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OPINION

Team's Place In College Lore Is Secure

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with

Steve Helwag

Ohio State's 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl cemented more than just the school's first national championship since 1968.

It cemented this 2002 Ohio State team's place in college football history. This upset victory — remember, the Buckeyes were a prohibitive 13-point underdog — is a game that college football fans will point to for years to come when discussions come up regarding thrilling games.

As the game wore into overtime, I found myself asking the question, "Has a game this good ever meant this much?" Hmmm.

The Buckeyes seemed to be following a game plan left behind by Penn State in 1986 and Alabama in 1992. In each of those cases, heavily favored Miami was expected to wrap up a national championship season.

But strong defensive efforts kept the Hurricanes in check, allowing the underdog teams to dance off into the night with all of the hardware.

In the days leading up to the Fiesta Bowl, I heard two prevailing questions: "Can they do it?" was the first one.

And that one was usually followed by "What possessed you to pick Ohio State?" Well, the answer to the first question was (obviously) "yes." The answer to the second, truly, is "I don't know."

I honestly believe I got caught up in the post-Michigan game euphoria. I can even remember saying at the time, "I don't care who they play, I'm picking Ohio State to win the Fiesta Bowl."

As the weeks went by since that Michigan win, the Buckeyes were derided in every way imaginable. "They have no chance," the supposed experts would say.

When my colleagues at BSB, Jeff Rapp and Mike Wachman, took their turns and each picked Miami, I was overcome, perhaps, with the sentiment that somebody from our newspaper should pick the Buckeyes. In that sense, maybe I took one for the team.

I spent a good bit of time looking at Miami's last several games, and I have to admit that the Hurricanes were legitimate. But it was that tape study that led me to believe an OSU upset was certainly possible.

Here were some of my points of emphasis going into this game and how the Buckeyes fared with them.

• **The Buckeyes had to be able to run the football effectively** — OSU ended up with 145 yards rushing with quarterback Craig Krenzel leading the way with a career-high 81. So Maurice Clarett was unable to get his standard 100.

That didn't matter because Krenzel was keeping the sticks moving with use of the quarterback draw, which we had seen several Miami opponents use effectively.

• **OSU had to contain Miami's big-play ability** — This proved prophetic as Ken Dorsey's 28-yard pass to tight end Kellen Winslow Jr. ended up being the 'Canes' longest play of the game.

Andre Johnson, a big, strong receiver who abuses weak DBs, never got out of the starting gate against OSU two-way man Chris Gamble. He caught four passes for 54 yards and was not a major factor in the outcome, as he had been all year.

At the same time, tailback Willis McGahee's longest run from scrimmage was 10 yards. In nearly every Miami

game this year, McGahee was able to break a long gainer. Not so fast, my friend, against Ohio State.

• **OSU had to maximize its advantage in the kicking game** — This one nearly bit OSU as Mike Nugent misfired on a field goal and Miami's Roscoe Parrish returned a punt 50 yards to set up the game-tying Todd Sievers field goal that sent the game to overtime.

• **It goes without saying that Ohio State could not turn the ball over** — Turnover margin proved to be a huge deciding factor. Krenzel threw a pair of interceptions. Dorsey also threw a pair and lost a fumble. The 'Canes also lost two other fumbles.

OSU was hoping for a plus-2 turnover margin and got plus-3 instead. OSU got all 17 of its points in regulation as a result of turnovers.

Much of this was due to the heavy pressure OSU's front four exerted on Dorsey, who wasn't sacked once in 2001 and just 11 times this past year.

• **OSU had to withstand Miami's early surge** — The 'Canes seemed on the verge of breaking the game open, intercepting Krenzel after already grabbing a 7-0 lead. But the OSU defense forced three second-quarter turnovers and Miami found itself in a 14-7 halftime hole.

• **Summing Up** — This game was over on three different occasions. OSU had it wrapped up until the long punt return set up Sievers' field goal. The kick curled just inside the right upright and sent the game to OT.

Then the Buckeyes were twice all but dead in the first OT. On the first one, Krenzel converted a fourth-and-long with a 17-yard pass to go-to man Michael Jenkins.

Next came the pass interference penalty. Krenzel drilled a pass into Gamble, who could not haul it in. The line judge made the initial signal of incomplete, touching off a fireworks display overhead and prompting the Miami team to storm the field. Jarrett Payton had even gone into the stands.

But field judge Terry Porter had other ideas. His deliberate, 3-1/2 second wait before tossing his penalty flag seemed to say what we were all thinking: "This game is just too good to end."

OSU capitalized on the break moments later, when Krenzel scored the tying touchdown to force the second OT.

In the second OT, the Buckeyes moved it right down and scored on Clarett's 5-yard run. Then the defense delivered one of the school's best goal-line stands, capped by Cie Grant's near sack of Miami's Ken Dorsey on the final incomplete.

Now, finally, it was over and Ohio State, after 34 years out of the championship picture, had had all its hopes and dreams answered.

This was, perhaps, the greatest of what I like to call "Ohio State moments."

I'll go so far as to call it the school's biggest win ever. That was Miami, a winner of 34 straight, that watched OSU

essentially steal the win and the title right out of its hands.

Quite A Scene

Ohio State fans paid dearly — some as many as \$700 a ticket or more — to see their team make history.

It was stunning to look around Sun Devil Stadium or outside the stadium or around Tempe all week and see how OSU fans had virtually taken the city by storm.

This was like a game at Ohio Stadium — Miami had its little sliver of 5,000 or so seats in the northeast corner of the end zone. Otherwise, the stadium was firmly behind Ohio State.

There are several lessons to learn from this.

First, this game — which drew record TV ratings for a Bowl Championship Series game — shows what Ohio State means to the world of college football.

It is my good bet that next season's Aug. 30 season opener with Washington will be picked up by ABC as a prime-time event.

Plus, if OSU can win nine or 10 games some year soon and not make it to the Rose Bowl, I think you'll see the Buckeyes as a BCS at-large team at, say, the Orange Bowl with no questions asked.

At the same time, I doubt you will likely ever see OSU fall past the Outback Bowl, unless the season is a complete disaster (6-5 or 6-6).

Finally, we now know that bowl tickets are a hot commodity. Just imagine if OSU gets matched up with Alabama or Oklahoma or Notre Dame at a major bowl. Miami hardly traveled anybody. In fact, many OSU fans got their tickets directly from Miami or via UM fans on the secondary market.

But schools like I listed above will travel 20,000 or more fans for a big game. Ticket prices for such a match-up could extend over \$1,000 apiece.

Celebrating A Title

I have a round of toasts to make on the occasion of Ohio State's first national championship in nearly two generations. Here goes:

• My first salute is to the OSU fans. They turned out in droves to support their team. On at least two occasions, Miami had to burn timeouts because the crowd noise was too much to call out signals.

How neat was it to hear the "O-H-I-O" chant going full force an hour before kickoff?

You have to admit that the OSU-partisan crowd may have had a factor in field judge Porter throwing the flag on the pass interference penalty that kept OSU's hopes alive in the first overtime.

• This victory was for and due to the work of so many people.

Jim Tressel came to OSU with a belief that the Buckeyes could become a national power once again. That belief was manifested for all the world to see.

As our Gary Houstean told me not long ago, however, this season is not the end — it is only the beginning. Sit back and enjoy this ride. Just as he did at Youngstown State, Tressel will be keeping OSU in the national hunt for years to come.

• This also was for Mark Dantonio, OSU's brilliant defensive coordinator; Bill Conley, OSU's outstanding recruiting coordinator; and Jim Bollman, OSU's stellar offensive coordinator and line coach.

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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (FLA.)

'It's Nothing But Red'

Stars, Fans Help Turn Tempe Into Columbus, Arizona

By STEVE HELWAGEN
and JEFF RAPP

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writers

The stars turned out for Ohio State's Tostitos Fiesta Bowl national championship victory over Miami.

Among the former OSU athletes in attendance were golf legend Jack Nicklaus, former basketball stars Jim Jackson and Lawrence Funderburke, and ex-football standouts David Boston, Keith Byars, Joey Galloway, Eddie George, Rayment Harris, Tito Paul, Alonzo Shavers, Shawn Springs, Mike Tomczak and Jonathan Wells.

Jackson and Funderburke, teammates with the NBA's Sacramento Kings, made the trek down from Denver, where they had a game the next day. George appeared during an off week for his playoff-bound Tennessee Titans.

The Miami sideline was just as star-studded with the likes of Jessie Armstead, Phillip Buchanon, Randall Hill, Cortez Kennedy, Russell Maryland, Bryant McKinnie, Clinton Portis, Warren Sapp and Lamar Thomas.

Prior to the game, former OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit asked his close friend and former teammate Galloway as well as Miami alum Hill to join him on the set of ESPN's "College Gameday" to handicap the match-up.

"I like both you guys, so I'm going to take it easy on you," Hill said. "So I'm going to say Miami 37, Ohio State 12."

Galloway said, "Twelve?"

Herbstreit followed, "It doesn't sound like you're taking it easy on us."

Hill replied, voice rising, "I gave you 12, baby."

For the record, Herbstreit predicted the OSU upset. Lee Corso, his "Gameday" colleague, picked Miami by placing the mascot head of Ibis over his head.

At halftime, George and Sapp appeared on the ABC broadcast to discuss the NFL playoffs.

Prior to the game, several former college stars were honored as Legends

of the Bowl Championship Series. A player was selected from each BCS conference as well as Notre Dame. Those honored included OSU's Archie Griffin, Miami's Jim Kelly, Pittsburgh's Tony Dorsett, Washington State's Mark Rypien, Nebraska's Tommie Frazier, South Carolina's George Rogers and Notre Dame's Paul Hornung.

Luminaries from outside the college sports world included major league baseball players Roger Clemens, Gary Sheffield and Luis Gonzalez, who stars for the hometown Arizona Diamondbacks. Former baseball star Cal Ripken Jr. also was on hand to conduct the pregame coin toss.

Pro golfer Jim Furyk, the reigning Memorial Tournament champion, also attended the game. Furyk attended with his wife, a Columbus native.

Also, actor Matthew McConaughey, a known Texas Longhorns supporter and a friend of Herbstreit's, was roaming the sideline.

The rift between comedian Richard Lewis and his alma mater, OSU, seems to have subsided. Lewis returned to his familiar position on the field for this game, predicting a 24-17 OSU victory to reporters before the game.

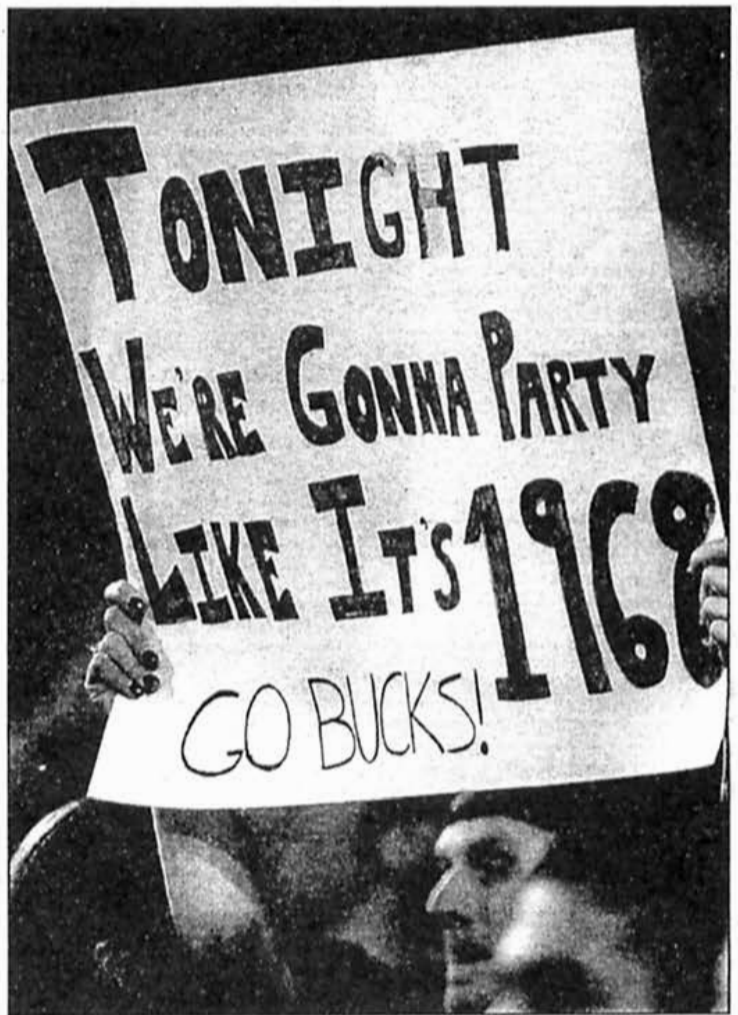
Lewis nearly sued the school for defamation several years ago when he was listed as a "drunk" in a compilation of prominent alumni in an OSU media guide.

Viewpoints On The Win

BSB tracked down former OSU coach Earle Bruce after the game. Bruce was overjoyed that his coaching protege, Jim Tressel, an assistant under Bruce from 1983-85, had completed his mission.

"Winning the national championship is unbelievable," Bruce said. "They were 14-0. What a great job the team and the coaching staff did in that season and this football game."

"To stay in there and win it in double overtime, what an exciting football game. What a great defensive stand there at the end. There are a lot of



WISHING AND HOPING — Sun Devil Stadium was filled with Ohio State fans who made the trip west. Many came bearing signs to lend kind words to their team or razz certain television analysts.

things to remember about this game and this team. They have been very exciting."

Bruce credited OSU fans for supporting their team in Tempe.

"They must have seen it coming because they turned out in droves," he said. "They were here in great numbers to witness. Give them a lot of credit. They are great fans. They do care whether they win or lose. It's been tremendous."

"Coach Tressel has done everything right. He has said all the right things and not said all the right things."

Bruce sees no reason the Buckeyes can't make playing in the title game a regular occurrence.

"I think if we just get the great players from Ohio to come here with a couple from outside, that will be great," he said. "I like what he's doing as far as the players are concerned with their education."

"A kid like Michael Doss comes in here and stays his extra year rather than going to the pros because he wants to win the national title. That

means a lot."

George, OSU's 1995 Heisman Trophy winner, also was overwhelmed by the Fiesta Bowl appearance.

"You've got to be here to believe this, and I still don't believe it," George said. "It was a hard-fought game on both sides. My heart goes out to Miami because they played their hearts out. I'm a big fan of Miami as well, but I can't go against my boys."

"It was a well-fought game with a lot of dramatics involved and we came out on the winning edge. I'm just really happy for them. I really am."

George spent part of the game counseling OSU tailback Maurice Clarett — that is, when George wasn't acting like a nervous wreck and pulling a towel over his head in disbelief.

Griffin, connected to the program as an associate athletic director, also was excited over the outcome.

"I am so very, very proud," he said. "These guys, they've done a terrific job

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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (FLA.)



LOW DOSE OF THE DEUCE — Though he had a touchdown and 67 net yards rushing, Miami sophomore running back Willis McGahee (2) didn't have the type of game that made him a Heisman Trophy finalist. In fact, he had to be carted off the field in the fourth quarter with a knee injury.

Dantonio, Staff And Defense Rise To Occasion

After an emotional, clutch and historic victory in the Fiesta Bowl, the Ohio State football team had much reason to rejoice.

That especially applied to the Buckeye defense, which stood up to the ultimate challenge, the vaunted Miami scoring machine, and played with the same searing intensity for four quarters and two overtimes.

When the defense found itself with a chance to finally put a wrap on the 31-24 upset, it didn't flinch. But what else could be expected from a group that had to hold on in the final moments in tight wins over Cincinnati, Wisconsin, Penn

INSIDE THE GAME

with

**Jeff Rapp and
Mike Wachsman**

State, Purdue, Illinois and Michigan?

"Our guys play with great character, great character," said OSU defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio, a finalist for

the Frank Broyles Award that honors the top assistant coach in the country. "I cannot say enough about how we've handled adversity in some situations and keep playing and playing hard. If you play hard and you play with toughness and effort and you believe in each other, you've got a chance."

That message obviously was sold on Dantonio's troops before the ball was even kicked. The task at hand was monumental — Miami boasted two Heisman trophy finalists in quarterback Ken Dorsey and tailback Willis McGahee, a qualified star at wideout in Andre Johnson, a match-up nightmare in tight end Kellen Winslow Jr., and one of the best offensive lines in the nation — but so was the effort by the Buckeyes.

Dantonio, who somehow maintained his trademark calm during and after the game, said the performance stemmed from focusing on very high, yet attainable, goals for the defense.

"We talked going into the game," he said, "that our four keys to victory were turnovers, coming up plus-two, which we did do that; affecting the quarterback, and we felt we had to pressure the ball to affect the quarterback because their offensive line had not given up very many sacks; eliminate the long run and

long pass, which I think we did a pretty good job of because they have a tremendous football team with very good skill players; and then stop the run, which I think we did that. We definitely shut the run down."

"It was a tremendous job by everybody."

The Hurricanes managed just three first downs via the rush, converted only 6 of 18 third downs and committed four turnovers on offense. Miami's 369 yards of total offense was more than 100 below its season average of 475.4 coming into the game.

McGahee, a fluid and jet-quick sophomore, was held to 67 yards rushing, his lowest output of the season with the exception of a nothing-to-prove six-carry outing vs. Division I-AA Florida A&M in the season opener. He was knocked out of the game with a major knee injury in the fourth quarter and left averaging just 3.3 yards per carry.

Backs Jarrett Payton and Quadtrine Hill had even less success thereafter, combining for 17 yards in nine carries.

"That didn't really change anything for us," Dantonio said. "They still ran the ball. Payton had a nice run to get them

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Game Will Go Down As D's Masterwork

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down there (in the first overtime)."

Dorsey, meanwhile, succumbed to pressure at times and threw a pair of interceptions. His receivers either found themselves cut off from their routes or smacked as soon as they made the catch.

"Miami hasn't seen that," nickel back Will Allen said. "Most times when Miami catches the ball, based on the film, they're running upfield for 6- or 7-yard gains."

"They weren't doing that tonight. They got the ball and we had somebody right there tackling them to the ground every single time."

Applying Pressure

Even with the Buckeyes being able to match up better than many expected on the outside, Dantonio wasn't about to let Dorsey drop back or have his pick of receivers as he had in so many games this season.

The OSU coordinator decided instead to conduct a symphony of defensive pressure with every member of the front seven wielding their own important instrument.

It was yet another masterpiece by Dantonio as the unpredictable changes

in attack were just enough to keep normally dominant Miami off-balance.

"We felt like we needed to pressure the quarterback," Dantonio said. "He's too good to stand back there and just let him throw it. He's got Winslow and he's got Johnson and those other guys are good, too. It's a tough situation."

OSU's use of linebacker blitzes proved timely, including two very key plays in the second overtime — a crushing tackle by middle man Matt Wilhelm that temporarily knocked Dorsey out of the game and a storming of the Miami QB by OLB Cie Grant that forced an incompletion on the very last play of the game.

"We played man free on the last one — Tight Will Tulsa Red Nine — and we told our middle field safety to double the tight end," Dantonio explained.

"That's the first time we called that defense all day where (Grant) came off the open side. When he came free and nobody touched him I thought, 'It's over. That's it.' That's exactly what I thought."

"I knew that he wouldn't miss, I knew that the guy was going to be hurried and it was just going to be a matter of whether he made a great play, which he's capable of doing."

The Buckeye defense turned the momentum of the game in the second quarter by forcing Dorsey to throw off his



JEFF BREHM

GOING OUT IN STYLE — All-American Matt Wilhelm, playing his final game at linebacker for Ohio State, recorded a team-high 10 tackles and three tackles for loss in the Buckeyes' national championship-clinching victory over Miami.

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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (FLA.)

back foot on several pass plays and picking him off twice with thefts by Dustin Fox and Mike Doss. Dorsey was jittery on both of those plays as OSU hemmed him in with its defensive line.

"We felt like our front four was pretty good and we would get some pressure, that if we could make the quarterback look twice, hold the ball another second or so, we were going to get pressure," Dantonio said. "They started throwing some three-step passes early in the second half."

"I felt in the first half we were getting to him. The second they did a better job of throwing the ball quick."

However, the defense made its statement immediately with regard to Dorsey. Defensive end Will Smith, in fact, planted him for a sack on the first snap of the game by the Hurricanes. Later in the series, Kenny Peterson dropped him. Peterson added a second sack late in the half and Simon Fraser made it four against a Miami team that came in allowing 11 sacks all season.

"We just stepped up today," said defensive tackle David Thompson, who also played a key role with several QB pressures. "We played big. It's our last game, me and Kenny Peterson, the seniors on the D-line. We had to play our best and we played our heart out. The younger guys — Darrion (Scott), Tim Anderson, Will Smith, Simon Fraser — all of them came up big for us."

Fraser was most happy for teammates Peterson and Thompson, two of the team's 13 seniors who went out on top.

"Kenny Peterson and Dave Thompson have faced a lot of adversity throughout their whole careers and for them to come out and have career-best senior years and go out champions at 14-0 ... these are what books are written about, these type of kids," Fraser said. "Their leadership skills and the type of people they are totally represents what this program is all about and is going to become."

Secondary Comes To The Fore

Also impressive in keeping Miami at bay was the play of the OSU secondary. Not only did Fox pick off a pass from his cornerback position and Doss do likewise at strong safety, the other DBs — Chris Gamble, Donnie Nickey and Allen — also were instrumental in the effort.

Dorsey was 28 of 43 for 296 yards but completed only 11 for 10 or more yards, six of those coming before halftime.

"We did a good job of stopping the big pass all year and, as you can see, the great wide receivers of Miami didn't go deep on us," Allen said. "They couldn't do it. They just dinked it and got Winslow in the game and we just broke to the ball. I don't think Miami's seen a defense as quick and as fast as we were. We were able to compete with their speed."

"I don't think the nation has seen our speed like that, and I think they're going to be talking about that for the year to come."

Added Fox, who was tested deep repeatedly and came up big. "They didn't have any big plays, and that was crucial for us. For the most part all game we were in our position and making plays. We played solid. When you don't hear a player's name from the secondary called that much, that's not a bad thing."

However, Miami nearly found an answer to the OSU game plan in Winslow, who looks like a young version of his Hall of Fame father. Winslow gave Miami a 24-17 lead in the first overtime with a 7-yard touchdown grab despite

interference by Allen.

"I commend him," Allen said of Winslow, who finished with 11 catches for 122 yards. "He's a great player. He looked like he wanted it more than anyone on the team."

"On that play I had my back turned and at the last second he just kind of pushed off to get separation. It was a great throw, a great pitch and catch. That's what he's there for. He's 6-5 and it's like a wide receiver playing tight end."

"I was disappointed, but I knew our offense would come back and score."

Offense Proves Efficient

Efficient beats flashy, and Ohio State was definitely the former in its stunning national championship victory.

Despite the fact they were outgained by over 100 yards, the Buckeyes were able to score when it counted and, most importantly, hang on to the football.

Miami's explosive offense imploded by coughing up the ball four times — OSU's Maurice Clarett forced a fumble after a Miami interception for a fifth turnover — while the Buckeyes were content to play the field position game.

"We didn't run as well as maybe we wanted to, but we came up with plays when we had to," OSU offensive coordinator Jim Bollman said. "There was some inconsistency, but the biggest thing for us is that we didn't put the ball on the ground. We chose to punt or throw it away when we got into trouble."

The Buckeyes averaged just 3.7 yards per play but got tough in the red zone, scoring four times from inside the 10.

Craig Krenzel wasn't so much a quarterback as he was a field general, deploying his troops perfectly and giving them the confidence and will to win with timely passing and outstanding running. Krenzel led everyone with 81 yards rushing.

"He did what we needed to get done," OSU coach Jim Tressel said. "He led the team."

Clarett, the center of a firestorm in the days leading up to the game after making comments that Ohio State didn't have his best interests in mind by denying him a chance to return home for a friend's funeral, had a subpar game with just 47 yards on 23 carries.

But he found the end zone twice, including the game winner from 5 yards out in the second overtime that included a nice juke past Miami safety Maurice Sikes and a stumble into the end zone.

"We were just beating ourselves, we were missing blocks," said Clarett. "They were in a different scheme than we had prepared for. We did a good job of adjust-

ing. I was trying to make too many things happen."

Jenkins Da Man — Again

Michael Jenkins had been the hero of many Ohio State victories this season, and though he didn't find the end zone

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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (FLA.)

Jenkins' Grabs Were Certainly Timely

Continued From Page 25

against the Hurricanes, his contributions were still huge.

The junior finished the evening with four catches for 45 yards, including a dramatic 17-yard sideline grab as OSU faced a fourth-and-14 in overtime.

Three of Jenkins' grabs went for first downs, which is all in a day's work.

"I just went out and tried to make some plays," Jenkins said. "I told Craig I could beat my man (on the fourth-down play), and he did a great job getting me the ball. It really kept things going for us."

Bollman said the decision to go to Jenkins was a no-brainer after everything he has done.

"We know what kind of player Michael is and that's why we wanted to get him the ball," Bollman said. "We had run that same play on first down (on the same series), but Craig got flushed out and had to run."

I Dare You To Step Across This Line

Much of the pregame discussion centered on how Ohio State's line would hold up against Miami's athletic, attacking defense, a unit that had collected 46 sacks.

The Buckeyes had allowed 33, the second highest figure in the Big Ten, and looked overmatched against a Hurricanes defense that had quickness to spare.

Those lambs turned into lions, limiting Miami to just one sack and keeping holes open just long enough for Krenzel to dart through.

"We knew they were aggressive, so if we just let them go to the outside we knew that would open things up for us up the middle," center Alex Stepanovich said. "If they don't get by you with their speed you can get leverage on them and take them out of the play. They also play man coverage, so that leaves the middle open a lot of the time."

OSU may have been dominated in the yardage department (369 to 267), but Tressel will gladly take that if his team wins the time of possession battle the way it did.

The Buckeyes held the ball for 46:27 to Miami's 28:33.

Miami's Matt Walters felt his defensive linemen would be able to dictate tempo against what was thought to be a plodding Ohio State front line.

"They played a tough game," he said. "My hat is off to Ohio State. They did what they needed to when they needed to and won the football game."



JEFF BUECHER

HUGE, HUGE PLAY — Facing fourth-and-14 in the first overtime, quarterback Craig Krenzel hit wide receiver Michael Jenkins (12) for a 17-yard gain and a first down. OSU went on to score and keep the game alive.

Also Notable

- Wilhelm led OSU with 10 total tackles followed by nine from Doss. Those two played like the senior All-Americans that they are, but they certainly didn't do it alone.

- Nine other players logged at least four tackles, including Smith with eight, and Fox and Grant with seven.

- Doss' second-quarter interception was the eighth of his career and second of the season. He was named the Defensive MVP award winner in the game.

- Meanwhile, Fox's interception was his third of the year and fourth of his career.

- Miami's Johnson came into the game with more than 1,000 yards receiving and a gaudy average of 21.6 yards per catch. He finished with four grabs for 54 yards.

- Miami lost only 9 fumbles in the regular season but lost all three against Ohio State, albeit one was by defensive back Sean Taylor, who was stripped by Claret after an interception.

Peterson caused one fumble by Dorsey that was recovered by Scott late in the first half and set up a go-ahead touchdown. Fox poked out another after a com-

pletion to Roscoe Parrish, and Allen jumped on the loose pig.

- The five turnovers forced gave OSU 30 for the season. The Buckeyes got 17 points off turnovers in this game, giving them 80 points off turnovers this year.

- Kicker Mike Nugent's 44-yard field goal in the third quarter was his OSU-record 25th this year. It also was his 10th 40-yard kick this year, also an OSU mark.

Nugent later missed on a 42-yarder in the fourth quarter to end his sophomore year with 25 makes on 28 attempts.

- OSU flanker/cornerback Chris Gamble enjoyed a big game. His 57-yard catch from Krenzel went down as the team's longest play of the season, beating a 50-yard Krenzel-to-Jenkins pass against Illinois.

Gamble participated in 120 of the game's 178 plays — all 77 on defense, 32 on offense and 11 on special teams.

- The 'Canes bothered to take a stab at just eight fourth downs all regular season, converting five. Against OSU, Miami was 1 of 2, the unsuccessful attempt bringing an end to the college football season.

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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL PROFILE

Smith Played Through Injury, Loss Of Pal

By STEVE HELWAGEN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The 2002 football season has been one of joy and pain for OSU defensive end Will Smith.

The joy was evident as Smith was one of the key contributors on a defense that helped lead the Buckeyes to the national championship game at the Fiesta Bowl.

But Smith played with pain — both physically and emotionally — during the course of the season.

Smith overcame a knee injury in mid-season, never missing a game along the way. But that was followed in late October by news that one of his close friends from high school had been murdered in their hometown of Utica, N.Y.

The whole experience has changed Smith, he said.

"I think I've just gotten more mature and more humble," he said. "Anytime you go out on the football field, you have to give it up and lay it on the line."

The 6-4, 250-pound Smith enjoyed a second big season as a starter for the Buckeyes, tallying 51 tackles, 10-1/2 tackles for loss, 4-1/2 sacks and an interception as the Buckeyes rolled through a 13-0 regular season.

His contributions earned the junior a spot on the All-Big Ten second team.

It was not quite the All-American season many had expected out of Smith, who dominated OSU's injury-depleted offensive line in the spring.

Rather, Smith played his assignment in OSU's defense, even dropping into pass coverage instead of going on the all-out pass rush in some key situations.

"It is pretty rare to play on a team where everybody has the same goal and the same focus," Smith said. "Coach (Jim) Tressel has led us that way. He made sure we took things game by game."

"If I do good, I know the team will do good. I think everybody assumes it should be that way."

Smith had several shining moments, including two sacks in the season-opening win over Texas Tech, an interception in the pivotal win over Penn State, a forced fumble deep in OSU territory against Illinois, a fumble recovery late in the Michigan game that helped preserve OSU's monumental 14-9 victory and a sack of Miami quarterback Ken Dorsey on the Hurricanes' first offensive play in the Fiesta Bowl.

Dealing With Adversity

Smith's strong season was nearly derailed as the Buckeyes played one of their weakest opponents, San Jose State.

He left the Oct. 12 game against the Spartans with a sprained knee. The injury limited his availability for practice as the

Buckeyes prepared for a Big Ten road trip to Wisconsin.

But on game day in Madison, Smith sucked it up and played a reserve role. He ended up with a key sack in OSU's narrow 19-14 win over the Badgers. His line coach, Jim Heacock, called Smith's appearance in that game a courageous act.

"I had never been injured before and it was kind of scary," Smith said. "At first, I didn't know if it was career-threatening or if I'd be out a couple of months or if I would miss any games."

"Then, I realized it was only minor. For a couple of games, it bothered me. But after a while it did not hurt at all."

If the injury was a minor setback, nothing could have prepared Smith for what would happen only a few short days later.

He learned that his former Proctor High School basketball teammate, Mychal Harris, had been gunned down on Oct. 27.

Harris was reportedly visiting his girlfriend at a Utica-area apartment complex. The police responded to a noise complaint at a nearby apartment. That tenant then confronted Harris and asked if he had filed the complaint. The two exchanged words and, when Harris tried to leave the complex a short while later, the tenant allegedly shot him in the back.

That man is now in custody and awaits trial on the shooting death.

Smith received permission to leave the team and return home to Utica for his friend's funeral.

"That was pretty shocking," Smith said. "I didn't think something like that would happen to him. He was one of those kids who was always doing good things. You never figured something bad would happen to him."

"I went to the funeral and reality hit me. That's when everything sank in that this really did happen and I would never see him again."

Smith said his friend's death had a profound effect on him.

"He had always pushed me to be a better football player," Smith said. "That got me more focused and I became a better football player because of it."

"That was a hard process for him to be one of my best friends and for him to pass away. I just tried to stay focused on football."

One Piece Of The Puzzle

Smith was a key component in an OSU defense that finished second nationally in scoring (12.2 points per game), fourth in rushing yards allowed (78.7 yards per game) and 20th in total defense (317.2).

He has enjoyed playing alongside tackles Tim Anderson and Kenny Peterson and fellow end Darrion Scott.

"I think we all bring something unique because we have the ability to play different positions," Smith said. "Because of that, when somebody comes out we're not losing a



JEFF BREHM

I SAID, 'A YEAH, YEAH, YEAH' — Defensive end Will Smith capped his second season as a starter with a national championship but it wasn't easy: He had to overcome a knee injury and the slaying of a close friend.

big part of our defense."

Once the Fiesta Bowl trip is complete, Smith will have a small window of time to contemplate his future. Some draft analysts believe he could elevate himself to a first-round NFL draft choice.

Smith said he would weigh his options closely before deciding whether to return for his senior year, when the Buckeyes figure to

be among the preseason favorites for the 2003 national championship.

"You always think about leaving after your junior year," Smith said. "You know that's an option you have. But that will be a whole other process. I want to sit down and talk with my family and see if that suits me best or if it would suit me best to come back and help the team."



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Clarett, OSU At Odds Over Friend's Funeral

By STEVE HELWAGEN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

After a contentious week marked by a war of words with school officials, OSU freshman tailback Maurice Clarett helped deliver on his immense promise — he and his teammates captured the national championship with a 31-24 double-overtime win over Miami (Fla.) in the Fiesta Bowl.

But Clarett was not in any mood to celebrate after his school's landmark victory.

Earlier in the week, Clarett and his school were at odds over his request to return home from Arizona to the Youngstown, Ohio, area to attend the Dec. 30 funeral of a childhood friend.

While school officials say they approved of Clarett's decision to leave the team to attend the funeral, they contended the player needed to fill out federal paperwork to be eligible for NCAA Special Assistance Fund money to pay for his airline ticket.

Clarett had not filed the Free Application For Federal Student Aid form until just before leaving for the bowl trip, not giving the government or Ohio State officials time to properly process it.

The entire dispute left Clarett stewing in Arizona as OSU coach Jim Tressel and athletic department officials were left to explain their side of the issue to the media.

The unseemly dispute lingered much of the week, although it ultimately had no impact on Clarett or the Buckeyes: He had two touchdowns in his team's Fiesta Bowl win over the Hurricanes.

Here is a chronology of how this controversy unfolded during Fiesta Bowl week.

• **Dec. 30** — Clarett was among a small group of players transported from the team hotel at the Scottsdale Fairmont Princess Resort to the media hotel at the Phoenix Airport Marriott for a morning news conference.

Toward the end of the press conference, Clarett was asked by an Associated Press columnist about growing up in Youngstown.

He volunteered the information that it was a rough upbringing, noting that a close friend had been gunned down and he was unable to go home to Ohio for the funeral, which was scheduled for that very day.

Clarett would not give the name of his late friend, but his mother told the AP that it was 23-year-old Juan Bell, who was shot Dec. 21. The shooting was reportedly drug-related.

"I'm kind of messed up because they jerked me kind of," Clarett told the AP. "I really wanted to go back. I'm not really supposed to be here. But it's cool. Things happen in life, there's bumps in the road like everything else. But I'll be all right."

Clarett said the university "told me it was (an NCAA) compliance issue."

"They didn't really give me an answer to the question," Clarett said, referring to OSU officials. "I guess football's more important than a person's life to them. That's why I'm ready to get this game over and go back home."

Ohio State officials countered after the team's practice. They said they told Clarett he could buy an airline ticket and then ask for reimbursement through the NCAA's Special Assistance Fund. The fund exists to pay for such emergencies as long as an athlete demonstrates need.

"We told Maurice that he could fly home ... if he could buy a ticket home and back we would reimburse him later," OSU ath-

letic director Andy Geiger said. "He elected not to do that, or couldn't afford that, or there wasn't anybody in his family who could do it."

"We were stuck in a place where the rule is we couldn't go forward and buy a ticket."

OSU coach Jim Tressel told reporters Clarett was never denied the chance to go home for the service.

"The best thing for all involved is to say it didn't work out," Tressel said.

Tressel said he was disappointed about Clarett's comment about football being more important to Ohio State officials than life.

"That's something we talk quite a bit about is that football is a part of life," Tressel said. "Football is one of the things we do. It certainly isn't everything we do."

Geiger also was sympathetic to Clarett's plight.

"The human experience is not put on hold because we're playing in the Fiesta Bowl," he said.

OSU compliance officer Heather Lyke Catalano filled in some of the blanks for CBS Sportsline.com. Clarett wanted the school to pay for the ticket, something it simply could not do by NCAA rules.

"He wanted the easy way," Catalano said. "He didn't want to pay for it."

• **Dec. 31** — Clarett joined his teammates by appearing at Sun Devil Stadium for the official Fiesta Bowl media day.

As many as 100 reporters surrounded his podium on the field and they hung on his every word for almost an hour.

He did not back down on his stance that OSU did him wrong in handling his request to return home.

Clarett began the session by saying the situation was "nothing to stumble over."

"I'm cool," he said. "I think it was what it was. I think everybody is past it."

Clarett said he did not sense a backlash from coaches or his teammates over the flap, which drew nationwide media attention on ESPN and in USA Today.

"I think people took it the way they wanted to take it," he said. "I just said what I said and however people perceive it or take it is on them."

Clarett was then asked if he filled out the necessary paperwork to make emergency fund aid available.

"They didn't tell me I filled out the paperwork before I left. You can go ask them about that," he said.

"I'm not going to sit here and let them lie about that. My paperwork is on file. My mother just filled it out. You can call her and ask her about that."

"I filled it out so I can get a Pell Grant beginning with winter quarter."

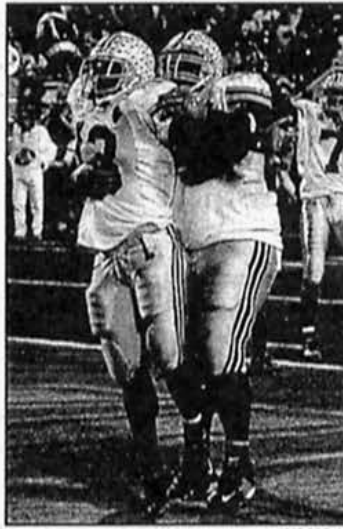
Clarett told reporters he was directed by Tressel to speak with Catalano. But she never got back to him, he alleged.

"They didn't talk to me," Clarett said. "I talked to the coach and he pointed me in the direction of the compliance lady. The compliance lady told me she would get back to me at my room (at the team hotel)."

"But she never got back to me at my room or on my cell phone. That's the real reason I was mad — she said she would call me back, but nobody ever returned my call."

Tressel tried to do damage control from his podium, just 10 feet away from Clarett's.

"I know it's the job of the people here to discuss those things," Tressel said. "It's the job of our folks to make sure we're there for each other."



JEFF BROWN

DISTRACTIONS BE DAMNED — Though he captured a lot of headlines during game week, Maurice Clarett (left) delivered when it counted most.

"Anytime someone in your family or a friend is in the grieving process, they need to know we're here for them. I would never tell them how to handle the situation. That's a personal issue."

"I know people have jobs to do here. We have our jobs to do, too. Anything we did or didn't do, we did out of concern for one of our own."

But Clarett was having none of it. "Of course, they're going to make themselves look better than me," he said. "They're going to make me look stupid like I did something to put myself in this position."

Hours later, Geiger issued a statement to try to further clarify the school's stance on the matter.

"It is absolutely essential that everyone understand the process involved with this form," Geiger said. "First and foremost, this is a federal document, not a university document."

"Each of our student-athletes at the time of their orientation is encouraged to complete this form. This can be done either online or by completing the necessary paperwork."

"The document requires full financial disclosure of the parents' or guardians' income for the previous tax year. It must be filed annually and signed by the student-athlete and the parent or guardian."

"Once the document is filed, it is evaluated by the proper agency to make sure it has been properly completed. The institution is then notified that the student-athlete has a FAFSA on file. That information is kept on file in the Financial Aid Office at Ohio State."

"As of Dec. 30, 2002, there was no FAFSA on file for Maurice Clarett. Maurice may have begun the process but at the time we had to make the decision, there was no indication of a FAFSA on file for Maurice in our Financial Aid Office. We were therefore compelled to follow the NCAA rules as they apply to this situation."

"We care deeply about all of our student-athletes and we did everything possible to assist Maurice Clarett in this time of his personal grief. Unfortunately, given the

circumstances, we had no choice other than to react in the manner in which we did."

"I cannot emphasize enough how important it is for our student-athletes to complete this form."

• **Jan. 1** — Several of Clarett's teammates picked up the ball and ran with it during interview sessions.

"He's got some things he needs to work through," said OSU tight end Ben Hartssock. "But it's nothing that hasn't been said before this happened. But every time, we've been able to move on from it."

"Everybody is confident he knows his assignments in the game and will play his hardest."

"He's the kind of guy that drama kind of follows him around, I guess."

• **Jan. 3** — Miami geared up to try to stop Clarett, limiting him to 47 yards on 23 carries. But he did score a pair of touchdowns and turned in one of the key plays in the game when he tracked down Miami defensive back Sean Taylor after an interception and stripped him of the ball.

"Maurice Clarett is a tremendous competitor," Tressel said. "He cares a lot about the team and he gives a tremendous effort as evidenced by his strip on that interception."

"He is probably relieved to be walking out the door as a national champion."

In the moments following the game, Clarett watched the postgame trophy celebration onstage at midfield by leaning against a restraining fence 30 feet from the stage.

"This doesn't mean anything to me," he muttered to reporters. "I just want to go home. I'm all about winning games."

Moments later, he responded to requests by ABC's Lynn Swann and OSU associate athletic director Archie Griffin to appear onstage. He answered one question about the strip on Taylor before Swann signed off.

After dressing, Clarett answered questions for reporters in the interview room. He said he sought some advice after a slow start in the game.

"I talked with Eddie George and Jonathan Wells," Clarett said. "They said I should be patient and things would start going my way. At the beginning of the game, I was trying to rush everything and trying to make too many things happen."

"I didn't have the game I wanted to, but I made a couple of plays when I needed to."

He then appeared in a taped segment on ESPN's "SportsCenter" coverage of the Fiesta Bowl. Initially appearing tentative, Clarett eventually warmed to questions from one of his confidants, former OSU quarterback Kirk Herbstreit.

Following the interview, reporters caught up with Clarett's mother, Michelle, in a tunnel underneath the stadium.

"I think Maurice had an awesome game," Michelle Clarett said. "He was out there 100 percent plus. His desire showed today."

"He had an up-and-down week. He saw an opportunity to pull it together and he did."

Michelle Clarett told reporters she had been counseling her son on the tiff with the school.

"Motherly advice is every day and this week was no exception," she said. "It may have been a little more for support and for what he had on the inside."

When asked if this was a simple misunderstanding, Michelle Clarett said, "We have a national championship. We are not going to go backwards."

OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (FLA.)

In The End, A Helluva Day For The Scarlet & Gray

Continued From Page 3

They, and the rest of this staff, have worked hard to make this program what it is today — a national champion.

- This win was for Krenzel, OSU's not-so-flashy quarterback. His 7-of-21 passing line may not look too gaudy. In fact, it looked just like something, say, Rex Kern or Cornelius Greene would have turned in for Woody Hayes. But Krenzel got the job done.

- This win was also for Claret, OSU's wunderkind freshman sensation. After the game, Claret was almost dazed. He seemed emotionally spent and understandably so after the death of a close friend.

We all put expectations on Maurice for him to do the things we want him to do. But he needs the support of his teammates, coaches and OSU fans now more than ever.

Claret came to OSU with one goal in his mind — winning a national championship. And in his first year, he delivered.

- This is for the rest of the offense, which also delivered, particularly the line. This unit should return intact in 2003, when the Buckeyes will take on a new identity.

- This was for OSU's battle-tested defensive front. I'm sure many of you are hoping this was not the last game for juniors Darrin Scott and Will Smith, who each came up huge against the 'Canes.

- Unfortunately, it was the final game for seniors Kenny Peterson, Matt Wilhelm, Cie Grant, Donnie Nickey and Mike Doss. They each played a huge role in OSU's upset win as well as this national championship season.

Doss, in particular, has earned a lifetime of praise from OSU fans. He set the

tone for 2002 almost a year ago when he decided to stay at OSU for his senior year. He almost willed OSU to this championship.

This title also was for All-American specialists Andy Groom, who will be sorely missed, and Nugent, who has two more years left.

- This victory was for John Cooper. Those were his players, in many cases, making the pivotal plays out there.

- This victory was for Andy Geiger. He made the right decision to replace Cooper two years ago and followed it with the decision to hire Tressel, soon to be college football's next millionaire (or millionaire-and-a-half) coach.

- This also was for all former OSU players, particularly the likes of Eddie George, Jonathan Wells and Raymont Harris, who were coaching Claret on the sideline. Others of note in attendance included Kirk Herbstreit, Joey Galloway and Keith Byars.

- This also was for everybody out there who never gave Ohio State the time of day this year. ESPN know-nothings Trev



JEFF BREHM

NO LOVE LOST — Ohio State fans really seemed to take genuine displeasure with comments made by college football analysts like Trev Alberts and Mark May, both of ESPN and both of whom said Miami would throttle OSU in the Fiesta Bowl. Of course, a Hurricane win never happened, but signs jeering Alberts did.

Alberts and Mark May should retire their microphones after their embarrassing statements about the Buckeyes (vis-a-vis Iowa and Miami) this season.

Likewise, Tim Brando of CBS and The Sporting News showed his acumen for the game he covers so closely — although he

broadcasts only had SEC football — by saying Miami would roll 48-10. Guess again, Timbo.

- Most of all, this Ohio State victory was for all of you — the OSU fans. Without your undying devotion, none of this would have ever happened.

Archie Saw The Upset Coming All Along

Continued From Page 14

all year long, they never gave up, and even in times where it looked like it wasn't going to go our way, they just beared down and said, 'Hey, we're going to win this football game.'

"They did it. I'm so very proud of them. They're a terrific bunch of guys. And to Coach Tressel and his staff, they are fabulous. They find a way to win. They brought these guys together, and I've got to believe we've got a tremendous future ahead of us."

Griffin was asked if he had any inkling that the Buckeyes would pull off the upset.

"Oh, I really did," he said. "I watched them practice and I tell you, they actually had some wonderful practices. They were spirited and every day after practice I would ask one of the coaches, 'How'd it go?' and to a man each of them told me we had a great practice."

"So I felt very, very good about this football game and how our players would play."

The Fans Speak Out

A Fiesta Bowl official crossing Tempe's Stadium Drive before the game made an obvious observation when he told his companion, "It's nothing but red."

The official was referring to the sea of scarlet-clad OSU supporters who flooded the city's streets in the days leading up to the Fiesta Bowl.

BSB caught up with several OSU fans, who shared their views on the weekend's events.

Sheri Bugher of Columbus came into town the night before the game with her husband, sister and brother-in-law. They did not come up with game tickets but were allowed into the stadium to watch the ESPN postgame show.

"I thought they were going to win," she said. "In the overtime I was a little hesitant, but I still thought they were going to do it."

"I can't imagine it any better. Even if they wouldn't have won, it was absolutely amazing that they made it here. But they just did awesome in that game. It was spectacular. Great game."

"When you look in the crowd and see that pretty much everything was red, I can't see how that could not affect the team and help them. They know they have a great fan base. The fans did a great job and I think that does help."

Paul Moore of Susanville, Calif., near the Nevada border, made the 12-hour drive to Tempe on New Year's Day.

"I'm a high school football coach and we won the state championship this year, and for us to win the state championship and the Buckeyes to win the national championship in the same year is like the most amazing thing ever and I will never forget it," Moore said. "If I die tonight, I die a happy man."

Moore said the dramatic climax of the game was hard to watch.

"I died several times," he said. "When they were kicking the field goal to send it to overtime, I was just praying that they would miss because I knew that would give us the national championship. The two fourth downs in the first overtime, we thought it was over. We didn't see the flag for the pass interference. And then the last play, great call by the coaching staff to blitz there on fourth down and put pressure on (Miami quarterback Ken) Dorsey."

"It was just an unbelievable feeling."

Moore was still in the stadium over an hour after the game. He and his friends weren't sure how to celebrate.

"That's why we're still here, actually," he said. "It's like, 'What do you do?' You almost don't know how to act when something as special as this happens."

OSU student Eddie DeBarr of Montville, N.J., also enjoyed being a part of history.

"The atmosphere at the stadium was like a home game," DeBarr said. "Everybody was going nuts. We were chanting O-H-I-O. All across the country, people heard that and all they saw was the red."

George Gulgas, the athletic director at Youngstown (Ohio) Liberty High School, is well acquainted with Tressel's teams and was glad to see the coach capture his first Division I-A title.

"That was a great game," Gulgas said. "It all came down to defense and the kicking game. You can't run on the Bucks."

"I was there since Tuesday (Dec. 31). That was so fantastic. It was almost as good as the Michigan game."

Pat King of Dublin, Ohio, took her son and his family to Arizona as a Christmas present.

"This couldn't happen to a nicer guy," King said. "I love Jim Tressel. I love his demeanor. He's a class act."

"That was an emotional game with all of the ups and downs. But to watch him, it's so calming. When it got all exciting, he didn't get too wild. He really does conduct himself well and the players react to it."

OPINION

The Ballad Of The Story That Didn't End Sadly

Growing up as an Ohio State fan, you get a little conditioned to expect things to fall apart at inopportune times.

So even with the glorious season the Buckeyes had put together, there was a small voice in the back of my head saying, "Don't get too high because you might end up disappointed." That's the way it had become since, oh, about 1972, when I first really began paying attention to the Buckeyes.

There were too many close calls to mention, though most had come in the last 10 years with John Cooper at the helm. Sure, the Rose Bowl win was great, the benchmark of his coaching tenure at Ohio State. But there was also so much ancillary stuff going on that it was almost hard to even enjoy that one.

While preparing for the journey to Tempe — which was often a sore subject around the old homestead — I told myself to go out there, do my job and enjoy myself no matter what happened. And that's what I intended to do.

As New Year's Day got closer, there were more nagging doubts, mostly from the family. They asked if I really had to go, and I said that while I didn't have to, I owed it to myself — and to BSB, of course — to get out there and do my job and chronicle the game. Plus, I wanted to have a chance to see a potential national championship because you never know when you might get the chance again.

The day finally got here, and as I kissed my 3-year-old daughter goodbye, I told her I'd be thinking of her and that I'd call when I got to Arizona. She immediately responded with a cry of "I want to go!" which tugged at the heartstrings a little, but I remained steadfast and told her that wasn't possible. But it made leaving harder, because no matter how well OSU is doing, family comes before football.

After reassurances from the wife that the little one would be fine, I was off to Tempe.

Not much happened in the days leading up to the game, but as Jan. 3 dawned the buzz became tangible. There hadn't been this much national excitement for an Ohio State sporting event since maybe the Final Four run by the men's basketball team a few seasons ago. Ohio State was going to be on a grand stage and was intent on not blowing it.

The first quarter turned into the second, and OSU showed it was more than up to the challenge. Miami no doubt came in with the idea that its speed would overwhelm the Buckeyes, but OSU proved to be technically sound and on top of its game and the Hurricanes had tough sledding. When OSU took a 14-7 lead, the looks on the faces of the few Hurricanes in attendance were priceless — mouths agape and eyes wide. They never thought they'd trail, let alone going into halftime.

It could have been worse, too, if Jim Tressel hadn't made that horrible fake field goal call. You've got an All-American kicker in Mike Nugent and you choose that route. You don't get fancy when the stakes are this high. You stick with what got you here, and fortunately that was one of the few true gaffes of the evening.

The final 15 minutes and change were possibly the most tense, frantic,

THE FACTS MAN

Mike Wachsmann

electric moments surrounding a sporting event that I've ever seen. Former OSU players on the sideline were hyperventilating as the pressure mounted.

When Todd Sievers lined up for the game-tying field goal, there was no doubt he was going to miss. He hadn't made a kick since early November, and that wasn't going to change. But it did, and we were headed to overtime.

The talk along the sideline was that overtime would favor OSU because it had been down this road before. Miami was truly challenged once this year, while the Buckeyes' season was fraught with potholes.

As OSU came perilously close to falling off the tightrope in the first overtime, Craig Krenzel did what he did all season — stepped up and made a play. His 17-yard pass to Michael Jenkins on fourth-and-14 may have trumped the duo's pitch-and-catch that brought victory at Purdue.

After that, there seemed little doubt the Buckeyes would do the requisite things to win. And when Chris Gamble was held coming out of his route by Miami's Glenn Sharpe, it seemed obvious to everyone that the Buckeyes would get a fresh set of downs. Only there was no flag — at least not immediately.

The hue and cry in the days after the game talking about how Miami got hosed is laughable. Folks say you can't let the officials decide the game, but when there's a definite penalty it has to be called. It doesn't matter if the game is a 40-point blowout or a nail-biter. A penalty is a penalty, and it was the right call.

I will admit that taking so long to throw the flag is horrible, and the guy should have been reaching for the flag when Gamble came out of his break. That makes conspiracy theorists come out of the woodwork and think the Hurricanes were jobbed. They weren't.

And they had opportunities to rebound, anyway.

When OSU took the lead, the title was in view. The supreme confidence everyone has in the defense was never more apparent than when Kirk Herbstreit said, casually, to Matt Wilhelm, "Just do what you've done all year, baby." That's all there was to it.

When Ken Dorsey was blasted by Wilhelm, he and the Hurricanes were down for the count. Never mind that there were a few more chances, including first-and-goal at the 2 in the second overtime.

In what was quite possibly the biggest, most stirring goal-line stand in college football history, the Buckeyes took no prisoners, took chances and made plays when they had to. When Cie Grant got loose and pressured Dorsey into throwing early — the only time all day that blitz scheme was called — it showed just what kind of coaching staff Jim Tressel has. There was no fear changing things up even though what had been done had worked all night.

As the football dropped harmlessly to the Sun Devil Stadium grass, pandemonium broke out.

And it washed away all the mixed feelings churning in my stomach about balancing family and business because I had just witnessed history. How many of us can really say that? Not many.

When I got a call from my wife in the following minutes, she was as excited as I was and was happy that I had been part of the scene.

It was definitely a night to remember. And the way things look with Tressel in control, it seems safe to say that the previously pessimistic outlook that many Buckeyes have had through the years can finally be discarded.

It's about time.

Grow Up, Mo

While the national play the Maurice Claret diatribe received was way overblown, this much needs to be said.

Claret has to learn to pick his battles, and if he has a problem with the OSU administration, he should go to them and not do battle in the media.

Was it an unfortunate situation that he couldn't go to his friend's funeral? Certainly. Should the NCAA give serious consideration to changing its rule about compensation for a plane ticket in this type of situation? Yes.

From The Pages Of BSB

FIFTEEN YEARS AGO — 1988

After weeks of speculation and a mere 12 hours before 1987 came to a close, Ohio State named John Cooper its 21st head football coach and the successor to Earle Bruce.

Cooper came to Columbus from Arizona State, where he was 25-9-2 in three seasons. One of those wins was over Michigan in the 1987 Rose Bowl, which helped his chances of being hired at OSU.

"I think we can win the national championship," Cooper told the media contingent at his inaugural press conference on New Year's Eve.

"I felt like we could win the national championship at Arizona State. That's a goal we had every year and that's a goal we'll have at The Ohio State University every year."

TEN YEARS AGO — 1993

Cooper was in Tampa, Fla., to lead the Buckeyes into battle with Georgia in the Citrus Bowl. Things did not go as planned, as the Bulldogs came away with a 21-14 victory.

Georgia running back Garrison Hearst and OSU back Robert Smith traded short touchdowns before Bulldog running back Frank Harvey scored the eventual game winner with 4:32 to play.

After the game, Buckeye linebacker Steve Tovar knew the main reason Georgia was able to pull it out.

"I don't think you can simulate the kind of speed that they had," he said. "I think we tried to in practice, and we worked hard. But in certain situations, they just seemed to have too much speed."

FIVE YEARS AGO — 1998

Once again, a Southern team beat Ohio State in a Southern bowl game and once again quickness had a lot to do with it.

In the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans, fourth-ranked Florida State throttled the Buckeyes 31-14.

Why not allow the kid to get money ahead of time — after all, they can't have jobs, and if the situation arises where a dire circumstance happens, many of them don't have the resources to afford a plane ticket on short notice. They would have to pay the money back, or it could be taken out of the money stipend they're given that covers books, housing, whatever.

In Claret's case this wouldn't have applied because this guy wasn't an immediate family member. Claret needed to worry more about the game than the perceived injustice OSU was putting him through.

Claret's less than enthusiastic display after the game was something to worry about and belies his statements about being most concerned with victory. His team has won the biggest game in recent memory yet he was leaning on a fence sulking and ignoring teammates.

Methinks the problem isn't with Ohio State or his competitive nature or anything like that, but that Claret is unhappy when the spotlight isn't on him. He says otherwise, but I'm not buying.

If he doesn't grow up and get rid of this me-first attitude, even someone as team-oriented as Tressel might not be able to handle him.

"It's just speed, speed and more speed," said OSU linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer. "Plus, they have execution. They executed extremely well today and we didn't."

OSU finished the year at 10-3.

Ohio State hired 59-year-old Maryland president William English "Brit" Kirwan as its 12th president. He took over for Gordon Gee, who left to become president at Brown University.

OSU athletic director Andy Geiger worked with Kirwan at Maryland before he left for Columbus in 1994.

"One of the joys about accepting this position is the fact I am reuniting with Andy," Kirwan said. "I am the person that ripped him away from Stanford. Then I held onto his leg as Ohio State took him away."

ONE YEAR AGO — 2002

The first bowl game of the Jim Tressel era at Ohio State ended the same way many during Cooper's tenure did, with a loss.

The Buckeyes' latest postseason defeat came at the hands of South Carolina for the second year in a row. The Gamecocks won the Outback Bowl, 31-28.

Lou Holtz's squad jumped out to a 28-0 lead that held up until OSU quarterback Steve Bellisari ran for a 2-yard score as the third period came to a close.

In the fourth quarter, Bellisari helped bring OSU all the way back to tie it at 28 behind a pair of touchdown passes to Darrell Sanders. Running back Jonathan Wells also ran for a score.

Gamecocks kicker Daniel Weaver kicked a 42-yard field goal as the fourth-quarter clock expired, giving his squad the win.

In addition to the loss, the field goal meant that OSU still had not played an overtime game in its history.

"Well, 28-0 and 31-28 are different," Tressel said. "They are both losses. We don't feel good about either, but we are proud of the way those kids fought."

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Buckeyes' Physicality Trumped Miami's Speed

First and foremost, congratulations to the Ohio State football team. National Champions!! Congratulations to everyone involved with the program — the players, coaches, support staff and, last but not least, the fans.

The fans did their part. To say that the Buckeyes played Miami on a neutral field is like saying that the OSU basketball team played Duke on a neutral court in Greensboro, N.C., earlier this season. For a week, the scarlet and gray horde made Tempe look like a far western suburb of Columbus and Sun Devil Stadium became Ohio Stadium West. In a neck-and-neck game, that intense fan support had to have given Ohio State an edge.

Congratulations given, I have to say if I had heard Miami's "speed" mentioned one more time, I would have throttled somebody. That's all any of the so-called experts (you know, the experts who said Ohio State didn't have a chance) seemed to want to talk about — Miami's speed and how the Buckeyes had yet to see anything like it.

Correct me if I'm wrong here, but the Buckeyes and Hurricanes were meeting in a football game, not a track meet. Speed is great. In fact, the so-called experts seemed to forget — or never knew — that the Buckeyes have plenty of it themselves.

Yet while Ohio State might not have seen — as we were so often reminded — a team with as much speed as Miami, I don't think the 'Canes had seen a team that was as physical as Ohio State. There is no better way to slow a speedy opponent down than to hit them and hit them again, and that's what OSU did in the Fiesta Bowl. In fact, the Buckeyes knocked both of Miami's Heisman Trophy candidates — Willis McGahee and Ken Dorsey — out of the game with good, clean hits, though Dorsey was able to stagger back into the contest.

I also don't think that Miami had played against a defense as good as Ohio State's. The Buckeye defensive line was sensational in the Fiesta Bowl. The guys in the trenches had their moments this season, but they just took charge against the Hurricanes.

You also have to believe that all those nail-biters during the regular season helped prepare the Buckeyes for this ultimate game. I know, when Miami scored its first touchdown in the first quarter and then Krenzel quickly threw an interception, the national naysayers thought the rout was on.

If Ohio State is anything, however, it is composed. The Buckeyes didn't get flustered then, nor were they flustered late in regulation or in overtime. The team has been a reflection of its coach, the unflappable Jim Tressel, the entire season. If any team looked flustered during the Fiesta Bowl, I would have to say it was the defending national champions.

You have to give the Hurricanes their due. They were a really good football team. That's what makes this victory so significant and so much sweeter.

There are those who point to the key pass interference call in overtime that afforded the Buckeyes the chance go on to win the game, a penalty they question, as the only reason Ohio State won the game. To say that the game turned on one play — a penalty that many neutral

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

observers felt was a good call — is to minimize the fact that the Buckeyes played college football's top-ranked team and the defending national champions toe-to-toe for 60 minutes and then some.

To those who still don't believe, who are still trying to justify why Miami didn't "obliterate" the Buckeyes, I point to something I said in this space last issue.

"I don't think that those who minimize Ohio State's chances against Miami have seen the Buckeyes play as often as we have, nor are they as familiar with the character of the team as followers of the program are."

I doubt that anybody who followed the Buckeyes on a regular basis this season is completely surprised at the Fiesta Bowl's outcome. Most Buckeye fans truly believed that Ohio State could beat Miami, and not just because, as Buckeye fans, they were looking at the match-up through rose- (or in this case, Fiesta-) colored glasses. I think most Buckeye fans believed that Ohio State had the discipline and the mental and physical toughness to win the game.

And that they did. Again, congratulations, Buckeyes!!

The Healing Of Winning

Most of you saw the game, either in person or on TV, and it will be eloquently recapped throughout this paper. So rather than recapping game details, I wanted to focus on the tremendous healing process that this whole season, capped with the national championship, has been for the Buckeye nation.

The Ohio State football community had really become fractured in the '90s. The repeated losses to Michigan and other failures had led to a large number of disgruntled Buckeye fans. Then came the battle over who was really a Buckeye fan — those who wanted a coaching change because they thought it would be for the better and those who insisted that a true Buckeye fan had to accept the team and its coach, regardless of outcome. It wasn't pretty.

Many fans just seemed to lose interest.

Things seemed to turn with last year's surprise win over Michigan and the spirit continued to build, game after nail-biting game through the 2002 season. By the time the Buckeyes beat their archrivals a second time to clinch a berth in the national championship Fiesta Bowl, the scarlet and gray army had been reassembled and was ready to take over Tempe. There were plenty of reserves back in Columbus, throughout Ohio and in every state ready to raise the Buckeye banner.

I'm sure that there have been 40,000 or more Buckeye fans in the Los Angeles area for Rose Bowls before. But recent figures show that the Los Angeles metropolitan area includes 15.8 million people, while the Phoenix area has just 2.9 million. That made the Buckeye contingent far more visible than they have ever been at a remote site. This created a sense of community thousands of miles

from Columbus and added to this sense of pride that you feel everywhere you go right now.

The fact that all of the accomplishments this season were made by a blue-collar group of guys that fans of all ages and backgrounds can be proud of makes it that much better. If these Buckeyes had been a group of trash-talking thugs, would we be as proud? Sure we'd be proud. Everyone covets a national championship. But would a team of less character than the current bunch of Buckeyes have done as much to bring Ohio State fans back together? I don't think so.

If you look at OSU's past national champions, they've always been groups of very special people — both coaches and players — who went on to make an impact off the field, in addition to the accolades they earned on it. I have a feeling this group will be no different.

And the fact that Tressel was able to lead Ohio State to its first national crown in 34 years in just his second season at the helm should, hopefully, eradicate that guerrilla army of Glen Mason backers who refused to throw their support behind Tressel even as the victories mounted this season. They could have been a problem in the quest for unity in Buckeyeland, but I would guess that group has been silenced for the time being.

There is a lesson from the past that I believe it has been proved still holds true. It used to be said that the goals of any Ohio State football team were to beat Michigan, win the Big Ten title and go to the Rose Bowl. The Rose Bowl thing is a little muddled now with the BCS. But the road to OSU's return to prominence, the road to the Fiesta Bowl, the road to a unified Buckeye faithful all started with wins over Michigan. The Game is still a key component of any Ohio State season.

Next year's battle in Ann Arbor — with the Wolverines seeking double revenge against the defending national champions — should be a doozy.

Game Notes

• After all the hubbub surrounding Maurice Clarett in the week leading up to the Fiesta Bowl, I had a feeling he would have a monster game. He's the type of player who would excel with a chip on his shoulder.

A 200-yard day didn't materialize, but Clarett scored two touchdowns and had one of the plays of the game — one of the hustle plays of the season — when he came from nowhere to strip Sean Taylor of the ball after he had intercepted a Craig Krenzel pass.

Many had worried whether the firestorm surrounding Clarett would be a distraction to the Buckeyes in preparation for the game. Obviously it wasn't too big a distraction, as the Buckeyes won. I think the team is used to Clarett and his antics by now. They probably just roll their eyes and move on.

I'm not going to speculate as to who

was right or wrong in the flap over Clarett's desire to go home for a friend's funeral. There seemed to be a bit of "he said, she said" to all of it. Regardless of who, if anyone, was at fault, Clarett needs to learn to keep some things private rather than letting them play out in the media.

And don't think that he is manipulated by journalists. He has already proved in his brief career that when he doesn't want to talk, he won't talk.

Clarett is a very special athlete. He also appears to be very high-maintenance. I worry sometimes that he is so high-strung that coaches are reluctant to be as firm with him as others for fear of the consequences. Does he remind anyone beside me of Robert Smith, whose OSU freshman rushing record Clarett broke? Hopefully, Clarett will end up accomplishing more than Smith did at Ohio State.

He's got a national championship under his belt, so I guess he already has.

By the way, as I visualize the Clarett of earlier in this season who racked up the yards and touchdowns, I see a player who was always moving forward. He seemed to dance too much against the Hurricanes, something he appeared to start doing after he injured his shoulder. Is he protecting the shoulder?

Clarett should take a lesson from his position coach, Tim Spencer, who was one of Ohio State's better straight-ahead runners.

• The biggest fear of many Ohio State observers coming into the game was that Miami would jump out to a quick lead and the Buckeyes would not be able to recover. While the Hurricanes jumped out to a 7-0 lead, the rout never happened.

One reason was the outstanding punting of Andy Groom in the early going, when the Buckeyes were still getting untracked.

Groom boomed a 56-yarder on Ohio State's first possession and took the Buckeyes from the shadow of their goal line with a 44-yarder that Miami was unable to return on the second possession. Early in the second quarter, he blasted a 63-yarder that helped pin the Hurricanes back at their own 13. A couple of plays later, Dorsey fired an interception to give the Buckeyes the ball on the Miami 37.

Groom was key in helping the Buckeyes hold their own in the early battle for field position.

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