

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 32, No. 4

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 29, 2012

OSU Eludes Upset



JOSH WINSLOW

WAIT! WAIT! – Ohio State sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller (5) holds off UAB cornerback Kelton Brackett (21) en route to the end zone on a two-point conversion attempt in the fourth quarter. The Buckeyes held off the upset-minded Blazers on Sept. 22 and earned a 29-15 victory.

Frustration Evident After Buckeyes Struggle Vs. UAB

By ARI WASSERMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Urban Meyer stood behind the lectern in the postgame interview room Sept. 22, after the Buckeyes' 29-15 win over the University of Alabama at Birmingham in Ohio Stadium, for the fourth time in his head coaching career at Ohio State.

And for the fourth time, the head coach began his meeting with the media by expressing gratitude to secure a win.

The positive vibes stopped there. Meyer didn't have to say it – for the second time in as many weeks, his unbeaten team was made to look eminently beatable by an opponent oddsmakers had installed as a pre-emptive underdog.

"I think we seem like a very passive team," Meyer said. "We've got to be more aggressive on defense and play a little (tighter) coverage. On offense, our explosive plays, our explosiveness is obviously nonexistent for much of the game. If there's one thing, we could make adjustments and fix it. It's more than one thing right now."

Perhaps the Buckeyes were fortunate the team they were playing wasn't adept at capitalizing on its big opportunities late in the game.

Had the Blazers risen to the occasion when they had the ball in Ohio State territory down by only six

with 11:39 remaining in the fourth quarter, the 16th-ranked Buckeyes maybe wouldn't be holding onto the security they've found in simply taking a win and enjoying it, regardless of the margin of victory.

Instead, UAB missed a field goal on that drive despite being 29 yards away from the go-ahead touchdown. Ohio State responded with a 10-play, 71-yard drive that took five minutes off the clock and ended with a 1-yard touchdown run from quarterback Braxton Miller.

After Miller crossed the goal line on the team's two-point conversion attempt, the Buckeyes extended their lead to 14, which was enough to help the team survive another scare at home from an opponent most didn't think was equipped to compete.

"I think (Coach Meyer) is frustrated because we have a lot of talent, but we haven't come close to playing to our potential yet," senior linebacker Etienne Sabino said. "I think he's happy that we have shown a lot of fight and haven't quit, but I think he expected a lot more out of us through the first four games of the season."

The week before, during his weekly press conference two days after the Buckeyes took a 35-28 win over California, Meyer took offense when a reporter insinuated his team should have beaten the Golden Bears by a margin greater than seven.

In the team's next game, Ohio State struggled against the 37-point underdog Blazers who were coming off a 49-6 blowout loss to then No. 8 South Carolina.

It's unclear if Meyer identified weakness in his team solely from the way Ohio State struggled to beat winless UAB, but the head coach didn't mind admitting he isn't satisfied with the Buckeyes' progress through the first four games of the season.

"No," Meyer simply responded when asked if this is where he envisioned his team would be heading into Big Ten play.

Too much concerns him to narrow the issues down.

"The defense, offense and the kicking game – we have to be better in all three phases of the game," he said.

What will bring Meyer back to a state of discomfort when he has finished celebrating the win is his team's susceptibility to making errors in areas he's identified as crucial aspects of the game.

The Buckeyes still have extended spurts of offensive dormancy, the defense has struggled immensely with tackling and the team has been vulnerable to allowing big offensive plays, though that wasn't as apparent against the Blazers.

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OPINION

Meyer's Buckeyes Remain Work In Progress

To say the honeymoon between Urban Meyer and Ohio State fans is over would not be totally accurate. But the newlyweds are slowly coming to the realization that life isn't one big party.

If you listened closely enough to the 105,019 packed into Ohio Stadium on Sept. 22 for the final game of a rather nondescript nonconference schedule, you could make out a smattering of boos from the scarlet and gray faithful. And the patrons who weren't voicing their displeasure mostly just shuffled in their seats, uneasy at the disjointed product the Buckeyes have displayed so far this season.

Fans began eagerly looking forward to the 2012 season late last November when Meyer was announced as head coach of the Buckeyes. They looked at a guy who produced winners at Bowling Green and Utah as well as a couple of national titles at Florida, added the tradition of Ohio State, and somewhat naturally extrapolated copious amounts of easy victories and a multitude of scarlet and gray championships.

Of course, fans are a fickle lot. Yesterday's hero is today's scapegoat, and if you listen to what passes for sports talk radio in Columbus, you will hear enough headache-inducing comments to make you want to crash your car into the nearest telephone pole.

One caller wanted to know what happened to the wide-open spread offense he had been promised. Another said the duties of being defensive coordinator were far beyond Luke Fickell's capabilities. One misguided soul even offered the opinion that the team would be better served with Kenny Guiton as the starting quarterback.

Perhaps it would be worth noting (again) that Meyer inherited a team that went 6-7 last season, is fighting through a spate of injuries and is counting on regular contributions from more than a dozen first- and second-year players.

Perhaps it would also be worth noting that while Meyer is viewed as somewhat of a miracle worker, his super powers are not limitless. Only once before in his previous 10 seasons as a head coach has he produced an undefeated team. (That was Utah in 2004.) Moreover, while his first seasons at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida represented improvements over the previous year, the bar for excellence wasn't set very high.

The year before Meyer's arrival, BG was 2-9, Utah was 5-6 and Florida was 7-5. The coach obviously turned each of those programs around, but he lost at least two games during his first season at all three schools.

Still, after you get used to winning – and winning a lot – you have a tendency to take all of that winning for granted. It happened to Ohio State fans toward the end of the Jim Tressel era and perhaps it happened to Meyer as he assumed his self-described dream job.

Tradition, national championship banners, Big Ten trophies and a stadium listed on the National Register of Historic Places – those are all effective recruiting tools for both prospective players and coaches. When you come to Ohio State, you are expected to continue that tradition and win football games. Unfortunately, that expectation sometimes morphs into victory as a foregone conclusion. And if last year's 6-7 finish wasn't enough of a shock to the system, perhaps the string of mediocre performances to start this season will serve as a needed dose of stark reality.

No one except for the most myopic of Buckeye fans is thrilled about this 4-0 start. Yes, Ohio State is one of only 26 remaining undefeated teams at the Football Bowl Subdivision level, but that record has been achieved against nonconference opponents now showing a combined record of 5-9.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

Meyer's power spread offense has been a work in progress from day one with certain pieces of the attack functioning well at times and not so well at others. Ohio State has rushed for 917 yards in four games and thrown for 791, but much of that production has been generated by just one player – Braxton Miller, who has run for 441 yards and thrown for 754. You need only look at what has happened to a certain team up north to realize what happens when you rest your entire team's fortunes on the shoulders of just one player.

And then there is the defense. What was supposed to be a team strength is quickly becoming a liability. There are no records kept for missed tackles, but Ohio State would probably be near the top of the nation in that category. In the first quarter against UAB, I counted at least six missed tackles by the Buckeyes that accounted for an extra 29 yards' worth of gain for the Blazers. I counted four more early in the second quarter for 30 yards before giving up.

Through four games, the Ohio State defense is giving up an average of 394.8 yards per game. That number hasn't been that bad since week five of the 1988 season when after Indiana finished administering a 41-7 spanking of the Buckeyes, the defense was giving up an average of 396.6 yards per game. By the time that season ended, the average had dipped slightly to 385.3, but John Cooper's first team still wound up with a 4-6-1 record.

And what makes anyone believe things will get better this year? The Buckeyes' next four opponents – Michigan State, Nebraska, Indiana and Purdue – each average better than 400 yards of total offense per game. The Cornhuskers and Hoosiers are currently averaging north of 500.

Then, of course, there are the special teams. Ohio State got a punt blocked against UAB that the Blazers returned for a touchdown. To put that into some kind of context, UAB had not returned a blocked punt for a touchdown since 2003. And then to pour salt into the wound, the Blazers caught the Buckeyes napping and recovered an onside kick to start the second half.

After the UAB game, when Meyer was asked which areas of his team concerned him the most, the coach indicated an all-of-the-above answer.

"Defense, offense and kicking game," he replied. "We have to be better in all three phases. ... This is not a finely-tuned machine. It hasn't been for a while, especially on both sides of the ball."

Exceedingly more candid than his predecessor, Meyer admitted, "It's not as easy as ..." before thinking better of finishing his thought aloud. Woody Hayes is the one who said, "Nothing worth a damn is easy," and Meyer obviously realizes the old coach knew what he was talking about.

But when a coach deems his offense's explosiveness "obviously nonexistent for much of the game," his defense "painful to watch," special teams breakdowns "nonsense" and his overall team mentality "passive," you know the kettle is about to boil.

When a reporter prefaced a postgame question with "I can't figure your team out," Meyer replied, "Yeah, I'm with you. I think we seem like a very passive team. ... We've got to be more aggressive on defense and play a little snigger coverage. ... On offense, our explosive plays, our explosiveness is obviously nonexistent for much of the game. ... We're not a methodically dominating offense. I mean, we're not a very good offense right now. ..."

There's really not much more I could add.

Some Final Thoughts

- Several times during the preseason, Meyer expressed his desire for the Buckeyes to play like they had a chip on their shoulders "because I love coaching angry teams." But where does anger end and poor mental discipline begin? In four games so far, Ohio State has been flagged six times for personal foul penalties and twice for unsportsmanlike conduct. That doesn't include one personal foul call vs. Cal that was not assessed due to offsetting penalties and another that was somehow missed against the Blazers when an OSU defensive lineman shoved a UAB player right in front of an official. The Buckeyes have been flagged 31 times in four games for a total of 260 yards. Just one more thing to add on Meyer's to-do list.

- In light of the fact the Ohio State defense has at times struggled mightily with tackling, is it foolish to believe Michigan State tailback Le'Veon Bell has a shot at breaking the single-game rushing record for an OSU opponent? As if any Buckeye fan has to be reminded, that was established in 1995 when Tim Biakabutuka of Michigan carried 37 times and piled up 313 yards during his team's 31-23 win in Ann Arbor.

- In case you wondered what happened to former Ohio State quarterbacks coach Nick Siciliano, he wound up getting hired by the Cincinnati Bengals as a coaching assistant. Be advised that isn't the same as being an assistant coach. A coaching assistant is a position that involves a lot of grunt and gofer work. Before you scoff, however, it is a paid position, it is with an NFL team, and it is similar to how Bill Belichick got started as a \$25-per-week assistant to Baltimore Colts head coach Ted Marchibroda in 1975.

- Several people have asked recently why BSB no longer publishes game predictions from individual staffers. My answer: We still do. They appear each Friday in our electronic issues, available free to all paid subscribers. If you miss our predictions, or crave up-to-the-minute depth chart changes and breaking news from the world of recruiting – such as three-star DE/LB Tyquan Lewis' Sept. 20 verbal – you need to sign up to read our electronic issues. Signing up is as simple as sending your name, address, phone number and preferred email address to subscriptions@BuckeyeSports.com. We will send back easy-to-follow instructions on how to access all the electronic issues as well as regular editions of BSB print, which are posted online each Monday during football season and Tuesdays the rest of the year.

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COVER STORY

Buckeyes Fail To Follow Meyer's Plan, Still Win

Continued From Page 1

Meyer came to Ohio State with an established "Plan to Win" for each game, but UAB followed the plan closer than the Buckeyes despite coming up short in the end.

The OSU head coach drilled home to his players that the team that wins the kicking game – in all aspects of special teams – plus wins the turnover battle, scores in the red zone and plays good defense will more often than not win the game. It is a four-pronged approach Meyer developed in his first head coaching stop at Bowling Green and took with him to Utah and Florida before Ohio State.

Nonetheless, the Blazers bested the Buckeyes in two of those categories, although they also turned the ball over twice to none for OSU and UAB reached the red zone only once, settling for a 34-yard field goal on that trip. It was likely the discrepancy in talent level that helped the Buckeyes overcome their visitors' valiant efforts to complete the upset.

"I don't think anyone is pleased right now," said wide receiver Corey "Philly" Brown. "We're winning games right now, but not how we're supposed to. We aren't playing our game right now."

UAB took an early 6-0 lead after Calvin Jones poured through Ohio State's offensive line with multiple other Blazers defenders and blocked a Ben Buchanan punt, which was recovered by Nick Adams and returned 20 yards for the touchdown.

It was a formational error that allowed UAB to seamlessly penetrate the Buckeyes' punt protection unit – filled with freshmen because of what Meyer described as a depth issue – and get to Buchanan even before the kicker's foot was able to meet the drop of the ball.

Meyer was predictably displeased with the major error on special teams when asked about it after the game. UAB also converted on 3 of 4 field-goal attempts and recovered an onside kick to start the second half, though it couldn't convert that opportunity into points.

"It's nonsense," Meyer said of the blocked punt, keeping his response short

without disguising the look of disgust from his face. "Just a flat missed assignment. We can't obviously have mistakes like that. We work and talk about this – about (expecting) the unexpected, especially in this kind of game where the team has nothing to lose. And we didn't get it done, so (we have) a long way to go."

Winning the defensive portion in Meyer's plan to win is more complex because the offense has responsibility to move the chains on nonscoring drives to keep the Buckeyes on the right side of the field-position battle.

Though UAB came into Ohio Stadium having allowed 477.0 yards per game through its first two contests, the Buckeyes had five three-and-outs, coming up far short of Meyer's goal of moving the chains at least twice per offensive possession.

Ohio State's defensive numbers are deceiving, because while the Blazers out-gained the Buckeyes in total yardage, 407-347, they were unable to score an offensive touchdown and reached the red zone only once.

Still, Meyer wasn't pleased with the team's inability to tackle effectively. It didn't take a spirited postgame speech from the coach for his team to catch on to its deficiencies.

"He doesn't really like our ups and downs," said junior defensive tackle Johnathan Hankins. "He doesn't like the offense going three-and-out. He wants to see us all go out there and do our jobs and execute. Right now, this is not a good effort."

The Buckeyes took their first lead at 14-12 with less than two minutes remaining in the first half when Miller rushed up the middle of the defense, spun and broke away from a UAB defender before barreling into the end zone from 12 yards out. OSU didn't relinquish its lead for the remainder of the contest.

Defensive back Christian Bryant forced Ohio State's first turnover of the game on UAB's ensuing possession when he caused Blazers receiver Kennard Backman to fumble, which was recovered by cornerback Doran Grant on the opposing 32 yard-line.



JOSH WINSLOW

TOUGH DAY – Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer watched his team move to 4-0 with a win against UAB, but the Buckeyes remain an unfinished product.



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COVER STORY

Three plays later, senior fullback Zach Boren scored from 2 yards out to give the Buckeyes the 21-12 halftime lead.

The second turnover came in the form of an interception by Grant with less than five minutes remaining in the game. Linebacker Ryan Shazier was relieved to get the win, but he sensed his head coach wasn't particularly pleased.

"I think he really likes this team a lot, but he really sees what we can do and he's really aggravated because we're a lot better than we're playing right now," Shazier said. "I think he's just aggravated and wants us to play to our full potential."

Meyer's sees his team as unbeaten but vulnerable.

"I really had confidence this was going to be an Ohio State-looking team," he said. "And it wasn't."

Conference Play Coming

Sabino was asked if he felt Ohio State's performance against UAB would yield a win in the Buckeyes' Big Ten opener at Michigan State on Sept. 29. The senior linebacker who's already been through four conference slates was stern with his response.

"No," he said. "Too many missed tackles. We have to get off the field. Three-and-outs. We have to play better."

The senior echoed the sentiments from his head coach despite having not heard his postgame comments.

The exposure to potentially suffering their first loss of the season was apparent to everyone in the stadium, and the Buckeyes understand they won't get any leeway when traveling to East Lansing to face one of the most dangerous teams in their conference.

"We know what's ahead for us," senior running back Jordan Hall said. "That's a good team and we have to come out a lot better if we want to win that game. We're happy with this win, but it wasn't enough to win the next one."

Perhaps Meyer is a perfectionist, but senior defensive end Nathan Williams offered the opinion that his coach wouldn't have been happy had the Buckeyes won by 50, illustrating that Meyer never has a hard time detecting areas of weakness.

Meyer, however, said it would be abnormal to feel completely content with where

his team stands before playing a conference game.

"You've got to think about where this team (is) now," he said. "This is not a finely-tuned machine right now. It hasn't been for a while, especially on both sides of the ball."

"So we have to develop a finely-tuned machine. And obviously there's some growing pains. And it's not easy, as I thought we'd be further ahead. It is what it is. We have to get better fast."

Meyer should take solace in the fact he hasn't tasted defeated through the first month of the season. Michigan State, a team that knocked off the Buckeyes in Ohio Stadium a year ago, would be more than happy to introduce the coach to what losing a Big Ten football game feels like.

The 3-1 Spartans will likely be the most

talented team the Buckeyes have faced thus far this season, especially because they feature 244-pound running back Le'Veon Bell – the perfect weapon against a team that hasn't demonstrated sound tackling ability.

"I just know it's going to be a good game coming up," Hankins said. "They're going to run the ball, and it is our first game in the Big Ten. We can't start slow there, and we'd better be able to tackle a lot better."

To be fair, Ohio State played the Blazers without two starters in the secondary – cornerback Bradley Roby and safety C.J. Barnett – but even if they both return from injury next week, the Buckeyes will have to play better defensively if they plan to knock off what many consider to be the favorite to make a second straight trip to the Big Ten Championship Game.

The Spartans are off to a 3-1 start this season, suffering their only loss to Notre Dame on Sept. 15. Michigan State, however, has proved to be tough in the trenches on both sides of the ball and could boast the tools it takes to knock off the Buckeyes for the second consecutive year.

Meyer was left with seven days to help his team overcome what was by any measure an ugly win at home. No stranger to wanting to win and look good doing it, the coach also knows he'll settle for starting his press conference next week by expressing thankfulness for a win.

"I might be new to the Big Ten, but I'm not new to the big-time atmosphere of college football," Meyer said. "We have to be ready for this one."

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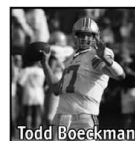
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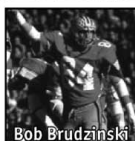
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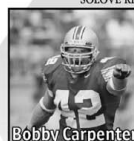
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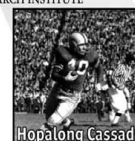
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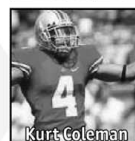
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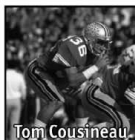
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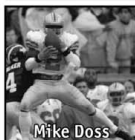
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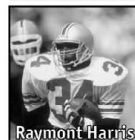
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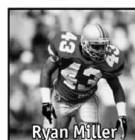
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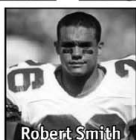
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OHIO STATE VS. UAB

Buckeyes Prevail Despite Sloppy Play

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

It wasn't pretty – in fact, far from it – but No. 16 Ohio State did what it needed to move to 4-0 on the season with a lackluster 29-15 victory Sept. 22 over a game-but-outmanned University of Alabama at Birmingham in front of 105,019 largely unimpressed fans at Ohio Stadium.

To say it was an uneven performance by the Buckeyes would be an understatement. While the defense did not allow a touchdown – UAB tallied three field goals, and its only touchdown came off a blocked punt – Ohio State surrendered 403 total yards to the Blazers, who entered the game ranked 81st in the nation in total offense.

Furthermore, OSU again struggled with numerous missed tackles that led to UAB enjoying 14 plays that gained 10 yards or more. Additionally, the Blazers converted seven of 17 third-down plays and ran 80 offensive plays encompassing nearly 34 minutes of possession time.

Meanwhile, the Ohio State offense produced a season-low 29 points and was shut out in the first and third quarters against the Blazers, who were ranked 120th among 120 Football Bowl Subdivision teams in scoring defense.

Additionally, the Buckeyes had a season-low 347 total yards against a defense ranked 114th in the nation in yardage allowed.

It was a performance to turn a head coach's stomach, and Urban Meyer admitted as much following the game.

"I sit there (and) I'm pained watching it," Meyer said. "We've got to be more aggressive on defense ... (and) on offense, our explosive plays, our explosiveness is obviously nonexistent for much of the game. If there was one thing, we could make adjustments and fix it, (but) it's more than one thing right now."

When asked if he thought his team might have overlooked UAB with Big Ten play starting next week, the coach shook his head.

"I thought our guys were ready to play,"



JOSH WINSLOW

COME HERE – Ohio State junior defensive lineman Johnathan Hankins (52) gets hold of UAB quarterback Austin Brown (11) despite the best efforts to hold Hankins by Blazers offensive lineman Brian O'Leary (76).

Meyer said. "They were ready to play. (We just) didn't play very good. I thought ... I really had confidence this was going to be an Ohio State-looking team (today) and it wasn't."

The Buckeyes did most of their offensive damage on the ground, picking up 204 yards and scoring all of their touchdowns in the running game. Senior tailback Jordan Hall led the way with 105 yards on 17 carries. It marked a career-high total for Hall and was the first time an OSU tailback had cracked the century mark since Dan "Boom" Herron rushed for 141 yards during a 34-20 win over Indiana in week nine of last season.

Sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller carried 11 times for 64 yards and two

scores, and sophomore tailback Rod Smith and senior fullback Zach Boren rushed for one touchdown each. Smith finished with 24 yards on six carries while Boren carried twice for 7 yards.

Miller had a pedestrian day in the passing department, completing 12 of 20 attempts for 143 yards, no touchdowns and no interceptions. OSU receivers Corey "Philly" Brown and Devin Smith each caught four balls with Brown turning his into 67 yards and Smith totaling 39 yards.

UAB was led by freshman quarterback Austin Brown, who entered the game in the second quarter in relief of junior starter Jonathan Perry and wound up completing 21 of 35 passes for 196 yards with one interception. The completions, attempts and yardage figures all established career highs for Brown, who was playing in only his third collegiate game.

Perry played the entire first quarter for the Blazers and completed 7 of his 11 throws for 63 yards.

The Blazers rushed for a season-best 144 yards, led by sophomore tailback Darrin Reaves, who gained 72 yards on 16 carries. Reaves was also his team's top receiver with seven catches for 42 yards.

Defensively, Ohio State was led by linebackers Ryan Shazier and Etienne Sabino. Shazier had a game-high 13 tackles while Sabino registered a career-high 11. Junior defensive lineman Johnathan Hankins also tied a career high with 10 tackles.

Sophomore cornerback Doran Grant also had a career day, totaling seven tackles, registering a sack, recovering a fumble and grabbing the game's only interception. The tackle total was a career best, and the sack, fumble recovery and pick were his firsts as a Buckeye.

Freshman safety Jake Ganus led the Blazers in tackles with nine while a trio of teammates – senior linebackers Marvin Burdette and Greg Irvin as well as junior safety Calvin Jones – had eight stops each. Jones also registered the punt block for UAB.

A Little Too Close For Comfort

At the beginning of the game, the upset-minded Blazers looked nothing like an 0-2 team that resided at the bottom of most NCAA statistical categories. They took the opening kickoff and held the ball for nearly five minutes before turning it over on downs at the Ohio State 32.

But the Buckeyes couldn't do anything with their first possession and were prepared to punt after only three plays. That's when UAB took advantage of a blown protection and Jones was able to smother the kick almost before OSU senior punter Ben Buchanan was able to swing his leg to the ball.

Senior Nick Adams scooped up the loose football ball at the 20-yard line and raced untouched into the end zone for the game's first touchdown.

OSU senior Ohrian Johnson managed to block the ensuing extra-point kick, but the Blazers still had a 6-0 lead at the 9:21 mark of the first quarter.

UAB held that advantage through the remainder of the first quarter as the Buckeyes were stuck in neutral. Their best possession of the opening period was their second, but that netted only 29 yards in seven plays before a Buchanan punt. The other two OSU drives of the first quarter were three-and-outs.

Meanwhile, the Blazers chipped away systematically at the Ohio State defense. Perry led a nine-play drive that managed to tilt the field-position battle into his team's favor, and then Brown replaced him to start the second quarter and immediately engineered a 10-play, 44-yard march that resulted in a 47-yard field goal from sophomore kicker Ty Long.

That gave UAB a 9-0 lead with 10:27 left until halftime, but it was much more bleak than that for Ohio State. To that point, the Blazers had a 143-42 advantage in total yardage and had held the ball for nearly 13 minutes to less than 6% for the Buckeyes.

The nine-point deficit seemed to finally

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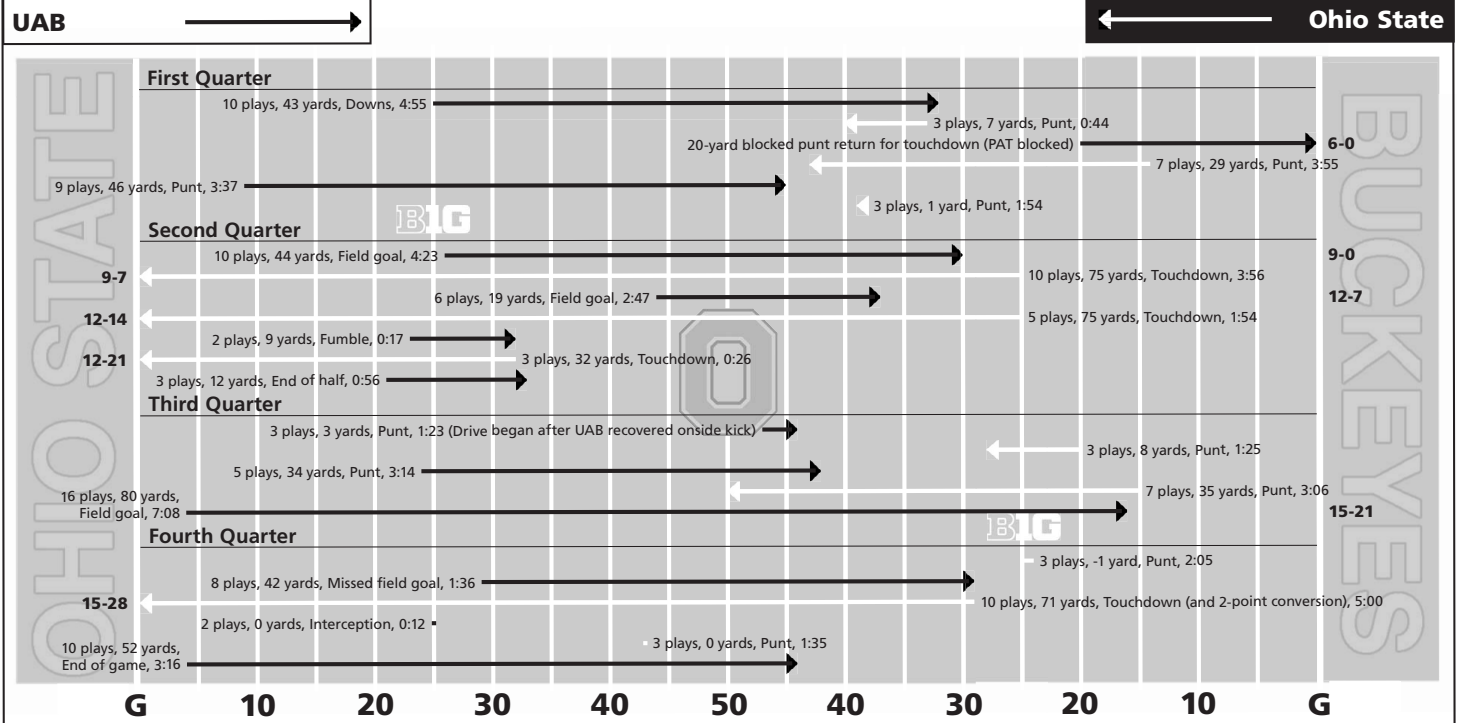
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OHIO STATE VS. UAB

Drive Chart



stir the offense, however, and OSU promptly strung together a 10-play, 75-yard drive for its first touchdown of the afternoon.

Hall got things started with back-to-back runs that netted 14 and 12 yards, and two plays later Miller chipped in with a 14-yard gain off a quarterback draw. That pushed the ball to the UAB 24, and Hall and Smith took things from there. Hall ran for 5 and 3 yards before Smith picked up the first down with a 3-yard run.

Then the sophomore took a handoff and sprinted out to his right, stiff-arming one defender away before being forced out of bounds just shy of the goal line. On the next play after that 12-yard gain, Smith got the call again and powered up the middle for a 1-yard touchdown.

Junior kicker Drew Basil added the PAT to pull the Buckeyes within two at 9-7 with 6:31 remaining in the second period.

The Blazers seemed undaunted by Ohio State's score. They took advantage of a 35-yard kickoff return by junior Jackie Williams and promptly moved across midfield. UAB got as far as the OSU 37 with second-and-2 but could progress no farther before settling for a 54-yard field goal from Long. The three-pointer was the longest in UAB history and increased the Blazers' lead to 12-7 with 3:44 left until halftime.

Unfortunately for the upstart visitors, Long's record kick represented the high-water mark in the game. The Buckeyes scored two touchdowns within a 48-second span inside the final two minutes of the half to take control of the contest.

After the field goal, Miller engineered what was by far his team's best drive of the afternoon. The sophomore QB got things started with a 12-yard completion to Devin Smith and then followed with a 6-yard pass to freshman wideout Michael Thomas. It was Thomas' first career catch.

On the next play, Miller found Brown in the left boundary for a 20-yard gain, and the two hooked up on the play after that when Brown got behind his defender along

the right sideline. That 25-yard completion gave Ohio State a first down at the UAB 12 and Miller did the rest. He danced away from Irvin's tackle attempt near the line of scrimmage and then powered his way through two more defenders to cross the goal line.

Basil followed with the PAT and the Buckeyes had their first lead of the game at 14-12 with 1:50 remaining until halftime.

Disaster then struck UAB on the ensuing possession when tight end Kennard Backman fumbled on the second play of the drive following a 7-yard reception. Grant recovered the loose ball at the Blazers 32, and the Buckeyes were right back in business.

Miller made several more would-be tacklers miss on a twisting 19-yard run on first down and then connected with Brown over the middle for an 11-yard gain. That gave OSU a first-and-goal at the UAB 2, and Boren navigated that short distance on the next play, getting nice seal blocks from right tackle Reid Fragel and receiver/tight end Jake Stoneburner.

Boren's 2-yard touchdown dive came at the 1:02 mark and Basil's PAT gave the Buckeyes a 21-12 lead heading into the locker room – not bad for a team whose offense had been outgained for much of the first half, whose defense had missed at least a dozen tackles and dropped a sure interception, and whose special teams had given up a touchdown.

The second half wasn't much better. While the OSU offense took most of the third quarter off for the second week in a row – just 43 yards in 10 plays during the period – the defense allowed the Blazers to string together a 16-play drive that covered 80 yards and lasted more than seven minutes.

The march began on the UAB 4-yard line with 5:52 remaining in the third quarter and survived several stops and starts, including an interception by Ohio State senior cornerback Travis Howard that was

The Bottom Line

The game was over when ... UAB kicker Ty Long missed a 47-yard field goal with 10:03 remaining. Had Long's kick been good, the Blazers would have pulled within three points of Ohio State at 21-18. Following the miss, the Buckeyes went 71 yards in 10 plays for the game-clinching touchdown.

Game ball goes to ... Jordan Hall. There is no doubt the Buckeyes have resembled more of a power team since Hall returned to the lineup. The senior is proving adept at running between the tackles and totaled a career-high 105 yards on 17 carries. Hall also showed his versatility with a pair of pass receptions for 21 more yards.

Stat of the game ... 400. Ohio State marked victory No. 400 in Ohio Stadium history with its win over UAB. If you think you are experiencing a bit of déjà vu, you are excused. The program first celebrated its 400th victory in the Horseshoe last season following a 27-22 win over Toledo. Since then, however, eight home victories during the 2010 season have been vacated by the NCAA, making this year's win over the Blazers the "official" No. 400.

– Mark Rea

nullified by an offside penalty. The Blazers also seemed determined to stop themselves by committing two penalties for illegal blocks.

But UAB proved resilient, converting a trio of third-down plays during the possession including a third-and-17 and a third-and-16. Thankfully for the Buckeyes, however, UAB never got any closer than the OSU 16 before being forced to call upon Long again, this time for a 34-yard field goal that brought the Blazers within six points at 21-15 with 13:44 to go in the fourth quarter.

UAB got a chance to draw even closer just a few minutes later. After Ohio State had another three-and-out series, the Blazers were aided by a 15-yard taunting penalty against OSU junior safety Christian Bryant on a third-and-5 play that had resulted in an incomplete pass.

The penalty gave UAB a fresh set of downs, and the Blazers continued to drive into Ohio State territory, getting as far as the 24-yard line. But a couple of Brown misfires along with a substitution infraction ruined the Blazers' momentum, and Long was summoned for a 47-yard field-goal try. This time however, the UAB kicker pulled his attempt wide to the left, leaving the Buckeyes with their 21-15 advantage intact at the 10:03 mark of the final period.

That proved to be the final gasp for the Blazers. Ohio State took over possession at its own 29, and Miller guided the offense 71 yards over the next 5:00 for the clinching score. The drive included a crucial 11-yard pass from Miller to Brown on a third-and-6 play as well as a three-play sequence that

Continued On Page 12

OHIO STATE VS. UAB

Miller TD, Grant Interception Seal Victory

Continued From Page 11

netted 41 yards. Miller connected with Hall for 14 yards, followed with a 10-yard pass to sophomore tight end Jeff Heurman and then took off on a quarterback draw for 17 more yards.

That gave the Buckeyes a first-and-goal at the UAB 7, and three plays later Miller finished off the drive with a 1-yard touchdown run. The sophomore then added a nifty scamper for the two-point conversion to give the Buckeyes a 29-15 cushion with 5:03 remaining in the game.

UAB had two more possessions, but the first ended with Grant's first career interception at the 4:51 mark while the second ended with a Brown incompletion on the game's final play.

Game Notes

- The game marked the first-ever meet-

ing between Ohio State and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The UAB program is currently in its 22nd season of intercollegiate football. The Blazers began as a Division III independent in 1991 before moving up to Division I-AA in 1993. Three years later, they moved to Division I-A as an independent and then joined Conference USA in 1999.

- Although UAB had never played Ohio State, first-year head coach Garrick McGee was familiar with the Buckeyes. McGee spent four seasons as an assistant coach at Northwestern from 2004-07, a period during which the Wildcats were 1-3 vs. Ohio State. He was also offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Arkansas in 2010 when the Razorbacks lost a 31-26 decision to the Buckeyes in the 2011 Sugar Bowl.

- With his 4-0 start, Meyer is tied for the third-best start to a career by an Ohio

State head coach. Carroll Widdoes won his first 12 games in 1944 and '45, while Earle Bruce won his first 11 in a row in 1979. Others to start 4-0 were Perry Hale (1902), E.R. Sweetland (1904) and Howard Jones (1910).

- The Blazers were the 22nd team in the past 25 seasons to make their first-ever trip to Ohio Stadium. Ohio State has now won 21 of those 22 games against first-time visitors with the only blemish a 25-22 loss in 2005 to eventual national champion Texas.

- Meyer moved his career record to 5-1 against current members of Conference USA. That includes two victories over Central Florida, including the Buckeyes' 31-16 win Sept. 8. His 2006 national championship team at Florida also defeated the Knights by a 42-0 final in the second game of that season. Meyer's only loss to a current C-USA school came during his first

season at Bowling Green when Marshall dealt the Falcons a 37-31 defeat. Marshall was a member of the MAC that season, but the Thundering Herd joined Conference USA in 2010. Meyer's other two victories against current C-USA teams came at the expense of Southern Miss – a 17-0 victory in the 2003 Liberty Bowl while at Utah and a 34-7 decision in the 2006 season opener at Florida.

- The Buckeyes are now 14-1-1 all-time against current members of Conference USA. In addition to the win over UAB, Ohio State is 2-0 vs. Marshall and Rice, 1-0 against Central Florida and Houston, and 7-1-1 vs. SMU. The only blemishes on that record are a 35-35 tie with SMU in 1978 and a 3-27 loss to the Mustangs in 1950.

- UAB fell to 0-3 all-time against current members of the Big Ten. The Blazers lost a 55-18 decision at Michigan State in the 2007 season opener and dropped a 38-7 final at Nebraska in the first game of the 1998 season. The Cornhuskers were members of the Big 12 at that time.

- The Buckeyes increased their home winning streak to 65 consecutive games against unranked nonconference opponents. They haven't lost to an unranked nonconference team in the Horseshoe since a 34-17 defeat to Florida State in 1982.

- UAB is now 3-15 lifetime against ranked opponents, including 0-2 this year. The Blazers dropped a 49-6 decision Sept. 15 at No. 8 South Carolina. The team's only victories over ranked teams were a 34-31 win over No. 20 Southern Miss last season, a 35-23 win at No. 24 UTEP in November 2005 and a 36-17 decision over No. 17 East Carolina in October 1999.

- The Blazers featured no native-born Ohioans on their roster, but they did have an Ohio State connection on their coaching staff. John Peterson, a four-year offensive lineman for the Buckeyes from 1987-90 who then spent eight seasons as an OSU assistant coach from 2004-11, is in his first season as offensive line coach at UAB.

- Ohio State failed to score at least 30 points for the first time this season, failing in a chance to become only the eighth team in program history to score 30 or more points in each of its first four games. The Buckeyes topped the 30-point mark in each of their first four games in 1904, 1917, 1919, 1926, 1969, 1998 and 2010. The 1969 team holds the school record by scoring 30 or more points in each of its first eight games that season.

- Long's 54-yard field goal was not only a UAB record, it was the third longest by an opposing kicker in Ohio Stadium. Morten Andersen of Michigan State has held the stadium record for opponents since 1981 when he booted a Big Ten-record 63-yarder during a 27-13 loss to the Buckeyes, and Chris Bahr of Penn State had a 55-yard field goal during his team's 17-9 loss to Ohio State in 1975.

- UAB's Williams caught five passes for 55 yards, pushing his streak to 26 consecutive games in which he has caught at least one pass. That is tied for the 10th-best current streak of its kind in Division I-A football. Conner Vernon of Duke has the longest current streak with at least one reception in 39 consecutive games. Williams also went over the 100-reception mark for his career. He now has 104, good for fifth all-time in program history.



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Inconsistency Again Plagues Ohio State's Attack

UAB came into its Sept. 22 game against Ohio State with some not-so-impressive defensive numbers.

The Blazers ranked near the bottom of teams in the NCAA Football Bowl Subdivision in several team defensive categories. After its first two games, UAB on average allowed 44.0 points (120th nationally), 220.5 rushing yards (109th) and 256.5 passing yards per game. The latter two numbers equaled 477 yards per game, 104th among FBS teams in total defense.

INSIDE THE OFFENSE

Matthew Hager

So it wasn't unreasonable to expect an impressive performance by the Buckeyes' offense. Unfortunately for OSU, that wasn't to be. Ohio State did enough to earn a 29-15 victory at Ohio Stadium, but inconsistency was again an issue.

"We have our moments when we've shown how explosive our offense can be, but at the same time, we've got to execute better," sophomore tailback Rod Smith said. "Some things don't go as we plan, but we have to execute. That's the bottom line. We have to execute."

Head coach Urban Meyer was, as has become the norm, blunt in his assessment.

"On offense our explosiveness was obviously nonexistent for much of the game," Meyer said. "If it was one thing we could make adjustments and fix it, (but) it's more than one thing right now."

The offense is still waiting for the game in which it puts together a four-quarter performance, but on back-to-back second-quarter drives against UAB it showed just how dangerous it can be when clicking.

The first quarter wasn't pretty for the Buckeyes offensively. Ohio State not only trailed 6-0 after the first 15 minutes, but the offense did not cross midfield at all and was held to a three-and-out in two of its three possessions.

The second quarter, however, was a different story. The Buckeyes scored touchdowns on all three of their offensive possessions and on the first two showed they can move the ball on the ground or through the air.

Ohio State began its first possession of the second quarter after UAB had extended its lead to 9-0 on a 47-yard field goal by Ty Long. The Buckeyes took over at the on their own 25 following a touchback and found offensive traction for the first time all afternoon. The ground attack led the



JOSH WINSLOW

HEADING TOWARD SIX – Sophomore tailback Rod Smith (2) earned playing time, primarily in red-zone situations, against UAB. He scored his first touchdown of the season on a 1-yard run in the second quarter.

way, with senior tailback Jordan Hall getting the bulk of the carries. His first two runs on the drive set the tone, going for 14 yards thanks to a nice cut back inside and then following that with a 12-yard gain to the UAB 49.

After Hall added a 4-yard gain on the next play, sophomore Braxton Miller pushed the drive with a 7-yard completion – his lone pass of the drive – to Devin Smith and added a 14-yard rush on the next play, complete with a juke of UAB middle linebacker Marvin Burdette.

Following consecutive rushes by Hall that advanced the ball from the UAB 24 to the 16, the Buckeyes called on Rod Smith. The sophomore finished the drive with three carries, culminating in a 1-yard touchdown up the middle.

"It was downhill running, just downhill running," Smith said of the drive. "That's what I was focusing on when I was in the game. It worked pretty well."

While the Buckeyes showed they could rush the ball on their first TD drive, the second featured an aerial attack by Miller. The sophomore QB led a five-play scoring drive, one that lasted only 1:54, by completing 4 of 4 passes for 63 yards. He began the march with a 12-yard completion to Devin Smith that advanced the ball from the OSU 25 to the 37. Miller then added a 6-yard strike to freshman Michael Thomas before

finding Corey "Philly" Brown for a 20-yard pass to the UAB 37.

Miller connected with Brown again on a 25-yard gain on the next play, advancing the ball to the 12-yard line. That's where Miller called his own number, finishing the drive with another highlight reel-worthy run. He faked a handoff and raced toward the end zone, spinning around UAB outside linebacker Greg Irvin at the 8-yard line before finishing the run by diving into the end zone.

The score gave Ohio State a lead it never relinquished. The Buckeyes went into halftime with a 21-12 lead thanks to OSU's third and final touchdown of the quarter. Following a UAB lost fumble at its own 32, Ohio State reached the end zone in three plays. Miller rushed 19 yards to the 13 before finding Brown for an 11-yard gain. Senior fullback Zach Boren then capped the march by piling into the end zone from 2 yards out.

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, they were unable to maintain the momentum after halftime. Ohio State was forced to punt on four of its five second-half possessions. The other resulted in a fourth quarter touchdown that iced the victory, but take that 71-yard scoring drive away and the Buckeyes were held to 52 yards of offense in the second half.

Consistency continues to elude the Ohio State offense.

"Some of it is what defenses do and how they play," said Ed Warinner, OSU's co-offensive coordinator/offensive line coach. "Some of it is our execution, our ability to execute against multiple looks and things like that. Certain adjustments you make and certain things that happen out there are a part of the growth process in this offense. It takes a little bit of time. Once they see it and adjust, they do pretty well."

Warinner was upbeat following the game. He said he still has high hopes for the Buckeyes offensively.

"I'm very confident," Warinner said.

"We have a dynamic quarterback. We have good offensive linemen. Our skill players are very good. And we have a good coaching staff. We're all growing together. I'm very confident that we have a high ceiling and that we can continue to grow."

"Great things will come here with the spread. I wouldn't say that I'm happy about today, but I am happy that we're 4-0 in a new system with new players and a young quarterback. We're making progress. It's going to be good. This could be really a dynamic offense with the players we have."

Hall, Smith Shine

Hall returned to the Ohio State starting lineup Sept. 15 against California and looked like a player coming off an injury that kept him sidelined throughout the preseason and the first two weeks of the 2012 season. In that game, Hall rushed for 87 yards on 17 carries. Afterward Hall told reporters that he felt he left yards on the field, meaning he felt that he could have broken off longer runs.

The senior tailback didn't have a game-changing run against UAB, but his numbers were improved. Hall rushed for 105 yards on 17 carries, producing an average of 6.2 yards per carry.

"I think there was a little rust last week," Warinner said. "I think this week, he took another step. I like his progress. We've got to keep utilizing him for quality carries and yards."

Hall was happy with his performance.

"I was definitely more comfortable this week," he said. "I had a full week of practice this week and I felt good."

Hall was the game's leading rusher, but Ohio State also got a boost from the player Hall calls his "big little brother," Rod Smith. He carried six times, all but one coming in the red zone, for 24 yards and a touchdown. Best yet, Smith did not fumble.

"He earned it," Meyer said of Smith's playing time. "That was not a 'hit or miss and boy I hope this works out.' He's done it in practice, and he's earned that right."

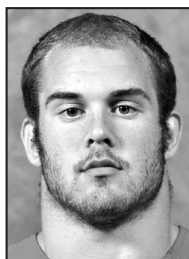
Warinner echoed his head coach.

"He's really been different at practice recently in terms of his energy and production, and he's earned the right to get some carries and get some reps," Warinner said. "So we put him in there in certain situations and thought he played hard and did a nice job."

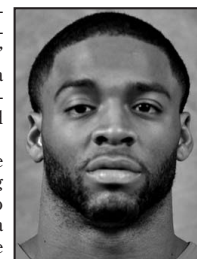
The sophomore from Fort Wayne, Ind., admitted to some frustration with his spot on the depth chart, but Smith added that he worked hard to get the chance to take the No. 2 tailback spot while Carlos Hyde rehabs an injury.

"It all comes from practice," Smith said. "I showed them I could do it in practice and my number was called (today). They gave me an opportunity, and I feel like I did a good job."

Of course, Miller also had his moments carrying the ball. Miller rushed for 64 yards on 11 carries, including his two TD runs and a two-point conversion.



Zach Boren



Jordan Hall

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Buckeye Game Analysis

Play Of The Game

This was not a game that had a true signature moment, but Braxton Miller's 12-yard touchdown run in the second quarter turned out to be a big play in the grand scheme of things.

The Ohio State offense sputtered for much of the day, leaving it again to rely on Miller's dynamic ability when all else failed.

That was again on display inside the final two minutes of the first half when the Buckeye signal caller took a shotgun snap, looked to his left as if to throw a bubble screen pass to wide receiver Corey "Philly" Brown and then started to his right behind fullback Zach Boren.

While that action went on in the backfield, the Ohio State offensive line got to work clearing some space. Right guard Marcus Hall and right tackle Reid Fragel double-teamed UAB nose tackle Deric Scott, and left guard Andrew Norwell pulled around to his right to kick out Blazer tackle Connor Boyett. Boren locked horns with end Diaheem Watkins at the line of scrimmage, but the best was yet to come.

Miller cut behind his fullback and then left linebacker Greg Irvin grasping at air in the middle of the field with a lightning-fast spin move that drew "aahs" from the denizens of the Ohio Stadium press box as well as the Ohio State fans among the 105,019 in the stands.

From there it was a matter of Miller gathering himself to cover the last 8 yards to the end zone. He took four quick steps before diving for the last 3 yards as safety Jake Ganus got hold of him just a second too late. Miller stuck the ball out with his right hand to make sure it broke the plane of the goal line before his body was down.

The play gave the Buckeyes a lead they would not relinquish in a day they never quite could pull away.

The play was executed well as everyone on the front side not only took care of his initial responsibility, but Fragel was also able to peel off and neutralize UAB linebacker Patrick Bastien.

Yet it was Miller's quickness and sense as a broken-field runner that made it worth six points and relieved the pressure of having to come from behind in the second half.

The soft-spoken signal caller was – not surprisingly – nonchalant when asked about his running ability after the game, but head coach Urban Meyer lauded his quarterback.

"I think he's got great acceleration, but he's got an uncanny ability to make guys miss," Meyer said. "He's without question one of the best athletes in college football. That's a true statement."

Hidden Play Of The Game

UAB drove to the Ohio State 24-yard line with a chance to take the lead in the final 11 minutes of the game, but the Blazers could not finish the job as the Buckeye defense stiffened at the right time.

An errant throw by Austin Brown intended for Greg Franklin prevented them from converting a third-and-11, but the previous play had a better chance to change the game.

Brown took a shotgun snap and faked a zone-read hand-off to Franklin before setting his eyes downfield. He gave a short pump fake to slot receiver Patrick Hearn, who beat Ohio State nickel back Christian Bryant 5 yards down the field in coverage. Hearn then freed himself with a hard cut inside after faking a flag pattern and had room to run inside the 20, but Brown could not get him the ball.

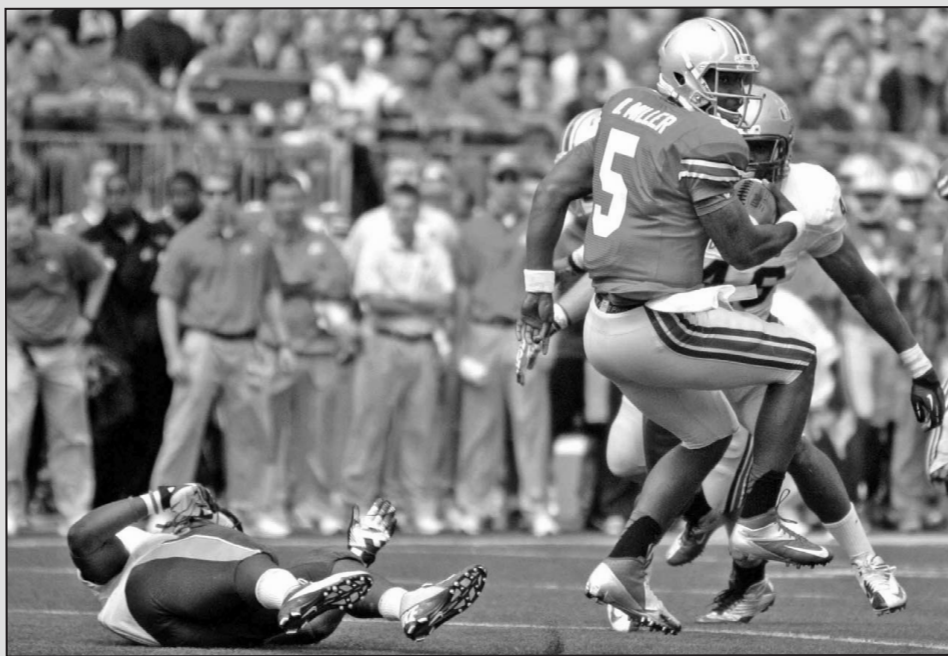
The UAB quarterback saw Hearn but could not set to throw as Ohio State defensive end John Simon was bearing down on him after quickly recognizing Franklin did not have the ball. Brown eluded Simon and got outside, but the timing of the play was off and he was unable to reset his feet and deliver an accurate throw. It sailed well over Hearn's head and into the end zone, where it fell incomplete.

Safety Orhian Johnson was in deep coverage and could have prevented a touchdown, but Hearn likely would have been able to give the Blazers at worst a first-and-goal situation if he had been able to connect with Brown.

Two plays later, the Blazers had to settle for a 47-yard field-goal attempt by Ty Long that sailed wide left.

What Worked Well

- **Miller's feet:** The Ohio State sophomore quarter-



JOSH WINSLOW

SPIN CYCLE – Ohio State sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller (5) left linebacker Greg Irvin (left) face up on the Ohio Stadium turf after eluding the UAB defender en route to a 12-yard touchdown run in the second quarter.

back had a pedestrian day throwing the ball, but he used his innate running ability to score the go-ahead touchdown with the 12-yard run and the clinching score on a 1-yard burst in the fourth quarter.

- **Realigning the line:** After Cal repeatedly ripped the Buckeye rush defense by outnumbering it by formation a week earlier, Ohio State responded by adjusting how it lined up. Instead of automatically setting the strength of its line to the wide side of the field, the coaching staff matched strength on strength and shifted toward the side on which the UAB tight end lined up. The result was tackle Johnathan Hankins being in the way many times the Blazers wanted to run to the short side of the field where the Bears had found so much success.

What Didn't Work

- **Consistency on offense:** Whether it was dropped passes, errant throws or untimely penalties, the OSU offense never could find a rhythm. That has turned into a consistent theme in the first third of the season as big plays from Miller and some others have masked inefficiencies on a play-to-play basis.

- **Tackling drills:** Meyer told reporters the Buckeyes spent an extra day working on tackling for a game week (two days instead of one) but the results were hard to detect. If anything, the Blazers might have slipped more tackles than did the Golden Bears. That had Meyer promising to have his staff redouble its effort on the fundamental part of the game.

Reviewing The Matchups

Ohio State rush offense vs. UAB rush defense: Ohio State turned in another 200-yard day on the ground thanks to Miller and senior tailback Jordan Hall. The 5-9, 194-pound Hall rushed for a career-high 105 yards in his second game back after offseason foot surgery. He took advantage of the extra attention UAB paid to Miller, who was forced to give up the ball consistently on option plays. Highly touted sophomore tailback Rod Smith also had a notable appearance with 24 yards and a touchdown on six carries. **EDGE: Ohio State**

UAB rush offense vs. Ohio State rush defense: The numbers were not as ugly as the week before when Cal gashed the Buckeyes for 224 yards on the ground, but they were still far from what the Silver Bullets are used to giving up on the ground. Suspect tackling was again a major culprit as multiple

Buckeyes failed to wrap up and bring down UAB backs Darrin Reaves (72 yards on 16 carries) and Franklin (21 on three). They were able to often turn what could have been 2- or 3-yard gains into 5 or more by making the first man miss or fall to the side. On the bright side, the Buckeyes maintained better leverage on the ball and were not victimized for as many major plays as the week before. **EDGE: UAB**

Ohio State pass offense vs. UAB pass defense: This looked like a major mismatch on paper but turned out to be something of a wash. The Blazers have been among the nation's worst in defending the pass this season and last, but Miller turned in a pedestrian 143 yards on 12-for-20 passing. Several drops prevented his stat line from looking much better, and he appeared to audible from pass plays into runs on several occasions as UAB played its safeties deep to avoid getting beaten over the top. **EDGE: Even**

UAB pass offense vs. Ohio State pass defense: The Blazers threw a changeup at the Buckeyes by using Brown at quarterback most of the day. Ohio State had prepared for Jonathan Perry, who started but did not play after the first quarter. With Brown, UAB transformed from a more traditional dropback passing attack to a spread-based horizontal game that featured many short, quick passes and a plethora of screen passes. That was another area where tackling issues reared their heads for the Buckeyes, but consistently swarming to the ball prevented even more big plays. **EDGE: UAB**

Special teams: This was mostly a disaster area for the Buckeyes, who had a punt blocked and returned for a touchdown and who allowed the Blazers to recover a surprise onside kick to start the second half. On the bright side, Ohio State blocked a PAT kick, but Long kept the Blazers in the game with field goals of 34, 47 and 54 yards. The block aside, OSU punter Ben Buchanan averaged 42.5 yards per punt and had 3 of 6 downed inside the 20-yard line. **EDGE: UAB**

Intangibles: The Blazers were outmanned but stuck around far longer than anticipated by anyone, including oddsmakers who favored Ohio State to win by more than five touchdowns. Few in scarlet and gray came away feeling good about the win with a trip to Michigan State on the horizon. Neither team really played a brilliant game as the Buckeyes hurt themselves again with penalties and multiple chop-block infractions put dents in UAB drives. **EDGE: Even**

– Marcus Hartman

OHIO STATE VS. UAB

Defense Had Share of Good, Bad Moments

As with most stories, there were two sides to the one that played out Sept. 22 for the Ohio State defense.

On one hand, the Buckeyes gave up 403 total yards and 22 first downs during a 29-15 defeat of UAB. The Blazers ran for 144 yards and converted 7 of 17 third downs. They averaged 4.2 yards per rush on 34 attempts, including four that broke for more than 10 yards. The visitors added 259 yards through the air, including 10 pass plays that went for double-digit yards.

INSIDE THE DEFENSE

Marcus Hartman

Ohio State forced only one three-and-out all afternoon while the defense gave up three scoring drives.

But the Blazers managed only 15 points despite those successes, and some would argue that is the only thing really worth measuring in assessing a defense's performance.

Everett Withers left no doubt which side he sat upon when it was over.

"We gave up 15 points," the co-defensive coordinator and safeties coach said. "That's all I give a s— about."

The Blazers advanced into Ohio State territory nine times, but they reached the red zone only once. That drive ended in a 34-yard field goal by Ty Long, who also connected from 47 and 54 yards after the Buckeyes stiffened with their backs starting to approach the wall.

The home team also forced three punts from their own side of the field and took the ball away twice.

Although the effort was good enough to help the Buckeyes finish nonconference play with a perfect 4-0 record, it was not what their head coach was expecting after a long week of harping on shortcomings that had been exposed during a 35-28 win the week before against California.

"The fact is we're a bend-but-don't-break defense, which is painful to watch," head coach Urban Meyer said. "We missed too many tackles today again."

There was no disputing that as Blazer ball carriers made yards after contact throughout the day. Players from every position group contributed to the problem, and no one had a magic solution.

The players walk a line between positive aggressiveness and bad recklessness, one apparent even in the messages they get from the coaching staff.

"The coaches always tell us to take a shot," cornerback Travis Howard said. "Anytime you're on defense and they're running the ball, take a shot because he feels there are 10 more guys running to the ball so anytime we're in a situation where a guy doesn't wrap up he's just taking a shot because there are people around us."

"At the same time, we can't lose our fundamentals and not wrap up. He always tells us to shoot our guns because there are going to be 10 guys around the ball."

Linebacker Etienne Sabino, a senior like his former high school teammate Howard, explained that knowing when to go for the kill versus simply wrapping up is a crucial concept he and his teammates must continue to work on.

"Take a shot when you have your shot,



JOSH WINSLOW

PRESSURE'S ON – The Ohio State defense, including senior defensive lineman John Simon (54), seen here chasing UAB quarterback Austin Brown (11), allowed only three field goals against the Blazers.

but first and foremost get them on the ground," said Sabino, who had 11 tackles. "Right now we're not wrapping with our arms, me included, and we all just need to change that."

Missed tackles were also a major issue against Cal, but the Buckeyes improved in another crucial area when the Blazers came to town. That was maintaining what football coaches now generally refer to as leverage but was once simply known as containing the football.

Fourteen plays of 10 or more yards are certainly more than any coach will feel comfortable allowing, but only three of those covered more than 20 yards.

The latter marks an improvement from the week before when Cal had five plays of 20 yards or more, including three runs. There were multiple missed tackles on all of those, but lost containment allowed big plays to turn into touchdowns.

That was not the case against UAB, providing at least one thing for the Buckeyes to hang their hats on as they were still able to make the Blazers execute consistently instead of scoring in quick bursts.

"I don't think it's a bend-but-don't-break philosophy," Withers said. "When they spread you the width of the field you've got to eventually say that's not going to beat you, and it didn't. All you have to do is tackle. We've got to keep improving tackling and those things."

"We did miss some, but anytime you're playing in space there's going to be an opportunity to miss some tackles. The key is getting the second and third guy there to attack him. That's what we've got to continue to improve."

The Buckeyes ended up seeing more spread offense from UAB than they expected to. Jonathan Perry started the game at quarterback but gave way to Austin Brown in the second quarter.

With the move, the Blazers increased their use of three- and four-receiver sets after Ohio State prepared to see a team that was

going to more frequently use bigger personnel groupings while trying to run the ball and then go down the field in the passing game. Instead, they got a ball-control passing game featuring lots of screens and other short passes.

"I guess they knew that we kind of play off and play (zone) a lot so they were trying to play those little short routes for 4 and 5 yards," Howard said. "It was a great adjustment for them because we thought they were going to take shots."

As other teams had earlier this season, the Blazers found some success with their screens, including a 21-yard pass from Brown to wide receiver Jackie Williams on the first play of the fourth quarter that set them up for their last field goal.

"That's one of those plays where really the one that hurt us, we were in man-to-man coverage and that's obviously not the best thing to be in but they had the right play and the right call," Withers explained.

In keeping with the tackling problems in general, Sabino pointed to a simple need to continue to emphasize fundamentals to keep the screen passes in control. Cal also hurt the Buckeyes with a variety of similar calls.

"Tackle. Beat blocks," Sabino said. "Really there's no secret to it. Recognize it and run hard. If you're rushing the passer and they just let you go you're probably not the world's best pass rusher. You've got to recognize it and track it down."

Screen passes might not be such an issue Sept. 29 when Ohio State travels to Michigan State to face the Spartans' power-based offense, but tackling will.

Meyer promised it will continue to be addressed. Though the team generally practices live tackling only once a week during the season, it did twice after the debacle against the Bears. That will be the case again with the Spartans and tailback Le'Veon Bell on the horizon.

"Tuesday and Wednesday we'll tackle again," Meyer said. "I saw some signs. We're facing a 250-pound back coming in next

week. I still see guys flailing across and missing tackles. There were far too many third down conversions on defense."

"It's hard to pinpoint one thing that we have to get better at, but tackling is something we'll continue to. That's the fundamental. That's the essence of tackle football, and we've got to continue to improve."

Boundary Issue Solved

Some of the improvement in the run defense, which gave up 144 yards after being torched for 224 a week before, owed to a slight schematic adjustment made during the week by the coaching staff.

Ohio State generally shifted its defensive line toward the wide side of the field against Cal, something the Bears took advantage of by lining up a tight end on the other. That gave them a numbers advantage and made running the ball easier as a result.

The Buckeyes responded late in the Cal contest by flipping their line and putting an extra man on whichever side the tight end lined up, something they continued to do against UAB.

The result was not hard to see as Johnathan Hankins, the defensive tackle who made the switch, was more often in the thick of things when the Blazers tried to run. He notched 10 tackles on the day.

"I think that helped it," Withers said. "Obviously Hank is a good player. We put him over there to help us."

Hankins just smiled when asked about the move.

"I would prefer they run it to me than to somebody else," he said. "I think it turned out pretty well."

Linebacker Ryan Shazier, who bested Hankins by recording a game-high 13 stops, noticed a definite improvement thanks to the shift.

"We still gave up too many yards rushing, but I think it helped a lot because they couldn't run some of the plays they really wanted to toward the boundary because our linemen wouldn't allow it," Shazier said.

OHIO STATE VS. UAB

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 29, UAB 15

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer's opening statement: "Pleased with the win. We're 4-0. I like to give credit to the team that we played. They played very hard, UAB. (They are) well-coached. It's glaringly obvious we've got to get a lot better or we won't win next week."

UAB head coach Garrick McGee's assessment of the game: "Our defensive staff does a good job on game-planning, but we turned the ball over a lot. Overall I thought we did a good job on (Ohio State quarterback Braxton Miller), one of the most explosive players in the game."

Co-offensive coordinator and offensive line coach Ed Warinner on the fact that Miller did not run the football until the second quarter: "I think he brings a lot to the table when he carries the ball, obviously. We know that. We just didn't get much going in the first quarter. I don't think it wasn't because we weren't running Braxton. We were just trying to get a feel for what they were doing."

UAB safety Calvin Jones on his team's effort against Miller and the Buckeyes: "Our game plan for the day was to attack the quarterback and stop him because he is mainly their offense. We did that in the beginning and I don't believe he had any yards in the first quarter. Ohio State kept progressing and we kept fighting against them. It's a great experience to go against a double-threat quarterback, and it will definitely help us out in our conference because I don't think we will see anyone as good as him, so it was a nice experience."

Miller on Ohio State's slow start on offense: "We're not coming out with enough energy – somebody's got to get our energy to rise. Our mind-set isn't where it needs to be at the start of the game."

Junior wide receiver Corey "Philly" Brown on the same subject: "We came out slow today. It was obvious. We prepared well throughout the week, and our main focus was to come out strong."

Senior tailback Jordan Hall on the offense's inconsistency: "We ran the ball well, but we have to execute better. I feel like we should have put more points up. We've still got a lot of work to do. But you can't be mad at a win."

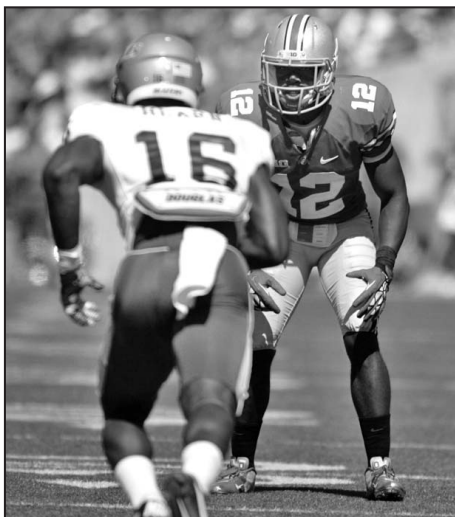
Sophomore tailback Rod Smith on the same subject: "We just have to be more consistent. We have to be consistent. Once we get that down pat, it's going to be scary."

Meyer on the performance of Miller in changing play calls at the line of scrimmage for the first time this season: "He did pretty good in that phase of it. We gave him the keys to the offense a little bit today. He did good. It was very minimal, but it was a great first step for him. We're developing a quarterback as we speak, and it takes time. He's still an elite competitor with some elite talents, but we just have to keep improving. It can improve around him as well."

Hall on his career-high 105-yard rushing performance: "I'm happy about it, but Michigan State is really where my focus is."

Smith on his performance: "It felt good to be on the field with my teammates and contributing a little bit. It always feels great to help with a victory."

Warinner on Smith: "He's starting to pick it up. He runs hard. I thought he made a couple of plays. He's had great energy at practice, so we're really thinking that he can take over for Carlos



SONNY BROCKWAY

NO PRESSURE – Sophomore cornerback Doran Grant (12) felt prepared for his spot start in place of injured Bradley Roby.

(Hyde) and be the next guy in until Carlos gets healthy."

Warinner on the possibility of having junior tailback Carlos Hyde available for the start of Big Ten play: "Whenever that day comes, that'll be pretty nice. Hopefully it'll be this week, but we'll see how time heals."

Sophomore cornerback Doran Grant on getting the start in place of an injured Bradley Roby: "There really wasn't any pressure today. (Cornerbacks coach Kerry) Coombs has always prepared me, just in case, for a situation like this, and I think I handled it OK."

Senior offensive tackle Reid Fragel on UAB's performance: "Every time a team like that comes to the 'Shoe, they're going to bring their best shot. That's just the way it is at Ohio State. You get the best out of every team you play. They were a pretty talented group of guys out there today. They did some things schematically."

Co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers on what changed when UAB switched quarterbacks: "It went to a zone-read, spread-bubble team as opposed to a dropback, throw-it team. We had seen him in a game doing that, so we had to change our mind-set in what we wanted to do. They hadn't been a true four-wide receiver team. They had been more of a (three-wide) team with a tight end in the game, so they kind of changed their mind, too."

Junior defensive lineman Johnathan Hankins on OSU's tackling efforts: "I feel like it was much better than a week ago. I think what hurt us was the penalties – guys being offside and getting personal fouls. We're going to get that straightened out and get ready to play."

Senior cornerback Travis Howard on the defensive mentality after bad plays: "Coach always tells us to snap and clear. Anytime something bad happens, you have to snap and clear because anytime something bad happens you have to learn how to brush it off. It's just an aggressive mentality for us. We got a couple of big penalties, but our coaches love when we're aggressive so we just have to eliminate those."

Withers on UAB's success on third down:

"I just think some of the stuff they did was good vs. zone coverage. I think the biggest thing is we've got to continue to generate a pass rush to get to the quarterback. We obviously have to do a better job of covering on some of the longer yardage."

UAB kicker Ty Long on the game and his missed field goal in the fourth quarter: "We played well, some things we didn't do well, like the 47-yard field goal I missed. I knew what I did wrong right when I hit it. I take blame for that."

Howard on the difficulty of being a bend-but-don't-break defense: "It's definitely hard. Anytime you're on a defense, and teams put up that many yards, it hurts you because you know what type of guys you've got on your team. We know they put a lot of effort into the schemes and for a team to get those kinds of yards is a tough thing, but getting a victory is the biggest thing."

Senior linebacker Etienne Sabino on whether expectations are too high for the Buckeyes: "No, it's Ohio State. This is why we come here. Ohio State has the Silver Bullet defense. We're not playing up to that standard right now. We've been to Rose Bowls, national championships and all that stuff. That's why we come to Ohio State. We love those expectations."

Junior safety Christian Bryant on Ohio State's defense: "We have a lot more to work on. We can't be content right now. We know Michigan State is up next, so we have a lot of work to do."

Brown on whether the Buckeyes are ready for Big Ten play: "I know we're ready. I've been playing with these guys every day. I know as a team we're ready. I know how we're going to approach this week, especially with the way some of the guys were talking in the locker room. This week, when we come out to practice on Tuesday, we're going to have a whole different mind-set. We realize this is the Big Ten, and nonconference (play) is done. Big Ten is big-boy ball. We've got to come out and practice a little harder."

Junior offensive tackle Jack Mewhort on the start of conference play: "It's physical. The Big Ten is no joke. There's a bunch of big, tough dudes and the defenses are great defenses. I tell the young guys like Taylor Decker and those guys, 'Just strap it up.' Looking back, it goes fast, but when you're really in there grinding and practicing every day for a great team, it's a grind and something you have to work for. You have to focus on getting better every day. The Big Ten is no joke, and the end of our schedule is going to be tough."

Brown on Meyer's attitude after the non-conference slate: "He's not pleased. He's not pleased at all. He wants us to be No. 1 in America in everything – offense, defense, special teams. We're far from that right now. I already know how this week of practice is going to be. We have to be ready to roll."

McGee on his 0-3 Blazers: "It's tough on any program to go to South Carolina one week and then next week play Ohio State. I was impressed on how the team played four quarters of football, and I'm confident heading into conference play."

Meyer on his team: "I have a very clear understanding of where we are at. I'm disappointed, but that doesn't mean I don't love the guys. I think they're working their tails off. We've just got to keep grinding."

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 29, UAB 15

Sept. 22, 2012 — Ohio Stadium; Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
UAB	6	6	0	3	15
OHIO STATE	0	21	0	8	29

First Quarter

UAB — N.Adams, 20 yard blocked punt return (Long kick blocked), 9:21.

Second Quarter

UAB — Long, 47 yard field goal, 10:27; 10 plays, 44 yards, 4:23 TOP.

OSU — R.Smith, 1 yard run (Basil kick), 6:31; 10 plays, 75 yards, 3:56 TOP.

UAB — Long, 54 yard field goal, 3:44; 6 plays, 19 yards, 2:47 TOP.

OSU — B.Miller, 12 yard run (Basil kick), 1:50; 5 plays, 75 yards, 1:54 TOP.

OSU — Z.Boren, 2 yard run (Basil kick), 1:02; 3 plays, 32 yards, 0:26 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU — B.Miller, 1 yard run (B.Miller rush), 5:03; 10 plays, 71 yards, 5:00 TOP.

Att. — 105,019.

Weather — 61 degrees, partly cloudy; wind, WNW 8 mph.



Team Statistics

	UAB	OSU
First Downs	22	20
Rushing	7	11
Passing	11	9
Penalty	4	0
Rushes-Yards	34-144	37-204
Passing Yards	259	143
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	28-46-1	12-20-0
Offensive Plays	80	57
Total Net Yards	403	347
Third Down Efficiency	7-17	3-10
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-1	0-0
Punts-Avg.	3-31.0	7-36.4
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	0-0
Penalties	9-99	7-60
Time of Possession	33:55	26:05

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — UAB: Reaves 16-72; Jon.Perry 5-26; Franklin 3-21; Coles 3-21; Jackson 2-10; A.Brown 5-(-6). OSU: J.Hall 17-105; B.Miller 11-64; R.Smith 6-24; Z.Boren 2-7; P.Brown 1-4.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — UAB: A.Brown 21-35-1-196-0; Jon.Perry 7-11-0-63-0. OSU: B.Miller 12-20-0-143-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — UAB: Reaves 7-42; J.Williams 5-55; N.Adams 5-45; Hearn 4-40; Nelson 2-17; J.Davis 2-14; Coles 1-32; Backman 1-7; Accursio 1-7. OSU: P.Brown 4-67; D.Smith 4-39; J.Hall 2-21; Heuerman 1-10; M.Thomas 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) — UAB: Mullins 3-31.0-44. OSU: Buchanan 6-42.5-48; TEAM 1-0-0-0.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — UAB: J.Williams 2-2; Cal.Jones 1-20; Adams 1-20. OSU: None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — UAB: J.Williams 3-67. OSU: D.Smith 1-10.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds) — UAB: None. OSU: D.Grant 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) — UAB: None. OSU: D.Grant 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) — UAB: Walton 1.0-7; TEAM 1.0-6. OSU: D.Grant 1.0-8.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) — UAB: Walton 1.0-7; Farmer 1.0-6; TEAM 1.0-6; D.Scott 1.0-1. OSU: D.Grant 1.0-8; Hankins 0.5-1; N.Williams 0.5-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) — UAB: Ganus 6-3-9; Irvin 6-2-8; Cal.Jones 5-3-8; Burdette 4-4-8; Watkins 2-2-4; Brackett 3-0-3; Farmer 2-1-3; Bastien 2-1-3; Walton 1-1-2; Richards 1-1-2; Scott 1-1-2; Hearn 1-0-1; TEAM 1-0-1; Boyett 0-1-1; Landers 0-1-1; Webb 0-1-1. OSU: Shazier 7-6-13; Sabino 7-4-11; Hankins 4-6-10; Howard 5-3-8; Bryant 4-4-8; D.Grant 5-2-7; C.Brown 3-3-6; N.Williams 1-4-5; O.Johnson 3-1-4; Goebel 2-2-4; Simon 1-3-4; S.Klein 1-1-2; C.Williams 1-0-1; TEAM 1-0-1; Marcus 1-0-1; D.Smith 0-1-1; Domicone 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME — UAB: Offense, Adams, Hubbard, O'Leary, Autrey, Green, Ike, Jon.Perry, J.Williams, Hearn, Accursio, Franklin, Long. Defense, Watkins, Boyett, Scott, Walton, Irvin, Burdette, Bastien, Richards, Cal.Jones, Ganus, Brackett, Mullins. Reserves, Nelson, Farmer, Jackson, Reaves, L.Johnson, Landers, A.Brown, Webb, Grissett, Parrotta, Challenger, Coles, Slaughter, Waterford, Sh.Jones, Rabb, Parrish, Morris, Byrd, T.Klein, Payne, Herring, Backman, Onufrak. OHIO STATE: Offense, Mewhort, Norwell, Linsley, M.Hall, Fragel, Vannett, Heuerman, B.Miller, J.Hall, D.Smith, P.Brown, Basil. Defense, Simon, Hankins, Goebel, N.Williams, C.Brown, S.Klein, Sabino, D.Grant, Bryant, O.Johnson, Howard, Buchanan. Reserves, R.Smith, C.Brown, C.Williams, Spence, Reed, Griffin, Shazier, Stoneburner, C.Grant, Spencer, Murray, Perkins, Dunn, Niehoff, Rice, Marcus, Crowell, Jos.Perry, Haynes, Z.Boren, Hale, Makridis, Decker, Kramer, C.Carter, Baldwin, M.Thomas, Schutt, Washington.

Season Statistics

2012 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Sept. 1	(18) MIAMI (OHIO)	W, 56-10	105,036
Sept. 8	(14) C. FLORIDA	W, 31-16	104,745
Sept. 15	(12) CALIFORNIA	W, 35-28	105,232
Sept. 22	(16) UAB	W, 29-15	105,019
Sept. 29	at Michigan State	3:30 p.m.	
Oct. 6	NEBRASKA	8 p.m.	
Oct. 13	at Indiana	8 p.m.	
Oct. 20	PURDUE	TBA	
Oct. 27	at Penn State	6 p.m.	
Nov. 3	ILLINOIS	TBA	
Nov. 17	at Wisconsin	TBA	
Nov. 24	MICHIGAN	Noon	

* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	86	72
Rushing	50	22
Passing	34	42
Penalty	2	8
Average Per Game/Rush	229.2	117.5
Average Per Game/Pass	197.8	277.2
Total Offense	1,708	1,579
Total Plays	281	297
Average Per Game	427.0	394.8
Average Per Play	6.1	5.3
Penalties-Yards	31-260	25-217
Fumbles-Lost	5-2	4-2
3rd Down Efficiency	23-54	25-66
Percentage	43%	38%
4th Down Efficiency	2-3	1-8
Percentage	67%	12%
Sacks-Yards	10-96	6-41
Times Of Possession Avg.	28:54	31:06

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	20	59	28	44	—	151	37.8
Opponents	19	13	20	17	—	69	17.3

Rushing	Individual Statistics	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Braxton Miller	67	441	6.6	7	65	
Jordan Hall	34	192	5.6	0	15	
Carlos Hyde	24	109	4.5	2	16	
Bri'onte Dunn	12	60	5.0	1	13	
Rod Smith	12	50	4.2	1	12	
Philly Brown	4	42	10.5	0	19	
Zach Boren	11	33	3.0	2	8	
Kenny Guiton	5	14	2.8	0	11	
Devin Smith	1	2	2.0	0	2	
TEAM	4	-26	-6.5	0	0	
OSU Totals	174	917	5.3	13	65	
OPP Totals	118	470	4.0	3	81	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Braxton Miller	60	98	61.2	754	7-2	145.34
Kenny Guiton	5	9	55.6	37	0-0	90.09
OSU Totals	65	107	60.7	791	7-2	140.70
OPP Totals	112	179	62.6	1,109	4-7	114.17

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Philly Brown	20	233	11.6	1	38
Devin Smith	17	272	16.0	3	72
Jake Stoneburner	7	92	13.1	3	40
Evan Spencer	5	70	14.0	0	44
Zach Boren	4	35	8.8	0	14
Nick Vannett	4	19	4.8	0	7
Jeff Heuerman	3	28	9.3	0	10
Jordan Hall	2	21	10.5	0	14
Verlon Reed	1	13	13.0	0	13
Michael Thomas	1	6	6.0	0	6
Carlos Hyde	1	2	2.0	0	2
OSU Totals	65	791	12.2	7	72
OPP Totals	112	1,109	9.9	4	58

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPP	FG	PTS
Braxton Miller	7	—	2-2	—	—	46
Drew Basil	—	18-19	—	—	1-1	21
Jake Stoneburner	3	—	—	—	—	18

Devin Smith	3	—	—	—	—	18
Carlos Hyde	2	—	—	—	—	12
Zach Boren	2	—	—	—	—	12
Philly Brown	1	—	—	—	—	6
Bri'onte Dunn	1	—	—	—	—	6
Bradley Roby	1	—	—	—	—	6
Rod Smith	1	—	—	—	—	6
OSU Totals	21	18-19	2-2	—	1-1	151
OPP Totals	8	6-8	—	—	5-10	69

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Drew Basil	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-1
OSU Totals	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-1
OPP Totals	2-3	1-1	0-3	2-3	5-10

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Ben Buchanan	23	950	41.3	1	55
TEAM	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	24	950	39.6	1	55
OPP Totals	19	721	37.9	0	57

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Travis Howard	3	26	8.7	0	17
Christian Bryant	1	38	38.0	0	38
Orhian Johnson	1	3	3.0	0	3
Etienne Sabino	1	2	2.0	0	2
Doran Grant	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	7	69	9.9	0	38
OPP Totals	2	3	1.5	0	3

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Philly Brown	3	12	4.0	0	10
Devin Smith	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	4	10	2.5	0	10
OPP Totals	5	40	8.0	1	20

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Devin Smith	4	80	20.0	0	26
Armani Reeves	2	45	22.5	0	26
Bri'onte Dunn	1	22	22.0	0	22
OSU Totals	7	147	21.0	0	26
OPP Totals	16	315	19.7	0	35

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ryan Shazier	26	14	40	2.0-10	1.0-9
Etienne Sabino	15	13	28	1.0-10	1.0-10
Christian Bryant	14	11	25	—	—
Johnathan Hankins	10	15	25	2.0-12	1.0-10
Bradley Roby	14	5	19	2.0-13	1.0-11
C.J. Barnett	9	8	17	1.0-2	—
Orhian Johnson	9	5	14	—	—
Garrett Goebel	6	8	14	2.0-8	1.0-3
Travis Howard	9	4	13	—	—
John Simon	5	8	13	1.5-7	1.0-7
Doran Grant	10	2	12	1.0-8	1.0-8
Nathan Williams	5	4	9	0.5-1	—
Corey Brown	5	4	9	—	—
Curtis Grant	2	5	7	—	—
Jamal Marcus	5	0	5	—	—
Storm Klein	2	2	4	—	—
Tommy Schutt	2	1	3	—	—
Adam Griffin	3	0	3	—	—
Joshua Perry	1	1	2	—	—
Duval Perkins	2	0	2	—	—
Steve Miller	2	0	2	1.0-10	1.0-10
Noah Spence	2	0	2	1.0-20	1.0-20
Adolphus Washington	2	0	2	1.0-8	1.0-8
Drew Basil	1	1	2	—	—
Devin Smith	1	1	2	—	—
Najee Murray	2	0	2	—	—
Camren Williams	1	0	1	—	—
Conner Crowell	1	0	1	—	—
TEAM	1	0	1	—	—
Zach Domicone	0	1	1	—	—
Bryce Haynes	1	0	1	—	—
Philly Brown	1	0	1	—	—
J.T. Moore	1	0	1	—	—
Joel Hale	0	1	1	—	—
OSU Totals	171	114	285	16-109	10-96
OPP Totals	160	122	282	20-84	6-41

Fumbles Forced: 1 — Christian Bryant, Etienne Sabino, Ryan Shazier.

Fumbles Recovered: 1 — Doran Grant, Bradley Roby.

OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Herman Shining In Major Role At Ohio State

By ARI WASSERMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Urban Meyer didn't worry about making a big splash when hiring his first offensive coordinator at Ohio State. The head coach opted to bring in a big brain, instead.

By all rights, Tom Herman didn't fit the profile for a job of this magnitude at this point in his career, yet Meyer entrusted him with the installation and guidance of his spread offense and the development of sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller.

The 37-year-old Herman is young, hasn't yet coached in the Football Bowl Subdivision for a decade and wasn't regarded as the kind of offensive guru most programs would go to great lengths to bring onto their staff before he was hired.

The two things Herman does bring – unmatched intelligence and a similar coaching philosophy to Meyer's – trumped any reservations the head coach may have had before bringing him onto his first staff at Ohio State.

Meyer said many people reached out for the job – even multiple so-called big names expressed interest – but it didn't matter.

"Tom Herman has one of the bright young minds in college football," Meyer said in his initial statement regarding Herman's hire. "His philosophies are very similar to those of my own."

Born in Cincinnati, Herman worked at Sam Houston State and Texas State before serving as Rice's offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2007-08, a time during which the Owls won their first bowl game since 1954 and the offense broke more than 50 of the program's offensive records.

Herman quickly moved on to Iowa State for the same position, where he spent the next three years of his career before Meyer called. Herman's background includes the practical experience most would expect, but Meyer wasn't exaggerating when referring to Herman's bright young mind.

Though it hasn't been included on his résumé since he was in his mid-20s, Herman is (or at least was) a member of Mensa, an intellectual society that welcomes people whose IQ is in the top 2 percent of the world.

At the urging of his mother when he was in his early 20s, Herman took the standardized test – a logic test that gauges a person's ability to think critically more than to measure knowledge – and his results exceeded the standards for Mensa's acceptance.

"That's merely a deal that followed me around, I guess, since I put it on my résumé when I was 24 years old," Herman told BSB, as he blushing attempted to brush the topic aside.

"There are coaches in this profession that have forgotten more football than I know. I, by no means, have all the answers but continually am trying to educate myself to get better as a coach, and I think that is what keeps driving me."

Herman has more to learn from Meyer than he'd probably like to talk about, yet he's been given responsibility for calling plays for the Buckeyes' fast-paced, no-huddle offense. He'll use his ability to simultaneously think quickly and critically more now than perhaps he's had to do his entire life.

But it's not just Herman's intellectual nature that made him an ideal candidate for his job. It's that he's completely on the same page with Meyer philosophy-wise, making it easy for the head coach to hand the reins



JOSH WINSLOW

REACHING THE BIG TIME – First-year Ohio State offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Tom Herman (left) is in charge of the development of sophomore QB Braxton Miller (5).

over to the relatively youthful play-caller.

Though the two coaches are still easing into their relationship, especially on game day, Herman passed his first test in a pressure situation during the Buckeyes' 35-28 win over California on Sept. 15.

The Buckeyes were locked in a tie game with less than four minutes remaining, and they faced a third-and-7 from their own 28-yard line. Herman had a matter of seconds to decide whether he'd be aggressive and try to win the game or play it safe and not put the team's defense in a bad situation.

Herman didn't need to think.

"I probably wouldn't be sitting here if I had suggested (playing it safe) to Coach Meyer, knowing his personality," Herman said. "We're going to go get the first down and we're going to win the game on that drive. We have plenty of confidence in Braxton (Miller) and his ability to do that. There was no hesitation on our part whatsoever on what we were going to do."

Miller rolled out of the pocket to his right, drew defenders off their man in coverage by enticing them with his threat to run, and found Devin Smith wide open for a 72-yard score for the game-winning play.

As the 105,000-plus fans in Ohio Stadium erupted after the most crucial play of Ohio State's young season, it didn't matter that most of them had never heard of Herman when Meyer announced his hiring.

Herman had just successfully called the play that won the Buckeyes the game while staying consistent with the way Meyer would have liked to see it attacked, even if the first read wasn't the deep pass to Smith.

The fans, however, may as well not have been there. Though it was certainly a pressure-filled moment, Herman promises exterior expectations or opinions don't resonate with him.

"I don't read them," he said of newspapers and the Internet, "so I wouldn't know."

It doesn't matter that he is leading the offense of one of the most prestigious college football programs in the country during an era when style matters, or that he's responsible for the development of one of the top emerging stars in the nation.

"The most pressure I feel is internally," Herman said, "whether I am the wide receivers coach at Texas Lutheran University, putting my name on a group of wide receivers running out there for a Division III school, or I am the offensive coordinator at Ohio State putting my name on Braxton Miller and an entire offense. All of that is a little bit irrelevant compared to the pride that I have of putting my name on something. It had better be a damn good product."

"That's what continues to drive me. It's not the external (stuff) like the Block 'O,' the scarlet and gray and the 105,000 fans. It's the fact that our name is going on this on every Saturday and you want it to be the best in the country."

Perhaps that play was the first step for Herman in creating a name for himself, much as current Mississippi State head coach Dan Mullen did while a part of Meyer's staff at Bowling Green, Utah and Florida. For now, Meyer is content with the production he's seeing from a person who doesn't quite have a name just yet.

"The key for me was no ego," Meyer said. "Whoever I brought in couldn't have an ego. He had to be aligned with what we were doing, and Tom has done that better than I could have hoped."

Offensive Philosophy

Schematically, Ohio State's offense looks quite a bit different from the attack the Jim Tressel regime employed in the recent past. Herman, however, doesn't like the general term "spread offense."

Though aggressiveness is certainly a trait Meyer and Herman share, the vast difference in the formations the Buckeyes currently use sometimes is nothing more than a facade.

"The one thing that will never change as long as we're here is that we're still going to be a downhill run-oriented team with play-action passes," Herman said. "Running the ball with play-action is our bread and butter. We just kind of do it with a few more bells and whistles and allow the quarterback to be involved in that run game while we do it up-tempo."

"Though it may look different to the naked eye, a lot of the things that go on up front still hold true to the things that have been going on here for the last 50 years."

Herman's offensive mind was molded early in his career while he was working with lesser talent than most of his opponents, thus the reason he referred to his scheme as the "underdog offense."

Often deficient at multiple position groups, Herman's teams found a competitive advantage by spreading the field. If the line was weak, Herman threw it quickly. If the receivers were substandard, he spread the field and ran the ball more, setting up his most talented ball carriers for more room to run.

Now at Ohio State, Herman has been given the gift of having elite talent for the first time in his career. That leaves all options open for his offensive attack – run and pass – thus making the Buckeyes more versatile and tougher to defend.

"The neat part is that both myself and Coach Meyer have always tried to adapt the offense to the personnel that you inherit and then kind of recruit to a philosophy," Herman said. "The core tenets of being spread to do those things and being no-huddle and up-tempo have never changed. It is more about focusing on what we can do well and kind of focusing on that."

Coming Home

Though Herman was born in the state of Ohio and still has family who reside in Cincinnati, he was raised in Simi Valley, Calif.

Herman played wide receiver for California Lutheran, and after he graduated in 1997 with a business administration degree, he realized he wanted to make football his life. He became a graduate assistant at Texas in 1999, and that kicked off a coaching career in that state that lasted until he went to Iowa State 10 years later.

Three years later, Meyer's unexpected call fulfilled a lifelong dream.

"I think I said yes before he got the offer fully out of his mouth," Herman said. "Being from Cincinnati and having my whole family down there and growing up a fan of the Buckeyes, I tell people it took me 30 years to get back to the state of Ohio but I made it and what an unbelievable opportunity to do so at Ohio State with Coach Meyer."

"I pinch myself every day when I wake up to come to work."

OPINION

Ohio State Needs More Than Miller To Succeed

No one at Ohio State wants to become Michigan. And for a change, here's a reason that has nothing to do with the rivalry.

It has to do with rolling up early-season victories built largely on the success of an incredible running quarterback.

THE EXNER POINT

Rich Exner

If depending hugely on a running quarterback is the only way to score points, it should be done. But if that's what is happening, fans should be wary of what awaits down the road in the Big Ten season.

To explain, let's back up to the beginning of the 2010 season and the excitement in Ann Arbor regarding sophomore quarterback Denard Robinson.

Robinson burst onto the national scene by

running for 197 yards in an opening day victory over Connecticut. The next week, he ran for 258 yards as Michigan beat Notre Dame. Next were 104 yards against Massachusetts, 129 against Bowling Green and 217 against Big Ten bottom-feeder Indiana.

The Wolverines started 5-0, largely because of Robinson's running. In just five games, he had 905 yards rushing on 98 carries for an incredible 9.2 yards per carry. He was averaging 181 yards per game.

But then Michigan got into the heart of the Big Ten schedule. All of a sudden, Robinson wasn't three or four steps faster than most of the players on the field. He might still have been the best and fastest player, but the gap closed.

U-M went 2-6 over the final eight games, and while Robinson was still very good (797 yards on 158 carries), he wasn't nearly as dominant as during the start of the season. He averaged 99.6 yards per game and 5.0 yards per carry over the final eight games.

The same repeated itself to some extent last

year during Robinson's junior season. Despite rushing for only 56 yards in the season opener against Western Michigan, he averaged 7.8 yards per carry and 138.0 yards per game as Michigan raced through its nonconference schedule with a 4-0 record.

The rest of the way, the Wolverines did much better than the previous year, winning seven of their final nine games, but it wasn't because Robinson continued his amazing running. He averaged only 4.2 yards per carry and 69.0 yards per game over the final nine games.

Why we bring this up now is what we've witnessed to date from Braxton Miller. His running (441 yards on 67 carries, for averages of 6.6 per carry and 110.3 per game) is a big reason Ohio State swept through the nonconference schedule with a 4-0 record.

And it's also reason for concern.

Miller might be one of the best runners in the Big Ten this season, but the talent gap will close now that OSU is finished with the UABs, Miamis and Central Floridas of the college football world. It's very important that the Buckeyes have a collection of dependable ways to move the football going forward.

Perhaps much of that will come from running backs Jordan Hall (192 yards) and Carlos Hyde (109 yards) once both are healthy at the same time. Maybe a receiver or two – the top candidates are Devin Smith (272 yards on 17 catches) and Corey "Philly" Brown (233 yards on 20 catches) – will become scoring threats on a more regular basis.

But it will take something more than just Miller's running to have a shot at running the table in the Big Ten even in what appears to be a down year for the league.

The defenders will be faster, quicker and smarter than what Miller has seen – and abused – so far.

Long-Strike Potential

Ohio State is just 3 for 17 on third-down plays with 10 or more yards to go so far this season. That is an indication of a lack of a good collection of long-yardage plays.

Against UAB, Ohio State was 0 for 3 in that situation. There was a short pass that was dropped by Zach Boren, a long pass to Smith that fell incomplete and a draw play that lost a yard.

The Buckeyes were 1 for 7 on third-and-long against California, with the lone success being a 35-yard pass to Smith. Against Central Florida, they were 1 for 4, with three incomplete passes – one of which was intercepted – and a successful draw play for 24 yards by Miller.

And in the opener, OSU was 1 for 3 on third-and-long, the conversion being a 44-yard pass to Evan Spencer.

Third-and-10 or more is a difficult situation, but you would expect Ohio State to be better against the competition so far than its 17.6-percent success rate.

Urban Ball

The share of passing plays Ohio State has run this year follows a pattern established by Urban Meyer when he broke into coaching 11 years ago at Bowling Green. And it hasn't varied much over the coach's career, according to an interesting analysis by The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer's Doug Lesmerises.

According to Lesmerises, Meyers' teams averaged:

- 18, 19 or 20 completions per game each season with the exception of one. The outlier was 2008 at Florida, when the Gators averaged just 15 completions per game.

- 27 to 33 passes a game, with the exception of just 24 in 2008.

- 214 yards to 264 yards per game, with the exception of 2010, when his Florida team averaged just 184 yards passing.

Why that is interesting is this year's numbers by Ohio State. They fall near Meyer's historical form, and they will probably edge closer into alignment once the competition stiffens and the Buckeyes have to pass more. Through four games, Ohio State has averaged 16 completions on 26 passes for 198 yards per game.

Outstanding Play

On the good side in the victory over UAB, senior defensive lineman John Simon played a monster of a game. The record book said he had four tackles and one pass broken up, but the printed record reflected just part of the story. Simon was a dominating force in the UAB backfield much of the afternoon, causing havoc even when he wasn't making the tackles.

On the bad side, junior Christian Bryant made a boneheaded play, getting flagged for taunting after Ohio State had stopped UAB on a key fourth-quarter drive when the lead was just six points. The Buckeyes had stopped the Blazers, but Bryant's penalty kept the drive alive.

Ohio State later stopped UAB a second time, but the Buckeyes might not be so lucky against a better opponent.

Ugly Wins Are Still Wins

The first four games weren't the type that will cause fans to scramble to copy DVDs to permanently record the performances for future viewing.

But they were wins. It took just moments after the UAB-OSU game for a reminder.

The Big Ten Network switched its Ohio telecast to the closing minutes of the Iowa-Central Michigan game. And fans who stayed tuned for a few minutes witnessed the Chippewas taking a 32-31 win on a field goal in the last few seconds.

Iowa players and coaches walked off their home field losers to a Mid-American Conference team.

Taking The Easy Way

It's interesting that Notre Dame took the easy route in selecting a conference affiliation for football. The Fighting Irish will not be playing for the Atlantic Coast Conference championship, but the arrangement calls for them to play five ACC opponents each season.

Notre Dame won't have to go through a full conference schedule, and in choosing a partial affiliation with the ACC, it is staying clear of the better conferences in college football, including the SEC, Pac-12 and Big Ten. All would have presented ND with a more difficult challenge, higher exposure and likely more revenue.

But the ACC option gives Notre Dame a better chance to win more games.

That is a reminder of the days some time ago when there were three strong Division I football programs in Florida – Miami (Fla.), Florida State and Florida.

Florida was a longtime member of the SEC, but when Miami and Florida State decided to forgo their independent status, they didn't force their way into the SEC. They didn't even join the same conference. Miami hooked up with the Big East – though it ultimately joined the ACC in 2004 – and Florida State went to the ACC.

The result was that none of the three schools had to compete against one another for a conference title.

Ohio State Fans!

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OPINION

Work Left For Meyer As Big Ten Play Arrives

As the Ohio State football team headed into its final nonconference tune-up with UAB in Ohio Stadium on Sept. 22, I was fairly optimistic about the Buckeyes' prospects for the 2012 season. I know that in this space in the last issue I lamented what I perceived as a failure to improve by the team over the first three weeks. But I still felt I had seen the Buckeyes display enough tools in those three games that a solid season was a distinct possibility.

I was actually more struck by what I saw as a surprising malaise among Buckeye fans than I was inconsistent play by the football team. The Buckeyes' 3-0 record seemed to offer little solace to many of the team's backers, some of whom clearly figured that new head coach Urban Meyer was going to immediately turn a 6-7 team from a year ago into a national juggernaut.

Those same fans are finally realizing that while Meyer may be arguably the best college football coach in the country, he is not a magician.

While I accept the fact he is not a miracle worker, I am now a little more concerned about the potential plight of the Buckeyes as they enter Big Ten play. UAB is a team that had racked up a stunning number of poor rankings in myriad national offensive and defensive categories.

I worry that the Buckeyes, on both sides of the ball, are falling into the habit of assuming they will be able to simply turn on a switch when necessary to win games.

Much was made after the UAB game of the fact that the Ohio State defense did not allow a touchdown and allowed the Blazers into the red zone only once. That's good. Football is still about scoring more points than your opponent, and no style points are awarded in the sport.

But pointing to the lack of UAB scoring glosses over the fact that a team ranked 85th in the country in total offense and 108th in scoring offense had marched up and down the field for 403 yards and held the ball for nearly 34 minutes against Ohio State.

Yes, the Buckeyes allowed only 15 points, six of which were scored on a special teams blunder. And as seems to be the case every week, an OSU defender came up with a late interception to kill the will of the opposition – this time by Doran Grant with less than five minutes to play.

But if the Blazers could move the ball that easily, you really have to wonder what a good Big Ten offense will do against the Buckeyes. In the first four games, the Ohio State defense has drawn up a primer for Big Ten coaches to use in scheming how to beat the Buckeyes.

Perhaps, more importantly, as opposing offensive players watch film of the games, they are bound to develop confidence that they can move the ball against the Buckeyes. What happened to the days when teams were intimidated when they prepared to face the Silver Bullets?

Yet for all the defense's foibles, I almost find the offense more maddening. For every stunningly well-executed drive, it seems like there are two or three three-and-outs. The Buckeyes had five such aborted drives against UAB after six against Cal the week before.

Quarterback Braxton Miller shows again and again the magic he can work with the football in his hands – running or passing. The continued improvement of tailback Jordan Hall in his second game back after foot surgery, coupled with the anticipated

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

return of Carlos Hyde and the fumble-free performance by Rod Smith, should take pressure off Miller to generate the bulk of the team's ground yardage. And receivers Corey "Philly" Brown, Devin Smith and Jake Stoneburner have all demonstrated big-play capabilities.

So why does the offense come to a complete halt so often?

Some of it might have to do with Miller himself. I consider him about the equivalent of a redshirt freshman, not the sophomore he is class-wise. Sure he played extensively last season, but I'm not sure how much coaching he got – picture him sitting alone on the bench with no headphones on – and he all but started from scratch when Meyer arrived with his new system.

Maybe, despite all his talent, Miller doesn't yet have the maturity to lead a team at maximum level for an entire 60 minutes. Ditto the revamped offensive line that helped Hall run for 105 yards on 17 carries but was unable to dominate the Blazers at other times during the game.

Meyer appears to be a master motivator and an offensive guru, but it's time for him to ramp up his ball-movers. Because while many thought the defense would have to carry the offense – at least initially – while Meyer installed his new system, now it looks like the offense is going to have to carry the defense.

Throw in special teams, another of Meyer's pet projects, and it's all kind of a mess.

Are the glimpses of greatness we see a solid sign for this season, or is the promise of the Meyer era still a ways away?

Quick Takes

- I continue to be amazed by the moves that Miller makes. Watch his feet. That can't be taught. That's a gift.

- I also think the sophomore QB executes his fakes on the option and other plays well. Opposing defenses have to account for Miller at all times, and his deception is only going to make the other backs more successful.

- As I speak to Buckeye fans, I am asked about Rod Smith almost as much as any other player. There are a lot of you out there who believe he has the talent to be the next great running back at Ohio State, which is possibly true. Unfortunately, no coach wants to play a running back who fumbles. Future Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George found himself on the outside looking in for nearly two years after a bout with the dropsies as a freshman.

Thus, the fact that Smith held onto the ball against the Blazers is almost as significant as his 24 yards on six carries with a touchdown. That should give the coaches more confidence to play Smith, and the staff and fans will get a chance to see what he can do.

Hall seems to have locked down the starting role. I will be curious to see how Smith and Hyde are used once Hyde returns from his knee injury.

- With the Ohio State defense struggling and defensive backs Bradley Roby and C.J. Barnett already out with injuries, fans and coaches alike had to be holding their collective breath as three of the team's top defenders – Johnathan Hankins, Ryan Shazier and Nathan Williams – each went to the turf with

possible injuries against UAB. Fortunately, all three seemed to be OK as the defense needs all the help it can muster.

Trying To Compare Apples

The personnel on the Ohio State defense this season is very similar to the personnel from last year – a group that finished a respectable 19th in total defense and 27th in scoring defense nationally but was not up to the standards of Buckeye defenses of recent years.

The main pieces missing from last year's unit would appear to be linebacker Andrew Sweat, lineman Adam Bellamy and a couple of coaches, including coordinator Jim Heacock.

So, after four games, how does this year's Ohio State defense compare with last year's in terms of numbers? Not so well.

Not surprisingly, the 2012 defense, which hangs its hat on not allowing opponents points, is only slightly behind in scoring defense, allowing 17.3 points through four games to 15.8 last year.

The yardage figures are another matter, however.

The current Buckeyes are yielding 277.3 yards passing and 117.5 yards rushing per game on average as opposed to 177.0 passing and 99.2 rushing yielded by the 2011 squad. That works out to 394.8 yards of total defense this year to 276.2 a year ago at this time.

Also not surprisingly, this year's opportunistic defense is actually doing better in turnovers with nine as opposed to six at this time last year. However the 2011 group allowed opponents to convert on just 29.8 percent of their third-down opportunities, while the current group is yielding first downs at a 37.9-percent clip. The teams were equal with 10 sacks each after four games.

The 2011 nonconference schedule of Akron, Toledo, Miami (Fla.) and Colorado was at least comparable to the 2012 non-league slate.

2002 Parallels? Hopefully!

If you are following our 10th anniversary recollection of the 2002 national championship season, you know that we are up to Ohio State's narrow 23-19 victory over Cincinnati in Paul Brown Stadium in the fourth game of the season.

At that point, despite Ohio State being 4-0, I suspect that only a few Buckeye fans could predict what was in store the rest of the way in that magical season. As I looked back at our coverage, I was surprisingly optimistic after the loss.

"I'm not going to attempt to make excuses for the play of the Ohio State football team against Cincinnati," I wrote in this space for the Sept. 28, 2002, issue of BSB.

"Let's just say that in virtually every championship season there is a game that the future champions probably should have lost but didn't. Victories all count the same, so the Buckeyes and their fans are going to have to just take this one and hope that it is an aberration, not a sign of things to come."

Interestingly, the Cincinnati game was not necessarily an aberration as there were a couple more games that season that the Buckeyes could also have lost, including the national

championship game. But they rolled on to the school's first national crown in 34 years.

Fast-forward to 2012.

While we know there is no national championship in store for this edition of the Buckeyes, will the current team shake off the sluggish performance it turned in against UAB and turn in another stellar season? Buckeye fans can only hope.

A couple of interesting tidbits from that win over the Bearcats.

The Buckeyes played the game without freshman sensation Maurice Clarett, who had played most of the previous game, an impressive win over highly-ranked Washington State, with a knee injury severe enough that it required arthroscopic surgery. Despite that injury, Clarett had rushed for 230 yards against the Cougars. When it was revealed he had turned in that near record-breaking performance on a bad wheel, it only added to his rapidly growing legend.

For those who wanted to point to Clarett's absence as a reason for the Buckeyes' troubles with UC, it should be noted that Lydell Ross turned in a solid performance in Clarett's place, gaining 130 yards on 23 carries.

There was also a very significant development with regard to Ohio State's march to the national title in this game.

It was the first game in which sophomore Chris Gamble, who entered the contest tied for the team lead with nine receptions from his wide receiver spot, made an impact in the defensive secondary. With the Buckeyes trailing by a 19-17 score in the fourth quarter, UC drove all the way to the OSU 13 before Gamble, who had three catches for 26 yards in the game, picked off a pass in the end zone to snuff the drive and give the Buckeyes a shot at victory.

"We have our receivers do a little bit of coverage in our one-on-one drills and so forth, and we felt since last spring that one of the best cover guys on the field was Chris Gamble," OSU head coach Jim Tressel said after the game.

"We didn't have time to teach him all the formations and checks and so forth," Tressel explained. But he said the coaches were looking for a spot where Gamble could simply play man defense and the strategy worked.

"People like to throw the fade and he's a guy who can break on the ball," the coach said. "He came up with a huge play."

The game story from the 2002 game with Cincinnati can be found on pages 34-35 of this issue. For Tressel's complete comments, my column, a statistical package from the game and more, check out our Sept. 28 electronic issue, available free to all current BSB print subscribers. If you are not enjoying our 36 additional electronic issues, see the instructions on page 5.

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