OL	6-7	350	St. Henry, Ohio

best senior prospect by The Ohio Football Recruiting News and as the nation's ninth-best offensive tackle by The National Recruiting Advisor.

McNutt (6-0, 170, 4.5) was regarded as one of the nation's top defensive backs prior to his senior season. But he missed the entire year due to a severe ankle sprain.

McNutt visited OSU Dec. 4 and came

away saying OSU was his top school.

"It felt like it was home there, yet it was still a good ways away," he said.

He then saw UCLA Dec. 11, but the Buckeyes maintained their lead. A nudge from Cooper and Spencer led McNutt to pick the Buckeyes over UCLA, Northwestern, Michigan State and Florida.

McNutt said he shook Cooper's hand and said, "I want to be a Buckeye."

He said his ankle is beginning to respond, although he has not been able to join his school's basketball team yet this winter.

"I hurt it on Aug. 15, the first day of contact drills," he said. "It actually happened during a drill where I rolled it. I taped it up and kept practicing, but I couldn't do much after I took the tape off."

McNutt's reputation was built on a big junior year in which he intercepted nine passes and returned two of them for touchdowns.

He feels he can earn his way into the rotation in the secondary at OSU next year.

"I know I can go up there and play next year," McNutt said. "I just have that intuition."

He says he's done making official visits.

"My coach told me that once I make a decision, don't ever look back," he said. "I'm going to be in there in the fall. I feel good about my decision. It's a big relief to make up my mind."

McNutt holds a 3.2 GPA and scored a 19 on the ACT. He is also a state meet qualifier in track in the long jump, triple jump and 400 meters.

An All-Star Cast

If all of the players scheduled visit

over the Jan. 3 weekend, Ohio State would have five of the 25 players selected for USA Today's All-USA Super 25 team on campus together in Bowling Green, Carey, Dockett and Duvall.

Several of OSU's verbal commitments, including Clarke, Mike Doss, Ben Hartsock, Jesse Kline and Kelton Lindsay, will likely visit.

Here is a look at the other players tentatively scheduled to visit that weekend.

• **Kevin Beard, wide receiver, Plantation, Fla.** — Beard (6-2, 186, 4.4) is considered among the country's top flanker prospects.

Although he committed to Miami (Fla.) previously, Beard now says he is only "leaning" to the Hurricanes. He has visits set to Tennessee Jan. 15, Miami Jan. 22 and Missouri Jan. 29.

• **Bryce Bishop, offensive lineman, Miami Killian** — Bishop (6-5, 310, 4.9) is rated the nation's eighth-best offensive lineman by SuperPrep and No. 7 among guards by TNRA.

He could play either tackle or guard at the college level. This great run blocker is a three-year starter at tackle. This year he blocked at 84 percent and had 12 pancake blocks.

Bishop has said previously that OSU was his leader with Florida State and Michigan also in his top three. Florida, Miami (Fla.) and Auburn are also in the picture. His visit schedule besides OSU was unavailable at press time.

Bishop, who benches 330 pounds, holds a 2.8 GPA and has a reported ACT score of 20.

• **Reggie Brown, wide receiver, Carrollton, Ga.** — Brown (6-7, 175, 4.25) is both Georgia's top overall prospect and the nation's No. 1 wide receiver, according to TNRA.

After catching a whopping 60 passes for 1,150 yards and 15 touchdowns as a junior, Brown missed four games as a senior due to a broken fibula. He still caught 62 passes for 1,046 yards as his team went 13-1 and won the Class AA state title. He had seven catches for 150 yards and two scores in the title game.

After OSU, Brown plans to visit Tennessee Jan. 15, Georgia Jan. 22 and Florida Jan. 29.

"I'm anxious to see what all the schools are about," Brown said. "I hope to have my decision made by the end of January."

"Whenever I feel it will be right, I'll pick a school."

OSU assistant Tim Salemi is recruiting Brown, who holds a 3.0 GPA and scored an 880 on the SAT.

• **Nick Brezinski, tight end/defensive end, Detroit Central**

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COVER STORY: FOOTBALL RECRUITING

Catholic — Bruminski (6-4, 235, 4.8) is a versatile athlete. He was an all-league back at receiver and defensive end last year, but recruiters believe he could make a decent tight end. As a senior, he caught 29 passes and averaged 23 yards a catch.

He benches 350 pounds. This 3.0 student scored a 28 on the ACT. He visited Duke Dec. 4 and Northwestern Dec. 11. Besides OSU, he will see Indiana Jan. 15. Michigan State could also get a look.

• **Atari Callen, defensive back, Concord (Calif.) DeLaSalle** — Callen (5-10, 190, 4.4) has visited Washington and UCLA previously. After OSU, he plans to visit Arizona Jan. 15 and perhaps Cal Jan. 22.

He says he has no clear favorite at this time. TNRA ranks Callen among the nation's top 15 running backs after he rushed for over 1,500 yards, but he figures to play defensive back at the college level.

• **Vernon Carey, offensive lineman, Miami Northeastern** — Carey (6-6, 321, 5.2) is TNRA's top offensive tackle and a USA Today first-team pick.

Carey blocked at 91 percent efficiency and averaged seven pancake blocks a game. He led Northwestern to a 15-0 mark and a second straight Class 6A state title. The team finished fourth in USA Today's national rankings.

Carey previously saw Kentucky and plans to see Florida Jan. 22. Miami (Fla.) may also be in the picture.

Carey benches 410 pounds, holds a 2.6 GPA and scored a 930 on the SAT.

• **Ryshaun Conover, wide receiver, Lakewood, N.J.** — Conover (6-2, 200, 4.45) is rated among the nation's top 15 receivers by TNRA.

He is reportedly down to just OSU and Penn State (Jan. 15), although his academic picture is cloudy. He had 32 catches and nine touchdowns and averaged 40 yards on kick returns as a junior.

• **Darnell Dockett, defensive lineman, Burtonville (Md.) Paint Branch** — Dockett (6-5, 265, 4.6) is the nation's top weak-side defensive end, according to TNRA, and a first-team All-USA pick by USA Today.

He earned those accolades on the field, tallying 171 tackles (102 solos), 15 sacks, two fumbles caused and three blocked kicks. He returned one of his two interceptions 90 yards for a touchdown and had a school career-record 47 sacks.

Dockett rescheduled his OSU visit from Dec. 4 to Jan. 8 because he had to take an SAT test that weekend. He visited Florida State Nov. 21 for the win over Florida. He saw Miami (Fla.) Dec. 18 and will see North Carolina Jan. 15.

Dockett holds a 2.6 GPA but may need improvement on the SAT.

• **T.J. Duckett, linebacker, Kalamazoo (Mich.) Loy Norrix** — Duckett (6-3, 255, 4.47) is rated as TNRA's top strong-side linebacker prospect and was also a first-team All-USA pick by USA Today.

As a senior, he had 102 tackles (63 solos) with 16 for losses. He rushed for 1,600 yards for an 8-1 team that just missed the playoffs.

He had visited Michigan State, the alma mater of his brother, former MSU running back Tico Duckett, over the Dec. 4 weekend without committing. He visited FSU along with his good friend Dockett Nov. 21. He also visited Michigan Dec. 11 and UCLA Dec. 18. There are reports he is now interested in an unofficial visit to Notre Dame Jan.

15. "I'm really confused now," Duckett said after the UCLA visit. "All of these schools are about even right now."

Duckett's physical credentials are, in some ways, Andy Katzenmoyer-like. Besides his sub-4.5 40-yard time, he benches in the 425- to 450-pound range. He holds a 3.0 GPA and scored an 18 on the ACT.

• **Kareem Kelly, wide receiver, Long Beach (Calif.) Poly** — Kelly (6-2, 180, 4.4) has committed to USC, but he still seems intent on visiting OSU as well as Colorado (Jan. 15). Florida could also get a look.

Kelly, one of TNRA's top five receiver prospects, is a former high school teammate of OSU receiver Ken-Yon Rambo.

• **Dashaun McCullough, defensive back, Gardena (Calif.) Serra** — McCullough (5-11, 180, 4.4) has already visited Texas A&M and Colorado.

Besides OSU, he also plans to see UCLA Jan. 15 and Cal Jan. 22.

• **Scott McMullen, quarterback, Granville, Ohio** — McMullen (6-4, 200, 4.8) told BSB he was offered a scholarship Dec. 16, literally the day after Chris Simms committed to Tennessee. The Buckeyes seem intent on building their depth at quarterback.

"I think they need an extra guy because they may not be sure which side of the ball Steve Bellisari will play on," McMullen said. "It's real exciting for them to offer me, especially growing up just 20 minutes from the Horseshoe."

McMullen has visited Michigan State and Pitt. He may also visit Florida State Jan. 15 and perhaps West Virginia as well.

As a senior, McMullen completed 118 of 191 passes (62 percent) for 2,577 yards with 24 touchdowns and just five interceptions. In three seasons, he threw for 6,100 yards and 58 touchdowns.

He was rated as Ohio's 21st-best prospect by TOFRN.

• **Tony Milton, running back, Tallahassee (Fla.) North Florida Christian** — Milton (5-10, 180, 4.5) is rated among the nation's top three all-purpose backs by TNRA.

He is reportedly leaning to OSU, although Auburn, Tennessee and Syracuse could also get visits during January.

• **Clint Mitchell, defensive lineman, Clearwater (Fla.) Countryside** — Mitchell (6-7 1/2, 245, 4.7) prefers to play defense, although he is also a standout offensive lineman.

SuperPrep has him 23rd among all defensive linemen, while TNRA rates him as the nation's 20th-best offensive tackle.

Mitchell, who saw OSU unofficially for the Michigan game, visited Georgia Dec. 11 and Kansas State Dec. 18. He plans to see Tennessee either Jan. 15 or 22 and Florida Jan. 29. He plans to take all five visits.

Mitchell had 14 sacks this season. He benches 330 pounds, cleans 275 and squats 475. He holds a 2.2 GPA and scored a 21 on the ACT.

• **Kendyl Pope, linebacker, Lake City (Fla.) Columbia** — Pope (6-3,



T.J. Duckett

215, 4.49) committed to Florida State during his unofficial visit Nov. 21 for the Florida game.

Still, he is looking at other schools. He canceled a Dec. 18 trip to Miami (Fla.). After OSU, he plans to see Tennessee Jan. 15, FSU Jan. 22 and Alabama Jan. 29.

"I am very anxious to see Ohio State," Pope said. "I'm looking forward to coming to Columbus. My dad told me there was a lot of snow up there. That will be different because I've only seen snow one time."

He excels as an inside linebacker but feels he'll play outside at the college level. In fact, he is rated as one of the nation's top five weak-side LB prospects by TNRA.

He amassed 175 tackles, five sacks and two interceptions this year after logging nearly 200 tackles as a junior.

Pope, who benches 380 pounds, holds a 2.5 GPA and retook the ACT Dec. 12. He had a 16 on his first attempt.

• **Alan Reuber, offensive lineman, Plano, Texas** — Reuber (6-7, 275, 4.95) visited Texas Dec. 18 but did not commit. Besides OSU, he is still scheduled to see Notre Dame Jan. 15. He has previously visited Miami (Fla.) and Texas A&M.

"More and more as time goes on, I feel like I want to stay in state," he said. "I did make an unofficial visit there over the summer and got to know Coach Jacobs and Coach (Jon) Tenuta, who recruits this area, really well."

Reuber, who benches well over 300 pounds, led his team to a 10-3 mark and third-round playoff berth.

Reuber was born in Cleveland and lived in Columbus during his sixth- and seventh-grade years.

He holds a 2.9 GPA and scored a 24 on the ACT and a 1050 on the SAT.

• **Nate Stead, fullback, Marion (Ohio) Harding** — Stead (6-0, 245) is an intriguing player who has burst onto the scene. He could be pegged to back up Jamar Martin, especially if Sean Penny is unable to return due to injury.

Stead, who will visit OSU either Jan. 8 or 15, has an offer from Akron and will go there unless OSU or Michigan State offer him a scholarship. This power run-

ner carried for 500 yards in eight games, missing four of the team's games due to a knee injury.

OSU reportedly became interested in Stead after his team completed in the Division I playoffs.

• **Fred Sturup, defensive lineman, Plantation, Fla.** — Sturup (6-4, 280, 4.9) told BSB that he favors OSU. After he sees OSU, he has visits set to Florida State Jan. 15, Missouri Jan. 22 and Miami (Fla.) Jan. 29. He previously saw Virginia Tech.

"I like their reputation," Sturup said of OSU. "They treat their players good. That sounds like where I want to be."

Yet Sturup, ranked ninth among defensive tackles nationally by TNRA, isn't close to making it official.

"I don't plan to commit until signing day," he said.

As a senior, Sturup notched 15 sacks in leading his team to an 11-1 mark and a playoff berth. As a junior, he tallied 165 tackles and nine sacks during his team's 12-1 playoff run. His Plantation team was knocked out of the playoffs by Carey's Northwestern Dec. 10.

"I have mainly played nose tackle, but I've also played some end," Sturup said. "I want to play end at the college level."

Sturup, who benches 380 pounds, holds a 2.3 GPA. He needs an improved test score in order to qualify.

• **Brandon Ward, defensive back, Dallas Kimball** — Ward (6-5, 195, 4.5) is a rangy strong safety prospect, rated among the nation's five best by TNRA.

He reportedly has a top three of Florida State, OSU and Nebraska. He saw FSU Dec. 11 and Nebraska Dec. 18. Ward could postpone OSU and see Michigan instead Jan. 8.

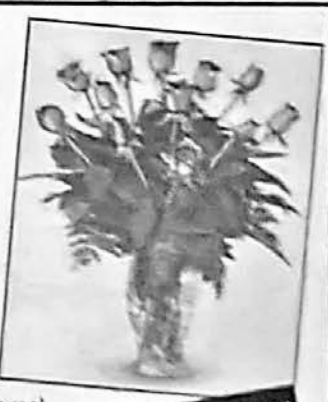
"The football teams stood out, but they stressed academics there, too," Ward said of his visits to FSU and Nebraska.

He said he began following OSU in 1995 with the star-studded team that included Eddie George, Bobby Hering and Terry Glenn. He said he is looking for an opportunity to play right away.

He holds a B- average and took the ACT Dec. 12.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Will Underclassmen Stay Or Will They Go?

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ever the optimist, OSU coach John Cooper believes he will not lose any of his star underclassmen early to the National Football League.

That would be quite a coup for the Buckeyes, who could lose All-Americans like split end David Boston or linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer to the pros if they declare such intentions by Jan. 8.

"I think they're all coming back," Cooper said prior to the Sugar Bowl. "I don't think we have an underclassman, in my opinion, who is ready to go to the NFL."

Cooper's cause was buoyed prior to the game when junior tailback Michael Wiley announced he would return. Things got even better afterward when junior guard Rob Murphy said he would also be back.

It would be hard to find a program that has been stung more by early departures than Ohio State. Although no Buckeyes were drafted last year, OSU has seen 10 underclassmen bolt for the draft since 1992. That contingent is marked by No. 1 overall draftees "Big Daddy" Dan Wilkinson, who left after the 1993 season, and Orlando Pace, who left after the '96 campaign.

During Sugar Bowl preparation, Cooper did his level best to persuade OSU's fence-sitting juniors to return to the Buckeyes.

"I think they should all come back. Why should they leave?" the coach asked.

"If they are the No. 1 pick, they should leave — how can you improve on perfect? Orlando (Pace) and Danny (Wilkinson) were the No. 1 guy picked."

"Shawn (Springs) was the No. 1 defensive back picked (in 1997)."

Boston Looks Gone

There were rumors swirling around New Orleans that Boston would announce he was leaving OSU, likely at a Jan. 6 press conference in Columbus. It was reported that he would have his sister, who would serve as his agent, at his side.

After earning Sugar Bowl MVP honors, however, Boston said the decision was not a slam dunk.

"Leaving early ... I've learned to set goals ever since I've been a freshman here at Ohio State," he said. "Leaving early is not my No. 1 goal."

When asked if that meant he would stay, he said, "That doesn't mean anything. My decision will be made by Jan. 8."

Cooper added his two cents on his record-breaking wide receiver.

"I don't think he'll enter the draft," Cooper said. "David indicated to me two or three weeks ago that if he was not the No. 1 receiver taken in the draft, he was coming back."

"If David was going to be the No. 1 wide receiver picked, I don't know if I would be able to argue with it."

Boston's Sugar Bowl performance — 11 catches, 105 yards — only helped him extend many of his OSU records. He ended the year with OSU single-season records for catches (85) and yards (1,435) as well as career marks for catches (191), yards (2,855) and touchdowns (34).

He broke both yardage marks — previously held by Terry Glenn for the 1995 season and Gary Williams for his career (1979-82) — during the Sugar Bowl.

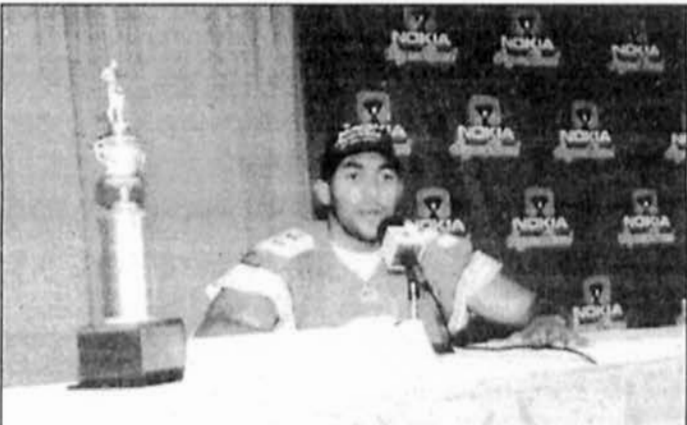
Sports Illustrated recently listed Boston as its No. 10 overall draft choice. Some sources, though, say he should go as the third wide receiver behind Florida State's Peter Warrick and N.C. State's Terry Holt.

And there is the small matter that Boston could have more business to attend to on the college level. He could be a candidate for the Heisman Trophy and the Biletnikoff Award if he comes back and would be a key piece in any OSU national title run.



SONNY BROCKWAY

DECISIONS, DECISIONS — Above, OSU guard Rob Murphy tells reporters just after the Sugar Bowl he plans to return for his senior season. Below, OSU split end David Boston accepts the Sugar Bowl MVP award and says he is still pondering his plans.



SONNY BROCKWAY

"I think he should come back because of the college experience," Cooper said. "He's having more fun now than he'll ever have in his life."

"David's situation is a little different. He does not come from an economically deprived family. He's living a pretty good life now. I think he should come back."

Katzenmoyer Remains Mum

While Boston's stock has risen this year, Katzenmoyer's has fallen after a lackluster junior year. He could be a mid-to-late first rounder.

"If Andy is the first linebacker taken, maybe he should leave," Cooper said. "But I don't think he will be the first linebacker taken."

Katzenmoyer, blistered by media coverage for his off-season drunken driving arrest and his plight to regain his academic eligibility in summer school, has not spoken to reporters covering the team since midseason.

However, sources say he would like to return to the team. Maintaining his eligibility would be the key stumbling block. He reportedly took his autumn quarter classes "pass/fail" — and passed them all — so his GPA, hovering near the eligibility limit, would not be threatened.

Another source told BSB that the Katzenmoyer family had canceled meetings

with potential agents, perhaps signaling his return.

For more on Katzenmoyer, see Ohio State Insider on page 4.

Murphy, Wiley Back In Fold

Prior to heading to New Orleans, Murphy told reporters he had pretty much decided which way he was leaning, but he did not share the decision with the media.

That changed after the game when the All-American guard and pillar of the offensive line told reporters he would be back for a fifth year.

"I'll be here next year," he said. "I'm happy to have the privilege of playing here."

Prior to the Sugar Bowl, Murphy said he was seriously considering making the jump to the NFL after earning All-American honors from Football News and the AP.

"You have to examine every avenue," he said. "You can't keep your chips in one bag. You've got to look."

"It's a distraction if you let it be. I play for this university. I love this university. Right now you're playing for the best program in the country and the best coach in the country. It's not a distraction for me. I'm honored to play with the guys I'm playing with."

From a personal standpoint, he has accomplished a lot.

"The things I wanted to set out and do differently than last year, I think I'm doing

them."

But the national title — one goal that has remained out of reach — still weighs on Murphy's mind.

"Everybody's main goal is to win a national championship," he said. "Year in and year out, we put ourselves in the position to make a run for that. That's the main motivation for coming back to Ohio State."

"There are so many intangibles a lot of people don't understand. You have your friends and the relationships with the coaches. Coach (Mike) Jacobs is my second dad. He really is. He's my dad away from home, so to speak."

"Those intangibles outweigh the money. The money is going to be there."

"Of all the guys who could leave, every one of us would benefit by staying another year."

Likewise, Wiley says he has more to accomplish at the college level.

"There have been a couple of people calling me," he said. "I will definitely look into it, but I don't think anything will persuade me to come out."

"The biggest thing for me is I haven't won a national championship. I'd like to do some things I haven't done yet, like make a couple of All-American teams and maybe get put into a couple of (awards) races."

Wiley eclipsed the 1,000-yard mark in his first season as the starter at tailback. He had already decided to stay before the game, and an ankle injury suffered late in the contest probably clinches it, despite the fact there appears to be a dearth of impact-quality running backs in this draft class.

"Hopefully I can come back and the team will count on me to make some big plays and to carry the offense," Wiley said.

"You never know. If David would leave, Ken-Yon (Rambo) and Reggie (Germany) are by no means slouches. We're going to have a good team."

"Hopefully I'll be a main part of the offense and help it to keep rolling."

The List Is Long And Distinguished

Defensive lineman Alonzo Spellman started the recent trend of Buckeyes to leave early for the pros when he bolted after the 1991 season.

A year later, OSU lost safety Roger Harper and tailback Robert Smith. Wilkinson left a year later.

Three Buckeyes, linebacker Craig Powell, tackle Corey Stringer and linebacker Lorenzo Styles, left after the 1994 season. Wide receiver Terry Glenn departed after the 1995 campaign.

Pace and Springs came next after OSU's 1996 Rose Bowl run.

High-profile Buckeyes who resisted the urge to turn pro a year early include linebacker Steve Tovar, a senior in 1992, wide receiver Joey Galloway, who returned for his final year in 1994; tailback Eddie George, who returned in 1995 to win the Heisman after rushing for 1,442 yards as a junior; and cornerback Antoine Winfield, who finished up his eligibility this season after earning All-American honors last year.

Winfield was asked what he would say to his teammates regarding their decision.

"Talk to your family and talk to your coaches," he said. "If you think you're prepared and you're ready to make that big step, go for it."

"I didn't go because I didn't think I was ready."

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

Buckeyes Bag The Ags

Despite Bum Ankle, Boston Helps OSU To Sugar Bowl Win Over A&M

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

As Jan. 1 faded quietly and slowly into Jan. 2, deep in the recesses of the cavernous Louisiana Superdome there was OSU split end David Boston clutching the Miller-Digby Award as the Sugar Bowl MVP.

Boston, who missed much of the final week of OSU's bowl preparations with an ankle sprain, came up big as the go-to man in the Buckeyes' 24-14 win over upset-minded Texas A&M in the Sugar Bowl.

Boston, OSU's All-American receiver, overcame an ankle sprain suffered when he slipped on a patch of ice while home in Texas on Christmas break.

Although he did not catch a touchdown pass — he and quarterback Joe Germaine barely missed connections on a pair of would-be scores — he pulled in a season-high 11 passes for 105 yards.

"I just wanted to go out there and have fun like we did all year," said Boston, who rewrote the OSU receiving record book this season.

"I was probably 80 percent. It was OK early in the game, but as it went on it was kind of sore. I just had to suck it up and show some heart for these seniors."

OSU coach John Cooper credited OSU's training staff for getting Boston ready for the game.

"Our trainers, Bill Davis and Doug Calland, did a good job of working with David this week," he said. "We held him out of practice. He didn't practice hardly at all. I thought David made a good effort to get himself healthy and our doctors and trainers treated him well."

Boston agreed — his play and MVP honor were team efforts.

"That's a team award right there," he said. "That just shows you right there. I just wanted to go out and help the team. I had to fair catch some punts and things like that, but I'm happy for everybody."

"My ankle was hurting real bad, but they did a good job taking care of it during the week."

Hounded by questions of whether he plans to leave OSU a year early for the NFL — he remained noncommittal after the game — Boston repeatedly made possession catches to keep OSU drives alive.

"I just wanted to concentrate on the game and play the best game I could," he said.

"I didn't want to be involved with the questions about me leaving. I just wanted to focus and play the best game I could against Texas A&M."

Germaine noticed Boston was not at full capability. But even at 80 percent, he proved to be better than most.

"There were a few times in the ball game where he tried to make some cuts and he just couldn't do it as well as he could with a good ankle," Germaine said.

"He was playing on guts today. He put his neck on the line. That's just the kind of guy he is."

A Win Is A Win

Despite a lackluster second-half showing — OSU was held scoreless for a full half for the first time all year — the Buckeyes were happy to get an elusive third bowl win in 10 tries under Cooper.

"It always feels good to win, no matter how you do it," said Germaine, who capped his stellar OSU career with one more command performance. He hit on 21 of 38 passes for 222 yards and a touchdown.

The Buckeyes (11-1) fell behind eighth-ranked A&M (11-3) 7-0 early before striking for three quick touchdowns to grab a commanding 21-7 lead. But OSU never seemed to put the Aggies, champions of the Big 12 Conference, away until the game's waning moments.

In the final analysis, the Buckeyes did hold A&M under 100 yards rushing — the Aggies finished with 96 yards on 27 carries. With the run bottled up, A&M quarterback Brannon Stewart attempted an uncharacteristic 39 passes, completing 22 of them for 187 yards.

"I thought we played a real good, solid football game tonight," Cooper said. "We played a real good, solid football team. We took their best shot."

"They came out fired up early in the game and scored, and we answered right back."

"In the second half, I thought both defenses really buckled down. It was a good, hard-hitting college football game."

The Buckeyes also benefited from a blocked punt by Derek Ross. Teammate Kevin Griffin recovered the block and returned it for a touchdown, giving OSU its 21-7 lead.

"The blocked punt was the key play in the game," deadpanned A&M coach R.C. Slocum. "You can't fall behind a team like Ohio State like we did."



SONNY BROCKWAY

SCORE ONE FOR GERMANY — OSU sophomore Reggie Germany celebrates after toasting Texas A&M's Sedrick Curry (18) on an 18-yard touchdown catch. The play helped OSU tie the game at 7-7 with 8:34 left in the first quarter.

As It Happened

After forcing OSU to punt on the game's first possession, Texas A&M drew first blood. The Aggies marched 59 yards in a quick six plays. The key play was tailback Dante Hall's 25-yard jaunt down to the OSU 27.

A&M had good success running at the Buckeyes early as Sirr Parker and Ja'Mar Tombs each had a 6-yard gain, setting up Hall's 9-yard touchdown run over the right side. He broke a pair of tackle attempts on the play, lifting the Aggies to a quick 7-0 lead with 10:53 left in the first quarter.

Ohio State answered with an eight-play, 71-yard scoring drive. The first key play came on third-and-15 from the OSU 24 when Germaine went deep down the right side to Dee Miller for a 28-yard gain.

Three plays later, Germaine hooked up with Boston on a deep slant to net 17 more yards. Then, after an incompletion, Germaine found Reggie Germany on a slant pattern for the 18-yard touchdown, tying the game at 7-7 with 8:34 left in the first.

"I was just able to be in the right place at the right time," Germany said. "I tried to get

the defender off me and to get to the inside. Joe threw a good ball, and I was able to catch it."

The Buckeye defense then forced an A&M punt, giving the offense possession at its own 29. OSU needed just six plays to cover the remaining 71 yards. Michael Wiley opened this scoring push, picking up gains of 11 and nine yards on the first two plays. Germaine then connected with Boston on a pair of 6-yard gains.

Backup tailback Joe Montgomery then took over, exploding through a big hole over the right side and rolling for 29 yards down to the OSU 10. One play later, Montgomery got the ball again and busted up the middle for the 10-yard touchdown, staking OSU to a 14-7 lead with 4:10 left in the first.

"We just ran the counter," said Montgomery, who finished with 96 yards on nine carries. "The line did a great job. Give the credit to them. It's not about Joe Montgomery. It's the offensive line. They executed and I was able to run over a few people."

OSU then held A&M to another three-and-out with the key play coming on third-

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

and-6 as Stewart threw a quick slant to Parker. OSU's Gary Berry corralled Parker and waited as teammates Jerry Rudzinski, Na'il Diggs and Clinton Wayne combined to bowl him over for just a 4-yard gain.

A&M's Shane Lechler then dropped to punt, but he suffered his first block of the season as OSU's Ross burst through from the right side and smothered the kick as it came off his leg. Griffin recovered the loose ball at the A&M 16 and cruised into the end zone for the touchdown and a 21-7 OSU lead with 1:59 left in the first.

"That play changed the momentum of the game," Griffin said. "I think after that we took control of the game."

OSU missed a pair of scoring chances later in the half, failing to capitalize on a 31-yard run by Montgomery and a later drive that stalled at the A&M 36.

"I was disappointed at halftime that we didn't score a couple more touchdowns in the first half," Cooper said.

OSU's two-minute offense did net a 31-yard Dan Stultz field goal with just 16 seconds left in the half to make it 24-7.

Although OSU penetrated all the way to the A&M 27, the Buckeyes failed to score on their first second-half possession. A delay-of-game penalty backed the Buckeyes up and Stultz was wide left on a 49-yard field goal attempt.

The Aggies then began their climb back into the game. A&M drove 68 yards in 11 plays — aided by four OSU penalties that cost the Buckeyes 40 of those yards. Included in that spate of yellow flags were a pass interference call that negated a Damon Moore interception and a defensive holding call that overrode a third-down incompletion.

With opportunities galore, A&M finally cashed in as Stewart hit Toombs with a swing pass that went for 18 yards down to the OSU 9. Two plays later, Stewart hit flanker Leroy Hodge on a slant for a 7-yard touchdown, trimming the gap to 24-14 with 5:24 left in the third.

"We had three real key penalties in their drive that led to their second score," Cooper said.

The OSU offense sputtered to the finish line with Stultz missing another field goal, this one from 47 yards, early in the fourth quarter. But the Aggies were never in position to threaten OSU, especially after Rudzinski recovered an errant Stewart lateral pass with 9:15 left in the game.

Sugar Bowl Notes

- Ohio State won the Sugar Bowl for the first time ever after losing the 1978 game to Alabama and last year to Florida State. OSU's bowl record is now 14-17, including 3-7 under Cooper.

- OSU became just the third school to win the big five bowls. OSU joined Notre Dame and Penn State as winners of the Cotton, Fiesta, Orange, Rose and Sugar bowls.

- OSU improved to 4-0 against Texas A&M. The other wins came in the 1987 Cotton Bowl and in the 1963 and '70 regular seasons.

- With the win over the Aggies, OSU's record against top-10-ranked teams under Cooper improved to 8-9-1. The Buckeyes are 25-22-3 against all ranked teams in Cooper's tenure.

- A sellout crowd of 76,503 witnessed the game, much higher than last year's announced crowd of 67,289 for the OSU-Florida State game.

- Berry, OSU's free safety, led the Buckeyes with 12 tackles, 11 of them unassisted. Cornerback Ahmed Plummer also came up big with 10 solo tackles and three passes broken up.

- Ross blocked a kick for the second consecutive game, following up his key block against Michigan.

"I was surprised I was that free," the freshman said. "I thought for a second I could almost take it out of his hands. But then I did what they told me to do all week and just

layed out to make a play on the ball."

The blocked kick was the first against A&M in five seasons.

Unfortunately, Ross also suffered the indignity of being tossed from the game after he was involved in a fracas during OSU's kickoff return after A&M's third-quarter touchdown.

"From time to time, emotions spring up while the game is being played," Ross said. "Everybody is on the edge out there. The unsportsmanlike call is part of the game. Somebody, (OSU assistant Jim) Heacock, I

think, grabbed me and got me out of there. There was a little tussle between me and another player."

- Native son Jonathan Wells got some face time on OSU's final possession of the game.

The 6-1, 220-pound freshman from nearby River Rouge, La., carried seven times for 33 yards as the Buckeyes ran out the game's final 3:51.

"It's a great feeling for me to be playing in front of my family," Wells said. "I had about 40 family members and friends up

there. It was a great feeling to get in there in the fourth quarter and get some carries.

"We had a lot of fun down here this week, but we did what we had to do."

Wells' showing could be a precursor to next year: He could replace Montgomery as OSU's power back.

"I was real happy to get Jonathan Wells in the ball game," Cooper said. "I think he showed the people, particularly here in New Orleans, what kind of running back he's going to be."

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

After Early Success, Buckeyes Couldn't Score

After scoring touchdowns on two of its first three possessions, the OSU offense appeared well on its way to a big showing against Texas A&M.

But OSU's offensive juggernaut was held to just a field goal the rest of the way. Including a blocked punt that went for a touchdown by the special teams, the Buckeyes matched their season low for points with 24.

Possession after possession, the Buckeyes were stymied in their bid to put the Aggies and their vaunted Wrecking Crew defense away.

"I felt we had a pretty fast start," said quarterback Joe Germaine, who wrapped up his OSU career by completing 21 of 38 passes for 222 yards and a touchdown. "We had some missed opportunities where we could have put more points on the board, and I take responsibility for that."

"But Texas A&M was a great defense. They play hard."

Ohio State's two early touchdowns both resulted from 71-yard drives, one taking eight plays and the other six.

OSU did most of its damage through the air on the first one as Germaine completed passes of 28 yards to Dee Miller, 16 yards to David Boston and the 18-yard touchdown to Reggie Germany.

Then, OSU went to the ground on the second scoring march, a drive capped by breathtaking runs of 29 and 10 yards by power back Joe Montgomery.

Moments later, Derek Ross' blocked punt led to another OSU touchdown and a

INSIDE THE OFFENSE with Steve Helwagen

21-7 lead.

But things did not go as planned after that as the Buckeyes failed to convert their next six third-down conversions as well as a fourth-down try where tailback Michael Wiley lost two yards on fourth-and-1 at the A&M 24 in the second quarter.

Over the final three periods, OSU was 3-for-12 on third-down conversions.

And after having been burnt for eschewing the long field goal on that fourth-down try in the first half, OSU coach John Cooper watched kicker Dan Stultz misfire on attempts of 49 and 47 yards in the second half.

Afterward, members of the OSU offense were left to point fingers — at Texas A&M.

"They did a good job of getting pressure on us," Germaine said. "They went with some eight-man fronts, and we weren't able to capitalize with the long ball. That's how they did it."

"They gave us a couple looks we weren't ready for. But for the most part I thought we were pretty steady the whole game."

Discounting the blocked punt touchdown, A&M held the Buckeye offense to 17



SONNY BROCKWAY

MONTGOMERY EXPLODES — OSU tailback Joe Montgomery roars through a gigantic hole for a 29-yard gain, which set up his 10-yard touchdown run. Also pictured are OSU left guard Rob Murphy (56) and Texas A&M defensive end Ronald Flemmons.

points — slightly more than its regular-season average of 14.6 points per game. The Buckeyes came into the game averaging a Big Ten-high 36.9 points per game.

But when the Aggies needed big plays, including at least three short-yardage stops and a pair of third-down sacks, they got them.

"They made some adjustments," said Montgomery, who closed his OSU career with a team-high 96 yards on nine carries. "I give their coaches and their team a lot of credit. They came in and tried to stop the run more than ever. They had a lot of people in the box."

"They tried to disrupt our offense, but we were able to overcome that. We made a few mental mishaps, but overall we played pretty well."

OSU's frustration began to build just before halftime. Working in the two-minute offense, the Buckeyes picked up 40 yards and had a first down at the A&M 15 with 51 seconds left.

A first-down draw play to Wiley netted just two yards before a pair of incompletions forced OSU to bring Stultz out for a 31-yard field goal, which pushed the lead to 24-7 at halftime.

The Buckeyes twice moved into scoring range in the second half.

But a delay-of-game penalty and subsequent pass interference call on Boston left Stultz to try the 49-yarder early in the third.

Leading 24-14, OSU appeared headed toward the game-clinching score early in the fourth quarter as Germaine and Boston hooked up for three plays totaling 34 yards.

OSU was in business at the A&M 33. Wiley grabbed three yards on first down there before fullback Matt Keller was stopped for a 2-yard loss on second down. OSU, believing A&M would be defending the pass, then went with a nifty fullback draw to Keller. Unfortunately, linebacker

Jason Glenn and safety Brandon Jennings stayed home and stopped Keller for a 2-yard gain.

Stultz came on, but his 47-yard field goal attempt hit the right upright.

It was a case, most of the night it seemed, of doing a lot but having very little to show for it.

"They made some adjustments in the second half," offensive guard Rob Murphy said. "They definitely adjusted well. It did get kind of frustrating there at the end. We had some good drives, 60, 70 yards, and weren't able to put it in. Their defense is great."

Later, OSU failed to capitalize when the defense recovered an errant A&M lateral at the Aggies' 48. Lombardi Award-winning linebacker Dat Nguyen, who was credited with a game-high 14 tackles, broke free to sack Germaine to thwart that threat.

With the game locked up in the final minutes, the Buckeyes flexed their muscles and allowed third-string tailback Jonathan Wells, a Louisiana product, to effectively run the final 3:51 when he carried seven times for 30 yards.

Besides the win, Germaine, was just glad he did not take the same beating he suffered a year ago in the Sugar Bowl at the hands of Florida State. He was sacked three times, but none of them were as vicious as the hits Andre Wadsworth, Sam Cowart and company inflicted last year.

"I didn't take as many shots or as hard as shots as I did here last time," Germaine said. "That was pretty good."

Finding Germany

Sophomore receiver Germany had become almost the forgotten Buckeye late in the year after suffering a collarbone injury on a hard fall Oct. 24 at Northwestern.

He missed the Indiana game the following week then played against

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

Michigan State and Iowa before reinjuring the collarbone and missing the Michigan game.

But those who were able to witness OSU's bowl practices told of Germany's presence. It appeared, they said, he would have a breakout performance.

And that was definitely the whole nation watching as he got behind A&M cornerback Sedrick Curry on a post pattern for the 18-yard touchdown.

It was Germany's fourth touchdown of the season, although it was just his sixth catch since September.

"It was very enthusiastic for myself," he said. "After sitting out so long, it was almost like I was starting the season over again. I was able to get that fire back."

OSU unveiled three- and four-wide receiver sets early and often, trying to go after an A&M defense that had not seen many strong passing attacks this year.

"We knew we would have to throw the ball with the way they put their safeties up in the box," Germany said. "We saw on film that their DBs get turned around a lot, and we were able to get behind them tonight a couple of times."

"I guess we were successful."

Germany also made a leaping grab and held on for a 16-yard gain despite being blasted by A&M cornerback Jason Webster when he returned to earth. That play helped set up OSU's field goal before the half.

With the line providing ample protection, Germaine had his choice of receivers much of the night.

"It's easy to sit back there with all the great athletes we have to just get them the ball," he said.

"I'll admit there were three (passes) I can remember in the first half that I

missed on, but that's just the way the ball bounces. I'm not going to miss many of those."

Statistically Speaking

• Finishing with 432 yards total offense, the Buckeyes missed hitting the 500-yard plateau for only the fourth time this year. Missouri, Penn State and Michigan were the other teams to hold OSU under 500 yards.

But the Buckeyes were able to finish the year with a school-record average of 497.5 yards per game, edging the 1969 team that averaged 493.2 yards per contest.

• Wiley proved to be a big threat on the ground and through the air. He rushed 16 times for 88 yards (5.5 average) and caught five passes for 40 yards before leaving with an ankle injury in the fourth

quarter.

Wiley's season total of 1,235 rushing yards ranks 12th on the school's single-season list.

Wiley was also third on the team in catches this year with 27, trailing Boston and flanker Dee Miller.

• Montgomery, who nearly had his third 100-yard rushing game of the year, ended up with 766 yards.

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

Aggies Jumped On OSU But Not Often

When Texas A&M marched down the field and scored a touchdown against Ohio State in its first possession of the Sugar Bowl, the Aggies were in uncharted territory.

It marked just the third time all season the Buckeyes had allowed an opponent to score on its first possession of the game, and the first time an OSU foe had dared to put the ball into the end zone to open the game (West Virginia and Michigan State netted field goals on their first possessions against the Buckeyes).

It seems that the Buckeyes may have come out of the gate a bit tentatively on defense.

With Brandon Stewart opening the game at quarterback in place of the injured Randy McCown, it was unclear to some what the Aggies would try to do. While McCown had piloted a ground-oriented attack much of the year, the Buckeyes figured Stewart would try to test them with his strong passing arm.

After all, that's what he did with success against Kansas State in the Big 12 championship game.

The Buckeyes were partially right — Stewart did hit receiver Chris Taylor for gains of seven and six yards on A&M's first possession.

But otherwise, the Aggies were con-

INSIDE THE DEFENSE with Steve Helwagen

tent to use their gigantic offensive line — which averaged an even 300 pounds — to run the ball right at the Buckeyes.

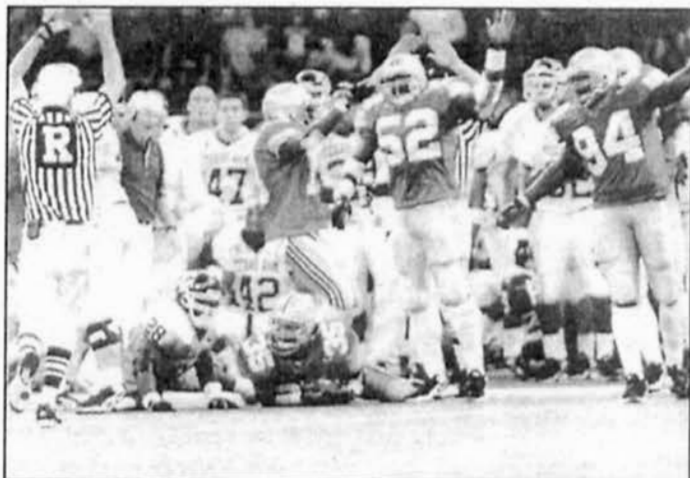
And the plan worked as tailback Dante Hall burst through a hole right up the middle and rolled for 25 yards on A&M's second play from scrimmage.

Two plays later, versatile tailback Sirr Parker went right on a counter for six more yards. Massive fullback Ja'Mar Toombs then went up the gut for six more down to the OSU 9.

There, Hall went right and broke several tackle attempts on the touchdown run that gave the upstart Aggies a quick 7-0 lead.

"They came out and had a nice scheme," admitted OSU linebacker Jerry Rudzinski, a captain playing his final game as a Buckeye. "They knocked us off the ball. It was back to the basics. They made big holes for their running backs. They made us miss."

A&M's six-play, 59-yard touchdown march served as a wake-up call for the



SONNY BROCKWAY

IT'S OUR BALL — Buckeyes Jerry Rudzinski (35), James Cotton (52) and Rodney Bailey (94) look for the right sign after Rudzinski recovered an errant Texas A&M lateral pass. The officials gave OSU possession on the backwards pass.

Buckeyes.

"It wasn't a real X's and O's adjustment after that first drive," Rudzinski

said. "It was a matter of 'let's get down and buckle our chin straps. They're going to come out and try and hit us in

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

the mouth, so let's try and do the same to them."

"If you can't stop the run, you're not going to win many football games."

As the game wore on, the Buckeyes became more aggressive defensively.

"On the first drive, Ohio State kind of laid back," Hall said. "After that, they blitzed more. They blitzed on about two out of every three downs, and that caused us problems."

The results were fairly telling: The Aggies managed just two more first downs and were forced to punt after three plays three other times in the first half.

OSU allowed A&M just one more touchdown, and that scoring second-half drive, which measured 68 yards, was aided by several perhaps questionable OSU penalties that added up to 40 of the yards (see Editor's Notebook, page 3).

"I thought we played a very good team, a very talented team," Hall said. "When we got down there deep in their territory, we couldn't get things done."

After a six-week layoff since the Michigan game, Rudzinski said the defense was offended by the way it opened the bowl game.

"That opening series kind of upset us," he said. "But we came back and redeemed ourselves and I think we played a pretty good game."

"We have very high standards on defense. When our offense scored 24 points, we knew it was in our hands."

Parker's Absence Hurts

Texas A&M's offense took a major hit when Parker, its valued speed back/receiver, was injured returning the second-half kickoff.

OSU special teams star Derek Ross, who also blocked a punt that led to a score, buried the 5-11, 190-pound Parker on the opening kickoff of the second half and he did not return.

Stewart had attempted three passes to Parker in the first half in hopes of turning him loose.

"They were putting him in motion and getting the ball to him," said OSU safety Gary Berry. "When he went out, that kind of made it easier for us."

A&M had hoped Parker would relive his heroics from the K-State upset, where he caught the game-winning touchdown in overtime on a quick slant.

With Parker out of the game, Stewart was forced to spread the ball around. He ended up throwing to nine different receivers, hooking up with Taylor and tight end Derrick Spiller five times each.

But the Aggies completed only three passes that went for more than 20 yards despite having Stewart attempt a season-high 39 passes.

"We schemed them pretty well," Berry said. "Our defensive coaches told us their tendencies. We played them and it worked out."

Toombs Looks Tough

A&M utilized Toombs, a burly freshman whose weight had to be underestimated at a listed 235 pounds, as a weapon at fullback.

He left several Buckeyes battered and bruised after carrying 10 times for 62 yards and deftly catching a pair of passes, including a devastating 18-yarder that set up A&M's second touchdown.

Interestingly, Toombs was a friendly face for some of the Buckeyes. After all, the Kilgore, Texas, native had made an

official visit to OSU last winter and seriously considered the Buckeyes before committing to A&M just before signing day.

"Toombs was a load," Berry said. "I hosted him when he came to Ohio State for his visit. I'm just glad to see he's doing well."

Toombs, who is probably closer to his high school playing weight of 250 pounds, elicited comparisons to Pittsburgh Steelers star Jerome Bettis and Wisconsin standout Ron Dayne because of his footwork and strong running.

"I told him I would have to bring it to him," Berry said. "But seriously, he's a good boy and he's going to be a great player."

Statistically Speaking

- The Buckeyes held A&M to 283 yards total offense, slightly more than the 257.7 average the Bucks had allowed this season. That average led the Big Ten and was fourth nationally in the regular season.

- A&M became the ninth OSU opponent to finish with less than 100 yards rushing. The Aggies netted 96 yards on 27 carries. OSU's regular-season average of 67.4 yards was tops in the country.

- Safety Damon Moore held on to win the total tackles race by one over linebacker Nail Diggs, 81-80. Cornerback Antoine Winfield (75) and linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer (74) were also right there in a tightly bunched field.

Moore had 62 solo tackles, barely beating Winfield (61), Katzenmoyer (60) and Diggs (59).

- Diggs notched a pair of tackles-for-loss to cement the season lead with

16. Katzenmoyer finished second with 14.

- Defensive end Rodney Bailey, who enjoyed a fine second half of the season, notched a sack on A&M to pull into a tie with Diggs for second in sacks with six. Defensive end Brent Johnson finished the year with the team lead with seven.

- In the secondary, Moore had his

third interception of the year canceled by a dubious pass interference call.

He would have needed that one and another one to catch cornerback Ahmed Plummer, who finished with a team-high four.

- Plummer broke up three passes in the Sugar Bowl to take the team lead in that category with 17. Winfield was next with 15.

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OHIO STATE VS. TEXAS A&M

Cooper Meets Media After Sugar Bowl Win

Throughout the football season, BSB has published excerpts of Ohio State head coach John Cooper's postgame press conferences. Here is what Cooper had to say following the win over Texas A&M in the Sugar Bowl.

COOPER: "Obviously I'm very, very happy for our football team. The senior football players leave Ohio State as the winningest class ever in school history, so I'm very proud of those guys."

"I thought we played a real good, solid football game here tonight. We played a real good, solid football team in Texas A&M and took their best shot. They came out real fired up there early in the game and scored, and then we answered and came right back. I was a little disappointed at halftime that we didn't score a couple more touchdowns in the first half."

"In the second half both defenses

really buckled down. That's why we're both here — we both have real good defensive football teams. It was a good, hard-hitting college football game. We had three key penalties in their drive to set up their second score."

"Offensively we didn't turn the ball over the entire game. We got a touchdown off the kicking game, as we did against Michigan, so this was a good, solid victory for us, and I'm really happy for our football team."

Q: Did you talk about you guys still having a chance to win the national title after this game?

COOPER: "I think a lot of that depends on what happens in the Fiesta Bowl. If Tennessee wins, I don't have a problem with them running the table. If it's a sloppy game and Florida State wins, I think you can make an argument that the Buckeyes are as good as anyone in the country."

"I thought we beat a real good foot-



SONNY BROCKWAY

FACING THE NATION — John Cooper talks with ABC's Jack Arute after the Sugar Bowl. The bowl win was Cooper's third in 10 tries at OSU. It marked just the sixth time OSU has beaten Michigan and won a bowl game in the same year.

ball team tonight. Three weeks ago, A&M beat the No. 1 team in the country."

"Those of you who thought the Big Ten wasn't very strong this year, I think today proved that wrong. The Big Ten made a pretty good showing in the bowl games. That speaks for itself."

Q: How courageous was David Boston with his ankle injury? Talk some about his effort.

COOPER: "David was chosen as MVP in the game. I thought David, Joe Germaine — there were several players who played well tonight. Michael Wiley had a good game until he got hurt. I was really proud and happy to get Jonathan Wells into the ball game. Joe Montgomery played well, Jonathan got in the last couple series and showed the people what kind of back he's going to be for us for the next three years."

Q: What was the story with having David back there on punt returns on his ankle?

COOPER: "We put David back there and told him to fair catch. We were not going to attempt to return any punts. Their punter did a great job, he got a lot of height on his kicks. He's one of the best in the country. We were satisfied with just catching the ball and keeping it from bouncing."

Q: Did any discussion of Michigan State come up at halftime since you had a big lead on them and they came back to beat you?

COOPER: "We weren't talking

about Michigan State, we were talking about Kansas State. We were talking about the comeback Texas A&M made in that ball game and knowing they were getting the second-half kickoff. The only thing I really emphasized to our squad was to play as good as you're capable of playing. If we're better than A&M, we'll win the game. If not, we won't. I thought the effort was outstanding. We played a good, solid football game."

Q: Is this a good season or a great season?

COOPER: "It's not a perfect season, but it's a good, solid season. I don't think we're going to be any worse than No. 2 in the country and, in my opinion, depending on what happens in the Fiesta Bowl, we might have a case for being as good as anybody."

Q: On the fourth-and-1 when they stopped you, was that a disappointment?

COOPER: "Again, we're playing one of the top defensive teams in the country. We're disappointed that we didn't make it and then we missed a couple of field goals. We could have put the ball game away."

"Their guy made a great play on the long pass to David, knocked the ball out, and then we had an interference call on David that could have gone either way. They got their momentum going on the drive where we had the three penalties. That's where we took their best shot there in the second half."

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Ohio State 24, Texas A&M 14

The Sugar Bowl

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TEXAS A&M	7	0	7	0	-14
OHIO STATE	21	3	0	0	-24

First Quarter

A&M — D.Hall, 9 run (Bynum kick) 10:53; 6 plays, 59 yards, 2:26

OSU — Germany, 18 pass from Germaine (Stultz kick) 8:34; 8 plays, 71 yards, 2:19

OSU — Montgomery, 10 run (Stultz kick) 4:10; 6 plays, 71 yards, 2:41

OSU — Griffin, 16 blocked punt return (Stultz kick) 1:59

Second Quarter

OSU — Stultz, 31 field goal 0:16; 9 plays, 40 yards, 1:45

Third Quarter

A&M — Hodge, 7 pass from Stewart (Bynum kick) 5:24; 11 plays, 68 yards, 4:45

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Team Statistics

	A&M	OSU
First Downs	17	25
Rushing	7	10
Passing	7	13
Penalty	3	2
Rushes-Yards	27-96	42-210
Passing-Yards	187	222
Passes (Att.-Comp.-Int.)	39-22-0	38-21-0
Offensive Plays	66	80
Total Net Yards	283	432
Third Down Efficiency	1-11	3-14
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	0-2
Punts	10-39.8	6-38.3
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	3-0
Penalties	6-43	6-61
Time of Possession	28:18	31:42

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — A&M: Toombs 10-62; D.Hall 11-53; Parker 1-6; Stewart 5-25; OSU: Montgomery 9-96; Wiley 16-88; Wells 7-30; Keller 4-15; Germaine 6-19.

PASSING (Att.-Comp.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — A&M: Stewart 39-22-0-187-1; OSU: Germaine 38-21-0-222-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — A&M: C.Taylor 5-52; Spiller 5-43; Parker 3-9; Toombs 2-19; Hodge 2-15; D.Hall 2-3; Campbell 1-20; Oliver 1-20; Bumgardner 1-6; OSU: Boston 11-105; Wiley 5-40; Germany 2-34; Miller 1-28; Lumpkin 1-8; Keller 1-7.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) — A&M: Lechler 9-44.2-54; Team 1-0-0-0; OSU: Bartholomew 6-38.3-55.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — A&M: None; OSU: Ross 1-12; Boston 1-2; Griffin 0-16.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — A&M: Parker 5-71; OSU: Rambo 2-36; Wells 1-19.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES — A&M: None; OSU: Rudzinski.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) — A&M: None; OSU: None.

SACKS — A&M: Nguyen 2-7; Edwards 1-8; Holdman 1-4; OSU: Katzenmoyer 1-7; Bailey 1-6; Brown 1-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) — A&M: Nguyen 3-8; Anthony 3-6; Holdman 2-6; Edwards 1-8; Brooks 1-1; OSU: Berry 2-4; Diggs 2-3; Katzenmoyer 1-7; Bailey 1-6; Brown 1-4; Moore 1-3; Rudzinski 1-2; Collins 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Assist-Tot.) — A&M: Nguyen 13-1-14; Anthony 9-1-10; B.Jennings 6-2-8; Coady 5-3-8; Curry 6-1-7; Brooks 5-2-7; Webster 4-3-7; Holdman 5-1-6; Edwards 2-2-4; Glenn 2-0-2; Flemmons 0-2-2; Bernard 0-2-2; Madison 1-0-1; T.Jones 1-0-1; Patton 1-0-1; Bradley 1-0-1; Coryatt 0-1-1; OSU: Berry 11-1-12; Plummer 10-0-10; Diggs 2-4-6; Moore 4-1-5; Katzenmoyer 3-2-5; Johnson 2-2-4; Winfield 3-0-3; Wayne 2-1-3; Collins 2-0-2; Cotton 1-1-2; Brown 1-1-2; Rudzinski 0-2-2; Bailey 1-0-1; Pickett 1-0-1; King 1-0-1; LaVar 1-0-1; Bellisari 1-0-1; McClellion 1-0-1; Ross 1-0-1; Griffin 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME — TEXAS A&M: Starters: Defense, Bernard, Edwards, Flemmons, Holdman, Anthony, Nguyen, Bradley, Webster, Curry, Coady, B.Jennings, Offense, Cole, Tucker, Spikes, Heimuli, Vincent, Campbell, Stewart, Oliver, D.Hall, Hodge. Reserves: Jameson, Rodriguez, T.Jones, Lechler, Parker, Price, Horn, Glenn, Brooks, Toombs, E.Jennings, Rhodes, Patton, Bynum, Simpson, Robertson, Taylor, Coryatt, Simon, Nichols, Thierry, Lednicki, Valletta, Bumgardner, Broughton, Brinkley, Spiller, Young, Kazmierski, Perroni, Madison. OHIO STATE: Starters: Offense, Boston, Walter, R.Murphy, K.Murphy, Gilbert, Burris, Lumpkin, Germaine, Keller, Wiley, Miller, Defense, Bailey, Pickett, Brown, Johnson, Diggs, Katzenmoyer, Rudzinski, Winfield, Berry, Moore, Plummer. Reserves: Mitchell, Rambo, Bellisari, Cooper, King, Clements, McClellion, Webb, Wells, Ott, Montgomery, Simpson, Ross, Martin, Bartholomew, Griffin, Kirk, Stultz, LaVar, Cheatwood, Cotton, Gurr, Bentley, Elford, Germany, Wisniewski, Houser, Wayne, Eisenhard, Collins.

Season Statistics

1998 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent (AP Rank*)	W/L	Score	Crowd
Sept. 5	(1) at West Virginia (11)	W	34-17	68,409
Sept. 12	(1) TOLEDO	W	49-0	93,149
Sept. 19	(1) MISSOURI (21)	W	35-14	93,269
Oct. 3	(1) PENN STATE (7)	W	28-9	93,479
Oct. 10	(1) at Illinois	W	41-0	46,250
Oct. 17	(1) MINNESOTA	W	45-15	93,183
Oct. 24	(1) at Northwestern	W	36-10	47,130
Oct. 31	(1) at Indiana	W	38-7	52,049
Nov. 7	(1) MICHIGAN STATE	L	28-24	93,555
Nov. 14	(7) at Iowa	W	45-14	69,473
Nov. 21	(7) MICHIGAN (11)	W	31-16	94,339
Jan. 1	(3) vs. Texas A&M (8) S	W	24-14	76,503

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

S - Sugar Bowl

Team Statistics	OSU	Opp
First Downs	290	168
Rushing	126	61
Passing	155	91
Penalty	9	16
Avg. Per Game/Rush	109.6	69.8
Avg. Per Game/Pass	208.0	100.1
Total Offense	597.1	311.8
Total Plays	933	628
Average Per Game	497.6	259.8
Average Per Play	6.4	3.8
Penalties-Yards	97-933	60-503
Fumbles-Lost	30-12	13-7
3rd Down Efficiency	74-185	50-199
Percentage	.404	.254
4th Down Efficiency	10-20	5-20
Percentage	.500	.250
Sacks	42-265	34-229
Time of Possession	30:58	29:02

Score By Quarters	1	2	3	4	Total	Avg.
Ohio State	159	119	80	72	430	35.8
Opponents	30	67	25	22	144	12.0

Attendance	Games	Total	Avg.
Home	6	561,014	93,502
Away	5	283,391	56,678
Neutral	1	76,503	76,503
Total	12	920,908	76,742

Individual Statistics	Att.	Net.	Avg.	TD	Long
Rushing					
Michael Wiley	198	1235	6.2	10	76
Joe Montgomery	118	766	6.5	7	80
Jonathan Wells	41	197	4.8	2	25
Matt Keller	36	143	4.0	1	12
Derek Combs	31	88	2.8	1	12
James Martin	12	34	2.8	1	10
Dee Miller	3	17	5.7	0	10
Jammon Jackson	2	8	4.0	0	4
Jerry Westbrook	1	3	3.0	0	3
Charlie Sanders	1	3	3.0	0	3
David Boston	1	1	0.5	0	7
Brent Bartholomew	1	-4	-0.0	0	0
Mark Garcia	6	-13	-2.2	0	7
Joe Germaine	62	-83	-1.3	0	22
OSU Totals	514	2395	4.7	22	80
OPP Totals	378	837	2.2	6	35

Receiving	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	Long
David Boston	85	1435	16.9	13	58
Dee Miller	59	915	15.5	3	42
Michael Wiley	27	200	7.4	1	35
John Lumpkin	17	278	16.4	4	41
Matt Keller	16	200	12.5	1	40
Reggie Germany	14	229	16.4	4	37
Ken-Yon Rambo	6	77	12.8	0	15
James Martin	5	68	13.6	0	17
Derek Combs	5	47	9.4	0	17
Steve Wisniewski	3	43	14.3	0	22
Jonny Redmond	2	25	12.5	0	15
Kevin Griffin	2	19	9.5	0	14
Joe Montgomery	2	0	0.0	0	5
Chad Cacchio	1	11	11.0	0	11
Jonathan Wells	1	11	11.0	0	11
Kevin Houser	1	10	10.0	0	10
Jerry Westbrook	1	7	7.0	0	7
Derek Combs	1	1	1.0	0	1
OSU Totals	247	3676	14.5	26	58
OPP Totals	219	2261	10.4	8	69

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPP	EPR	FG	PTS
Dan Stultz	0	53-54	--	--	13-25	92
David Boston	14	--	--	1	--	86
Michael Wiley	11	--	--	--	--	66
Joe Montgomery	7	--	--	--	--	42
John Lumpkin	4	--	--	--	--	24
Reggie Germany	4	--	--	--	--	24
Dee Miller	3	--	--	--	--	18
Matt Keller	2	--	--	--	--	12
Jonathan Wells	2	--	--	--	--	12
Mike Collins	1	--	--	--	--	6

Joe Cooper	1	—	—	—	—	6
Na'il Diggs	1	—	—	—	—	6
Kevin Griffin	1	—	—	—	—	6
James Martin	1	—	—	—	—	6
Central McClellion	1	—	—	—	—	6
Damon Moore	1	—	—	—	—	6
Jerry Rudzinski	1	—	—	—	—	6
Joe Germaine	0	—	1-2	—	—	0
OSU Totals	56	53-54	1-2	13-25	430	
OPP Totals	15	13-14	0-1	0-13-14	144	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	INT	TD	Rating
Michael Wiley	2	2	100%	33	0	0	238.6
Joe Germaine	230	384	59.9	3330	7	25	150.6
Mark Garcia	12	26	46.2	189	0	1	119.9
Steve Bellisari	3	5	60.0	24	0	0	100.3
Austin Mohrman	0	1	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Jonathan Wells	0	1	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
OSU Totals	247	433	56.9	3576	7	26	147.8
OPP Totals	219	453	48.3	2281	17	8	88.9

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Dan Stultz	5-5	6-9	2-9	0-2	13-25
OSU Totals	8-5	6-9	2-9	0-2	13-25
OPP Totals	3-3	5-6	5-5	0-0	13-14

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Brent Bartholomew	58	2338	40.3	1	57
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	59	2338	39.6	1	57
OPP Totals	105	4250	40.5	5	66

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Ahmed Plummer	4	2	0.5	0	2
Damon Moore	2	73	36.5	1	73
Central McClellion	1	27	27.0	0	27
Mike Collins	1	22	22.0	0	22
Steve Bellisari	1	19	19.0	0	19
Na'il Diggs	1	18	18.0	0	18
Clinton Wayne	1	17	17.0	0	17
Brent Johnson	1	11	11.0	0	11
Percy King	1	3	3.0	0	3
Tim Cheatwood	1	0	0.0	0	0
Nate Clements	1	0	0.0	0	0
David Mitchell	1	0	0.0	0	0
Jerry Rudzinski	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	17	225	13.2	3	73
OPP Totals	7	75	10.7	0	73

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
David Boston	19	270	14.2	1	70
Ken-Yon Rambo	19	128	6.7	0	24
Gary Berry	15	65	4.3	0	13
Derek Ross	1	27	27.0	0	27
Percy King	1	8	8.0	0	8
Nate Clements	1	7	7.0	0	7
David Mitchell	1	2	2.0	0	2
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0
Joe Cooper	0	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	57	505	8.9	2	70
OPP Totals	28	199	7.1	0	30

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
David Boston	19	270	14.2	1	70
Ken-Yon Rambo	19	128	6.7	0	24
Gary Berry	15	65	4.3	0	13
Derek Ross	1	27	27.0	0	27
Percy King	1	8	8.0	0	8
Nate Clements	1	7	7.0	0	7
David Mitchell	1	2	2.0	0	2
Team	1	0	0.0	0	0
Joe Cooper	0	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	57	505	8.9	2	70
OPP Totals	28	199	7.1	0	30

Defensive Leaders	Solo	Ass.	Tot.	TFL	Yds.	Sacks
Damon Moore	62	19	81	7.21	2-3	—
Na'il Diggs	59	21	80	10-73	6-44	—
Anthony Winfield	61	14	75	5-34	2-17	—
Andy Katzenmoyer	60	14	74	14-50	4-27	—
Gary Berry	44	11	55	4-13	1-5	—
Ahmed Plummer	47	5	52	4-14	—	—
Jerry Rudzinski	30	20	50	10-46	4-27	—
Brent Johnson	25	15	40	8-43	7-35	—
Joe Cooper	15	9	24	1-3	—	—
Mike Collins	15	8	23	6-16	3-11	—
Ryan Pickett	17	5	22	5-19	2-7	—
Steve Bellisari	15	7	22	—	—	—
Clayton Kopp	15	2	17	6-8	2-1	—
Carleton Wayne	10	10	20	2-11	1-9	—
Tim Clements	18	1	19	—	—	—
Nate Chavous	8	10	18	1-3	—	—
James "Big Boy" Givens	8	10	18	—	—	—
Rodney Baker	11	5	16	11-46	6-37	—
Genia Cottam	12	5	16	3-11	1-7	—

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 24, Texas A&M 14

OSU coach John Cooper on the Big Ten's perfect bowl record this year: "Those of you who did not think the Big Ten was very strong this year ... if I'm not mistaken, the Big Ten was 5-0 (in bowl games)."

OSU split end David Boston on whether the Buckeyes deserve at least a piece of the national championship: "I can't answer that right now. We would play anybody in the country head to head, but I'm not going to make a statement about that."

Texas A&M running back Dante Hall compared OSU to Florida State, whom the Aggies lost to 23-14 in the season-opening Kickoff Classic: "They remind me of Florida State. They are solid on both sides of the ball. We haven't played Tennessee. I would give (Ohio State) a vote to have a chance to play for the national championship."

OSU safety Derek Ross on how he was able to block an A&M punt, which teammate Kevin Griffin returned for a touchdown: "I just did all I could do. We worked hard on special teams this week. I think we just did what the coaches told us to do. I stepped free and made a nice play."

Griffin, OSU's special teams captain, on how he'll savor his blocked punt return for a touchdown in his final game as a Buckeye: "I'm going to have to get the highlights from somebody. You can't keep the ball, but I'll have to get the highlights from somebody so I can always show my grandkids that I did score in the Sugar Bowl."

OSU linebacker Jerry Rudzinski discussed the celebration on the field after the game: "There were a lot of hugs and high-fives out there. It was a happy but, in a way, sad moment."



SONNY BROCKWAY

THE SENIOR SCORES — OSU special teams captain Kevin Griffin capped his Buckeye career with a 16-yard blocked punt return for a touchdown. It marked the second time Griffin had scored a touchdown off a blocked punt in his career. Freshman Derek Ross blocked this punt attempt by Texas A&M's Shane Lechler.

OSU cornerback Antoine Winfield on how the Texas A&M offense was able to hurt the Buckeyes at times: "They came out and ran the ball on us pretty good and got us out of position. Then in the second half, they threw the ball a lot more."

OSU receiver Reggie Germany compared last year's Sugar Bowl, a loss to Florida State, to this result: "We didn't think we were physical enough last year. We got tossed around last year. We weren't going to stand for that this year, so we took the fight to them."

OSU tailback Michael Wiley on how he suffered an ankle injury when tackled by A&M's Lonnie Madison during the fourth quarter: "A player hit me on my ankle. He came in from the backside. I heard a pop. I hope it's just a sprained ankle. We'll find out more about it when we get back to Columbus."

Texas A&M tight end Daniel Campbell on his team's quick start: "We came out on that first drive, performed well and scored. We felt real good about it. Then they made some adjustments. We just didn't match their intensity after that."

Griffin talks about how he tried to "low-key" the celebration of his blocked punt return: "I didn't want the guys to jump on me because I didn't want a penalty. But it felt great. I wanted to make a big play, being a senior in my last game. Derek Ross made the most important part of the play, blocking the punt, and fortunately I was there to scoop it up."

OSU safety Gary Berry, who had a team-high 12 tackles, discusses the defense's play against the Aggies: "I thought I played well, but I thought we all played well on defense. I was playing a lot for the seniors back there, Damon (Moore) and Antoine (Winfield)."

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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Give Bucks Credit — They Won The Big Ones

If you go by the factors that many Buckeye fans have been using to criticize Ohio State football during the John Cooper era, you would have to consider this past season a success. The Buckeyes both beat Michigan and won their bowl game, two things that haven't happened that often in the coach's 11-year tenure.

If you were a fan who was going to only be satisfied with a national championship this season, then you were no doubt disappointed with the 1998 results. The Buckeyes eliminated themselves from Fiesta Bowl contention with their loss to Michigan State. And while their win over Texas A&M in the Sugar Bowl was solid, it was hardly the type of victory the Buckeyes needed to stake their outsider's claim to the national crown.

Could Ohio State have beaten Tennessee or Florida State? We'll never know, though I'd imagine on a given day the Buckeyes could have beaten any team in the country, especially when you consider that MSU knocked off the Bucks or N.C. State defeated the Seminoles.

I do think that 1998 was as good a shot at the national title as the Buckeyes are going to get. While everyone has been focusing on how well the Big Ten did during the bowl season, I've been thinking how that bowl success proves the toughness — even with back-to-back home games against Ohio University and Cincinnati — of next year's OSU schedule. The Buckeyes, with a new quarterback, open with resurgent Miami (Fla.) and '98 title contender UCLA.

After the games with the 'Cats — Bobs and Bears that is — they face contests in Ohio Stadium with bowl winners Wisconsin and Purdue, both off the OSU schedule in 1998. The Buckeyes also must play Penn State and Michigan — bowl winners and teams with revenge against Ohio State on their minds — on the road.

The game with Purdue will feature quarterback sensation Drew Brees. Hopefully, by that fifth game of the season, the Buckeyes will have established a replacement for Antoine Winfield. The defensive backs will surely be tested in that game.

While some may quibble over the merits of the 1998 season for the Buckeyes, it seems certain to me that if Ohio State can survive the 1999 schedule relatively unscathed, the season would have to be considered a success.

Winner Chosen, Offer Continues

Ken Mazik of Mingo Junction, Ohio, was the winner of the Buckeye Bowl Bonanza Contest. Ken and his wife, Dorothy, enjoyed a trip to the Sugar Bowl, including charter air, hotel, game tickets and more as winners of the annual contest sponsored by BSB.

While the contest is over, we're giving readers a last chance to take advantage of the accompanying two-for-one gift offer. Buy one subscription at the regular \$48 price and get another subscription absolutely free. Send your subscription names and addresses to P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212 or call (614) 486-2202 for more information.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Griffin Ends Career On High Note

I'm sure every Buckeye fan was as thrilled as I was when Kevin Griffin scored a touchdown in the Sugar Bowl, picking up a punt blocked by teammate Derek Ross and returning it 16 yards for the score.

Griffin overcame the curse of being the legendary Archie Griffin's nephew — talk about pressure — and numerous position changes to have a productive career at Ohio State as a special teams demon and a ready role player when called on to play as a wide receiver. The TD was a nice way for Griffin to end his career.

It was a game for the good guys, as Joe Montgomery, another fan favorite, turned in a strong game. Montgomery took over on the Buckeyes' second scoring drive, turning in consecutive runs of 29 and 10 yards for the touchdown.

There's a reason that fans and media members pick up on guys like Griffin and Montgomery. You can tell from even the cheap seats that these are unselfish players with a tremendous amount of heart. They are players who have overcome adversity to become important members of a national power. Best of luck in the future to the both of them, as well as the other graduating Buckeyes.

Speaking of special teams demons, Ross and Tim Cheatwood seem to be following in the footsteps of Buckeyes like Griffin, Central McClellion and Alonzo Shavers by making a name for themselves on the suicide squads.

Ross and Cheatwood, however, have to learn to tone it down just a bit. These guys seem to end up in a scuffle on virtually every special teams play.

Berry Better

Early last season, some of the guys in the office were looking at a football

picture they were considering using in the paper.

"Look how far out of the play he is," one of the reporters was saying. "He's not even close."

Without knowing who was in the picture, I said, "You must be talking about Gary Berry." I wasn't psychic. It was just a good guess at the time because Berry seemed to be out of position on almost every play.

I bring this up because Berry has come such a long way since those early days as a starter. He doesn't get the type of ink that teammates Winfield, Damon Moore or even Ahmed Plummer do, but he turned in a solid Sugar Bowl, registering a team-high 12 tackles including 11 solos and two tackles-for-loss.

As far as not getting a lot of ink, sometimes being a defensive back is like being an offensive lineman. If your name is not being mentioned, that's not always bad. People were talking a lot about Berry when he first joined the starting lineup and it wasn't because of plays he was making. Don't be surprised if he gets more mention next season, his senior year, for more positive reasons.

What Do We Do?

Have you noticed how Dan Stultz's inconsistent kicking has affected Ohio State's decision-making? If a Buckeye drive stalls between the opponent's 20- and 40-yard lines, the coaching staff seems to have trouble deciding if the Buckeyes should go for the first down, kick the field goal or punt. Several such situations occurred in the Sugar Bowl.

Stultz has proven on many occasions he can nail the long ones. He needs to get off to a fast start next sea-

son to build his confidence, which may be suffering right now. That, in turn, would give the staff more confidence in Stultz so that they can spend their time and energy on more important things than deciding whether to go for the field goal or not.

Buckeyes On The Rise

With the addition of Scoonie Penn, added depth and added experience for some of the younger players, I knew the OSU men's basketball team would improve. After all, there was really no place to go but up. I'm not certain I thought they would improve as much as they have, however, though there's a lot of basketball yet to be played.

I figured Michael Redd would continue to be outstanding and if Penn lived up to his press clippings, which he pretty much has, I knew he would be good as well.

The players who have really surprised me in the early going are Jason Singleton and George Reese.

Singleton has always looked the part of a basketball player, but he hadn't really done much in his first three years at Ohio State. He has really been a key in the Buckeyes' fast start this season, however.

He was averaging 8.7 points and 4.9 rebounds a game, third on the team in both categories. His scoring average was down from 10.7 last season, but with the added depth, he was playing six minutes less per game. His contributions are coming at key times, and it's hard not to notice that his free-throw percentage was up to 61.0 percent from last year's embarrassing 36.1.

As for Reese, his recruitment out of junior college was met with some skepticism. However, he has proved to be a keeper, providing the Buckeyes with solid inside play off the bench with 7.1 points and 4.2 rebounds, both fourth on the team. As with Singleton, Reese's contributions are often coming at critical times.

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