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Vol. 32, No. 1

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 8, 2012

Meyer Era Off To Good Start

Buckeyes Thump Miami For Coach's First OSU Victory

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

A total of 105,039 fans showed up at Ohio Stadium and millions more at home tuned in to the Big Ten Network broadcast expecting to see the Urban Meyer era officially begin at Ohio State just after noon Sept. 1.

The 18th-ranked Buckeyes prevailed 56-10 against over-matched Miami (Ohio), but the exact time Meyer's program truly seemed to arrive remained open to debate as fans shuffled out of the stadium back to their cars, homes and tailgate parties.

Was it before the game when the team gathered in the south end zone to do a few quick calisthenics with the students in Block "O"?

How about the first touchdown of the game, an amazing one-handed grab by sophomore wide receiver Devin Smith early in the second quarter?

Then again, it could easily be considered Braxton Miller's dazzling 65-yard touchdown run to open the third quarter. The sophomore quarterback faked an inside handoff then ran around left end on an option keeper that showcased his speed and his feet with a nifty stutter step that kept the last pursuing RedHawk defender at bay long enough for Miller to scamper into the end zone.

A score coming on such a signature play of Meyer's ballyhooed spread offense seems like a great place to call the Ohio native's tenure officially on, but he sounded as if he had his own preference.

For Meyer, it just might have been the end of the third quarter.

By then, of course, the new Buckeye machine was really humming.

Miller had accounted for three touchdowns including his long jaunt and a 5-yard scoring toss to wideout Corey "Philly" Brown less than three minutes after his connection with Smith.

The running game had piled up 214 yards, and the 207 yards



KEVIN DYE

GETTING STARTED – New Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer (center) leads the Buckeyes onto the field before their Sept. 1 game against Miami (Ohio). The Buckeyes cruised to a 56-10 victory at Ohio Stadium.

gained through the air represented the type of balance Meyer has said he craves from his attack.

With six catches, Brown was already nearly halfway to the mark of 14 receptions that three players logged to lead the team through all of last season, and running back Carlos Hyde was proving a solid counterpunch to the dynamic Miller with 74 yards rushing on 16 carries.

The defense, much like the offense, had shaken off a sluggish first quarter and taken hold of the Miami passing game and seemed to be in control as well.

Forget all that, though.

Meyer's focus was back on the South Stands, where the Ohio State University Marching Band was about to reprise an age-old tradition of ringing in the last quarter of play with the state's official rock song, "Hang On Sloopy."

"The day overall, it was a great day," Meyer said. "Hang on Sloopy" kicked it off in the fourth quarter. I stared at that for a while, watched it. I told a couple of people that I've never seen that before. I checked that out.

"I was just a little disappointed in the first quarter, but after that, what a great day. We enjoy a win. We all know it's difficult to win in major-college football. Now we've got one and now we get ready for next week."

Hearing a college football coach turn the page so quickly after an emotional day came as no surprise, but there was plenty to look back on as the victory bell chimed in the southeast tower of the old stadium by the Olentangy River.

Something For Everyone

Meyer's debut as head coach of the team he grew up cheering for in Ashtabula, Ohio, and for which he was a

graduate assistant in the mid-1980s had a little bit of everything.

The Buckeyes lit up the scoreboard with 56 points, their most since a 73-20 defeat of Eastern Michigan on Sept. 25, 2010. They last eclipsed 50 points in a season opener in 1996 with a 70-7 win over visiting Rice.

Seven players had carries, including a quarterback running wild, a signature of the Meyer spread-option offense. Miller set an Ohio State single-game QB record with 161 yards rushing and added 207 through the air to finish with the sixth-most total yards in a game in school history.

Seven players caught passes, too, including a fullback (Zach Boren), four wide receivers (Brown, Smith, Evan Spencer and Verlon Reed), a tight end (Nick Vannett) and a player who is a little bit of both of the latter two (Jake Stoneburner).

Ohio State gained 538 total yards and won the turnover battle (3-0), and the special teams checked in with a score as Bradley Roby recovered a muffed punt snap in the end zone for a touchdown.

There were a few negative notes, of course, as Meyer saw one of the four prongs of his "Plan to Win" (Play great defense, win the turnover battle, win the kicking game and score in the red zone) fall short with a failed attempt to power the ball in from the 1-yard line at the end of the second quarter.

The stop unit was not great, either, as it gave up 313 yards passing and 10 points, although the RedHawks converted

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Charter Member

OPINION

Work Left To Do After Decent Start For OSU

Ohio State fans in attendance at Ohio Stadium as well as those tuned in around the world on the Big Ten Network hoped they would be among the first to witness Urban Meyer's sleek new Ferrari-type offense in the 2012 season opener against Miami (Ohio).

What they saw instead was the same kind of steamroller the Buckeyes have been accustomed to using against lesser opponents for the better part of the last century.

Despite anticipation to the contrary, Meyer has never intimidated that his version of the spread offense resembles a pass-happy, basketball-on-grass type of attack. In fact, the head coach blanches at such comparisons. Therefore, the approach that piled up 56 points and 538 total yards – most of that coming in the final three quarters – was about what Meyer wants it to be. In other words, a game plan that features running the ball about 60 percent of the time.

In addition to resembling many OSU teams of the past, the Buckeyes really didn't put on the kind of show one typically associates with a 56-10 win. To be brutally honest, I wouldn't give Ohio State a much better overall grade than B-minus for its performance against the RedHawks.

The first quarter was especially troubling, so much so that Meyer called it embarrassing. After the opening period, Miami enjoyed a lopsided 17-24 advantage in total yardage, and had his receivers been able to help in even the slightest way, QB Zac Dysert would likely have staked his team to a 14-0 lead.

The Buckeyes might well have shifted gears from that point as they did from a much-smaller 3-0 deficit. But being down by two touchdowns at home to a 24-point underdog – especially for a team coming off a 6-7 season – would have at the very least caused some dry throats on the west sideline.

For all of the offseason pronouncements that he is improving as a passer, there were times when Braxton Miller didn't show it. You could argue that as overly harsh in light of a 14-for-24 performance that was worth 207 yards, two touchdowns and no interceptions. But there were times when the QB flat out missed open receivers and other times when his targets bailed him out with circus catches.

I can couch my criticism of Miller with the fact he remains only a sophomore still with fewer than a dozen college starts under his belt. But his athleticism is so off-the-charts that he is expected to throw the ball better than he does at times. Unfortunately, he remains very much a work in progress in that area.

Miller needs no such improvement with his running game, however, and the effortless move he made on Miami cornerback D.J. Jones was a gear-shift torn from the Walter Payton playbook. I seriously doubt Meyer wants his quarterback to run the ball 17 times every game, however, and the coach said as much after the game.

The play of the offensive line was steady but uninspiring. Again, with the promise that Meyer brought to the program, the thought was that the OL would be a streamlined, attacking type of unit. What the line showed against a smaller Miami defense was a mixed bag that included some good, some bad and some downright ugly.

Defensively, the Buckeyes seemed to play well up front despite getting to Dysert only twice. There was the fact that OSU held Miami to minus-1 yards in the rushing game, but the RedHawks can't run the ball on any-

one. They were dead last in the nation in that department last year for a reason.

Play from the Ohio State linebackers appeared to be a little uneven, and the Miami receivers created much more separation than should ever happen to a Big Ten secondary against MAC players. Had several catchable balls not been dropped, Dysert would have far exceeded an afternoon that still managed to produce 303 yards through the air.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

I know what you're thinking. You're wondering if I was watching the same game as you. After all, Ohio State did score eight touchdowns and beat its opponent into submission by 46 points.

All true, of course. But the blowout was accomplished against a team from a mid-major conference, a team coming off a 4-8 season that is picked to finish no higher than third in its division this year. It was accomplished against a one-dimensional team that is not nearly the competitive equal of Ohio State.

Yet for all of my criticism, there was plenty to praise. Miller is only going to get better at throwing the ball. The offensive line will likely begin to become a more cohesive unit. The offense should become more diverse when Jordan Hall returns. The defensive line is already among the best in the nation, and the linebackers are improving. So, too, is a veteran secondary that is intent on creating more turnovers this year. Travis Howard's two picks of Dysert is proof of that.

And perhaps best of all, solid play on special teams seems to have returned after a long hiatus. Bradley Roby recovered a mishandled punt snap to score a touchdown, Drew Basil was perfect on eight PATs, Ben Buchanan handled his new directional punting chores and still averaged 42.1 yards on seven attempts, and the Buckeyes held Miami to an average of only 18.5 yards on four kickoff returns.

All in all, it was a decent start – the kind of game a new coaching staff can use as a motivational teaching aid for any team beginning to believe the hard work is over when it has only just begun.

A Few Other Observations

- You can close the 2012 nominations for reception of the year following Devin Smith's acrobatic touchdown catch early in the second quarter. I saw the catch live and have watched it replayed about a dozen times, and I'm still not sure I believe what I saw.

Smith was fighting off pretty good coverage from Miami cornerback Dayonne Nunley when the OSU sophomore suddenly left his feet and speared Miller's pass out of the air with his right hand. In the blink of an eye, Smith pulled the ball to his body as he twisted in midair before falling to the turf just inside the back of the end zone.

I can think of only three catches that even come close to Smith's, and each of them occurred in the NFL – Pittsburgh Steelers receiver Lynn Swann's catch as he fell to the ground in Super Bowl X, San Francisco tight end Dwight Clark's leaping TD catch during the 1982 NFC Championship Game and New York Giants receiver David Tyree's

grab against his helmet in Super Bowl XLIII.

All three catches were spectacular in their own right, but I think Smith's grab might top them all.

- When Zach Boren scored his first career rushing touchdown in the fourth quarter against Miami, it broke an unusual scoring drought for Ohio State fullbacks.

The last time an OSU fullback ran for a touchdown was Brandon Schnitker, who scored on a 1-yard run during the 2005 season opener, a 34-14 win over the RedHawks. But even that TD is disputed by some who believe Schnitker was technically running out of the tailback spot when he scored. If that is true, you have to go back one more year to 2004 when Branden Joe scored on a 4-yard run during a 21-10 win over Penn State.

Either way, it's been a long, long time since an Ohio State fullback toted the pigskin across the goal line – much too long for a school that produced the likes of Bob Ferguson, Jim Otis and Pete Johnson.

- There is no doubt Meyer takes a much different approach to managing a game than his predecessor, and never was that more evident than at the end of the first and second halves.

Faced with first-and-goal at the Miami 3 with three seconds left in the first half, Meyer elected to go for the touchdown. Does anyone believe Jim Tressel would have done anything but kick a field goal in that situation? Then, with the game well in hand, his team with a first-and-goal at the Miami 4 and the clock winding under a minute, Meyer kept calling plays when Tressel would likely have had his team in a victory formation, taking two kneel-downs.

I'm not saying which approach I prefer. I'm merely pointing out there is a new sheriff in town – as if anyone hadn't noticed already.

Sometimes I Forget

Attending an Ohio State football game long ago became much more vocation than avocation for me. That will happen when you have covered the team as long as I have and attended as many games as I have – somewhere north of 250 and counting.

Every once in a while, though, something unusual occurs to knock some of the crust off my jaded exterior. This year, it was the reaction of my father-in-law when my wife gave him OSU-Miami tickets for his birthday.

My father-in-law isn't one to show much outward emotion. Some of that probably comes from being a Marine; some of it might come from playing football at Miami under Ara Parseghian. But the twinkle in his eye and the slight quiver in his voice when talking about attending the game with his daughter made me realize – again – what college football is really about.

The fact that my father-in-law is a proud Miami grad, and his alma mater was taken to the woodshed by the Buckeyes, seemed to matter very little to him. During his visit to the Horseshoe, he reconnected with old friends he happened into at a tailgate party, called plays from his seat in B-deck and bonded with some 105,000 other souls in memories that I daresay will last him the rest of his years.

That is the essence of college football in general and Ohio State football in particular. Some liken it to a religion, but it's more than that to a lot of people. Much more.

Sometimes I tend to forget that, but it's always nice to be reminded.

COVER STORY

Long Offseason Ends For Ohio State, Meyer

Continued From Page 1

only 5 of 19 third-down opportunities and scored only one of the two times they were inside the Ohio State 20-yard line.

Overall, there was much more to smile about than frown for many on the Ohio State sideline.

Maybe none had more to be personally happy about than Boren, who not only logged the second and third carries of his career but also picked up his first rushing touchdown on a 2-yard run in the fourth quarter.

"It has been a long time coming, but congrats to Coach Meyer," said Boren, a senior captain who spent the past three years doing little more than opening holes for more bally-hooded teammates. "He's put in a lot of work the past seven or eight months. It is kind of his time to come out and lead the troops. I think he did a great job of that. The coaching was great, but at the same time it was fun for me to get in there and do something new instead of dirtying my nose a little bit."

Meyer seemed to want to deflect the attention from himself, but there was no getting around how much a part of the story he was.

After a year away from coaching, he returned to take over an Ohio State program still reeling from months and months in the crosshairs of the NCAA for multiple

violations that happened under the watch of former head coach Jim Tressel.

The last shot came in December – about a month after Meyer's hiring – when it was learned the governing body of college sports had banned the Buckeyes from postseason play for the 2012 season, but since then the focus has been on football.

First there were countless hours in the weight room as a new strength and conditioning staff put the players through grueling workouts that would have many showing up for spring practice in noticeably better shape than when they were last seen at the Gator Bowl in Jacksonville, Fla., on Jan. 2.

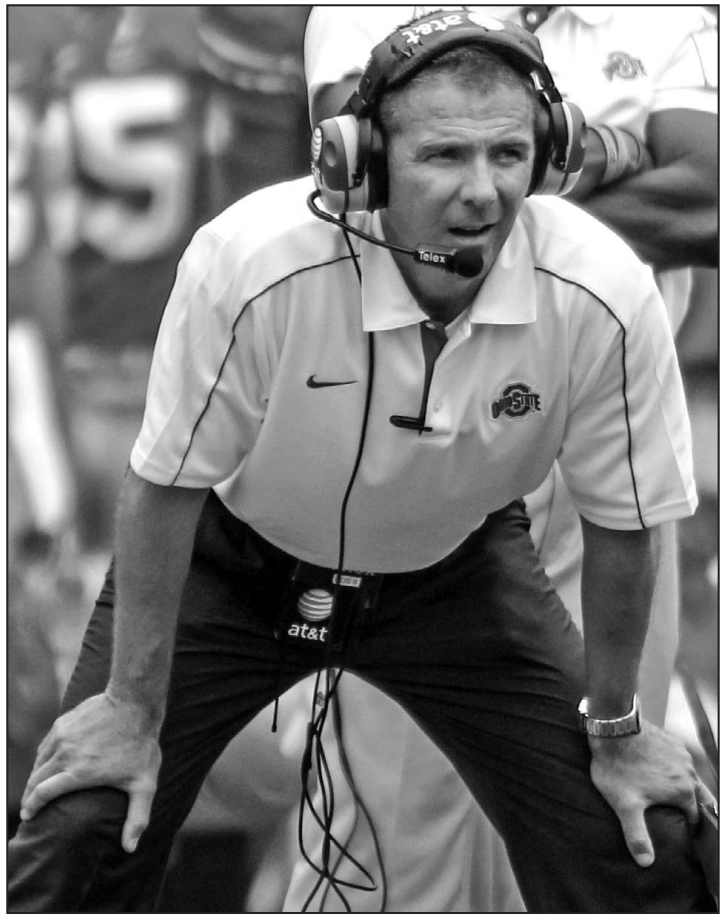
Then came spring practice, 15 days to install Meyer's offense and instill the entire roster with a competitive spirit to match that of the fiery new head coach and his group of intense assistants.

After a summer back at the grind in the weight room, there was a harrowing training camp and 29 more practices to hone the new attack and mentality Meyer wanted.

That all led to the opener, an overcast, 82-degree day in Columbus that featured enough humidity to drench fans and players alike in sweat before opening kickoff arrived at 12:04 p.m.

Despite the weather, Meyer insisted he was able to keep his cool as his debut approached.

The coach notorious for driving himself



JOSH WINSLOW

THAT'S ONE – Urban Meyer led the Buckeyes to a 56-10 win against Miami (Ohio) in his first game as head coach at Ohio State.

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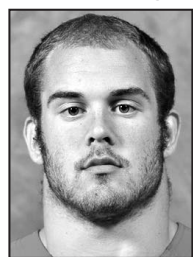
over the edge with pressure to succeed in his previous stop at Florida said he slept well the night before, though he explained there was good reason to be able to relax.

"I like this team — I like these guys," he said. "When you feel like that, you sleep pretty well. I was anxious for the day. I was glad the fans enjoyed a decent day."

"I was worried about the weather and how we would adjust to weather issues. I just wanted it to be a good day for Ohio State football. And I believe it was."

For their part, players saw little out of the ordinary.

"He was pretty calm, didn't really say much before the game," said Boren, who



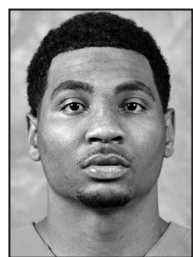
Zach Boren

noted that Meyer let the players take the lead when they performed their typical gameday ritual of walking from the team hotel to St. John Arena for Skull Session, a pregame performance by the marching band.

"He was looking around a little bit, having us lead the way because he didn't know the ins and outs of it," Boren said. "Coach Meyer has been in a lot of big games before, and I know this means a lot because he's the head football coach at Ohio State and it's been his dream, but Coach Meyer was dialed in all day."

That remained true even as the offense sputtered early.

"He was trying to get us in that rhythm, trying to put us in different formations to try to get us through that defense,"



Braxton Miller

Boren said. "They had a great game plan for us to try to take us out of the basic stuff. We were having trouble at first, but Coach Meyer seemed calm and knew we would pull through. I think he was pretty satisfied with the outcome."

Meyer credited Miller, the laidback sophomore in his second season as a starter, for helping him keep his cool. That represented a notable reversal from the offseason when Meyer made it clear he wanted to see more fire and forcefulness from his quarterback.

"I was just trying to fix the problem instead of whining or complaining or screaming," Meyer said. "We don't do that. Just figure out what exactly is happening. If I thought it was because they weren't playing hard, then there's a lot of screaming and throwing things and everything else."

Roby said Meyer told the team to make the game one to remember, and the players resolved not to let the new era start on a losing note.

He also described Meyer as kickoff approached as a kid on Christmas.

"He was soaking it all in, but at the same time he wanted that gift, and that was that win," Roby said. "He wanted to win big and that's how he wants to win every game. I was glad to be with Coach Meyer. It was just overall a good day."

A Mix Of New And Old

From the beginning, the day had a different feel from the previous 11 seasons

under Tressel and Luke Fickell, who served as interim head coach of the Buckeyes in 2011.

The team eschewed the "hive" entrance it had used under Tressel in which the players gathered at the eastern edge of the south end zone, locked arms and walked slowly to the middle of the end zone before swaying back and forth in unison then taking the field en masse as AC/DC's "Hell's Bells" played over the stadium sound system.

Instead, this time they huddled in the middle of the end zone briefly before spreading out to their various position groups.

When warmups were over, they took part in a new practice Meyer has dubbed "quick cal's," short for calisthenics.

The players gathered at midfield then sprinted to the south end zone, where students who had been primed by a video of Meyer sent to them via email mimicked the players as they raised their arms, grunted and clapped at the direction of director of strength and conditioning Mickey Marotti.

"It's fun," Boren said. "It gets everyone involved. The student section was great today. The whole student section was doing it, and hopefully we'll get the whole stadium doing it at some point."

"They brought their own traditions to Ohio State but it's new coaches, a new era and we're excited. There's some stuff that we don't do now that we did in the past, but there is some stuff that's still the same."

Indeed, there were plenty of familiar practices.

The walk from the team hotel with the stop at Skull Session remained, as did the postgame practice of gathering again in the south end zone to sing the alma mater, "Carmen Ohio," with the band and fans. That was a tradition instituted by Tressel during his first season, 2001.

"The 'quick cal's' are a cool little deal that he has for us," Smith said. "I thought it was great, him throwing out the information for the students to do that with us. I'm looking forward to the rest of the season and when we do that."

Players appreciated the addition of Meyer's methods and the maintenance of some from the past.

"It was a nice mixture," said Roby, a third-year sophomore cornerback who spent one season under Tressel and one under Fickell before Meyer's arrival. "It wasn't the same thing we've always done but he didn't want to get rid of everything because it would be a totally different atmosphere. We went to Skull Session and did the walk and stayed at the Blackwell (Hotel). I feel like he wanted to keep that because he's an Ohio State fan himself so he didn't want to get rid of everything."

As his first postgame interview as head coach of the Buckeyes wound down, Meyer was asked if he felt particularly good soaking in the alma mater with his new team.

He responded affirmatively but also pointed out that such a feeling was not unique to that moment. All nine months on the job have been enjoyable for the born-and-bred Buckeye back home after many years away.

"It's a great moment," he said. "I'm with a bunch of guys I care about. I love our players."

"There's a lot of guys on this team I have a lot of respect for. And singing the alma mater, I'm a graduate, and the fight song, that was a special moment. And we got to sing the fight song in the locker room as well."

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 56, Miami (Ohio) 10

Sept. 1, 2012 — Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4		F
Miami (Ohio)	3	0	7	0	—	10
Ohio State	0	21	14	21	—	56

First Quarter

MU — Patterson, 22 yard field goal, 5:06; 6 plays, 64 yards, 1:23 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU — D.Smith, 23 yard catch from B.Miller (Basil kick), 13:49; 4 plays, 83 yards, 1:03 TOP.

OSU — P.Brown, 5 yard catch from B.Miller (Basil kick), 11:03; 7 plays, 57 yards, 2:22 TOP.

OSU — Hyde, 4 yard run (Basil kick), 5:17; 9 plays, 73 yards, 3:57 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU — B.Miller, 65 yard run (Basil kick), 14:43; 1 play, 65 yards, 0:17 TOP.

MU — Roby, 1 yard fumble recovery (Basil kick), 12:41.

MU — Harwell, 44 yard pass from Dysert (Patterson kick), 10:24; 7 plays, 73 yards, 2:12 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU — Hyde, 8 yard rush (Basil kick), 14:04; 1 play, 8 yards, 0:05 TOP.

OSU — Z.Boren, 2 yard run (Basil kick), 9:33; 8 plays, 41 yards, 2:46 TOP.

OSU — Dunn, 4 yard run (Basil kick), 0:44; 14 plays, 68 yards, 6:15 TOP.

Att. — 105,039.

Weather — 82 degrees, partly cloudy; wind, SE 7 mph.

Team Statistics

	MU	OSU
First Downs	12	27
Rushing	1	15
Passing	10	11
Penalty	1	1
Rushing-Yards	20-(-1)	53-294
Passing Yards	313	244
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.-TD)	32-54-2	19-33-0
Offensive Plays	74	86
Total Net Yards	312	538
Third Down Efficiency	5-19	9-17
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-2	1-1
Punts-Avg.	9-37.1	7-42.1
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	2-0
Penalties	6-33	3-20
Time of Possession	28:34	31:26

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — MU: Ju.Semmes 5-13; Rob.Williams 3-10; Westbrook 4-7; D.Scott 1-4; Treadwell 2-4; A.Boucher 2-(-8); Dysert 2-(-14). OSU: B.Miller 17-161; Hyde 17-82; Dunn 7-31; R.Smith 3-16; Guiton 5-14; Z.Boren 2-10; D.Smith 1-2.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — MU: Dysert 31-53-2-303-1; A.Boucher 1-1-0-10-0. OSU: B.Miller 14-24-0-207-2; Guiton 5-9-0-37-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — MU: Harwell 8-120; Cruse 8-48; D.Scott 5-87; Westbrook 4-19; D.Frazier 2-15; Rob.Williams 2-7; Ju.Semmes 1-10; David 1-4; Marck 1-3. OSU: P.Brown 7-87; Spencer 3-54; D.Smith 2-31; Stoneburner 2-28; Z.Boren 2-18; Vannett 2-13; Reed 2-13.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) — MU: Murphy 9-37.1-51. OSU: Buchanan 7-42.1-52.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — MU: None. OSU: P.Brown 2-10; D.Smith 1-(-2).

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) — MU: D.Scott 4-74; Payne 1-18. OSU: Reeves 2-45.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) — MU: None. OSU: Roby 1-1.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) — MU: None. OSU: Howard 2-17.

SACKS — MU: TEAM 1.0-12; Wamulumba 1.0-6; Kern 0.5-2; Kelly 0.5-2. OSU: Spence 1.0-20; Washington 1.0-8.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) — MU: TEAM 1.0-12; Wamulumba 1.0-6; Burris 1.0-3; W.Williams 1.0-3; Johns 1.0-2; Swanson 1.0-2; Kern 0.5-2; Kelly 0.5-2. OSU: Spence 1.0-20; Washington 1.0-8.

TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.) — MU: Burris 6-1-7; Hinkel 4-3-7; D.J.Brown 3-4-7; Dooley 5-1-6; Nunley 4-1-5; W.Williams 3-2-5; Taylor 3-1-4; Ju.Semmes 1-3-4; Kern 1-3-4; Wade 2-1-3; Johns 2-1-3; Dupuy 2-1-3; C.Boucher 2-1-3; Kelly 1-2-3; Swanson 1-2-3; Wamulumba 2-0-2; Bowers 2-0-2; DeLeon 0-2-2; Taylor 0-2-2; D.Scott 1-0-1; Becks 1-0-1; Albright 1-0-1; Zulantz 1-0-1; Ju.Semmes 1-0-1; TEAM 1-0-1; A.Brown 0-1-1. OSU: Shazier 7-2-9; Roby 4-2-6; Sabino 4-1-5; Bryant 3-2-5; Schutt 2-1-3; C.Brown 2-1-3; Simon 1-2-3; C.Grant 0-3-3; N.Williams 2-0-2; Griffin 2-0-2; Washington 2-0-2; D.Grant 2-0-2; Murray 2-0-2; Barnett 1-1-2; Perry 1-1-2; Hanks 0-2-2; S.Miller 1-0-1; Marcus 1-0-1; Spence 1-0-1; Moore 1-0-1; Crowell 1-0-1; Cataline 1-0-1; Goebel 0-1-1; O.Johnson 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME — **MIAMI (OHIO):** Offense, D.Scott, Lewis, Matthews, Bednar, Cook, Harvey, White, Dysert, Harwell, Cruse, Ju.Semmes, Patterson. Defense, W.Williams, A.Brown, Johns, Ju.Semmes, Wade, Swanson, Hinkel, Dupuy, Bowers, D.J.Brown, Nunley, Murphy, Reserves, Bey, Westbrook, Krontz, Culpepper, Turvy, A.Boucher, David, Tylar, Treadwell, Payne, Taylor, Rob.Williams, Olberding, Burris, Kelly, Krysinski, Kern, C.Boucher, Murphy, Finklea, DeLeon, Dooley, Zulantz, Tr.Brown, Kennedy, Anevski, Muller, J.Tanner, Lehwald, D.Frazier, Slack, Jenkins, Wurzelbacher, Marck, Gudeman, Wamulumba, Albright, Becks. **OHIO STATE:** Offense, Mewhort, Norwell, Linsley, M.Hall, Fragel, Stoneburner, B.Miller, Hyde, Z.Boren, D.Smith, P.Brown, Basil. Defense, Simon, Hanks, Goebel, Moore, Shazier, C.Grant, Sabino, Bryant, Barnett, Roby, Howard, Buchanan. Reserves, R.Smith, C.Brown, C.Williams, Spence, Griffin, Reed, D.Grant, Guiton, Perry, Spencer, Murray, O.Johnson, Oltorik, J.Wood, Reeves, Dunn, Perkins, R.Tanner, Rice, Bogard, Marcus, Cataline, Petrella, Crowell, Clinton, Haynes, N.Williams, Homan, J.Boren, Hale, Makridis, Farris, Blackman, Decker, Kramer, C.Carter, Underwood, Baldwin, Fields, Vannett, Thomas, Heuerman, S.Miller, Schutt, Washington.

OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (OHIO)

Miller's Performance Leads OSU To Rout

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller enjoyed a record-breaking day and the Urban Meyer era kicked off in style Sept. 1 as Ohio State overcame a sluggish start and rolled to a 56-10 victory over Miami (Ohio) in front of 105,039 fans at Ohio Stadium.

Miller rushed for 161 yards and one touchdown – a high-stepping, gear-changing, highlight reel of a 65-yard romp – on his way to a new single-game rushing record for OSU quarterbacks. He broke the record of 146 set by Cornelius Greene during a 52-7 win over Wisconsin in 1974. Miller added another 207 yards through the air, giving him 368 total yards for the game. That marked the sixth-highest single-game total in program history.

Miller looked tentative in the early going, and he completed just one of his first seven pass attempts. But then he rattled off five straight completions, and the Buckeyes were off and running. He finished the afternoon with a 14-for-24 performance in the passing department, connecting for a pair of touchdowns.

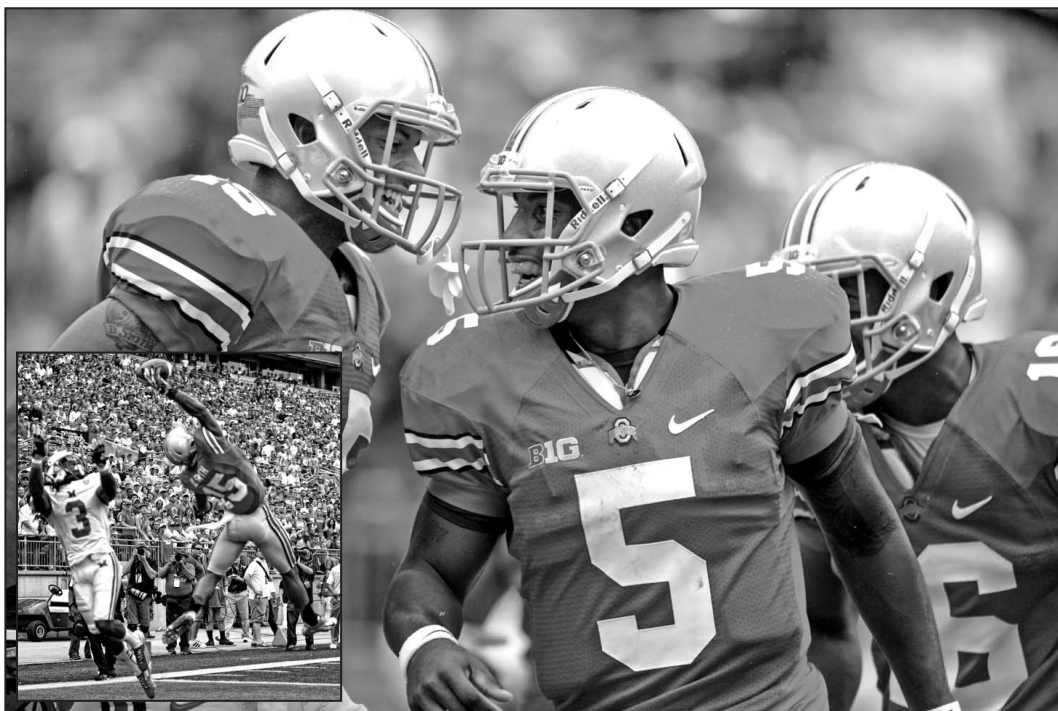
Making the scoring grabs were junior receiver Corey "Philly" Brown, who totaled a team-high seven catches for 87 yards – both career-best totals – and sophomore wideout Devin Smith, who scored the Buckeyes' first touchdown of 2012 on one of the most incredible catches the Horseshoe has ever seen. Fellow sophomore Evan Spencer also set new single-game bests with three receptions for 54 yards.

Ohio State shook off a forgettable first quarter to run roughshod over the RedHawks. OSU, which accounted for only 48 yards of offense during the opening 15 minutes, finished with 538 total yards for the game. It was the highest total yardage since Ohio State had 645 in a 73-20 win over Eastern Michigan during the vacated season of 2010.

Considering only non-vacated seasons, it was the largest yardage total since the Buckeyes had 559 vs. New Mexico State in 2009. OSU won that game by a 45-0 final. The point total was the team's best in a non-vacated season since a 58-7 victory over Northwestern in 2007.

Meanwhile, the 56 points was the most any Miami team had surrendered since a 58-7 loss to Dartmouth on Oct. 3, 1942.

The RedHawks actually enjoyed a 3-0 lead at the end of the first quarter, and it could have been much more. They dropped a pair of sure touchdown passes and missed a 24-yard field goal inside the first 10 minutes of the contest, and those gaffes eventually wore them down. After piling up 172 yards of offense in the first quarter, Miami managed only 140 more the rest of the game.



JOSH WINSLOW PHOTOS

SMILES ALL AROUND – Ohio State sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller (5) had a record-setting day during a 56-10 win against Miami (Ohio), but classmate Devin Smith (15 and inset) stole the show with his second-quarter touchdown reception.

Senior QB Zac Dysert was practically a one-man show for the RedHawks. He completed 31 of 53 passes for 303 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions. Dysert became the first opposing quarterback to top the 300-yard mark against the Buckeyes since Colt McCoy of Texas threw for 414 during his team's 24-21 win in the 2009 Fiesta Bowl, and no opponent had thrown for 300 or more against the Buckeyes in Ohio Stadium since 2005 when Drew Stanton of Michigan State had 340 during his team's 35-24 loss to OSU that season.

Unfortunately for Miami, a nonexistent ground attack was of no help to Dysert. The RedHawks had minus-1 yard to show for 20 attempts while the Buckeyes were running the ball 53 times, chewing up 294 yards and scoring five touchdowns on the ground.

Miller led the way with his career-high 161 yards and one score on 17 carries while junior tailback Carlos Hyde accounted for 82 yards and two TDs on 17 attempts. True freshman tailback Bri'onte Dunn chipped in with seven carries for 31 yards and a score during his first college game, and senior fullback Zach Boren tallied his first career

rushing touchdown on a 2-yard bolt in the fourth quarter.

Defensively, OSU was led by sophomore linebacker Ryan Shazier with nine tackles and a pass breakup while sophomore cornerback Bradley Roby added six stops. Roby also recovered a fumbled punt snap in the end zone for his first career touchdown. Fellow cornerback Travis Howard also made a major contribution as the fifth-year senior had the first two-interception day of his career.

The game marked the return of senior defensive end Nathan Williams, who played extensively for the first time since last year's opening game. Williams, who is coming off microfracture knee surgery, was credited with a pair of solo tackles in the contest.

Ohio State also had a pair of sacks, one each from heralded true freshmen Noah Spence and Adolphus Washington.

Not Exactly A Quick Start

After an entire offseason of anticipation for both Meyer and Ohio State fans, neither got what they expected in the first quarter. The Buckeyes had only two first downs to show for four first-quarter possessions, and most of the opening 10 minutes were played on the OSU side of midfield.

Miami set the tempo early by crossing into Ohio State territory on its opening possession. But the RedHawks stalled when sophomore receiver David Frazier dropped a third-and-1 pass from Dysert. That would become a recurring theme for the Mid-American Conference visitors, who dropped at least six passes in the first half and several more after intermission.

The Buckeyes couldn't get anything going with their offense, though, and the RedHawks got the game's first scoring opportunity on their next possession. Dysert found junior receiver Nick Harwell behind

the OSU secondary for a 42-yard pass play that pushed Miami to the Ohio State 22, and the MU quarterback completed three more attempts in succession to give his team a second-and-5 at the Buckeyes' 6.

But that was as far as the RedHawks could advance. Dysert misfired on second down and then managed to get a throw away under a heavy rush on third down. But senior running back Justin Semmes – with a seemingly clear path to the end zone – couldn't corral the low throw. On the next play, Miami freshman kicker Kaleb Patterson came on to try a 24-yard field goal, but he didn't get enough hook on the kick and the ball sailed past the right upright.

The RedHawks didn't seem deterred about squandering the scoring chance. After forcing a three-and-out by the OSU offense, Miami went right back to work as Dysert and sophomore receiver Dawan Scott hooked up for a 58-yard pass that moved MU to the Ohio State 10.

Three plays later, on third down at the 4, Dysert thought he had Harwell in the end zone for a touchdown. But the normally sure-handed receiver lost control the ball as he hit the ground, and the RedHawks had to settle for another field-goal attempt. This time, Patterson was able to convert a 22-yarder to give his team a 3-0 lead at the 5:06 mark of the opening quarter.

Miami was poised to strike again on its next possession when Scott got loose behind the OSU secondary. But after appearing to make a catch that would have netted about 50 yards and put the RedHawks back across midfield, Scott lost the handle as he fell to the ground and the pass was ruled incomplete.

By the time the first quarter finally ended, Miami had possession of the ball and control of the game. The RedHawks had run 26

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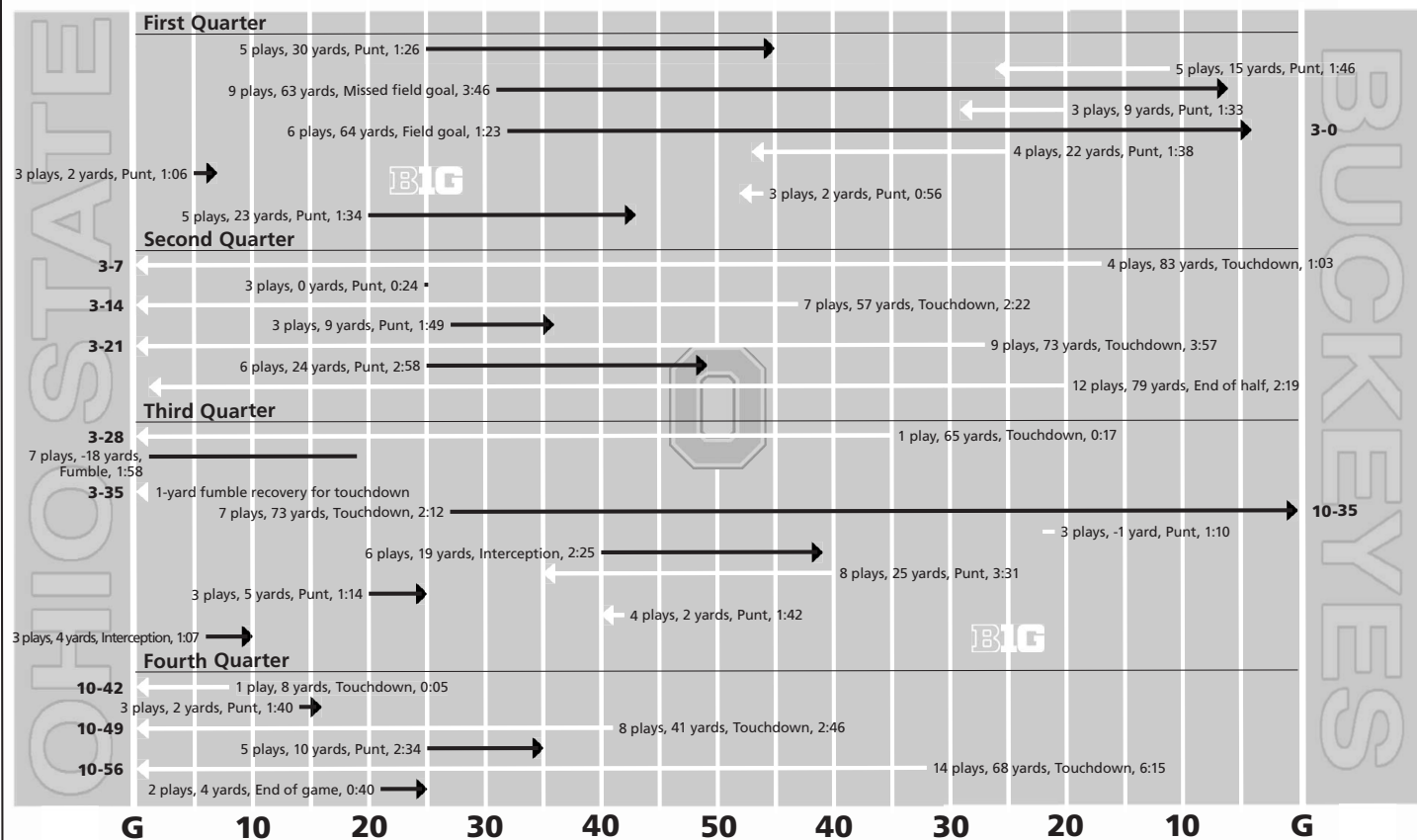
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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (OHIO)

Drive Chart

Miami (Ohio) →

← Ohio State



offensive plays and gained 172 yards while the Buckeyes had 48 yards on 15 plays.

Once the second quarter began, however, Ohio State seemed to shift gears. After a first period described by Meyer as "very poor football on our end," the Buckeyes traveled 83 yards in only four plays on their initial possession of the second period. Hyde had a 16-yard run to begin the proceedings, and two plays later Miller connected for 38 yards to Brown.

On the next play, Miller lofted a high pass into the end zone that Smith somehow speared out of the air with a spectacular one-handed grab. The 6-1, 200-pound sophomore leapt in front of Miami cornerback Dayonne Nunley, plucked the ball out of the air with his right hand and then cradled the pass against his body as he fell to the turf.

The 23-yard touchdown play ignited a heretofore silent crowd, and after junior kicker Drew Basil's extra point, the Buckeyes enjoyed a 7-3 lead with 13:49 left until halftime.

And they were just getting warmed up.

The OSU defense chalked up its first three-and-out series against the Miami offense, and Miller came right back to engineer a seven-play, 57-yard drive that included three straight completions. The third was a 5-yard TD flick to Brown on a quick out pattern, and after Basil added the PAT, the Buckeyes had padded their lead to 14-3 at the 11:03 mark of the second period.

Less than six minutes later, they were on the scoreboard again as Hyde capped a nine-play, 73-yard drive with a 4-yard score aided by excellent seal blocks from Boren and senior right tackle Reid Fragel. Basil tacked on the extra point to make it 21-3 with 5:17 remaining in the first half.

The Buckeyes nearly had another touchdown in the waning seconds of the opening half after Miller moved the offense 79 yards in just over two minutes. The final 44 of those yards came on a pass to Spencer, who was dragged down at the Miami 1 with three seconds left.

Meyer called a timeout and decided to go for the touchdown, but Hyde's dive was denied just short of the goal line.

That was but a temporary setback for the Buckeyes, who went on to tack 35 more points on the board in the second half.

It took only one play in the third quarter for Ohio State to add to its lead as Miller turned a simple quarterback keeper into a highlight-reel touchdown run of 65 yards. The sophomore took the shotgun snap and sprinted to his left, quickly breaking into the open. As he blew into Miami territory, RedHawks free safety D.J. Brown appeared to have an angle on him, but Miller used a stutter step and slight head fake, freezing Brown long enough for the Ohio State QB to turn on the afterburners.

The 65-yard romp was followed by another Basil PAT to make the score 28-3 just 21 seconds inside the third quarter.

Things really began to cave in on the visitors on their next possession. Dysert was called for intentional grounding that pushed the RedHawks back to their own 9-yard line, and then three plays later, disaster struck. Miami punter Zac Murphy was unable to field a high snap, and Roby came away with the loose football at the 1-yard line, tumbling into the end zone for a touchdown.

Basil made it 5 for 5 in extra points to

The Bottom Line

The game was over when ... Bradley Roby scored an Ohio State touchdown following a botched punt snap by Miami. The RedHawks were already trailing by a 28-3 margin, but with a potent passing attack, they were technically still in the game. But when a punt attempt went awry and Roby cashed in for the Buckeyes, it was all over but the shouting.

Game ball goes to ... Devin Smith. Yes, Braxton Miller established a new single-game rushing record for Ohio State quarterbacks and accounted for 368 total yards. But you are likely to never see a more stunning one-handed catch than Smith made for the Buckeyes' first touchdown of 2012.

Stat of the game ... 68. It had been 68 years since Ohio State scored as many as 54 points in a head coach's debut game. The Buckeyes rolled to a 54-0 win over Missouri in new head man Carroll Widdoes' maiden game in 1944. The school record for the most points scored in a coach's debut has been held since 1913 when the Buckeyes set sail under John W. Wilce with a 58-0 whitewash of Ohio Wesleyan.

— Mark Rea

gave the Buckeyes a 35-3 cushion at the 12:41 mark of the third period.

The RedHawks came back on the next possession with their only touchdown drive of the game and it was all Dysert. He accounted for all 73 yards on 5-for-7 passing, finishing things off with a 44-yard pass to Harwell. Patterson's extra point made it 35-10 with 10:24 remaining in the third quarter, but that was as much of a game as Miami could make it the rest of the way.

Two plays into the fourth quarter, Howard

picked off Dysert and returned the interception 17 yards to the Miami 8. One play later, Hyde swept over left end for the touchdown, and after Basil's extra point, the Buckeyes had a 42-10 lead with 14:04 remaining.

Junior backup Kenny Guiton took over the controls for Miller on the Buckeyes' next possession, and he engineered an eight-play, 41-yard march that culminated in Boren's touchdown run at the 9:33 mark. Dunn then

Continued On Page 12

OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (OHIO)

Ohio State Continues Success In Home Openers

Continued From Page 11

bolted over from the 4-yard line with 44 seconds remaining for the game's final TD.

Basil converted both extra points to give him eight for the game – only two shy of the school record – and set the final score at 56-10.

Guiton finished his afternoon 5 for 9 in the passing department for 37 yards. He added another 14 yards on five carries.

Game Notes

- In addition to his record rushing day, Miller tied Greene for the most recognized career 100-yard games by an Ohio State quarterback with four. Terrelle Pryor had seven 100-yard rushing games during his career, but the four he totaled during the 2010 season have been expunged from the school's official record book.

- Ohio State has now won 34 consecutive home openers, not tasting defeat since a 19-0 loss to Penn State in 1978.

- Meyer made his debut as the 24th head football coach in OSU program history. The last time a first-year Ohio State head coach failed to win his opening game with the Buckeyes was Paul Bixler in 1946 when the Buckeyes played Missouri to a 13-13 tie. The only time any Ohio State coach lost his opening game with the team was Jack Ryder in 1892.

- Miami second-year head coach Don Treadwell was not unfamiliar with playing against OSU. He was on staff at Michigan State from 2000-02 and again from 2007-10 during which time the Spartans posted an 0-3

record against the Buckeyes. Treadwell was also on Mark Dantonio's staff at Cincinnati in 2004 when Ohio State rolled to a 27-6 victory in that season's opener.

- Meyer bettered his career record to 2-1 against MU. His Bowling Green team dropped a 24-21 decision to the RedHawks in 2001, and his final Florida team rolled to a 34-12 victory over Miami in the 2010 season opener for both teams.

- The Buckeyes are now 107-12-4 all-time in season openers. (BSB counts victories from the vacated 2010 season.) The team's last opening-game loss came in the 1999 Kickoff Classic, a 23-12 loss to Miami (Fla.) in East Rutherford, N.J.

- Miami is now 79-39-6 all-time in season openers. The RedHawks haven't won an opener since 2007 when they took a 14-13 victory in a night game at Ball State.

- In season home openers, OSU is now 111-8-4 all-time.

- The last living coach to beat Ohio State in a home opener was Darrell Mudra, who led Arizona to a 14-7 victory over the Buckeyes in 1967. Mudra, who had seven stops as a college head coach including preceding Bobby Bowden at Florida State, had the unusual practice of coaching from the press box on game day. The 90-year-old Mudra, whose nickname was "Dr. Victory," had a career record of 200-81-4 and was elected to the College Football Hall of Fame in 2000.

- There are plenty of historical connections between Ohio State and Miami. Woody Hayes was head coach of the RedHawks (then known as the Redskins) in 1949 and

'50 before embarking upon a 28-year stay at OSU. Sid Gillman, an All-American end for the Buckeyes in 1932 and team co-captain in '33, served as Miami's head coach from 1944-47. Jim Tressel served as an MU assistant coach from 1978-80. And the father of Miami safety D.J. Brown, David, was a four-year defensive backfield starter for the Buckeyes from 1986-89. Also, Paul Brown – a 1930 Miami grad – became OSU head coach in 1941 and led the Buckeyes to their first national championship in 1942. Brown's statue will be unveiled in Miami's Cradle of Coaches Plaza on Sept. 22.

- Brown, Gillman and former OSU basketball coach Randy Ayers are members of Miami's Athletics Hall of Fame. Ayers was a two-time all-conference performer and four-year starter for MU's basketball team from 1975-78.

- Ohio State pushed to 62 games its home winning streak against unranked non-conference opponents. You have to go all the way back to a 34-17 loss to Florida State in 1982 to find the last unranked non-conference team to beat the Buckeyes in the Horseshoe.

- OSU is now 31-1 all-time against current members of the Mid-American Conference. The only blemish on that record against the MAC remains a 12-6 loss to Akron in a game played Sept. 15, 1894, at the Ohio State Fair.

- No Ohio team has beaten Ohio State since Oberlin scored a 7-6 victory over the Buckeyes in October 1921. Coincidentally, Treadwell's hometown happens to be Oberlin.

- The RedHawks are now 0-5 lifetime against Ohio State with all five of those games

having been played in Columbus. MU last served as the Buckeyes' season-opening opponent in 2005 when it absorbed a 34-14 loss.

- Miami fell to 12-43-2 all-time against current members of the Big Ten. In addition to their 0-5 mark against OSU, the RedHawks are 5-3 against Northwestern, 3-10-1 vs. Indiana, 3-9-1 against Purdue, 1-3 vs. Michigan State, 0-2 against Illinois, 0-3 vs. Iowa, 0-3 against Minnesota and 0-5 against Michigan. Miami has never played Nebraska, Penn State or Wisconsin.

- Ohio State is 405-109-20 in Ohio Stadium since the facility opened in 1922. That is a .777 winning percentage. All-time in Columbus, the team is 548-156-35, good for a winning percentage of .765.

- Dysert pushed his career passing yardage total to 8,833. He ranks second all-time in school history to current Pittsburgh Steelers QB Ben Roethlisberger, who threw for 10,829 yards as a RedHawk from 2001-03.

- Following last season's 6-7 record, Ohio State is seeking to avoid its first back-to-back losing seasons since three in a row from 1922-24. No other Division I-A team has gone so long between consecutive sub-500 seasons.

- Ohio State's defense held an opponent to negative yards rushing for the first time since 2008. Youngstown State had minus-11 yards on the ground during a 43-0 loss in that season's opener.

- Republican vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan, a 1992 Miami alum, visited the RedHawks' locker room before the game and spoke to the team for a few minutes.

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OHIO STATE VS. MIAMI (OHIO)

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 56, Miami (Ohio) 10

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer on the win: "I'm obviously pleased with the win, very pleased with the win. Obviously the first quarter was very poor football on our end. But you also want to give credit where credit's due, and that's Miami did a really good job defending a certain formation that we ran out of, which is a base formation. Concerning down the road, we need to make sure we make quicker adjustments, which we made some halftime adjustments."

Miami head coach Don Treadwell on his team's dropped passes: "You may have to ask our players about it. It will be interesting to find out if it was the environment, being humid and hot, or if it was just about the first game of the season."

Sophomore wide receiver Devin Smith on the Buckeyes' struggles in the first quarter: "It was kind of tough at first, but I knew we were going to fight through it. All of the guys on the team, we're all fighters. We all fight. We got through it, and after that play I made, the offense started to click and we got things going."

Meyer on Smith's highlight reel-worthy touchdown reception in the second quarter: "I don't know if Devin has been saving that, but I've not seen him do that. He's actually been playing pretty well for us. But that was a wild moment and that was a moment that ignited the stadium. The stadium got quiet. Our sideline got quiet and we were waiting for a play to happen, and he went out and made a play. That's football."

Smith on his acrobatic, one-handed touchdown reception: "I got by him and the ball went in the air. It looked like it was going out of bounds, so I just stuck my hand up there and caught it."

Meyer on quarterback Braxton Miller's attitude during OSU's early struggles: "I'm not as positive as Braxton was. But it's nice to have your quarterback stand right with you and say, 'Here, we'll be fine.' I liked his demeanor."

Smith on Miller's leadership: "He's more vocal, he's really worked hard in the offseason and gained a lot of respect from a lot of people. The sky's the limit for him, and I'm looking forward to him getting better and better."

Smith on what was said before the first touchdown drive: "Coach Meyer before that told me to make a play. When we got lined up, Braxton looked at me and shook his head like, 'Let's go.' We made the play."

Smith on Meyer's reaction to the early offensive struggles: "He was a little upset that we didn't get the offense rolling, but he had faith in us. That's the most important thing."

Senior fullback Zach Boren on Ohio State's slow start in the first quarter: "We knew we weren't performing the way we should have been. We just came out a little slow, and offense is all about rhythm and about getting things going. We just couldn't find it, but Braxton made a couple of great plays and a couple of guys stepped up like Devin Smith. We really came together."

Miller on whether the offense's second-quarter performance showed how good the unit can be this season: "No. No. Not at all. We haven't reached it yet. When we reach it, it's going to be out the gates. We've got a lot of work to do."

Junior center Corey Linsley on OSU's offensive success in the second quarter: "It was great to have this offense do as well as it should. That's what this offense's expectations are. They're going to do a lot better than that. It's awesome to have the success that we did and know we can still improve."

Junior tailback Carlos Hyde on being stopped at the goal line on the final play of the first half: "I guess I didn't score. The referees told everybody to go in (the locker rooms), so I guess I didn't make it. I definitely thought I scored, but I got another (touchdown later)."

Meyer on the play of Hyde, who finished with 82 yards: "I'm disappointed that he didn't get 100 yards. I thought he would. We were going to feature him a little bit today. They were forcing some of those big runs that Braxton Miller had. So a few carries got taken away because Miami made a decision to force the quarterback to run and then have extra defensive players where they were."

Sophomore cornerback Bradley Roby on Miller's stutter step-aided TD run in the third quarter: "That's just a typical Braxton play. He makes plays like no other quarterback. That's what you expect from him."

Roby on his fumble recovery for a third-quarter touchdown: "That's about whoever wants it most. I felt the ball and I just wrestled it away from whoever it was. I wasn't about to let it go. I think it ended up being one of my teammates, but we both had rights to the ball so I said I was getting it."

Fifth-year senior defensive end Nathan Williams on his return to the field: "It's unbelievable, man. To have something taken away from you and get it back, it's awesome. I took it on. I'm in the best shape of my life, from this last year to now. I've sacrificed a lot and given countless hours of work. Just to be out and to be with my guys and perform again is so, so relieving. I'm happy for my guys, my coaches and myself."

Meyer on Williams' return: "I love Nate. I

love the fact that he is a warrior, that he loves Ohio State, that he's doing the best he can. And I like the fact that (defensive coordinator Luke Fickell and defensive line coach Mike Vrabel) had enough confidence to get him in the game. He played more snaps than I thought he would. That must have made him feel good, a big smile on his face, knocked the rust off of him. He hasn't practiced a whole lot."

Meyer when asked if he was anxious or nervous the night before the game: "Yes, yes, yes. Yes."

Treadwell on his quarterback Zac Dysert: "He's got some great internal qualities and intangibles. He's one of those quarterbacks. He's got a great demeanor. He seems comfortable and has more latitude."

Treadwell on Ohio State: "They're a very good team, and there are a lot of good teams in the Big Ten. They have a lot of depth, and that's what you're trying to build in a program. They're a very good team, and you saw a lot of that out on the field today."

Dysert on losing to the Buckeyes: "It is just something we have to learn from. Hats off to Ohio State. Today they were the better team."

Dysert on the first quarter: "We should have scored more and earlier, but unfortunately it just didn't happen."

Miami senior linebacker Jaytee Swanson on Miller: "He is a really good athlete. He is a great runner, a great thrower and a good leader. He had great plays and cuts, which are to be expected from a great quarterback. And while we respect him, we have to do our job and try to stop him."

Boren on getting only the second and third carries of his Ohio State career: "It was a lot of fun. I've been doing a lot of it during fall camp, so it was finally fun to do it in a game."

Senior cornerback Travis Howard on his two interceptions: "This is a big confidence-builder, but this is the first game. I just have to keep focusing and keep my mentality right and move forward."

Boren on the differences between Meyer and former head coach Jim Tressel: "It is a big difference, but at the same time you're just going out on the field and competing. Our offense today was a little more up-tempo and it's going to be this year, unlike last year. I do have to say my head feels a lot better today than it normally did. It's all about rhythm. It was a lot of fun today, but it's the same thing whether you're in the I (formation) with Tress or working with Coach Meyer and stuff. It's all about getting in a rhythm, and we did that for three quarters so hopefully we can build on it."

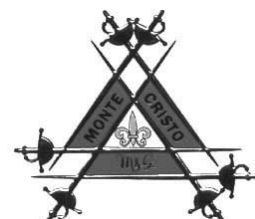


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First Impressions Were Good For Meyer's Men

The day before the 2012 season opener, a Michigan fan told me, "It must be nice to get a fancy new coach ... (with) talent left on the roster."

His thought, of course, was that Rich Rodriguez left Michigan with little talent as Brady Hoke took over the job in 2011. The Wolverines' 11-2 record in Hoke's first season notwithstanding, the events of opening day 2012 showed that the Michigan fan was at least partially correct.

THE EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Ohio State does have talent – plenty of it – starting with sophomore quarterback Braxton Miller. There's room to grow in the talent pool, of course, but Urban Meyer inherited a pretty good bunch of players. Sluggish at times, Ohio State nevertheless showed off much of that talent in overwhelming Miami (Ohio), 56-10.

We fully realize that Miami is no Alabama, Michigan's opening-game opponent. But the RedHawks could be good enough to wind up in one of those lesser bowls. They were picked to finish third in the seven-team Mid-American Conference East Division.

The OSU victory was less than six hours old when Michigan, apparently overrated in the preseason polls at No. 8 in the country, took the field against second-ranked Alabama. A few minutes later, still in the first quarter, the Crimson Tide was ahead 21-0 and had victory in hand. The final score: Alabama 41, Michigan 14.

No matter how good Alabama might be, Michigan's performance was not that of a top-10 team. And to some extent, the result confirmed the thought that the Wolverines' 11-2 record last season could have overstated the quality of that team.

The 2011 Michigan team didn't beat a ranked opponent until Week 11, when U-M knocked off Nebraska, which finished 20th in the final BCS standings. That's not the team's fault. Hoke had no control over the quality of opponents just as Meyer shouldn't be penalized for the cupcake of a pre-Big Ten schedule Ohio State has this season. But the Wolverines' record last season fooled some people into thinking that a turnaround in Ann Arbor was already in hand.

For Ohio State this season, the reviews likely will begin to come in at the end of September, when the Buckeyes play at Michigan State.

Until then, however, first impressions were more positive than negative for the new era.

A Rare Day

It didn't occur to me until game day what a rare occasion was about to occur.

For just the fifth time in my lifetime – and likewise just the fifth time for anyone between the ages of 33 and 60 – Ohio State began a new coaching era.

Woody Hayes controlled the OSU sideline from 1951 through 1978, followed by Earle Bruce's debut in 1979, John Cooper's in 1988 and Jim Tressel's in 2001. Luke Fickel, of course, was the interim coach last season.

So rare is the occasion of a new coach, that Buckeye Sports Bulletin – now in its 32nd year – covered only three of those games previously.

2011: Under the headline, "New Day Dawns for Buckeyes," BSB reported how the team rolled to a 42-0 win over Akron, a fitting way to put an offseason of turmoil behind it. Of course, the win was one of only six the Buckeyes would celebrate last year as they stumbled to a 6-7 record, the first losing season since Cooper's first year in 1988.

2001: The front-page BSB headline after Tressel's 28-14 victory over Akron declared, "A New Tradition Begins." The lead story focused on how Tressel had been waiting nearly his entire life to debut on such a grand stage in front of 102,602 fans.

Little did OSU fans know at the time, but 16 months later they would be celebrating a national championship. Before that 2002 title, Ohio State was 7-5 in Tressel's rookie season of 2001.

1988: The BSB headline read, "Cooper is Successful in OSU Debut," following OSU's 26-9 victory over Syracuse in front of 89,768 fans in at what was then a much smaller Ohio Stadium. The lead story, by our editor then and now, Mark Rea, began with this declaration: "Now, John Cooper deserves that big bear hug."

Unfortunately, for Buckeye fans and Cooper, things didn't stay so positive. The team lost 42-10 at Pittsburgh the following week and then slipped to a 4-6-1 finish.

Since Bruce's OSU coaching era began in 1979 – two years before BSB began publishing – I took a look at how my old friend, the late Ed Chay, a veteran of the Ohio State beat at the time for The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, described Bruce's opening-day victory over Syracuse in 1979.

Chay's story read, in part, "(Bruce) promised more timely passing and a varied attack. And the 46-year-old OSU graduate and one-time aide here in the early '60s, delivered on his promise." The headline read: "New-Look Buckeyes Wallop Syracuse, 31-8."

My, how things have changed. That description of a new era with more timely passing followed a game in which sophomore quarterback Art Schlichter completed 8 of 16 passes for a grand total of 81 yards. The leading rusher, Calvin Murray, had 88 yards. Attendance in the Horseshoe, by the way, numbered 86,205.

The results on the field were excellent as the 1979 Buckeyes went through the regular season unbeaten before losing a close game to USC in the Rose Bowl.

Playing Ohio Schools

The recent tradition of playing in-state schools was renewed in 1992 with a game against Bowling Green and has been an annual affair since 1997. I understand there are money reasons. The visiting payday for Ohio opponents is typically less than for other schools, such as Colorado last year.

And there is the goodwill of giving other Ohio schools the opportunity to play in Ohio Stadium with the chance of scoring an upset.

But, from an OSU fan's standpoint, the games often represent a bore (with routs) or fear (of an upset). A win is expected so there is little to gain.

Ohio State's closest games came in 2002 to Cincinnati (23-19), in 2003 against Bowling Green (24-17) and last season against Toledo (27-22). Otherwise, OSU largely has had an easy time of things, winning the 21 games against Ohio schools since 1992 by an average score of 35-10.

But not since 1998 has Ohio State routed an Ohio opponent like the Buckeyes did in this season's opener, scoring a 46-point victory over Miami. One has to go back to 1998 and the 49-0 blowout of Toledo to find a wider margin of victory over an Ohio school.

For this year's result, you have to give the Buckeyes credit. These games are not automatic. Ask Penn State, a 24-14 loser to Ohio University. Or ask Florida. Had Bowling Green not had major kicking game problems – missing a couple of short field goals and having severe punting problems – BG could very well have beaten the Gators instead of losing a 27-14 decision that was closer than the final score indicated.

A Coach's Delight

Football coaches like to win. And, at least early in the season, they like to have something to dwell upon, something to complain about to drive their teams to become better.

There were both in Ohio State's opener. On the good side, we witnessed the begin-

nings of a sophomore quarterback being coached to use the talent he possesses. Miller can run and he can pass. But there is room to improve in the passing game.

The receivers made some plays, but they didn't seem to find openings in the coverage like the Miami receivers did against Ohio State. That's something for both OSU receivers and the OSU secondary to work on.

Ohio State ran the ball, but not spectacularly when Miller wasn't the runner. Carlos Hyde finished with 82 yards on 17 carries, but lacking were breakaway runs – the kind of image that makes a player a threat to score on any play. The running game is another area that needs work.

And the slow start. OSU was shut out by Miami in the first quarter. Against better opponents, the Buckeyes will have to start stronger. Again, an area for work.

But having said all this, it's a little difficult to complain too much about a 56-10 victory.

Backup QB Snapshot

Fans haven't had much of a chance to see junior quarterback Kenny Guiton in action, but based on his performance against Miami, the team should be more comfortable in the backup quarterback than what was available last year. Guiton smoothly executed the offense, completing 5 of 9 passes for 37 yards and running five times for 14 yards.

Miller is the key to OSU's success this season. But if what Guiton showed is an accurate display of his skills, the Buckeyes can remain competitive with him in the game if necessary.

The Look Test

Some players in their football gear on game day draw attention by just how they fill out their uniforms. The one who caught my attention was 6-5, 315-pound junior guard Marcus Hall.

The roster says he's not much different in size from some of the other OSU linemen, but he's one of those players who catch your attention as being a giant as he strolls onto the field.

Look for No. 79 the next time you watch the Buckeyes.

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Minutes from OSU and Nationwide

OPINION

Early Hiccup Aside, Solid Debut For Buckeyes

Ohio State practiced Urban Meyer's offense all spring and all fall, but apparently it needed a little more time. As in 15 minutes of the season opener.

After lagging through a somnambulistic first quarter, the Buckeyes' offense got it going, scoring 21 points in the second quarter and topping the 50-point mark for the first time since hanging 73 on Eastern Michigan in 2010. And 538 yards later, Ohio State had an impressive opening victory even if it wasn't perfect.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

"The first quarter was poor football on our end," Meyer said. "They did a really good job defending our base formation. We have to make quicker adjustments."

All eyes were on Braxton Miller, who was erratic – and that's putting it nicely – last season, and he gave fans no reason to think things would be any different after finishing

the first quarter 1 of 7 passing. But he reeled off 11 completions in his next 14 throws – short, medium and long – and Meyer was positively beaming.

Miller's final numbers of 14 of 24 passing for 207 yards and another 161 rushing weren't as important as the fact he looked to be in command of the offense. He made a few secondary reads, kept the ball when necessary and handed off when the situation warranted. The sophomore didn't appear rattled – save for his intentional grounding that nearly became a disastrous fumble recovery for Miami – and looked confident, even when things weren't going well early. His single-game quarterback rushing total is a record, and he looks well on his way to becoming the perfect choice to run Meyer's quarterback-dependent system.

"One of the things I had to see with Braxton Miller, one of our objectives with him, is to make him become a quarterback that manages," Meyer said. "He has to manage the entire offense and has to be a leader. He showed that today. He kept positive even though ... well you all saw what it was."

Meyer admitted Miller's start wasn't exactly a confidence-builder, but the coach

had seen enough through fall camp to know that his quarterback would come around eventually. And once he did, there was no stopping.

The talk going into the game was that the receiving corps was still a work in progress, and it is. But Devin Smith continues to show that he has a nose for the end zone, making one of the prettiest one-handed grabs you'll ever see for Ohio State's first score. Jake Stoneburner made a couple of plays, Corey "Philly" Brown was heavily involved and Evan Spencer also got into the act.

Senior running back Jordan Hall is on the sideline with a foot injury, but it didn't matter as Carlos Hyde showed he is a man. At 232 pounds, he looks like someone who would simply be content to plow over you – and he is. But he also has some shiftness in space and was able to spin out of trouble on a couple of occasions. It was no coincidence that the offense started to get going after Hyde was given a role.

But it wasn't all praise. As the Buckeyes were playing hurry-up to end the first half, Hyde was stoned on a 1-yard plunge as time expired.

"Ohio State should be able to knock it in from the 1," Meyer said. "That was bad. ... That's absolutely nonnegotiable. Nonsense. The Ohio State University with a 230-pound tailback should be able to smash it in from the 1. Even though the whole world knew we were going to go for it, you still have to punch it in."

There was talk that the offensive line would be different than in years past, that it would have athleticism and open holes and be able to get to the second level. I'm still waiting. Oh sure, it happened some in the second half after Miami's will was sapped, but for most of the first half, blocking was inconsistent.

The defensive line didn't post huge sack numbers, but that will happen when the ball is designed to be out of the opposing quarterback's hand in two seconds. John Simon and crew, to their credit, did not give up and finally seemed to take Zac Dyzert out of rhythm. But that kid is good and will be one of the better quarterbacks the Buckeyes

face all season. Meyer thinks he's an NFL prospect, and he knows quarterbacks.

Meyer was seen pacing the sideline, looking agitated and throwing his arms up in disgust on a number of occasions early in the contest.

"I was embarrassed with the way we were playing in all phases," he said of the first quarter.

When asked if maybe his team was too pumped up, he replied, "I think emotion is one of the great things about college football. Without watching the film, I don't know how well we played. You have 10 months to prepare for a game and a lot of film to watch, and they did that. That's what happened in the first quarter."

One noticeable difference, aside from the tempo of the offense, was the aggressiveness Meyer displayed.

In years past, Jim Tressel would have been content to kneel with a 21-3 halftime lead, but Meyer wasn't having any of that. He ran his offense, and only the previously mentioned stop by the Miami defense as the clock wound down kept the OSU lead from being larger.

Personally, I like it. Some might say it's bad sportsmanship or running up the score, but Meyer had much of his second team in the game in the late stages and was predominantly leaning on the ground game. The opponent shouldn't be crying about getting scored on. It should work to get better on defense.

Meyer has been like a kid on Christmas Eve waiting for the season to start, and he said the game was everything he felt it would be and more.

"I was anxious for the day," he said. "I wanted it to be a good day for Ohio State football. I've been enjoying being Ohio State coach for about seven months now. To sing the alma mater, that was a special moment."

Very likely it was the first of what should be many special moments for the Buckeyes.

Quick Hitters

• Say what you will about hatred of Michigan, at least the Wolverines aren't afraid of competition. While other Big Ten teams were playing directional schools or lower level MAC schools, U-M was opening the season with a huge showdown against Alabama. The result wasn't as important as the idea that if you want to see what you have you take on the best. I mean, what do we really know about Ohio State after its pasting of Miami?

We know that the offense can be dynamic and has a lot of weapons, and that the defense can be opportunistic and is nails against the run. But it was Miami. The truth is we probably won't know much about Ohio State until it ventures to East Lansing to take on Michigan State.

• Everyone knew it was going to be an emotional opener at Penn State, but there probably weren't many who felt the Nittany Lions, decimated though they may be, would lose to Ohio.

The Bobcats won 10 games last year and returned exciting quarterback Tyler Tettleton (son of former major leaguer catcher Mickey Tettleton), but there was still the perception that in any MAC vs. Big Ten game, the Big Ten should come out on top.

Folks, I'm telling you – the Nittany Lions will be a bad team this year. First-year head coach Bill O'Brien is in a no-win situation and may wind up with just that – no wins.



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OPINION

Growing Pains Still Evident After First Game

The 56-10 final score in Ohio State's victory over Miami (Ohio) was probably about what most Buckeye fans were looking for in Urban Meyer's first game as head coach in Columbus. But the play of the Buckeyes in the first quarter probably reminded a good many fans that even Meyer can't walk on the Olentangy River.

There are those who figured Meyer's Buckeyes would dominate the college football world from the first snap of his first game on their way to the inevitable undefeated season.

That undefeated season is still possible as the Buckeyes ultimately won going away, but the fact Ohio State trailed the RedHawks by a 3-0 margin after the first quarter – a score that could have been worse if not for dropped Miami passes and a missed field goal – demonstrated that hiring the best coach in the business doesn't automatically put games in the win column.

Eventually the Buckeyes, led in particular by quarterback Braxton Miller, took charge in all three facets of the game – offense, defense and special teams – and with their superior talent (and coaching) won in an expected romp.

But with all the visions by Buckeye fans of a wide-open offense under Meyer's regime, I found it interesting that an old-fashioned run by Carlos Hyde seemed to jump-start the Buckeyes.

Ohio State had tallied only 48 yards in the first quarter to 172 for the RedHawks, and Miller was just 1 of 7 passing. The Buckeyes took over for their fifth possession seconds into the second quarter and Hyde, who to that point had 8 yards on three carries, found a huge hole for a 16-yard gain to the OSU 33. It was pretty much off to the races after that as Hyde's run seemed to loosen up the RedHawks' defense.

Miller followed with a 6-yard run and then connected with Corey "Philly" Brown for 38 yards to move to the visitors' 23. From there, Devin Smith guaranteed his spot on every highlight show in the country with one of the most acrobatic catches in Ohio Stadium history, giving the Buckeyes a touchdown and their first lead of the afternoon. The march covered 83 yards in four plays and took all of 63 seconds. Smith's points were the first of 35 straight for Ohio State.

Miller would go on to pass for 207 yards and two scores and rush for 161 yards (including a 65-yard touchdown) on 17 carries, good for a 9.5-yard average, before leaving the game with leg cramps. After that poor passing start, Miller completed 13 of his last 17 passes as he seemed to take a step forward on the path Meyer has set for him. That is going from a great athlete who plays quarterback – which he pretty much was as a freshman last season – to a quarterback who manages the offense and also makes big plays.

If Meyer was still looking for that "wow" factor from his wide receivers, he certainly got a dose of it from Smith on his scoring play. Evan Spencer also turned in a wow job with a 44-yard reception to the Miami 1 with three seconds to go in the half that almost set up another touchdown.

In all, the wide receivers, who have probably as a group taken the most criticism from Meyer since his arrival, turned in a pretty fair afternoon, which has to bode well for the Buckeyes. Brown finished with seven catches for 87 yards, Spencer with three for 54, Smith two for 31 and Jake Stoneburner, making his debut as a wide receiver, grabbed a pair for 28. Verlon Reed added a 13-yard reception for good measure.

Those 15 total receptions by the wide

receivers represented nearly a quarter of the total of 65 the group posted for the entire 2011 season while Brown's seven were exactly half of his total of 14 last year that tied for the team lead. But before you think Meyer's spread offense went pass-happy against the RedHawks, remember that the Buckeyes ran the ball 53 times while throwing it only 33.

It's funny but as the fourth quarter started, I was thinking that the Buckeyes had not thrown to the tight end or handed the ball to the fullback as promised – a promise that would have meant a great change from the Jim Tressel era. Almost as if on cue, however, OSU mounted a drive early in the final period that featured two completions to tight end Nick Vannett for 13 yards and a pair of runs by fullback Zach Boren for 10 yards. That included a 2-yard touchdown run by the 245-pound senior from Pickerington, Ohio, to give the Buckeyes a 49-10 lead with 9:33 to play. Boren had carried only once in his previous three years.

There was one play in particular that helped give me a feel for Meyer's spread, which is designed to make opponents defend the entire field.

With fewer than seven minutes to go in the second quarter, Miller lined up alone in the backfield with Buckeyes spread out across the entire line of scrimmage. With RedHawk defenders forced to fan out to account for the Buckeyes, Miller ran right up the middle for 33 yards to the Miami 9. It took Hyde two plays to cover the final yards and give the Buckeyes a 21-3 lead with 5:17 to go before the half.

While the offense gets high marks after its sluggish start, my biggest concern coming out of the game would have to be the pass defense. The bottom line in defensive football, of course, is the number of points allowed, and the Buckeyes gave up only 10. But a closer look at the game would show that if the RedHawks had not dropped countless passes, it might have been more of a contest.

Even with the drops, Zac Dysert completed 31 of 53 passes for 303 yards with plenty of open receivers. Coming into the game, I looked upon the secondary as a potential strength for the team, so I found the performance a little disheartening. In fairness to the Buckeyes, football is all about making adjustments and 165 of the yards – more than half – came in the first quarter when Dysert was 13 of 23 even with the drops.

However, while we keep hearing about killer instinct on offense under Meyer, where was the killer instinct by the Buckeye defense? After Ohio State went up 35-3 following a botched Miami punt snap for a touchdown early in the third quarter, the defense allowed the RedHawks to march 73 yards in seven plays – all passes – on a drive capped by a 44-yard scoring pass from Dysert to Nick Harwell.

Of course, defense is a team effort, and more pressure by the defensive line might have aided the secondary's cause. The Buckeyes did not record their first sack until the third quarter and had just two for the game, only one on Dysert. Some of that could be attributed to Dysert's quick release and also to the Buckeyes dropping more people back into coverage because of the Miami

quarterback's passing proficiency. Still, with the defensive line one of the strengths of the team, plus Meyer's known desire to have a relentless attack up front, I expected a little more pressure.

An encouraging note was that the sacks came from highly touted freshmen Adolphus Washington and Noah Spence, a great sign for the present and future.

It was also encouraging to see Nathan Williams back in action. His presence is bound to aid the pass rush. Early in the game, he got pressure on Dysert in the red zone, and while Williams didn't get the sack, he may have affected the pass, which Justin Semmes dropped. A better pass and the RedHawks might have had a touchdown instead of settling for a field-goal attempt, which freshman Kaleb Patterson missed.

In the end, it's hard to complain about a 46-point victory that hopefully portends great things to come under Meyer. But the coach and his staff will have plenty of things for the team to work on as the Buckeyes prepare for what will probably be a stiffer challenge Sept. 8 against Central Florida.

Now You're Talking!

One of the things I was most excited about hearing from Meyer after the game was the criticism of his offense for not being able to punch the ball over from the 1-yard line right before intermission. The Buckeyes' inability to power out a couple of yards the last few years has really bothered me.

"Ohio State should be able to knock it in from the 1," Meyer said after the game. "That's bad. That's absolutely nonnegotiable. Nonsense. And we'll hit that with a sledgehammer because that can't happen. And I just flat looked at the linemen. I don't know what happened. I couldn't see."

"But the Ohio State University, with a 220- or 230-pound tailback, can smash it in from the 1-yard line. And that didn't happen – without taking anything away from our opponent. The whole world knew what we were doing, but it was part of the deal. At that moment, I wanted to see if our line would do it."

There will come a time when Ohio State will need a yard or two for a touchdown or a first down that will have more significance than the Buckeyes' failure in a game they were leading 21-3.

I'm tired of hearing how parity in college has made it more difficult for teams such as Ohio State to just blow the opposition off the ball. That is the most fundamental and basic part of football, and a championship team had better be able to push opposing defenders back when needed.

The fact that the Buckeyes were even in position to go for the touchdown at that juncture or that they tried for it is a clear contrast in the styles of Meyer and Tressel.

With the Buckeyes taking over at their own 20 with 2:19 left in the half and holding a 21-3 lead, it is questionable whether Tressel would have come out passing as Meyer did, and it is doubtful the former coach would have gone for the touchdown at the end, instead opting to put points on the board with a field goal.

With the Buckeyes getting the ball to start the second half, however, it really wasn't that

bold a move by Meyer, and he's right – his team should have scored that touchdown. Once Miller took the opening play of the second half for a 65-yard touchdown, it was all pretty moot, though.

Speaking of Miller carrying the ball, the other thing that stood out for me from Meyer's postgame remarks was the fact that he admitted that Miller's 17 carries were probably too many, saying he would like his quarterback to be more in the 10 to 12 range as far as carries.

Regular readers of this column know that I have been concerned since his arrival that Meyer might run Miller, now listed at 6-2 and 220 pounds, too often. I have no doubt that Miller, with his excellent athletic ability, could gain large quantities of yardage if he ran the ball repeatedly. But exposing the franchise player to too much of a pounding could wind up a case of winning the battle but losing the war if he were knocked out for any extended period of time.

I think Buckeye fans were somewhat reassured with the performance of backup Kenny Guiton against the RedHawks. He completed 5 of 9 passes for 37 yards and ran for another 14 yards on five carries after Miller went out.

But make no mistake about it. Kenny Guiton is no Braxton Miller.

Wow Factor Times Two

Many, including me, have already dubbed Smith's touchdown catch one of the greatest in Ohio Stadium history. Don't forget that Spencer turned in a similar catch as a freshman in the opener last season against Akron. Spencer's 33-yard grab from Miller was described by BSB managing editor Mark Rea in his Akron game story as "a one-handed circus catch along the sideline" and was described in this space as a "highlight-reel reception."

Miller was the common denominator on both the plays. It will be even better for the Buckeyes when the sophomore quarterback starts putting his passes on the money more consistently.

Still, it has to be comforting for Miller, his coaches and Buckeye fans to know that there are receivers out there who can make the difficult catch when called upon.

Comparison To 2002 Opener

We continue our celebration of the 10th anniversary of Ohio State's 2002 national football championship in this issue with coverage of the Buckeyes' 45-21 opening victory over Texas Tech.

It is interesting to compare some of the numbers of that opener to the 2012 opener with Miami to get a sense of Tressel vs. Meyer. Ohio State ran the ball 57 times and passed 17 times against Texas Tech, compared to the 53 and 33, respectively, against Miami. The Buckeyes under Meyer got off 12 more plays.

Both Tressel and Meyer had to be pleased as each team won the turnover battle – 1-0 for the 2002 team and 3-0 in 2012.

The '02 team faced a similar quarterback to Dysert in Kliff Kingsbury and had similar success – or lack thereof – in stopping him. Kingsbury was 26 of 44 for 341 yards with three touchdowns and an interception.

One other interesting note as you try to compare Tressel with Meyer is the fact that the Red Raiders outscored the Buckeyes by a 14-7 margin in the fourth quarter, while Ohio State had a 21-0 fourth-quarter edge over the RedHawks.