Originally Published: Sept. 6, 2014

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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0 74470 12801 4 01

Vol. 34, No. 1 "For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More" Sept. 6, 2014

Sailing Away

SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG PLAY – Ohio State redshirt freshman Darron Lee (43) races across the back of the end zone followed by teammates such as Tyvis Powell (23) after Lee scored the Buckeyes' first touchdown in the third quarter of the win vs. Navy on a 61-yard fumble recovery.

Buckeyes Relieved To Be Past Navy's Challenge

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Standing on the artificial turf at M&T Bank Stadium following Ohio State's 34-17 win against Navy in Baltimore, redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett stood silently next to CBS Sports Network reporter Allie LaForce as they waited to start their interview.

When it came time to speak, the player tabbed to replace the injured Braxton Miller minced no words about how he felt after his first football game of any kind since October 2012, when he tore his ACL as a senior in high school.

"I feel relieved," he said.

Not long after that, as music thumped the walls in the nearby visitors' locker room, Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer stood in the interview room and quickly echoed Barrett's sentiments after first thanking the Buckeye fans who once again made an opposing venue feel like Ohio Stadium.

"Second of all, I have a lot of respect for Navy," the third-year head coach told reporters. "The best thing about this game is that we won and it's in the rearview mirror. It seems like we had been working on this thing forever."

In fact, the Buckeyes had been working on preparing for Navy for longer than usual. Meyer said in the week leading up to the contest that the instinct for coaches at the start of fall practice is always to worry about their own system and "install, install, install."

With Navy's vaunted triple option attack to prepare for, though, the third-year Ohio State coach included a Navy period in the Buckeyes' practices beginning on the first day of fall camp, an unusual choice. Meyer said he leaned on assistant coaches who had played against or worked for service academies to make sure the team's plan of defense was as sound as possible going into the game.

The need for the Buckeyes to adapt to a difficult offense that they almost never face was still trumped by issues plaguing their own squad. Heading into training camp, the Buckeyes were looking to replace four starters on the offensive line. Left tackle Jack Mewhort, left guard Andrew Norwell, center Corey Linsley and right guard Marcus Hall all moved on, leaving junior Taylor Decker as the only returning starter.

Running back Ezekiel Elliott faced the difficult task of replacing Carlos Hyde, the first running back coached by Meyer to rush for more than 1,000 yards in one season. The backfield picture muddled further when the sophomore underwent surgery on his wrist during fall camp that forced him to miss a week and limited his contact in practice once he returned.

The defense didn't live up to its Silver Bullets nickname last year, but that side of the ball still found itself looking to replace more talent than any coach would like, including a pair of first-round NFL draft picks in linebacker Ryan Shazier and cornerback Bradley Roby as well as two senior captains (safeties Christian Bryant and C.J. Barnett) who manned the secondary.

On top of all of that, the expectations laid out for the team ground to a halt when Miller tore his labrum in practice Aug. 18, less than two weeks before the game. The senior quarterback had already been limited in practice because of muscle soreness stemming from an injury sustained at the Orange Bowl in January and subsequent surgery, but his absence handed the keys to the offense to a redshirt freshman who had never taken a snap in college.

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BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

Vol. 34, No. 1
Sept. 6, 2014
www.BuckeyeSports.com

Buckeye Sports Bulletin (USPS 705-690, ISSN 0883-6833.) is published 24 times a year (weekly September through November, biweekly mid-March through May and January through early March and monthly June through August and December) by:

Columbus Sports Publications
1350 W. Fifth Ave., Suite 30
P.O. Box 12453
Columbus, Ohio 43212
(614) 486-2202
bsb@buckeyesports.com

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: $77.95/year.

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2014-15 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 34)

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The next issue (Sept. 13 cover date) will be mailed Sept. 9.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin is a privately owned newspaper and is not affiliated directly or indirectly with The Ohio State University.

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OPINION

Middling Performance Easy To Understand

From coaching to execution, the Ohio State football team was far from perfect during its 34-17 season-opening win against the U.S. Naval Academy, but there were some mitigating circumstances.

It marked the first time in a decade and a half the team had opened a season on the road, and the first time in 36 years it had started a freshman quarterback in a season opener.

For a team with more than a dozen first-year players sprinkled throughout the two-deep, one that played against an opponent with a fluky offensive scheme, and one whose franchise quarterback went down for the season less than two weeks before the first game, it was a victory whose importance was not lost on third-year head coach Urban Meyer.

"I have a lot of respect for Navy," Meyer said, "but the best thing about this game is that we won it. … It happened, we won, show great respect and get out of Dodge – fast, before they change their mind."

The Buckeyes managed to survive the relentless pounding of Navy and its triple-option running attack as well as some initial jitters of their own. While the revamped defense spent most of its time trying to guess where the Midshipman ball carrier was going to be next, Meyer and offensive coordinator Tom Herman spent a great deal of their time during the first half unable to settle upon which of a variety of options best fit their attack.

Mix in a couple of head-scratching play calls – such as a straight option on third-and-1 that was snuffed out by a Navy defense that sees that play every day in practice at least 50 times – and the rebuilt offensive line got off to a shaky start which manifested itself into some opening-day mistakes by redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett.

As a result, the Buckeyes trailed by a 7-6 deficit at halftime, marking the first time in the 26-game Meyer era that the offense had failed to generate a first-half touchdown.

Once things settled themselves, however, the OSU offense crossed the goal line three times during the final 19 minutes of the game. During crunch time, Meyer and Herman abandoned their flash-and-slash approach and went back to basics. The Buckeyes kept things simple in the fourth quarter and sank Navy with a punishing ground attack that averaged a hefty 7.6 yards on 16 attempts.

Meyer and Herman also appeared to simplify things for Barrett, who struggled at times during the early stages of the game as he tried to do his best imitation of injured quarterback Braxton Miller. The truth of the matter is that Barrett is not Miller – not even close. Barrett has a nice, easy throwing motion, but he also tends to wind up on occasion and telegraph his throws. There are times when he is going to have to show more zip on the ball than he did against Navy.

Additionally, while Barrett displayed enough mobility to finish as the team's leading rusher with 50 yards on nine carries, it is clear he does not possess Miller's gear-changing, jaw-dropping, game-breaking burst.

Still, Barrett did more than an admirable job for a rookie quarterback making his first collegiate start. With the exception of a careless second-quarter interception, he had a tidy 12-for-15 performance in the passing game, good for 226 yards and a pair of touchdowns.

All in all, it was a good start, but the new quarterback and his offense are clearly a work in progress. Now, it's on to face Virginia Tech and to see how much progress still needs to be made.

Opening Observations

• Ohio State is now 8-2 all-time in games played during the month of August. The only blemishes on that ledger each came in the now-defunct Kickoff Classic played at Giants Stadium at the Meadowlands in East Rutherford, N.J. The Buckeyes lost a 16-10 decision to Alabama in 1986 and absorbed a 23-12 defeat against Miami (Fla.) in 1999. The Kickoff Classic was last played in 2002, and Giants Stadium was torn down in 2012 and replaced by MetLife Stadium.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

• The Buckeyes increased their all-time record to 5-1 against service academy teams. All five victories have come against Navy while the lone loss was a particularly ugly 23-11 defeat against Air Force in the 1990 Liberty Bowl. Ohio State has never played Army although the teams were at one time scheduled to square off in the 2009 season opener. The Cadets asked to be released from that contract, and the Buckeyes opened against the Midshipmen instead.

• Meyer is now 3-0 as a head coach against service academies. During his tenure at Utah, his teams posted back-to-back victories against Air Force, outlasting the Falcons in 2003 by a 45-43 decision in three overtimes and taking a 49-35 victory the following season.

• The game at M&T Bank Stadium wasn't the first time Ohio State and Navy had played one another in Baltimore. Back in 1930, the Buckeyes rolled to a 27-0 victory over the Midshipmen in a game at the old Municipal Stadium. Three-time All-American Wes Fesler starred on offense, defense and special teams in the game, including throwing a touchdown pass to future OSU director of athletics Dick Larkins.

• There are big-play receivers, and then there is Devin Smith. His 80-yard touchdown reception ignited Ohio State's second-half surge against Navy and gave him 19 TD catches for his career. Ten of those touchdown receptions have gone for at least 40 yards, and Smith is now averaging a ridiculous 41.7 yards per touchdown catch.

• Senior tight end Jeff Heuerman didn't have a catch in the game, but he still figured into the passing game in a big way. Heuerman picked up a blitzing Navy linebacker late in the third quarter, giving Barrett the time he needed to spot Smith breaking free from safety Kwazel Bertrand, who was temporarily frozen by a play-action fake. Barrett connected with Smith for an 80-yard touchdown and the Buckeyes never looked back.

• After two years of searching, Meyer might have finally found his next Percy Harvin. Sophomore Dontre Wilson averaged a team-best 7.2 yards on six rushing attempts and added 46 yards on a pair of pass receptions.

• Outside linebacker Darron Lee got the credit for scooping up a fumble and racing 61 yards for Ohio State's first touchdown of the season. But Lee's scoop-and-score was made possible by the pressure defensive end Joey Bosa applied on Navy QB Keenan Reynolds. Bosa caused Reynolds to short-arm his pitch to running back Demond Brown, whose fumble Lee turned into six points for the Buckeyes.

• I heard a lot of grumbling about OSU's defensive effort, which included giving up 370 rushing yards, the most by any nonconference opponent since Washington piled up 413 in 1966. Considering, however, that Navy has proved over the past few years that it can run the ball effectively against anyone, I'm willing to give the defense a passing grade and see what happens against a more conventional offensive attack.

• Apparently I am in the minority, but I have no criticism for Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo burning his final timeout at the 9:53 mark of the fourth quarter to challenge an Ohio State first down. The Mids were still very much in the game, trailing only 20-17 at the time, and Niumatalolo sensed it was now-or-never time for his team. The Midshipmen had previously stopped the Buckeyes on a fourth-and-1, and doing it again near midfield at that juncture could have fueled a possible upset.

What We Learned

• We learned a couple of things about Big Ten teams during the opening weekend. One is that Rutgers is going to have to clean up its pass defense if it intends to remain undefeated for very long. The Scarlet Knights took a hard-earned 41-38 victory at Washington State but allowed Cougars QB Connor Halliday to throw for 532 yards and five touchdowns.

• Penn State head coach James Franklin has built his reputation as quarterback-friendly, and he underscored that in his first game with the Nittany Lions when Christian Hackenberg set a single-game school record by throwing for 454 yards. However, the Lions need some work on their running attack (a lowly 2.0-yard average on 28 attempts) as well as hanging onto the football. Penn State committed three turnovers that kept UCF in the game until kicker Sam Ficken delivered a 36-yard field goal on the final play to allow Penn State to escape with a 26-24 win.

• Is it possible that Pat Fitzgerald's seat might be getting a little warm at Northwestern? The Wildcats fell into a 31-7 hole during their home opener to Cal, a team generally perceived to be average, before eventually succumbing to a 31-24 final. Northwestern, which lost its first season opener since 2004, has now lost eight of its last nine games. That's the worst losing streak for the program since it lost eight in a row between 2001 and 2002.

• Wisconsin is one of the favorites to win the Big Ten West, but the Badgers need to find a passing game if they want to contend for the division title. They managed only 50 yards through the air and blew a 17-point lead in the second half, eventually dropping a 28-24 decision to LSU.

• There were several replays in the OSU-Navy game, many of which went against the Buckeyes. But whether confirming what was called on the field or overturning the original call, the goal of getting things right seemed to be achieved. Not so in Minnesota where the Golden Gophers withstood a late onslaught from Eastern Illinois to post a solid 42-20 win. Early in the fourth quarter, every replay seemed to indicate Minnesota QB Mitch Leidner's knee was down before the football crossed the goal line, yet the replay official upheld the original call of a touchdown. The disputed play came on second down, and the Gophers would likely have scored on the ensuing play, but the point is this: What good is having replay if you don't get the call right?

COVER STORY

Better Second Half Helps Buckeyes Down Navy

Continued From Page 1

"It definitely hurt us emotionally when Braxton went down, but what were we going to do?" Barrett said. "We weren't going to just sit there and start losing. Try to grab the reins and keep on going as far as the offense. The week before, it got announced that I was the second-string quarterback so it was just one of those deals like, we're not going to look at each other and just lose, I guess. So we had to come out and play like we did today and we would be all right."

The Buckeyes were all right, although it took some work to address the aforementioned concerns at offensive line, running back, defense and quarterback. With Barrett under center, Ohio State was held without a touchdown in the first half for the first time since Oct. 15, 2011, when Illinois allowed just a field goal over the first two quarters.

The drive chart at halftime looked particularly uninspiring, as Ohio State's six drives included two field goals, two punts, a red-zone interception and a kneel-down with five seconds left in the half after a missed field goal from Navy.

Part of that had to do with the rebuilt offensive line, which opened with Decker at left tackle, sophomore Pat Elflein at left guard, junior Jacoby Boren at center, redshirt freshman Billy Price at right guard and fifth-year senior Darryl Baldwin at right tackle. On Ohio State's fourth drive of the game, Elflein moved to right guard and Joel Hale came in for Price at left guard.

While the inexperienced line had its moments, it also struggled to give Barrett enough time or Elliott enough space in the first two quarters. At halftime, Navy had already registered its only sack of the game, and the OSU rushing attack had managed just 66 yards on 19 carries. Barrett had gone 8 of 11, but one of those three incompletions was an interception at the Navy 5-yard line that he let sail as three Midshipmen closed in on him.

SONNY BROCKWAY

STRONG FINISH – Ohio State had a better second half on offense, with quarterback J.T. Barrett and linemen Billy Price (54) and Jacoby Boren (50) helping the Buckeyes score 28 points after halftime.

The defense struggled to defend the triple option at times and was gouged for 370 rushing yards, the most allowed by an OSU team since the Michigan game in 1995 when Tim Biakabutuka ran for more than 300 yards by himself. Navy quarterback Keenan Reynolds, whose 31 touchdowns on the ground last season set an NCAA record for a QB, proved to be a formidable opponent.

A 61-yard fumble return for a touchdown by OSU linebacker Darron Lee early in the third quarter gave the Buckeyes their first touchdown of the season, but it also gave the plodding Midshipmen a second straight drive to kick off the second half. Using its textbook ball-control offense, Navy ran 25 plays to Ohio State's seven in that frame and held the ball for 12:08 of the 15 minutes. A whopping 23 of those plays were rushes, which went for 196 yards.

"It had nothing to do with young guys," safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash said. "It had to do with what they were doing. They saw how we were aligning and we were going to align a certain way and play with great technique and fundamentals, and so they saw that and had some other plays they went to that we had not seen.

"Anytime an opponent does that, I think there are probably anywhere from four to five plays each week that an opponent does that you haven't seen and your job as a defense is to try to survive those and adjust. One play in particular they kept hurting us on in the second half. We kept trying to adjust, but we just didn't execute. But we made the stops when we needed to."

After opening the fourth quarter by allowing a Navy field goal on a drive that began in the previous frame, the Ohio State defense locked down and stifled the triple option. Navy's final two drives of the game went three plays for 7 yards and six plays for 26 yards, ending with a punt and the final whistle, respectively.

During that time, Barrett went to work improving upon his first-half showing. The four-star prospect out of Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider had a flawless second half in the passing game, going 4 for 4 for 130 yards and two touchdowns through the air. While Navy's final two drives were stymied, Barrett led the Buckeyes to touchdowns on each of their final three possessions.

The bulk of his passing yardage came on one play with about four minutes remaining

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in the third quarter, as he found Devin Smith for a wide-open touchdown after the senior wide receiver sneaked past the Navy safeties unnoticed.

That score, which gave Ohio State a lead it would not surrender, was followed by a 10-yard scoring run from Elliott and a 9-yard touchdown reception by sophomore wide receiver Michael Thomas to give the game its final margin.

The win won't go down as one of the prettiest or most clinical in program history, but given the circumstances that plagued the team heading into the game, both players and coaches were happy to take a win any way they could get it.

"A win's a win," Ash said. "I'm not going to apologize for the way our guys played in getting the victory."

Given the challenge presented by facing such a unique offense, many Ohio State players seemed happier to know that moving on meant never having to see the triple option again than they were to open the season with a win.

"That was a tough game, and you're never going to see anything like that for the rest of the year," Ohio State senior defensive tackle Michael Bennett said. "The way they ran (the triple option), the speed they had, their running backs. I've never been against a running back that runs harder than those running backs.

"Their O-line, the guys looked like they were like 6-foot, maybe, and definitely not as big as me, but they were moving. They gave us troubles all night. That's just a grinder game."

Although opening with a team like Navy is likely not something Ohio State is in a hurry to do again soon, the experience of fending off a service academy with a second-half rally was not without benefits for the Buckeyes.

"We have a pretty tough program, we work out hard, and those are the types of games a team needs to come together," sophomore "H" Dontre Wilson said. "Once we got to the second half, they were pretty tired. We kept our foot on the gas and came out with a victory."

With the Midshipmen now in their rear-view mirror, the Buckeyes began to focus on the upcoming task at hand as Virginia Tech comes to town for a prime-time battle Sept. 6. Ohio State will host the Hokies in a highly anticipated night game in front of some of the top recruits in the country.

"Now we can move on to teams that aren't the triple option because you're not going to see the triple option ever again," Bennett said. "That was more of a team that people hate to start with because it's so different and it's a tough game and those guys are really good at what they do. It's great to get them out of the way, and Virginia Tech is going to be a pass-rushing game and that's what we love to do."

Unique Atmosphere Abounds

As students at the Naval Academy spent at least half an hour before the game polishing a brass cannon that was fired after every kickoff and following Navy scores, it became increasingly clear what a unique environment surrounded Ohio State's season opener.

The entire brigade of Midshipmen attended the game and marched onto the field before kickoff. Bennett, whose parents graduated from the United States Military Academy, led the Buckeyes out of the tunnel with an American flag in hand. All players from both sides met at midfield and exchanged handshakes before the game. At halftime, the Ohio State marching band paid tribute with an anchor formation and patriotic music.

All of that paled in comparison to the end of the game, though, when players from both teams stood side by side for the playing of "Navy Blue and Gold," the Naval Academy alma mater. That was followed by a trip to the other side of the field, as Navy players joined Ohio State for the singing of "Carmen Ohio."

The scene was similar to the end of each Army-Navy game, as tradition mandates that the two teams stay on the field for the playing of each school's alma mater – with the winning team earning the opportunity to sing second.

"It's very humbling with the things that those guys do, and then they come out here for football and put their heart on the line for football, as well," Wilson said. "It was a pretty humbling experience."

Being able to take part in such a moment had extra meaning for Bennett.

"The whole time they were singing I was wondering what my parents were thinking with me standing next to Navy singing with them," he said. "It was cool. It was a really cool experience. They're great guys who go as hard as they can between the whistles and then after the whistle, it's done. That's how it should be."

OHIO STATE VS. NAVY

Buckeyes Eventually Escape Navy Blockade

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State expected a challenge from the Naval Academy on Aug. 30 in Baltimore, and that is just what the fifth-ranked Buckeyes got.

They prevailed 34-17 against the Midshipmen, but not without having to rally from two deficits. The Buckeyes learned plenty about themselves, including that they have a lot to learn, but they were happy to escape M&T Bank Stadium with a 1-0 record.

"That's a big win," Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer said. "I want to first of all thank Buckeye Nation for supporting us the way they did. That was a great crowd, and it felt like that was our home stadium."

Those fans had a lot to cheer about in the second half, as Ohio State used a pair of big plays – a 61-yard touchdown on a fumble return by redshirt freshman linebacker Darron Lee and an 80-yard scoring pass from redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett to senior Devin Smith – to twice overturn Navy leads in the third quarter. From there, the Buckeyes wrested control of the game by scoring on their only two drives of the fourth quarter, ending the upset bid of the Midshipmen.

There were many heroes for Ohio State on both sides of the ball.

First and foremost came Barrett, who endured a few rocky moments but posted an impressive stat line while winning his first game as a starting quarterback at the college level in front of 57,579 fans. Barrett completed 12 of 15 passes for 226 yards and a pair of touchdowns with one interception and also ran for 50 yards on nine carries as the replacement for Braxton Miller, the senior who suffered a season-ending shoulder injury 12 days prior.

As planned, Barrett spread the ball around, finding six different receivers – none more than three times. He was also one of six Buckeyes to run the ball and turned out to be the leading rusher while true freshman Curtis Samuel was No. 2 on the team with 45 yards on seven carries. Sophomores Ezekiel Elliott (12 carries for 44 yards) and Dontre Wilson (six for 43) also went over the 40-yard mark for the Scarlet and Gray.

SONNY BROCKWAY

ALL THE WAY – Ohio State senior wide receiver Devin Smith (9) eludes Navy safety Kwazel Bertrand (lower left) en route to his 80-yard touchdown reception in the third quarter.

There were defensive standouts, too, for the Buckeyes as Lee added seven tackles, including two of the team's eight for loss. Senior linebacker Curtis Grant also had seven stops, including a sack, and junior defensive lineman Adolphus Washington made two of his six tackles in the backfield, including a sack.

But the Midshipmen did plenty to hurt the Buckeyes with their triple-option offense. With quarterback Keenan Reynolds at the controls, Navy piled up 370 yards on the ground, the most Ohio State has allowed since giving up 381 to Michigan in 1995. He threw only four passes – completing two for 20 yards – but made sure the right man had the ball most of the time as the Midshipmen kept the Buckeyes guessing all afternoon.

"It seems like we had been working on this (option offense) forever," Meyer said. "What you saw a little bit throughout the course of game was what I saw during practice. Every once in a while they'll get one over on you because they execute so well. Their quarterback is a heck of a player."

Slow Start, Hot Finish

Ohio State scored first on a cloudy day in the Charm City. After getting one first down then having to punt on their first possession, the Buckeyes drove 28 yards in eight plays to set up a 46-yard field goal by Sean Nuernberger, a true freshman making his college debut.

Navy answered with a vintage Navy drive, one that covered 75 yards in 11 plays. Ryan Williams-Jenkins started it with an 11-yard gain on a toss play, then Reynolds picked up 24 on an option keeper. After a 2-yard gain and a 5-yard false start penalty, the Midshipmen looked like they were in trouble facing a second-and-13. Reynolds converted that with a 17-yard pass to Brandon Colon, however, eventually setting up DeBrandon Sanders' 1-yard touchdown run.

Sanders barely was able to outrun Ohio State defensive backs Doran Grant and Tyvis Powell to the corner. Just before going out of bounds, he reached the ball out and knocked over the pylon in the front left corner of the end zone to give Navy its first lead of the afternoon, 7-3, with 56 seconds gone in the second quarter. The play was reviewed, and the result upheld by the replay official.

Ohio State followed with a three-and-out – the Buckeyes' only one of the day, as it turned out – then Barrett threw his lone interception on Ohio State's next drive. In a play the youngster wanted back, he initially did a good job of eluding pressure up the middle but then threw late across the field, a pass that found Navy defensive back Parrish Gaines at the 3-yard line rather than Ohio State's Dontre Wilson.

"That was a dumb interception," Barrett admitted. "I didn't really need it."

The Midshipmen failed to capitalize, however, as they gained only 7 yards before having to punt. Navy barely eluded disaster, though, as a fumbled option pitch on second down that Ohio State recovered was ruled to have been a forward pass on a replay review.

Barrett bounced back from the interception to lead Ohio State on an eight-play, 30-yard drive that resulted in a 28-yard Nuernberger field goal that brought them within a point with 2:04 left in the second quarter. Among the key plays on the drive was a 10-yard scramble for a first down by Barrett.

Navy nearly got those three points back, driving 47 yards in just 1:59 after Nuernberger's second field goal, but Nick Sloan's 36-yard field goal was wide right with five seconds on the clock.

At the half, Ohio State trailed 7-6 on the scoreboard but held slight statistical advantages in total yards (162-155) and yards per play (5.4 to 5.0). Barrett led all players in total offense with 107 yards, but his interception loomed large in denying Ohio State a shot at at least another field goal.

Both the score and the yardage numbers flipped in the third quarter as the Midshipmen piled up 199 yards but fell behind thanks to a timely scoop-and-score by Lee.

Navy took the opening kickoff of the second half and immediately went to work, getting a 15-yard run by slotback Geoffrey Whiteside and a 20-yard run from Williams-Jenkins to move into Ohio State territory. The Midshipmen faced a third-and-3 at the Ohio State 36 when an errant pitch on an option run landed at Lee's feet. He picked it up and ran 61 yards untouched to the end zone to put the Buckeyes on top 13-7 with 13:08 left in the third quarter.

While Lee ended up with the points, the play was created by defensive end Joey Bosa, who not only strung out Reynolds on the option but got a hand on his arm as he tried to pitch. That caused it to fall short of intended target Demond Brown.

"It was a bad pitch – completely on me," Reynolds said. "I should have handed the ball off (to the fullback) anyway. That was just a mistake, and it turned out to be a very critical mistake. Our only turnover and it went for a touchdown. We knew coming in that we couldn't turn the ball over, we had to be perfect, and that was a huge swing in momentum."

Navy was undaunted by falling behind, however, and the Midshipmen responded with their longest and quickest scoring drive of the day. It started with a bang as Williams-Jenkins took a counter handoff up the middle 67 yards to the Ohio State 17-yard line. Sanders took a pitch 13 yards on the following play to give the Midshipmen a first-and-goal from the 4, and Reynolds nearly scored on the following play but was stopped at the 1. He powered in on an option keeper on second down, and Sloan's point-after kick put Navy back on top, 14-13, with 11:15 left in the third quarter.

On the ensuing Ohio State drive, the Buckeyes drove just across midfield but were forced to give up the ball on downs when Elliott was stuffed on a fourth-and-1.

Taking over at their own 47, the Midshipmen appeared poised to take control of the game, but the Ohio State defense bowed its back. After giving up a 13-yard run to Brown that gave Navy a first down at the Ohio State 32, the Buckeyes threw Reynolds for a loss on consecutive plays. First he was

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 34, Navy 17

Aug. 30, 2014 – M&T Bank Stadium; Baltimore

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4		F
Ohio State	3	3	14	14	–	34
Navy	0	7	7	3	–	17

First Quarter

OSU – Nuernberger, 46 yard field goal, 4:26; 8 plays, 28 yards, 4:25 TOP.

Second Quarter

NAVY – Sanders, 1 yard run (Sloan kick), 14:04; 11 play 75 yards, 5:22 TOP.

OSU – Nuernberger, 28 yard field goal, 2:04; 8 plays, 30 yards, 3:58 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Lee, 61 yard fumble return (Nuernberger kick), 13:08.

NAVY – Reynolds, 1 yard run (Sloan kick), 11:15; 4 plays, 84 yards, 1:53 TOP.

OSU – D.Smith, 80 yard pass from Barrett (Nuernberger kick), 4:10; 1 play, 80 yards, 0:11 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

NAVY – Sloan, 32 yard field goal, 13:54; 11 plays, 61 yards, 5:16 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 10 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 8:54; 10 plays, 80 yards, 5:00 TOP.

OSU – Michael Thomas, 9 yard pass from Barrett (Nuernberger kick), 2:09; 8 plays, 70 yards, 4:48 TOP.

Att. – 57,579.

Weather – 74 degrees, cloudy; wind, SE 7 mph.

Team Statistics

	OSU	NAVY
First Downs	19	22
Rushing	12	21
Passing	7	1
Penalty	0	0
Rushing-Yards	40-194	63-370
Passing Yards	226	20
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	12-15-1	2-4-0
Offensive Plays	55	67
Total Net Yards	420	390
Third Down Efficiency	2-8	4-12
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	1-1
Punts-Avg.	2-55.5	5-45.6
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	2-1
Penalties	2-20	3-20
Time of Possession	27:34	32:26

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **OSU:** Barrett 9-50; Samuel 7-45; Elliott 12-44; D.Wilson 6-43; J.Marshall 3-7; R.Smith 2-6. **NAVY:** Williams-Jenkins 7-118; Whiteside 5-44; Reynolds 23-42; D.Brown 4-41; Swain 3-35; Sanders 6-30; N.Copeland 7-22; Ezell 3-17; Gulley 2-17; Singleton 1-2; Cass Jr. 2-2.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **OSU:** Barrett 12-15-1-226-2. **NAVY:** Reynolds 2-4-0-20-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Michael Thomas 3-39; D.Smith 2-94; D.Wilson 2-46; Spencer 2-24; J.Marshall 2-19; Samuel 1-4. **NAVY:** Colon 1-17; Whiteside 1-3.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **OSU:** Johnston 2-55.5-58. **NAVY:** Beltran 5-45.6-51.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** D.Wilson 3-24. **NAVY:** None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** D.Wilson 2-53. **NAVY:** D.Brown 4-64.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **NAVY:** Sloan (36).

FORCED FUMBLES – **OSU:** Bosa. **NAVY:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Lee 1-61. **NAVY:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** None. **NAVY:** Gaines 1-0.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** C.Grant 1.0-11; Washington 1.0-5. **NAVY:** Quessenberry 1.0-9.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **OSU:** Washington 2.0-7; Lee 2.0-3; C.Grant 1.0-11; T.Lewis 1.0-4; Bosa 1.0-3; Bennett 1.0-3. **NAVY:** Quessenberry 2.0-13; C.Johnson 1.0-7; Anthony 1.0-2; Britton 1.0-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **OSU:** T.Powell 8-5-13; Perry 5-4-9; Lee 5-2-7; Bell 5-2-7; C.Grant 3-4-7; Washington 4-2-6; Worley 4-1-5; Reeves 3-1-4; Frazier 2-2-4; Burrows 0-4-4; Bosa 1-2-3; S.Miller 0-3-3; Tanner 2-0-2; T.Lewis 1-1-2; D.Grant 1-1-2; Apple 1-1-2; Bennett 1-1-2; Fada 1-0-1; Schutt 1-0-1. **NAVY:** C.Johnson 7-4-11; Tuider 5-4-9; Bertrand 7-0-7; Adams 4-1-5; Anthony 4-1-5; Drake 1-4-5; Britton 3-1-4; Gaines 2-1-3; Quessenberry 2-1-3; Gonzalez 1-2-3; Clements 1-1-2; Krah 1-0-1; Uzoma 1-0-1; Jamison 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **OHIO STATE:** Offense, Decker, Price, Boren, Elflein, Baldwin, Heuerman, Spencer, Barrett, Elliott, Michael Thomas, D.Smith, Nuernberger. Defense, Bosa, Washington, Bennett, S.Miller, Lee, C.Grant, Worley, Apple, T.Powell, Burrows, D.Grant, Johnston. Reserves, D.Wilson, Samuel, McMillan, R.Smith, Bell, Frazier, J.Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Reeves, Bogard, Perry, Fada, Clinton, Haynes, Rock, Burger, Hale, Munger, C.Williams, Farris, T.Lewis, Underwood, M.Hill, Vannett, C.Smith, Greene. **NAVY:** Offense, Tillman, Heap, Binns, Ryder, Zuzek, Gaston, Dudeck, Whiteside, Reynolds, Williams-Jenkins, N.Copeland, Sloan. Defense, Quessenberry, Sarra, Anthony, C.Johnson, Drake, Gonzalez, Tuider, Clements, Bertrand, Gaines, Adams, Beltran. Reserves, Krah, Barbour, T.Smith, Cass Jr., Sanders, Gulley, D.Brown, S.White, Ezell, Singleton, Swain, Jamison, Grebe, Uzoma, J.Powell, Britton, Mason, Goble, R.Harris, Tamburello, Forrestal, E.Martin, West, Fleming, Davenport, Meier, Colon, T.Wilson, Davis, Cardona, Raiford, Uzoma.

OHIO STATE VS. NAVY

stopped in the backfield on an option keeper by Washington, then he was sacked on a play-action drop back by Curtis Grant. That backed Navy up to the OSU 45, and it could not convert a third-and-23. Reynolds' pass to Jamir Tillman was caught, but the receiver was out of bounds.

After Pablo Beltran's punt went into the end zone for a touchback, Ohio State took over at its own 20-yard line and struck immediately.

Devin Smith ran a fly pattern straight down the right hash, blowing past Navy safety Kwazel Bertrand. The OSU senior hauled in Barrett's slightly underthrown pass, stepped through an attempted ankle tackle by a diving Bertrand and sprinted for the end zone with an 80-yard touchdown. Nuernberger's PAT kick gave Ohio State a 20-14 lead with 4:10 left in the third quarter.

"They were giving us run, run, run, run and they caught us sleeping in the secondary," Gaines said. "Ultimately, a big play will always kill you. I'm going to be thinking about that play when I go to sleep tonight. When one person gets beat, everyone gets beat."

Navy was far from finished, though, as Reynolds led another long scoring drive, albeit it one that ended with only a field goal by Sloan from 32 yards out. That made it 20-17 Ohio State with 13:54 left, and it was as close as Navy would get the rest of the way.

In response, Barrett engineered a methodical drive heavy on the running game as Samuel ran for 1, 14 and 11 yards on the first three plays to move the Buckeyes near midfield. After Barrett runs of 1 and 2 yards sandwiched a 6-yard Elliott run, Ohio State faced a crucial fourth-and-1 at the Navy 45, and offensive coordinator Tom Herman and Meyer chose to keep it on the ground. Elliott took a zone-read handoff from Barrett and was tripped up near the line of scrimmage but managed to fall forward for enough yardage to move the sticks.

"I think we felt like we had a little bit of momentum and we could execute to get 1 yard," Herman said of the decision to go for it. "We actually didn't execute it very well at the quarterback position. He didn't read it correctly. Ezekiel did a nice job driving his legs and getting just enough."

Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo used his last timeout to challenge the spot of the ball, but the replay official upheld the ruling Elliott had reached the line to gain.

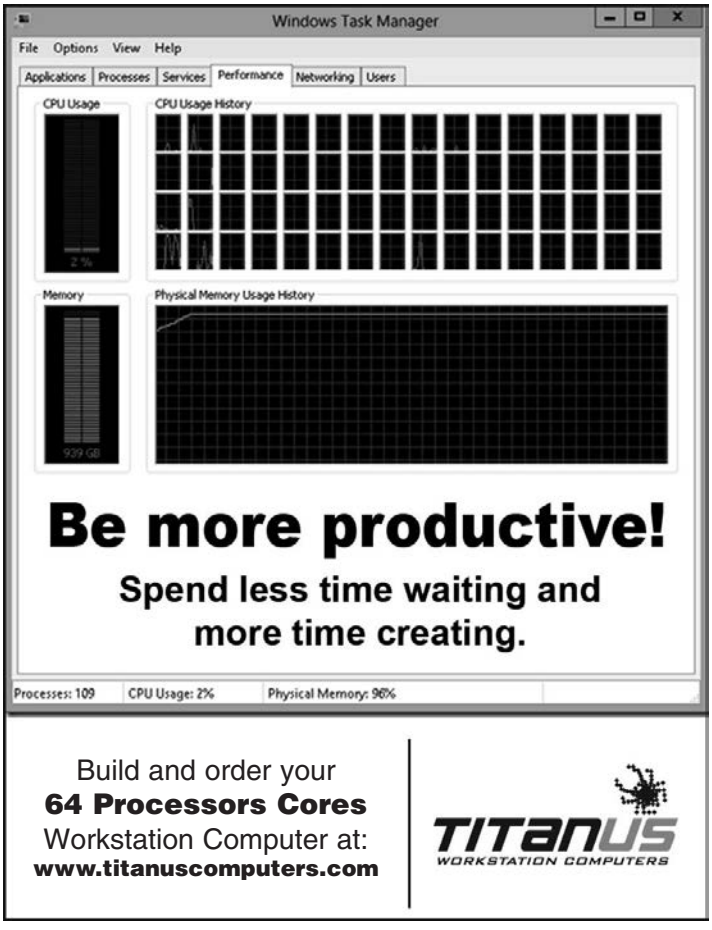
"It was kind of a desperation move," Niumatalolo said.

The Buckeyes were in the end zone three plays later as Barrett hit Evan Spencer for a 19-yard pass and Wilson ran 15 yards around left end before Elliott capped the drive with a 10-yard scamper up the middle untouched for the touchdown.

Nuernberger's kick gave Ohio State its largest lead at 27-17 with 8:54 left in the game, and the Buckeye defense slammed the door with a three-and-out on the ensuing possession.

After another Beltran punt, the Buckeyes took the ball at their own 30 and drove 70 yards for the put-away score, a 9-yard touchdown pass from Barrett to Michael Thomas that removed the drama that had existed for much of the afternoon.

"That's a good team, obviously, that won nine games a year ago and they'll win that many or more this year," Meyer said. "I have a lot of respect for who they are. I always have. When I was at Notre Dame (as an assistant), that was always the worst week of the year – every time that we had to prepare for Navy."



Originally Published: Sept. 6, 2014

OHIO STATE VS. NAVY

Unusual Attack Tests Ohio State's Defense

By MATTHEW HAGER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State senior captain Michael Bennett was not unfamiliar with the triple option before the Navy game.

Bennett, of course, came to Ohio State from Centerville, Ohio, where the Elks have employed the rush-heavy attack for decades.

Yet Bennett had never seen anything like Navy's triple option, which has been honed to perfection and was on full display at M&T Bank Stadium in Baltimore. The Midshipmen rushed for 370 yards with Ryan Williams-Jenkins leading the group of 11 rushers with 118 yards on seven carries.

Ohio State allowed the most yards it had on the ground since permitting 381 at Michigan in 1995, and Bennett had little but praise for Navy's offense after the Buckeyes emerged with a hard-fought 34-17 victory.

"We came into the game knowing that Navy is not a pushover team," Bennett said. "They're a good team and they run the triple option to perfection. It was a little frustrating to see the pitch player getting free a lot, but they were doing a good job (cut blocking) and we were having a hard time sticking with them.

"You have to give props to Navy. They were doing a really good job because guys were flying to the ball. We were playing our spots the right way. They were just good at it. It was frustrating, but it was good to see guys fight through it."

While allowing 5.9 yards per rush is never a good thing, the Buckeyes' much-maligned defense managed to fight through a tough game and still allow less than 400 yards of total offense when adding Navy's 20 yards through the air on two Keenan Reynolds completions. Ohio State also allowed only two long scoring drives to an offense that is known for eating up the clock with demoralizing marches.

SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUGH TO STOP – Quarterback Keenan Reynolds (19) led the Midshipmen's triple option attack to 370 yards on the ground in a losing effort against Ohio State.

"It was a hard game," OSU co-defensive coordinator Chris Ash said. "We knew it was going to be that way. That's a veteran offense. It's a coach (Ken Niumatalolo) who knows what he's doing. It's a coach who's been there for a long time, and they run their offense very well. We will move on and continue to get better."

Perhaps most important going forward, the Buckeyes managed to make the necessary adjustments during the game after Navy showed a few new looks that OSU had not seen on film.

"They popped some plays in you hadn't necessarily seen – that's a challenge," Ash said. "Our guys were very coachable on the sidelines. We were able to make some adjustments when we needed. We got stops at critical times.

"Was it pretty? No, but did we make stops when we needed to – absolutely. A win is a win. We'll move on to the next game and put this one behind us."

Navy found success on counter plays and breaking contain on the edge at times in the game, but Bennett said the Buckeyes never got down on themselves even when trailing the Midshipmen by a 7-6 score at halftime and 14-13 after Reynolds' 1-yard touchdown run in the third quarter answered a potentially momentum-changing 61-yard fumble recovery for a score by Buckeye linebacker Darron Lee.

"Not once on the sideline did anybody hang their heads," Bennett said. "There was no negativity, even when we were down. Not a single person was negative about the situation. We all believed in each other. We believed in the offense. We knew that eventually they were going to get it going, and that's what ended up happening.

"Nobody ever doubted that we were going to win that game."

Ash was particularly happy with Ohio State's tackling. Four Buckeyes had five or more solo stops in the game, including safety Tyvis Powell with eight among his team-leading 13 overall stops.

Ash also dismissed those who thought the Buckeyes played poorly defensively simply because of the 370 rushing yards allowed.

"They throw so much at you, it's a game of adjustments," Ash said. "I don't know how many plays they had (67), but they threw the ball four times so they're going to have some rushing yards when that happens.

"So to say someone played bad because we gave up that many yards, get out of here."

In the end, stopping the triple option of the Midshipmen was an early test that the Buckeyes passed. They did not ace the test, but they passed.

Better yet, the triple option won't be on the final exam, either, as no other OSU opponent runs that offense.

"The things that translate are the effort, the fundamentals of the game of football, understanding angles, being able to deal with adversity," Ash said. "Those things carry over, but schematically nothing translates to what we'll be doing for the rest of the year."

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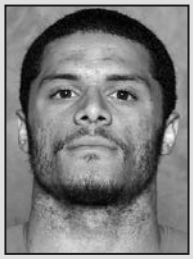
Buckeye Game Analysis

Play Of The Game

As Navy held a 14-13 lead with less than five minutes to play in the third quarter of the Aug. 30 season opener, it became clear the Buckeyes needed to do something to open up the game.

On the Buckeyes' previous possession, Ezekiel Elliott was stuffed for a loss on fourth-and-1, and to that point, the Buckeyes had just 72 yards rushing in more than 40 minutes of action.

The game called for a big passing play from quarterback J.T. Barrett, and he obliged with his 80-yard bomb to Devin Smith with 4:10 left in the third quarter that gave OSU a 20-14 lead the Buckeyes would not relinquish.



Devin Smith

"I was just trying not to miss him," Barrett said. "He was so open. They bit so hard on the play-action, I was trying not to miss him. He made a great catch then ran away from him."

Ohio State came out in one of its standard formations from its own 20, with Barrett in the shotgun and Elliott to his left. Wideouts Corey Smith and Dontre Wilson were split to the same direction, while tight end Jeff Heuerman was on a wing to the right and Devin Smith was alone matched up against cornerback Brendon Clements to the right side of the formation.

At the snap, Barrett faked a handoff to Elliott, who ran across the formation to the right, while Heuerman cut back to the left and blocked blitzing linebacker Chris Johnson.

Devin Smith ran a simple fly route down the field past Clements, who was covering the flat as part of the team's Cover-2 zone scheme. Safety Kwazel Bertrand was supposed to pick up Smith but instead was caught looking into the backfield, allowing the Buckeye receiver to get behind him.

Barrett had plenty of time as his six blockers built a nice pocket to keep Navy's four rushers at bay. Barrett's pass was a bit underthrown but hit Smith at the Navy 45, and he broke through safety Parrish Gaines' arm tackle shortly thereafter and raced to the end zone.

"The hard part about that play was we were in two-deep coverage, so (defensive coordinator) Buddy Green anticipated some deep balls," Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo said. "We were going to try to keep them underneath. Plays like that are normally things we don't allow. We make people earn what they get."

Either way, the play changed the momentum of the game.

"It was huge," OSU defensive lineman Michael Bennett said. "Football is a game of momentum, so when the defense is just fighting and fighting and fighting and the offense produces on a big pass like that from J.T., it's great to see. You're excited for your guys, and you know that your friends have your back too. It felt great."

Hidden Play Of The Game

Just moments before the bomb to Smith, the Ohio State defense made a play that changed momentum of the game as well.

Navy was up 14-13 and driving, facing a second-and-12 at the Ohio State 34 and looking to deliver a scoring blow that would be difficult to come back from.

Niumatalolo and his staff went with a play-action pass on the play, a risky proposition given the strength of Ohio State's defensive line but one that showed the Midshipmen were going for the throat.

It didn't work out as planned, though, as the Buckeyes were able to put pressure on quarterback Keenan Reynolds, who never looked comfortable as his receivers streamed down the field on deep routes.

All were covered, too, and as Reynolds tried to vacate the pocket to the left he ran into defensive end Joey Bosa. That forced him to cut upfield but right into linebacker Curtis Grant, who was a spy on the play originally and then cleaned up the action by bringing the Navy QB down for an 11-yard loss.

Navy had to punt from there, and the Buckeyes took the lead for good on their next offensive play.

What Worked Well

• **Getting better:** Ohio State was inconsistent in the early going, something that probably wasn't a surprise considering the number of players earning their first career extended action. Facing a determined opponent in a close game, the young Buckeyes could have resorted to panic, but that didn't happen, and the team closed out the game by posting a 150-36 yardage edge in the final stanza.

• **Being patient:** Much of beating Navy is about being patient. On offense, that means not getting frustrated if the Mids are able to thwart your attack with their bend-but-don't-break, 3-4 defense. On defense, that means understanding the triple option will pick up yards at times but handling that with aplomb and then not allowing the big play. Ohio State excelled at both parts, and that allowed the team to pull away in the late going.

What Didn't Work

• **Pass protection:** Especially in the first half, the young offensive line showed it has to make some progress in pass protection. Each player except for left tackle Taylor Decker, the rock of the line, seemed to have at least one play that didn't quite go according to plan in the passing game. That wasn't a huge surprise given the youth at the position, but it's something that will have to improve as the season goes on.

• **Red-zone success:** At the end of the day the Buckeyes scored on four of five trips into the red zone, but Meyer was not pleased with a pair of possessions in the first half. Ohio State scored touchdowns on 84.1 percent of red-zone trips last year, tops in the nation, but the first trip this year ended in an interception and the second ended with a field goal. The head coach made it clear he wants to see improvement in this realm going forward.

Inside The Numbers

2: Despite being a dominant rushing team, Navy had just two runs of more than 50 yards last year. Ryan Williams-Jenkins had a 67-yarder in the third quarter, which matched Navy's longest run of the 2013 season.

13: Meyer improved to 13-0 in his career in season openers, and Ohio State extended its own winning streak in lid-lifters to 15. The Buckeyes have lost just once in a season opener since 1979.

25: Ohio State won its nation's-best 25th consecutive regular-season game. The Buckeyes still haven't lost in the regular season under Meyer.

21: Navy's average starting field position was its own 21-yard line, and nine of Navy's drives started at or inside the 25. Having to traverse a long field was one reason Navy finished with almost 400 yards of offense but just 17 points.

41.7: Devin Smith's 80-yard TD pass upped his average score length to 41.7 yards, and it was his ninth career scoring catch of more than 45 yards.

Reviewing The Matchups

Ohio State rush offense vs. Navy rush defense: This wasn't Ohio State's 2013 attack, that's for sure. Missing Braxton Miller's electricity and Carlos Hyde's power, the running attack wasn't as overwhelming as it was a season ago, and in fact it was downright stagnant in the first three quarters. The fourth quarter helped salvage things and the Buckeyes ended up with 4.8 yards per carry, but one gets the sense there is more that can be done here. **EDGE: Even**

Navy rush offense vs. Ohio State rush defense: Navy ran for 370 total yards, and more than that, the Midshipmen were able to keep the Buckeyes off balance for much of the opening three quarters. The Mids' attack had success both on getting the triple option to the edge and hitting the Buckeyes with a surprise belly draw play. Navy just couldn't finish enough drives to take advantage of the ground success. **EDGE: Navy**

Ohio State pass offense vs. Navy pass defense: It's hard to complain about Barrett's day, as his only real miscue was the interception he threw in the red zone. That was quite a mistake, of course, but Barrett showed plenty of poise in not letting it bother him. He hit a fair number of intermediate passes and put his lone deep ball right on the money. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Navy pass offense vs. Ohio State pass defense: This is a big victory for Ohio State, which made Reynolds uncomfortable the few times he did try to pass. Reynolds completed just two passes – one on a nice rollout away from pressure – for 20 yards in four attempts and was sacked twice. The Buckeyes also showed great discipline in not letting Navy hit a long pass over the top as the Mids had done to spark their 2009 comeback. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Special teams: There were no big plays or major mistakes for either team in this realm, though Navy kicker Nick Sloan had to be kicking himself for missing a 36-yard field goal late in the first half that could have made a major difference on the scoreboard. OSU's specialists also had a nice day, as true freshman Sean Nuernberger drilled two field goals, including a 46-yarder, in his debut and Cameron Johnston dropped another punt to the 1-yard line. **EDGE: Ohio State**

Intangibles: Much was made before the game about how Navy would fight until the end, but at the end of the day, the Buckeyes were the ones who won the mental game and looked better in the final moments. It was a disjointed start for Ohio State – which probably should have been expected given all the youth on the field – but the Buckeyes got better as the game went on and overcame weird and unfamiliar circumstances to win the opener on the road. **EDGE: Ohio State**

– Jeff Svoboda

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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 34, Navy 17

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer on redshirt quarterback J.T. Barrett's first start: "J.T. I thought did OK. We'll evaluate the film. Every new player will have a certain amount of mistakes. We wanted to open it up a little bit more in the first half but didn't, and that wasn't because of him. It was because of our offensive line. We had a couple of mistakes in there with penalties and sacks, and we just can't do that up front. Obviously with the team we're playing next we have a lot of work to do before our next game, but I'm proud of our guys for fighting through the second half like they did."

Barrett on his start: "It was better at the end than it started. It was kind of rough at the beginning but better at the end."

Barrett on the reasons for his early struggles: "I think the first-game jitters. Whether it was the offensive line, receivers, once we got the first half out of the way, I think we started to get our feet underneath us. We started doing what we do."

Barrett on the messages he received before the game from teammates: "The main thing was saying they believed in me. The whole team was just giving me the reassurance that they believe in me and we're going to be all right as a team."

Barrett on the pregame advice he received: "Coach (Tom) Herman looked me in the eye and said, 'Hey, don't try to be something you're not. Just go out there and play the game, play with confidence,' and I feel like I did today. That definitely helped settle me down. Coming in after Braxton (Miller), people expect you to do some crazy stuff, but I'm not Braxton. I'm J.T., so I just went out there and played my game, and that definitely helped me."

Ohio State sophomore 'H' Dontre Wilson on the slow start of the offense: "We got out to a real slow start, but after Devin (Smith) scored that touchdown it really switched. We figured out what we can do and what we needed to do in order to put points on the board for the defense."

Wilson on Barrett's demeanor: "He was fine no matter what happened. Even after the pick he was smiling and telling us everything was going to be OK. And also the offensive line, their demeanor was good as well. Everybody was good. We stayed on track."

Ohio State sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott on Barrett: "J.T. is a very serious guy. He goes about his business, and he's a pro. That's how he acts. He might be a redshirt freshman, but I think he'll be great this year."

Wilson on the progress of the offensive line during the game: "They opened their eyes and saw that Navy is a great opponent. ... They pretty much put their heads down and put their feet on the ground and were ready to go."

SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT QUITE PERFECT – Navy head coach Ken Niumatalolo said the Midshipmen needed to 'play perfect' to beat the Buckeyes and made too many mistakes.

Ohio State junior defensive lineman Adolphus Washington on the game: "I feel like that last quarter, we wore their offensive line down. We wore them down. I know they're known for being tough, gritty guys, but I feel like we came in knowing they were not going to give up at any point of the game no matter what the score was. We had a rotation going, and we eventually wore their offense down."

Washington on the reaction to Smith's third-quarter touchdown reception: "The sideline went bananas. The whole D-line and the whole defense were cheering because we knew all we needed was that one big play and it was over from there. Once we got that, we were all set."

Ohio State fifth-year senior tackle Darryl Baldwin on Smith's TD: "We protected well as an offensive line, gave J.T. time to throw the ball and that play got us rolling. It got us rolling downhill finally."

Baldwin on the offensive line: "We hear all the time about how we have four new starters and we're so inexperienced. It was great to get things going and see what we can do when we play well."

Elliott on the offensive struggles in the first half: "It was definitely frustrating. We're not used to that, especially after last year. We had a very good offensive year. After the first half when we bit our tongue, we made some adjustments we needed to make. We came out in the second half and handled our business."

Elliott on the offense: "I think we're still figuring it out. We've got a lot of weapons. We can spread the ball around. There are a lot of guys getting touches like you saw today. I think we're going to keep developing and we'll get a lot better."

Meyer on the offensive line: "We'll evaluate the film and we have to settle in on a starting five. We'll have to play much better if we want to make a dent in the Big Ten Conference."

Meyer on the battle between Vonn Bell and Cam Burrows at safety and other position battles: "I think they're co-starters. It's a little bit like our group of wide receivers. You see a steady rotation of guys running in and out. Like, who's the starting 'H'? Is it Jalin (Marshall) or is it Dontre? It's both. Same thing at wide receiver with Mike Thomas and Evan Spencer and Corey Smith and Devin Smith. We've got a lot of confidence, and like I said, we have to spray the ball a bit more."

Defensive coordinator Luke Fickell on the win: "In the locker room, the No. 1 thing I wanted to say is I brought up the defensive line. This game was won by those guys. Those guys up front made the difference. Sometimes with a system like this, (Navy) can't account for not being able to block those guys up front. Those guys did a great job."

Washington on Navy quarterback Keenan Reynolds: "(He's) great. That's a great quarterback there and their O-line – we tried to get our best look at it with our scout O-line, but that O-line, you can't scout that. That was something."

Navy coach Ken Niumatalolo on the game: "They did a great job of battling and finishing us off at the end. We had some uncharacteristic mistakes that we don't normally have, and against a team like Ohio State you can't do that. We knew coming into the game we had to play perfect."

Ohio State senior defensive lineman Michael Bennett on whether his parents, both West Point graduates, would be proud that he and the Buckeyes beat Navy: "I sure hope so. I expect them to be."

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After Hype, Barrett Delivers In Debut

By RYAN GINN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

When Ohio State redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett first arrived at Ohio State, he was the quarterback whom junior tight end Nick Vannett was assigned to for summer throwing sessions.

During that time, Vannett developed some chemistry with the righthander out of Wichita Falls, Texas, forming a connection that may pay off down the line. But Vannett also got to see how the developing quarterback reacted to bad throws, rough days or any of the other struggles that come with the transition from high school to college.

"For him, it's (about) understanding why he made that mistake and how he can improve on that," Vannett said Aug. 25. "He's taken a great approach to it. Even when he's not in (at practice), he's back there with (Ohio State offensive coordinator Tom Herman) trying to talk over some plays and understand what he can do better if he made a mistake."

His first big mistake in an Ohio State uniform came in the second quarter of the Buckeyes' 34-17 win against Navy on Aug. 30. After driving the Buckeyes down to the opposing 8-yard line, Barrett threw an errant pass after being pressured by three defenders. The ball, intended for sophomore Dontre Wilson, was snatched away by Navy's Parrish Gaines 3 yards shy of the end zone.

The turnover nullified a hot stretch for Barrett, who had completed four straight passes for 54 yards to three different receivers in the plays leading up to that moment.

"After I threw the interception, I was like, 'J.T., you knew you shouldn't have thrown it,' " Barrett said. " 'Now you have to make up for it.' "

Making his first start after being pressed into duty when senior Braxton Miller tore the labrum in his throwing shoulder Aug. 18, Barrett showed no signs of wavering confidence after the red-zone turnover. He engineered an eight-play drive that led to a field goal on the next possession, the last Ohio State drive of the half other than a one-play kneel-down to run out the clock in the second quarter.

In the second half, he went to work. After his interception, Barrett didn't throw another incompletion. He connected on all four passes in the second half, throwing for 130 yards and two touchdowns. With the game on the line, Ohio State scored touchdowns on each of its last three possessions.

"It's his first game, first-game jitters," Wilson said about his quarterback. "He had to get his feet wet. After he threw that pick, his whole momentum and his whole demeanor changed. He came through."

It was Wilson who picked him up after the interception, which Barrett admitted he should have thrown away. As fellow Texans who were both part of Ohio State's 2013 recruiting class, Barrett and Wilson are good friends. Prior to the game, Wilson reminded his quarterback to focus on being himself instead of trying to live up to the expectations created by Miller, the two-time reigning Big Ten Player of the Year.

"Being from Texas, me and him are real close," Wilson said. "He's in my class, as well. I just told him, 'Man, do you. Don't try to go out there and do anything that you don't do and try to be like (Miller) or anything. Just go out and do you. When you do you, that's when you're the most comfortable.' That's what I told him."

Being Barrett

For Barrett, being himself has always been about having confidence in his abilities.

His high school coach at Rider High School, Jim Garfield, remembers one moment in particular when he fully realized how much Barrett trusted himself to make plays when needed. In a 2010 playoff game against El Paso Andress held in Odessa, Texas, Garfield looked to his sophomore quarterback to deliver a spark in a close game.

"It was kind of a back-and-forth game," he told BSB. "Our defense took the ball away, and I grabbed J.T. before he went out and said, 'Look, man, we've got to have a touchdown right here and right now.' He said, 'Yes sir,' and he went out to the field.

"We called a pass play and as soon as J.T. released the ball he came running over to me. It happened so fast, it was like he didn't even pay attention to whether the ball was completed or not. It went for a touchdown, and he just came up to me and said, 'Coach, there you go.' I knew right then and there we had a special young man with us. He wasn't being arrogant or anything, he's just that type of personality."

Rider went on to win that game in runaway fashion, advancing to the next round with a 47-22 victory in that contest followed by a 24-10 triumph the following week before bowing out with a loss in the regional final.

Barrett developed a reputation in high school for being a leader, and it didn't take him long to make a similar impression at Ohio State. During the 2013 season, Barrett was the only true freshman on the Ohio State leadership council that players estimated to contain about 20 or 25 members.

"Whenever J.T. spoke, everyone listened," Garfield said. "He commanded the respect of his teammates because he was going to produce out on the field. He's going to produce off the field, as well. He's committed to the program. There are many things he's done. I would watch him talk to the team at times, and the focus of the kids was like a coach was talking to them. Everybody paid attention."

While he's gifted with the way he can command the respect of teammates with his words, it was his actions that helped him win the backup quarterback job that turned into the starting role when Miller went down in practice less than two weeks before the season opener.

After tearing his ACL in October 2012 during his senior year of high school, Barrett charted a course that would leave him prepared to take the field for the Buckeyes once he healed from the injury. While he's known for being a quick learner and a cerebral player, Barrett showed his teammates

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SOLID START – Redshirt freshman quarterback J.T. Barrett completed 12 of 15 passes for 226 yards with two touchdowns and an interception in his first collegiate start.

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from the outset and throughout his time in Columbus that he's willing to put in the work to get results.

"He's always been the quarterback finishing first in the runs and attacking the weights in the weight room," Vannett said. "You want to see a guy like that take over an offense. That just gives you a little more trust in him."

In addition to the trust that his teammates have in him, they also handed him a vote of confidence by refusing to adjust their expectations following the loss of Miller. The absence of the two-time conference player of the year is more than just an afterthought, but player after player spent the two weeks leading up to his first game saying they expected Barrett to step in and adequately fill the void left by Miller.

Junior left tackle Taylor Decker said the offensive line, which had some shaky moments against Navy but yielded just one sack, will need to play at a high level in order to give him more time and protection as a younger player. However, he also noted that Barrett has the talent to help the Buckeyes shine.

"Braxton can make you look great, but so can J.T.," Decker said. "We're definitely going to miss Braxton, but we're not going to feel sorry for ourselves because we're missing him at all. I think we're going to be completely fine with J.T., and I'm 100 percent confident in him."

While some players might need to be monitored after being handed the reins at a program of Ohio State's caliber, Buckeyes head coach Urban Meyer said in the days leading up to the season opener that he didn't have to keep a close eye on the attitude of the first-time starter in practice.

"He's a calm guy that had a very good practice today, like a really good practice today, and was very businesslike about his approach," Meyer said in his Aug. 25 press conference. "He's not someone you have to watch to see their demeanor because it's the same as it was two weeks ago. We all know what's coming down the barrel at him, but he's handled it very well."

Perhaps the only way the even-keeled Barrett has changed has been in the way he addresses the team in the huddle. Decker said that in the wake of Miller's injury, Barrett has been more assertive and more of a leader than his underclassman status might suggest.

"He's had more of a voice in the huddle because he knows he's become the face of our program basically overnight," Decker said. "He's definitely come up with that voice and that leadership role, but other than that, he's always gone about his business and he's always handled himself well. I'm not worried about that at all."

What exactly does going about his business entail? For Barrett, it means working as hard as he ever has.

"He's always been a really mature, responsible guy who did what he needed to do," Decker said. "He came in off a surgery and would do what he needed to do rehab-wise. On the field, he's always been a mental rep guy. He's just mature. He's a guy who came in that was mature and understood what he needed to do even though he may not have been the starter. He's just always been mature and handled his business. He's always been ready. Him getting more and more reps, you're able to see his work ethic put forth into a product on the field."

Moving Forward

With his first game under his belt, Barrett will now have to show that he can improve upon a performance that was helped by the fact that Ohio State did its best to put him in low-risk situations.

Prior to the opener, Herman acknowledged that the play-calling wouldn't be the same as it would if Miller were the one receiving the snap. However, he also noted that the Buckeyes don't run a particularly complex offense in the first place.

"We don't do a whole lot on offense despite what some people think we may or may not do," Herman said. "We don't ask the quarterback to be a rocket (surgeon) by any stretch of the imagination and never have and never will. Maybe that's why those guys have played well in our system. But we might actually make a more conscious effort to keep it simple but not a ton less than we already do."

Only three of his 12 completions against Navy went for 20 or more yards, and several were quick throws after which a player such as Wilson gained the bulk of the yardage with his legs. Barrett's 80-yard touchdown to senior wide receiver Devin Smith, who sneaked behind a Navy safety, was the only deep threat of the day that connected.

The Midshipmen seemed determined to take away the pass and make Ohio State beat them on the ground, and Herman believes they'll see that again with other opponents. The Buckeyes' offensive coordinator admitted that there could have been more passes but also pointed to the fact that Ohio State needed to establish a rushing attack.

"You never want to get forced out of running the football when you need to run it, but the kid was 12 of 15 for 226 yards," Herman said. "When we felt like we needed to back them off and throw the ball over their head a little bit, I think we did a good job of that, but we weren't going to live in that world and just throw it every snap, either. So we had to figure out ways with their pressure and all those guys stacked at the line of scrimmage to run the ball a little bit."

As Barrett progresses, his teammates expect his play to open windows for them. The dependence on the ground game was forced at times against Navy, but Wilson anticipates a point in the future when the running game thrives because teams are so focused on defending Barrett's passing attack.

"I feel way more confident," Wilson said. "J.T., he's not a premier runner like Braxton was, but he's a great thrower. Once Coach Herman starts airing it out and opening it up in the secondary, that'll open it up for the run."

No matter what Meyer and Herman determine to be the best course of action over the rest of the season, the man who saw him grow up in high school believes that he'll be able to thrive.

"On the field, he's a field general," Garfield said. "He's a take-charge young man, and he's going to make sure the chains move and he puts points on the board. He's going to work within the game plan that Coach Herman develops for him."