

OHIO STATE VS. PURDUE

OSU Defense Keeps Purdue Out Of End Zone

In four trips inside the OSU 20, Purdue was able to come away with just six points, allowing the Buckeyes to stay in the game while the offense struggled. Holding teams to field goals was a major point of emphasis for defensive coordinator Mark Dantonio and his staff in the off-season.

"That was a big emphasis for us this past year because last year in the red zone we didn't quite get it done," Dantonio said. "We're playing very good red-zone defense. We're making them kick field goals instead of (scoring) touchdowns. We've handled sudden change and we've handled adversity, and that ought to just tell you about individuals as people."

On the opening drive of the game, Purdue marched to the OSU 15 before cornerback Dustin Fox came up with an interception of a Kyle Orton pass in the end zone. Later in the first quarter, Purdue took over at the OSU 23 after Purdue linebacker Niko Koutouvides intercepted a Craig Krenzel pass, returning it 21 yards. Again the OSU defense clamped down.

The Boilermakers advanced to the 4 but had to settle for a Berin Lacey field goal. In the second quarter, the Boilermakers went 81 yards — the bulk of it on a 30-yard pass from Orton to Joey Harris — to the OSU 19. After two short completions and an incompletion, Lacey was called on again. He missed the 36-yard attempt wide left.

"In the red zone, that's where we take

INSIDE THE GAME

with

Eric Loughry
and Mike Wachsman

pride in trying to stop their offense," defensive end Simon Fraser said. "We want to hold them to a field goal or no points at all. Last year, you see that if we would have held a couple teams here and there in the red zone to only field goals, it could have changed the momentum of the whole game. And this year you can obviously see that."

"Holding them to three points after a big gain for them and holding them to just six points in the game is just a huge turnaround for our team and just kept us in the game. Had it been a touchdown, the whole game could have been different."

In the fourth quarter with the score tied at 3, Purdue quarterback Brandon Kirsch found Ray Williams for a 58-yard pass that put Purdue at the OSU 22. Running six straight times, the Boilers moved to the 4. On third-and-3, linebacker Matt Wilhelm brought down Kirsch for a 6-yard loss. After a 5-yard false start penalty on Purdue, Lacey hit a 32-yard field goal to put Purdue up 6-3. Though Purdue had the lead, the OSU



JEFF BUEHM

GET BACK HERE — Ohio State linebacker Matt Wilhelm (35) crosses the line for a tackle of Purdue quarterback Brandon Kirsch. The Boilermakers lost 6 yards on the play, setting up fourth-and-9 from the OSU 10 and a field goal instead of a potentially lethal touchdown.

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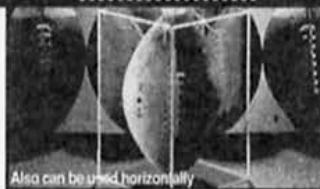
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defense saw the field goal as a minor victory.

"We take pride in our red-zone defense, obviously," Wilhelm said. "For teams to get so close to scoring and have to come away with three, we feel we've come away with a victory defensively because we know that our offense is going to grind it out and eventually get seven. And when you match seven and three, obviously you look at the scoreboard and we come out victorious."

OSU opponents are now 15 of 29 in the red zone with eight touchdowns and seven field goals. Opponents have thrown five interceptions, missed four field goals, lost the ball on downs four times and fumbled it away once in the red zone.

Purdue Uses Quarterback Platoon

Kirsch had started the previous two games for Purdue, the last a 42-13 romp over Northwestern Oct. 26. But Kirsch broke a finger on his throwing hand following the Northwestern game when he hit a wall during a fight at a fraternity party.

With an off week before facing OSU, Purdue coach Joe Tiller waited to name who the starter would be against the Buckeyes. He said both would play. And they did, with Orton, who started the first seven games of the season, opening up and playing the whole first half. Kirsch took over when the Purdue offense took the field in the second half. Orton didn't return until 1:36 left in the fourth quarter, after OSU had taken a 10-6 lead.

Kirsch, much more mobile than Orton, was a threat to run, whereas Orton, who possesses a stronger arm, stayed mainly in the pocket.

"We knew (Kirsch) was more of a runner and we were able to keep him in the pocket, so that was good," Dantonio said. "We knew that he brought a little bit of something to the table in terms of taking a bad play and making it a good one. We knew that we would see him. (Orton) played pretty well, too."

Even with the contrasting styles of the two signal callers, OSU didn't alter its

defensive approach much.

"There weren't many (adjustments)," Wilhelm said. "We knew that the threat of running the ball was there as you could see with a few quarterback sweeps, the one quarterback draw that got them 4 or 5 yards. It was just something to switch us up, to throw off a little bit, just a little wrinkle for them offensively."

Kirsch netted just 1 yard on five carries.

Wilhelm Comes Up Big

Wilhelm was the Buckeyes' second-leading tackler with eight, one behind strong safety Mike Doss, and came up with the two biggest plays — besides the 37-yard touchdown pass from Krenzel to Michael Jenkins — of the game.

With OSU down 3-0 late in the second quarter, Wilhelm intercepted an Orton pass at the Purdue 41, setting up the tying 22-yard field goal by Mike Nugent as the first half expired.

Wilhelm said he knew where the play was going before the snap.

"Watching film all week, the quarterback's in the shotgun (formation), they're kind of eyeing up the guy they want to go to," Wilhelm said. "Instead, they ran an option route on me. Rather than option out to run it on a defensive back, they did it on me. And my guy ran a shallow little cross (route) and I just cut him off. I knew a safety was going to be down behind him. He tried to force it low and I went down after it and just tried to catch it against my body."

The senior came up big again in the fourth quarter when he dropped Kirsch for a loss, which forced Purdue to settle for the field goal and a 6-3 lead.

"It was Kirsch on a quarterback sweep and it opened up," Wilhelm said. "I knew being back side into the boundary that I wasn't going to get there over top of everybody. I hit a gap that opened up because they pulled a guard out in front of him to hopefully lead him."

"But we had a blitz off the edge that kind of stopped the run and kind of boxed him in and I just came up the middle and

made the play and held on for dear life."

"I think it was probably the play of the game defensively, giving them three instead of seven," Dantonio said. "It was a critical part of the game."

Because of the situation, Wilhelm expected either a short pass or Kirsch to keep the ball.

"We knew they weren't going to run the ball because they needed more than the 2 yards or 3 yards which they consistently got all day," he said. "And so they were either going to throw a short route or the ball was going to be in the quarterback's hands, and it was."

After what was perhaps his best game as a Buckeye, Wilhelm talked about his play this season.

"It goes back to (linebackers coach Mark) Snyder obviously showing me my missed tackles and talking about the improvement needed out of my position and a little pressure from some of the young guys coming in and Fred (Pagac Jr.) being No. 1 after the spring, and so it was a lot of pressure on me," Wilhelm said.

"Obviously, being a senior, I want to step up and, like Coach (Jim) Tressell says, play your career-best year and we're going to have the type of year we're having."

Cornerback Chris Gamble intercepted an Orton pass to end Purdue's last drive. Wilhelm talked about the big plays he and Gamble have come up with this season.

"I think it speaks for what kind of people we are," Wilhelm said. "He's going to be a little bit more humble than I am just because this is all new to him. To come up with the big play, it's something you dream of as a kid. The pressure is on the line. You want to be that star player, and to make that play you've got to do that."

OSU Turns Tables On Purdue

The Buckeyes staved off elimination from the national title picture with a thrilling last-minute win over Purdue, in much the same fashion they were beaten on their last trip to West Lafayette.

Drew Brees had just under two minutes left when he flung a 64-yard strike to a wide-open Seth Morales, who scampered into the same south end zone that Jenkins found on this day.

Ohio State called and executed its biggest play of the season on fourth-and-1, which is notable because the Buckeyes hadn't converted much on this afternoon.

"It was fourth-and-1 and they thought we were going to try to run the ball," said Krenzel, who had another efficient day after completing 13 of 20 for 173 yards.

"We actually called that play at the line of scrimmage, so there wasn't really time to think about the season hinging on that play. In practice we're supposed to run plays when they're called and our mental focus stays on where we need to

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Running Game Grinds To Halt At Purdue

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be."

Ohio State managed just 267 yards, but there are no style points for beauty, only for victories.

"At that point in the game we're just trying to do something to win," Krenzel said. "Whatever play is called we have to run it and get the 'W' on the board and come out feeling like this."

Ohio State's rushing game was MIA, accounting for only 94 yards — just 42 after Maurice Clarett went out with another injury to his aching left shoulder.

But even though Purdue resembled a brick wall at times, Ohio State found enough resolve to hit a play when it counted.

"It builds our confidence and shows that no matter what we go through we can always come out of it," tailback Maurice Hall said.

With two weeks to prepare for Ohio State, the Boilermakers did their best

impression of the Dallas Cowboys' old Doomsday Defense. They plugged the gaps against the run and limited production through the air.

"We spent the last two weeks preparing to play the run," Koutouvides said. "With the way Ohio State played Minnesota, they ran the ball a lot. Our coaches put in a good scheme and we played real disciplined and physical up front."

They also did a good job of confusing the Buckeyes with multiple looks and a ton of movement before the ball got to Krenzel.

"They started stunting around and that got to us," center Alex Stepanovich said. "They'd come with a weak side blitz after dropping off or they'd loop around inside. They did a good job moving around before the snap."

OSU averaged just 2.4 yards per carry, and while some of that can be attributed to stubbornness on offense, some credit can also go to Purdue's active front.

"We ran inside a lot and their linemen



JEFF BREHM

"They have a good defensive front," he said. "We made little mistakes. We'd have a mental breakdown. They played a great game and kept us down most of the day. We can't let this happen again, making our defense bail us out."

The faces of the Buckeyes on the sideline during the fourth quarter were stoic at best. There wasn't much emotion, but there also wasn't panic. And when the final sequence unfolded, that stoicism turned to unbridled joy.

"It was so emotional," Ross said. "You have trouble and then you make a big play like that at the end, it was exciting. We knew we had to make a big play."

Points At A Premium

The OSU defense has been stingy all year, but the way Purdue stepped up and stifled the Buckeye attack had the visitors in a praiseworthy mood.

"They played us real hard and real well," double-duty star Gamble said. "They got to Craig a couple of times and stopped our run. They're physical and weren't going to allow us to make many big gains."

The hostile environment that Ross-Ade has become in the last few seasons under Tiller certainly played a part in the Buckeyes' struggles.

"Some people think we don't play well on the road," Ross said. "We're getting better. There are people out there that feel we're a better second-half team, and I guess we've proven that. But we need to get going in the first half."

Purdue's mission appeared to be to let the offense gain the lead and then allow the defense to win the game.

"We played just as well as we have all year," Koutouvides said. "They beat us on the last play, the same way Iowa and Illinois did. We need to learn how to finish."

The Boilermakers have lost six games by a total of 26 points, and it's the little things that have conspired to trip them up.

While Purdue has found ways to lose, the Buckeyes have manufactured ways to win.

"That's the difference between being in our position and being in theirs," Ross said. "We made a play when we had to. They're good, you can see that. But our defense was able to keep them out of the end zone and we got into the end zone. Sometimes it comes down to one play here or there. We kind of proved that today, I guess."

Also Notable

• Fox and Wilhelm both notched their second interceptions of the year and third of their careers.

• Kirsch's 58-yard pass to Williams was the longest play of any kind against OSU this season.

• Jenkins has now caught at least one pass in 23 straight games. He also registered his first career blocked punt and OSU's fourth of the season.

• OSU went into the red zone once, netting the 22-yard field goal by Nugent on the final play of the first half.

The Buckeyes are now 42 of 48 in the red zone with 28 touchdowns and 14 field goals. OSU had possessions ended at the end of a half or game three times in the red zone and also fumbled it away twice and threw one interception.

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TIPPY TOES — OSU cornerback Dustin Fox (rear) prepares to make an interception in the back of the end zone, snuffing a first-quarter Purdue scoring threat. Also around the play were Purdue's John Standeford (82) and Buckeye Michael Doss.

got in the habit of pinching a lot," tailback Lydell Ross said. "That affected us inside. Their defense is used to the run and good at stopping it."

Ohio State dodged a major bullet and then got some help when Texas A&M upset Oklahoma later that afternoon, leaving the Buckeyes and defending national champion Miami (Fla.) as the only major unbeaten left.

The Buckeyes know they'll need to play better down the stretch if the dream season is to continue, but there's something to be said for making it through alive after staring defeat in the face.

"In the game of college football, especially when you're playing a team that's trying to spoil your season, you go out and try to win," Krenzel said. "Next week we're going up against another good football team in Illinois and hopefully we leave 12-0. Even not playing our best football and getting a win today, that's a trademark for what kind of football team we are."

Their Own Worst Enemy

The Buckeyes couldn't seem to get out of their own way at times, converting just 4 of 15 third downs, including just 1 of 5 on third-and-2 or less.

"We played all right offensively but hurt ourselves in short yardage situations," Krenzel said. "We have to get better at those if we want to reach all of our goals."

Stepanovich knows that the line was at fault as much as anything else and also knows that his unit must play better if things are to end the way Ohio State hopes.

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 10, Purdue 6

Purdue linebacker Niko Koutouvides on OSU's decision to throw on fourth-and-1, resulting in the game-winning touchdown to Michael Jenkins: "I give credit to their coaches. We were expecting a run. The corner situation, we had them lined up one on one. Jenkins is a speedy receiver. That was a good throw and a good catch. Antwaun (Rogers) was there, but that's just the way the ball bounced."

OSU linebacker Matt Wilhelm on his team's decision to throw on the final fourth-down play: "It was tough. We had been stuffed on the run all day. They had nine men in the box and it was fourth-and-1. We had to give them something different and we did."

OSU tight end Ben Hartsock on what he saw on the game-winning touchdown: "You just look up and hope for the best. I saw Michael Jenkins had his man beat. When he caught that ball in the end zone, it was just an unbelievable feeling."

OSU quarterback Craig Krenzel on when he knew Jenkins was going to score: "As soon as I threw it. As soon as I threw it, I knew he had his man beat."

OSU's Jenkins on the aftermath of his touchdown catch: "I kind of got tackled. I didn't know what was going on. It was a good feeling. I think our whole bench left the sideline. I was just glad we didn't get a penalty."



JEFF BREHM

ANOTHER SOLID AFTERNOON — Ohio State quarterback Craig Krenzel completed 13 of 20 passes for 173 yards, a touchdown and an interception against Purdue.

OSU split end/cornerback Chris Gamble on what the defense had in mind on the last Purdue possession: "There was like 1:36 left. We knew we just had to go out there

and play our hearts out. We told ourselves we had to go out and try to stop their offense."

Purdue kicker Berin Lacey on his team's never-ending string of bad fortune: "Like Coach (Joe) Tiller said, you don't get a chance to play the No. 2 team in the BCS every day. But this was just more bad luck. It's like somebody has cursed us."

Purdue's Koutouvides also discussed his team's tough year: "No matter how you look at it, they are now 11-0 and we get the loss. They found a way to win and that's all there is to it. It's getting frustrating that we are in so many games and can't get the close win."

Purdue quarterback Kyle Orton on why he was benched at halftime: "I don't know the reason and I didn't ask why. It is Coach Tiller's decision. Whatever the head man says, goes. There is no discussion or debating the decision."

Purdue quarterback Brandon Kirsch on his injured hand: "It was fine. The adrenaline was rushing and I couldn't feel any pain in it. It got a little sore toward the end of the game. I really didn't have much control when I was looking to throw. On the last drive, I think Kyle gave us the best opportunity with my hand being hurt. We were going to have to throw the ball the whole drive."

OSU's Krenzel on his play against the Boilermakers: "I think I played pretty well. I stepped up and made a few good plays. I had the one interception where Bam (Childress) was jammed up a bit. I needed to put it out in front of him where only he could get it. It was my fault."

OSU kicker Mike Nugent on his team's rushed field goal at the end of the first half: "I saw it coming. When we got the ball back (with 3:15 left), I thought it might come down to that. I figured I might have to go out there and just try and aim it through with two seconds left."

OSU safety Donnie Nickey on the contrast to the team's loss at Purdue two years ago: "It feels good. When Mike caught that touchdown, I had a flashback. But it was the flip side. It felt good."

OSU defensive end Darrien Scott on finally getting to Kirsch for a second-half sack after chasing him and Orton around most of the day: "It felt good. I was just focused on getting the quarterback down. I didn't hit him like I wanted to. But I was just glad to finally sack him."

OSU coach Jim Tressel stonewalled a questioner who asked if he thought the Buckeyes would drop after the tough loss: "From here (pointing to platform)? We're not going to drop in the Big Ten standings. That's what's most important to us."

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As Tressel Predicted, It Was A Battle To The End

Throughout the football season, BSB is running excerpts from OSU coach Jim Tressel's postgame press conferences. Here is what Tressel had to say following OSU's win at Purdue.

Jim Tressel: "That was another example of a great Big Ten football game. No matter what stadium you go to in this league, it will be a battle until the end. Both teams fought extremely hard and Purdue prepared extremely hard and fought like crazy. We said all week they could be sitting there with eight or nine wins.

"Our players kept playing and our coaches kept coaching. Purdue came

out with a great plan for us and used their two weeks well. Our guys didn't fold and kept hanging in and kept plugging away. We always talk about if we keep banging something good is going to happen."

Q: Where was your heart on that last play?

JT: "Plays like that don't take very long. The thing we're watching most closely is the protection and to see if we're getting a hat on a hat, then trying to get a feel for what's going on down the field. As I saw Michael

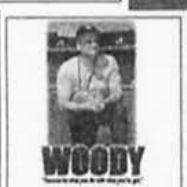
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WHAT'S THE CALL? — Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (right) takes a moment to confer with quarterback Craig Krenzel (left) and running back Maurice Clarett.

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There Was No Time For Gamble To Take Five

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(Jenkins) heading up the field, I glanced back to see if Craig (Krenzel) was still alive and he slid up in the pocket and made a great throw."

Q. Did you think about calling a timeout before that play?

JT: "Sometimes when you give us coaches a chance to think, we foul things up. I'm not sure we would have called anything different. It was a route that had all the components we needed — the quick throw for the first, it had a dump-off and it also had the long pass. I don't know if we would have done anything

differently."

Q. Chris Gamble continues to come up with big play after big play.

JT: "No doubt about it. He did it on both sides of the ball. We talked over the headphone about giving Chris a little rest, but in games like we've been playing there's no time for him to rest. He's the best available guy."

Q. A great win, a narrow escape. How thrilling was it today?

JT: "It was the best win of the day, I know that."

Q. Can you talk about your defense?

JT: "Our defense played like crazy and played hard. Purdue came in with a good plan and threw the ball out and

completed it. They're very efficient and they came up with a big play on their long one that set them up for their go-ahead field goal. They ran a boot action and ran someone through a zone and someone back under for a big play. When you have that much time to throw, good things can happen. Our defense wouldn't bend. Our coaches were communicating with them about what we had to stop. That's the way our kids play."

Q. Purdue seemed to have your tendencies down running the ball. What were your guys telling you coming off the field?

JT: "They played a lot of guys up in the box and when we run they're going

to be up there. And when we pass we might just throw it over top of them. They have a good defense."

Q. Craig had an up-and-down day at quarterback today yet still made the play to win the game. What does that say about him?

JT: "He has a lot of poise and patience, and we talk about how that has to be part of an away game. Things aren't always going to feel good. He has belief in himself and that's something you need. He did a pretty good job doing what he could do. He's getting better and stepped up and ran a little bit for us."

Q. At the end were you basically thinking about overtime?

JT: "You have to think about the scenarios and whether overtime would be good for us. The way we play defense and kick field goals, it wouldn't have been a bad thing. We weren't going to do anything crazy if it was tied to let it go the other way. There's no doubt about it. You have to be prepared and think it can go to overtime."

Q. How difficult was the wind to deal with?

JT: "The wind wasn't that bad. One thing Craig does is throws a tight spiral, so when not as much surface of the ball can be affected, it's a good thing. He threw a bomb but it was only 37 yards. It wasn't like he had to throw it 70. He had good form on it, and when you get it through the wind with a tight spiral you have a good chance of not getting it affected."

Q. Mike Jenkins stepped up again and made a big play.

JT: "Mike Jenkins is becoming our big-play guy. He's a guy we like to get the ball to. We're down 6-3 and we started that drive and threw three straight passes. A couple were to him. That's the way he is — he comes up big whenever we call his number."

Q. Is winning the essence right now?

JT: "That's the main thing."

Some news is far too good to whisper.

In fact, it's really worth shouting about.

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THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Thankfully For OSU, This Is 2002, Not 2000

Pardon me for repeating myself, but as I said a few issues ago after the Ohio State-Wisconsin game, big players make big plays in big games. Now as big games go, the OSU-Purdue game doesn't rank up there with Ohio State-Michigan or the Buckeyes vs. Penn State, or even the previously mentioned Buckeye-Badger game.

But at this late point in an undefeated season, with other undefeated teams dropping like flies, every game is a big game for Ohio State. And big players Craig Krenzel and Michael Jenkins teamed up for a big play, connecting for the game-winning touchdown pass on a fourth-and-1 play with 1:36 to play.

The big plays by big players weren't over, though. The Boilermakers had plenty of time to mount a touchdown drive of their own, and quarterback Kyle Orton went for a big chunk of the yardage needed for the six points with a long heave to Taylor Stubblefield.

Now admit it. As soon as that ball went in the air, you were thinking back to the Purdue game in 2000, when, after the Buckeyes had scored a touchdown to take the lead with 2:16 left, Drew Brees hit Seth Morales with a 64-yard scoring pass for the Boilermaker victory.

But this time, out of nowhere, here comes Chris Gamble, another big player, who made the leaping interception to preserve Ohio State's improbable victory. That's the same Gamble who helped set up Ohio State's final scoring drive with a 22-yard punt return. The same Gamble who finished the day with three receptions for 51 yards, five tackles and 35 return yards to go with his interception.

The call by OSU coach Jim Tressel to go long on fourth-and-short was a gutsy one. If the play had failed, he would have been bombarded with criticism for not going the safer route toward a first down, especially given what was seemingly unimaginative play-calling throughout the game. But the play worked to perfection.

After the game, Tressel indicated that there were other, shorter options available to Krenzel on the play. I don't doubt that there were, but it looked to me like the purpose of the call was to catch Purdue looking short, and I don't think Krenzel and his mates were ever thinking anything but touchdown.

And for one of the few times in the game, things worked correctly on offense for the Buckeyes. The line provided protection for one of the few times in the game. Krenzel stepped up in the pocket and then put the ball right on the money for Jenkins, who, despite being held almost the entire way down the field, separated from his defender to break open for the touchdown.

The OSU defense was again stellar, holding the Big Ten's leading offense to just 341 yards and two field goals. Ohio State has now not allowed a touchdown in the last two games and allowed just Purdue's three points in the second half of the past four games, lowering its season points allowed average to 12.2 a contest.

However, the Buckeyes can't continue to rely on the defense to bail the team out. If the offense continues to struggle, particularly in the first half, there is likely a disaster in the Buckeyes' future and it could come as early as the next game

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

against Illinois.

Ohio State was averaging just 19.0 points in the last four games. Take out the 34 that the Buckeyes posted against Minnesota and that average drops to 14.0. In that four-game span, the Buckeyes had scored just 29 points (7.25 average) in the first half.

It's easy to point to the play-calling as the offensive culprit. The best play call in the world, however, be it a pass or a run, is not going to work if it isn't blocked properly.

Let's face it. The offensive line has not been as strong in the past couple of games — especially at Purdue — as it was earlier in the season. There was very little running room against the Boilermakers and Krenzel, who was sacked three times, seemed to be scrambling for his life the entire game.

I'm starting to wonder if the grind of the long season isn't beginning to catch up with the big guys up front. While I have lauded the conditioning of the Buckeyes as a whole this season, you begin to wonder if some of the OSU linemen, especially those who look like they are hiding Vlade Janakievski under their jerseys, are starting to tire from 10 straight weeks of pounding.

Way too many times, there are OSU offensive linemen standing around looking at the end of plays rather than being body-on-body with a defender. With so much on the line, the big guys are going to have to ride the rush of a title drive and play with the strength and enthusiasm they are capable of.

I also think the coaching staff needs to make a decision about Maurice Claret. If his shoulder injury is going to be an ongoing problem, maybe they need to go ahead and shut him down. He was clearly favoring the shoulder on runs against the Boilermakers, and a Claret who doesn't put his shoulder down at the end of runs is not a Claret at his best (though still better than most backs). The Purdue defenders were clearly going after the shoulder, and I'm sure future opponents will do the same.

Not only is this a question of Claret's health, but I think the offense might be better off if the coaches go ahead and make the commitment to Lydell Ross and Maurice Hall and look at any contribution by Claret as a bonus rather than continuing to leave Hall and Ross in limbo.

The two could get more reps in practice and the coaches could draw up game plans based on using those two rather than Claret. Hall's speed to the outside might have opened things up a little against Purdue, rather than the Buckeyes' continued failures running inside against the Boilermakers.

There is also a psychological aspect to committing to Ross and Hall. You can tell a reserve he has to be ready, that he's only one play away from being called on, and I think the pair have done a good job of being ready when being sent in. But it's different when you know if and when you are going to play.

If Claret's shoulder is going to contin-

ue to be a problem, then for everybody's sake — particularly Claret's — let's move forward.

Despite any shortcomings people may perceive in the Buckeyes, the team is 11-0 and ranked No. 2 in the country. I have to think that even the most optimistic Buckeye fans wouldn't have really believed that Ohio State would be in this position at this late date.

I keep coming back to the poise of this team — coupled, of course, with a great defense and the aforementioned playmakers — as the main reason that the Buckeyes are where they are. While one might criticize Tressel for his play-calling, you have to admit that the poise starts with the coach and works its way down.

I have been almost a bigger advocate of taking things one week at a time this season than Tressel. Yet I have to wonder, after the stunning finish against Purdue, if this Buckeye team isn't a team of destiny.

Now that I've let that slip out, let's concentrate on Illinois.

Quick Kicks

• After watching Krenzel scurry and scramble all afternoon, I was a bit surprised that he ended the game with 13 completions on 20 attempts with one very big touchdown against one interception. It looked a lot worse than the statistics show.

This game and the big play at the end were more proof that — as people have been saying all season — Krenzel's play may not always be pretty, but he does what he has to do to win.

• I don't think Ohio State has run a two-minute drill since Tressel has been at Ohio State that, following the game, I haven't mentioned in this column that the coach doesn't seem to handle this situation very well.

Against Purdue, the Buckeyes took over with very favorable field position at the Boilermakers' 41 with 3:15 to play in the first half and two timeouts remaining. They ended up having to scramble to get a Mike Nugent field goal as time expired.

After the game it came out that Krenzel had run on his own in an attempt for a first down that would have stopped the clock right before Nugent's kick — a run that fell short, setting up the mad kick scramble. But the Buckeyes, as they tend to do, had already mismanaged the clock.

In these situations, the Buckeyes

appear indecisive on play-calling and don't seem to have a plan on how to use the clock or their timeouts. I found it particularly maddening how casually Krenzel would stroll to the line with absolutely no sense of urgency as the clock ticked.

If the logic was to use up the remaining time to keep Purdue from having a chance to score after a Buckeye score, I fault that logic. Having more than three minutes to cover just 41 yards was more than ample time to go for a touchdown that might have changed the momentum of the game.

I find Tressel's performance in the two-minute arena interesting for a coach who has four national championships to his credit. It's not like the two-minute drill is different in Division I-AA.

The Best Of The Best

In a story on two-way players on page 24 of this issue, it is noted that Ohio State Heisman Trophy winner "Hop" Cassidy was named AP Male Athlete of the Year in 1955, beating out Otto Graham, Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams and Rocky Marciano. That sounded pretty impressive, but I thought I'd check and see what those all-time greats did in 1955.

Mantle hit .306 for the New York Yankees while leading the league in home runs with 37. He scored 121 times and knocked in 99 as the Yankees won the American League pennant. Williams, playing in just 98 games, hit .356 with 28 home runs and 83 RBI and a .703 slugging percentage.

Graham led the NFL in passing while guiding the Cleveland Browns to a 9-2-1 record and a 38-14 victory over the Los Angeles Rams for the NFL championship. Marciano defended his heavyweight boxing title twice, including a ninth-round knockout of Archie Moore, to remain undefeated.



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