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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

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# Lesson Learned

## *Buckeyes Finish 'What If' Season On High Note With Fiesta Bowl Win*

 By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Sitting at a table in the ballroom of a Scottsdale, Ariz., hotel, Ohio State junior safety Tyvis Powell paused to reflect on what he silently knew would be the last season of his college career.

Ohio State was two days away from taking on Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl to cap off a season in which the Buckeyes' record often belied the frustration felt by the defending national champions and their fans. There was just one loss on the ledger, but that was more than enough to cue up feelings of disappointment when the season began with talk of the extent to which the Buckeyes would dominate rather than whether domination would happen at all.

"The way everybody was talking about us, it was, 'Oh, they're just the greatest team ever. They're going to just roll through the schedule,'" Powell told BSB. "We got to the games and we're not rolling and we aren't scoring as many points but we're still winning the game. There were a couple of complaints about it, like why are these other teams all able to score points against these teams but we can't? Stuff like that.

"But at the end of the day we were still winning games so we weren't down about it. As a defense we knew the offense was going to get it together because we've seen them at their best. So we knew all we had to do was keep holding it.

"We got to Michigan State and we needed both sides of the ball. One day the offense would click and one day the defense would click. That was one game we needed both sides of the ball and it didn't happen. It was like, 'Maaaaaaan.' I knew it was going to come back to bite us one day, but I didn't think it would be like this. I didn't think it would be at the time that we needed it the most. It was a slap to the face."

Ohio State's spot in the Fiesta Bowl was booked through both failure and rebirth. The Buckeyes likely would have gotten a chance to defend their College Football Playoff title had they not fallen short against a Michigan State team that later proved overmatched against the likes of Alabama. However, OSU could have fallen out of a New Year's Six game to the Citrus Bowl had it not recovered from the loss and administered a 42-13 beating to Michigan to close out the regular season.

The win against the Wolverines was the result everyone around the program had been waiting all season to see. That



SONNY BROCKWAY

**GOING OUT ON TOP** – Junior running back Ezekiel Elliott scored four touchdowns – and honored teammate Joey Bosa – in the Fiesta Bowl to finish with 23 in his final collegiate season.

Continued On Page 8

## COVER STORY

# Offense Finishes Lackluster Year With A Flourish

Continued From Page 1

performance alone was enough for most national analysts to declare at season's end that the Buckeyes were one of the nation's four best teams, if not one of the four most deserving of a playoff spot. The offense roared, the defense stood firm, and everything fell into place for the most successful class of fourth-year seniors in program history. It was everything expected of them over the course of the season, condensed into one game.

Powell admitted it was somewhat bitter-sweet for the team to finally play up to its potential once all its goals were out of reach, but he said he'd already moved on from the regret. With the last game of his career less than 48 hours away, he had only one request of himself and his teammates.

"As long as we do it one more time, I won't be that mad about it," he said.



The junior safety got his wish – and then some.

Ohio State built an early lead and never looked back, overpowering the eighth-ranked Irish in a 44-28 victory played before 71,123 fans at University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz.

Junior running back Ezekiel Elliott scored four touchdowns in yet another dominating postseason performance by the player who also tormented Wisconsin, Alabama and Oregon last season. Sophomore linebacker Darron Lee played like a madman on defense, racking up a team-high seven tackles and finishing with two sacks for 17 yards and a forced fumble.

Sophomore quarterback J.T. Barrett directed the offense with a deft touch, especially on the first two drives of the game. With offensive coordinator Ed Warinner back in the coaches' box for the second

game in a row, Barrett looked like a surgeon slicing up the Notre Dame defense to the tune of a quick 14-0 advantage.

"We had a plan, we had a set of plays that we wanted to use, and we went through certain ones the first drive and then certain ones the second drive and used tempo to get into a rhythm and our players were ready to play," Warinner said. "They were well-prepared by our head coach and our coaching staff."

Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly said he thought the quick start made all the difference in OSU's win. Although his team got back within one touchdown of the Buckeyes after falling behind 28-7, it proved too big a deficit to fully overcome.

"I thought they ran the ball effectively," Kelly said. "Obviously their first series was outstanding. They ran the ball effectively right down the field. So I just think that they executed very well early on. It was the difference in the game really, those 14 points early. We had to play catch-up from there."

Whenever the Irish scored, Ohio State always found an answer. The backbreaker came in the third quarter when Elliott plowed straight into the defensive line and somehow came out the other side untouched, at which point he accelerated past three defensive backs for a 47-yard touchdown that restored the Buckeyes' 14-point lead.

"He's a monster," Lee said. "He's been a monster since I was a roommate with him as a freshman. To see how he is now and to see how we've both grown is surreal and it's incredible."

The outcome might have been even more lopsided were it not for some stalled red-zone drives in the second half. Sophomore kicker Sean Nuernberger drilled three field goals, all shorter than 40 yards, on possessions Ohio State couldn't quite finish. The Buckeyes were also shorthanded because of the first-quarter ejection of All-American Joey Bosa, but the Irish were dealing with a loss of their own because Butkus winner Jaylon Smith tore his ACL and MCL on Notre Dame's second defensive series.

The win marked the first time Ohio State scored 40 or more points in back-to-back games since doing it over a six-game stretch that spanned the last five games of the 2014 season and the 2015 opener against Virginia Tech. That data, of course, leads to the obvious question: Where had those fireworks been all season?

Whether the offensive improvement came because of Warinner's move from the sideline to the box or because the loss to Michigan State sharpened the team's focus might never be fully certain.

"Honestly, I don't really know," Barrett said. "The only thing I could tell from Coach Warinner being in the box is – you'd have to talk to the O-line, but I'm pretty sure there's a little bit less yelling. Coach Warinner's a yell. I think just our mind-set changed. We figured it out after we lost. We learned from that and just regrouped. That's what you do when you lose."

Senior left tackle Taylor Decker echoed those thoughts, saying that Warinner's move

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## COVER STORY



FILE PHOTO

**ONE MORE TIME** – Despite falling short of the playoffs, junior safety Tyvis Powell (23) said ahead of the Fiesta Bowl that all he wanted was another big win. He tallied an interception in his final game as a Buckeye.

to play caller was just one of a number of things that were addressed because of the pain of the loss to Michigan State.

"I think after a loss, you take a hard look in the mirror," he said. "You don't necessarily let things slip by that you would if you win that game. I think losses always make you hungrier. And it hurt. It hurt that we didn't control our own destiny anymore because we did believe we're one of the four best in the country. At the end of the day, we responded and showed what the culture of the program is about. If we come out and play poorly after a loss and not being able to control our own destiny, our program is fake and our culture is fake. I think we showed it's not. It's a foundation built on concrete."

Lee even hinted that the big win over the Irish may have been sparked in part by spending the previous night watching the Spartans get waxed 38-0 by Alabama in the Cotton Bowl.

"I got up to my room and it was like 24-0 or 31-0 and at that point I cringed," he said. "If that built a little bit of frustration in the team, then we went out and showed it today. We were motivated regardless of what would have happened last night. That might have added a little extra fuel to the fire."

The win over the Irish gave Ohio State its 50th win over the last four seasons, making the fourth-year seniors who arrived in 2012 tied for the winningest class in FBS history. Boise State also won 50 games from 2008-11.

With nine underclassmen headed to the NFL draft and a senior class that won as much as anyone in the sport's history, it remains to be seen how the final season of such talented players will be remembered.

"I just think it's hard to be perfect all the time," Warinner said. "I think that our kids

are very resilient, our program is. We showed that by bouncing back and having a great game against our rival. And then we played a great game today against a really good opponent. So we finished with momentum to go into 2016, and I'm proud of our kids, proud of our offense and proud of what we did."

The team that nobody in the playoff would have wanted to face became the team that no playoff team had to face. Because their issues didn't get sorted out until it was too late, the Buckeyes will never know how they would have fared against teams such as Clemson or Alabama in the playoff.

"I think we are one of the top four teams in the nation, but we didn't do what we had to do during the season," Elliott said. "There's nothing we can say about it. We just didn't handle our business during the season so we weren't granted the opportunity to be back in the College Football Playoff. I think the young guys will learn from that, and hopefully they grow from that and hopefully they're back in the mix next year."

Added Lee: "It took us a minute to get things going at the beginning of the season. I wouldn't say it was much harder because we have such a good team and such a culture here that that's what's expected almost. It just really sucks to have a one in the loss column."

Those players will all exit with a championship ring, but they'll also leave with the knowledge that there could have been at least one more. Senior linebacker Joshua Perry said the feelings were all positive after finishing the season by bashing Michigan and Notre Dame, but he acknowledged that it's impossible to not think about what might have been.

"You know, it will probably always be there in the back of my mind," he said.

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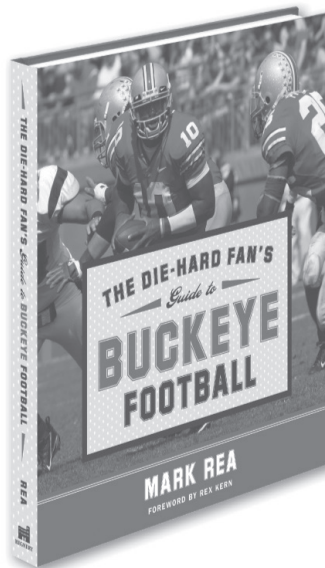
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## OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME

# Bosa's Career Ends On Targeting Call

With a 14-0 lead already in hand, everything seemed to be going Ohio State's way when Tyvis Powell intercepted DeShone Kizer less than 10 minutes into the Fiesta Bowl. Once Powell's celebration with his teammates quieted down, the high of the game's opening moments quickly turned into a low for the Buckeyes.

## GAME NOTEBOOK

Tim Moody

Not only did Powell's interception end up being called back for a penalty in the backfield, but Ohio State also found out it would have to go on without its best defensive player for the rest of the game. Junior defensive end Joey Bosa – playing in his last game as a Buckeye – had hit Kizer as he threw the pass and was flagged for targeting. Bosa's ejection was upheld upon further review because he led with the crown of his helmet.

So with 50 minutes and 26 seconds remaining in the game – and with Adolphus Washington and Tommy Schutt already sitting out through a suspension and injury, respectively – the Buckeyes were without their All-America defensive end. And despite a two-score advantage, the outcome of the game was suddenly in question for Urban Meyer's team.

"When that hit – and I knew our depth at the D-line issue – I'm thinking we could lose the game," Meyer said Jan. 7.

After the game Bosa himself admitted he was nervous about what might happen with him in the locker room and less experienced players having to step up.

"Leaving the game like that, of course the only thing I'm thinking about is letting my guys down," Bosa said. "I'm not thinking about myself at all. I'm just worried about what's going to happen, worried about if they're going to be able to step up, and I'm just so proud that they did and it was awesome to watch."



SONNY BROCKWAY

**LONG WALK** – All-America defensive end Joey Bosa (97) spent more than three quarters of the Fiesta Bowl in the locker room after being ejected for targeting.

While Meyer and Bosa immediately thought the outcome of the game could be in question, some Ohio State players were simply dumbfounded by the call.

"It sucked," linebacker Darron Lee said

of Bosa's ejection, "because I didn't think it was targeting. None of us did."

Bosa had been a nuisance for Notre Dame, recording four tackles before being sent packing. But he didn't get a chance to

add to that total, instead having to set himself up in the locker room to watch the rest of the game on TV.

With the line already depleted – Sam Hubbard and Michael Hill each made just the second starts of their collegiate careers – players such as Hubbard, Hill, Donovan Munger and Tracy Sprinkle had even more weight on their shoulders. Munger and Sprinkle were getting the first extended game action of their careers while Hubbard and Hill played an even bigger role than expected.

"They were ready. They were ready," Lee said of the young defensive line. "They know the game plan. They got a lot of great practices in bowl practice, and they knew the game plan. They were ready to step up."

With Bosa out and those younger and less experienced players filling in, the Buckeye faithful looking on might have gotten a preview of what the defensive line will look like next season with Hubbard and Tyquan Lewis on the edge and Hill and Munger playing inside.

"We got to see a lot of what you might see here in the near future," defensive coordinator Luke Fickell said Jan. 7.

Even though it ended earlier than he would have liked, Bosa's Ohio State career will go down in Buckeye history. He finished his junior season with 51 total tackles, 16 tackles for loss, five sacks and a memorable interception against Michigan – numbers that don't reflect the impact he had on the defense. Before that, Bosa had put together one of the best seasons in Ohio State history with 21 tackles for loss and 13½ sacks as a

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## OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME

sophomore, not to mention the 7½ sacks he had as a true freshman in 2013.

For two of those seasons Lee was a starter alongside Bosa – including one last collegiate game for each of them against Notre Dame. Lee ended up being the player who might have stepped up the most in Bosa's absence, recording seven tackles (all solo) and two sacks totaling a loss of 17 yards for the Fighting Irish.

Lee had high praise for Bosa after the game, citing his dynamic play and flexibility as making him difficult to stop.

"Playing alongside of him was just something I'll never forget," Lee said. "I'll tell my kids about it."

Bosa said his Ohio State career will be a great lasting memory as well.

"It's been so amazing," Bosa said of his time with the Buckeyes. "I wouldn't change it for the world. It's been the best three years of my life, and I'll remember it forever."

### Buckeyes Flip Field

More than touchdowns or quarterback sacks or anything else, Meyer tends to point at the field-position battle as the key to winning football games. Against the Irish, Ohio State won that battle in emphatic fashion, and it all started with the special teams.

"They had seven drives start inside the 20, we had one (actually two)," Meyer said. "Only one of those drives did they score points. They had six drives inside the 15, we had one. Their average start was 20, our average start was the 36."

Ohio State called on junior punter Cameron Johnston just three times in the Fiesta Bowl and ended up pinning its oppo-

nent inside the 20-yard line twice while not allowing a single punt to be returned. Johnston's first punt went out of bounds at the Notre Dame 30-yard line while the final two ended up at the opposition's 5- and 8-yard lines, respectively.

But even better than the punt team was Ohio State's kickoff coverage. The Buckeyes kicked off nine times in the game and stopped the Irish returner inside the 15-yard line on four of those kicks and inside the 20 on another.

Meyer noted that the Notre Dame returner tended to abort – or shuffle his feet and slow down with the coverage closing in – almost immediately.

"Every time their kick returner aborted inside the 10-yard line," Meyer said. "And the same thing with the punt returner. There's just really no opportunity for them because of the speed and effort down the field."

Meyer had plenty of praise for Ohio State's punt return team as well. The Buckeyes received the ball via punt six times in the game and started the offense off in Notre Dame territory after two of those boots.

Returner Jalin Marshall finished the game with four punt returns for 73 yards, including a long of 29 yards, and he tacked on a 36-yard kick return for good measure while Curtis Samuel had two kick returns for 52 yards, including a long of 38.

### Barrett Wins Offensive MVP

After compiling 307 yards of total offense to go with one touchdown pass, quarterback J.T. Barrett was named the Fiesta Bowl's

offensive MVP. Barrett totaled 96 yards on the ground and completed 19 of 31 pass attempts for 211 yards, helping to guide Ohio State to touchdowns on four of its first five drives.

Despite earning MVP honors for his individual play, Barrett directed credit toward the offensive line after the game.

"That's what we strive to do, is definitely dominate the line of scrimmage," Barrett said. "Those guys definitely did that, which opens up our whole offense when you're able to do that – (Ezekiel Elliott) being able to run, me being able to run then play-action pass, and then rip-back pass when you have control of the line of scrimmage."

The MVP honor came in the first postseason game of Barrett's career after he missed the Big Ten title game and the College Football Playoff last season due to a season-ending injury suffered against Michigan.

### Apple Named Defensive MVP

Just after Barrett received his MVP award, sophomore cornerback Eli Apple got a piece to add to his trophy cabinet following his final game as a Buckeye. Apple earned defensive MVP honors after totaling five tackles and a pass breakup while helping to limit Kizer and the Notre Dame passing game.

Apart from an 81-yard touchdown from Kizer to Will Fuller on which Ohio State's other cornerback, Gareon Conley, slipped and fell, the Irish totaled just 203 passing yards in the game.

"It was a team effort," Apple said of Ohio State's ability to limit Notre Dame's deep threat. "We knew our linemen were going to

do what they had to do. As a secondary, we knew we just had to stay on top of everything, make sure we play aggressive, but at the same time be aware of their deep threats."

Apple declared for the NFL draft three days after the game, but before announcing his future plans he said the Fiesta Bowl was a sign of things to come for Ohio State.

"It's just a blessing to be a part of this team, part of this great university," Apple said. "I mean, it will bring a tear to my eye thinking about everything I've been through, everything we've been through as a team. We just have to keep it going, and I see great things in the future for us."

### Smith Goes Down

Just a few minutes before Bosa was ejected, the Irish lost their top defensive player for the game as well. Linebacker Jaylon Smith went down during Ohio State's second drive of the game and stayed down for an extended period of time before being helped off the field.

Like Bosa, Smith was projected to be a high pick in the upcoming NFL draft after winning the Butkus Award as the nation's top linebacker, but his stock could be impacted by what was eventually diagnosed as a torn ACL and LCL in his left knee. He underwent surgery Jan. 8.

Meyer called Smith a "monster" during the postgame press conference and was disappointed to hear the severity of his injury.

"Knee?" Meyer inquired. "Oh, shoot. I didn't know that. I know he's a wonderful player, but I know him more than that, too," the coach said of Smith, whose brother Rod was a running back under Meyer at Ohio State.



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## OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME

# OSU Rides Elliott For One More Postseason Win

By RYAN GINN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

One last time, Ezekiel Elliott sliced through a top team and carried the rest of the Buckeyes with him.

The last two seasons were one giant pile of evidence that Ohio State's fate as a football team was intrinsically tied to Elliott. The dynamite back was held to 33 yards in a 2015 loss to Michigan State and 32 yards in the 2014 loss to Virginia Tech but scored 12 touchdowns in four postseason wins.

His final opus came against Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl, when he rushed for 149 yards and four touchdowns in a 44-28 win against the No. 8 Irish. It was the last chapter of a storied career in which he became the program's No. 2 career rusher and unleashed one of the most memorable runs in program history when he broke Alabama's back with an 85-yard touchdown run late in the fourth quarter of the Sugar Bowl.

He hammered the Irish from the start, alternating between delivering blows and outracing defenders. His three first-half touchdowns all came from either 1 or 2 yards out, but he showed in the second half that he could sprint with the best of them when he bolted free at the line of scrimmage and outraced the Irish defensive backs for a 47-yard touchdown that put OSU back in control with a two-score lead.

In the locker room after the game, surrounded by a crush of reporters, Elliott reflected on his three-year college career and what it meant to him.

"I'm blessed to be a part of this university,

blessed to have the career I had, blessed to play with the guys I had a chance to play with and form those bonds," he said. "I'm just honored just to be a part of this history."

"I'm glad I could leave this great university on that type of note. The O-line, what can I say about those guys? I had a run where no one touched me. It's easy when guys are blocking so perfectly like that. I'm thankful for being here."

Those words were more than enough from the former five-star recruit who gave everything from the moment he stepped on to campus, but Elliott also delivered an on-field performance that was essentially a four-quarter endorsement of the culture built by head coach Urban Meyer.

Elliott has always been known as a versatile athlete willing to put himself out there to help teammates make plays, and his toughness that showed throughout this season shone brightest in the Fiesta Bowl.

"Zeke Elliott I think may have played one of his best games, complete games – I'm not saying yardage-wise, but complete games – as he did all year," running backs coach Tony Alford said. "When he's out on the perimeter cutting guys down and blocking the way he did, he was just relentless in his play."

After the game, the website Pro Football Focus released a stat that said in the 103 snaps during which Elliott pass protected this season, the man he blocked never had a sack, hit or hurry.

"I've coached some guys in previous years that were very excellent in pass pro in all my years of coaching, but not to his level," Alford



SONNY BROCKWAY

**OUT WITH A BANG – Ezekiel Elliott (15) scored four touchdowns in his final collegiate game.**

said. "I think that's just a tribute to how he goes to work every day and trying to perfect everything he does and being a multidimensional player or a complete player."

"I've never been around that ever, so that will be dearly missed."

The way he blocks – quarterback J.T. Barrett once referred to it as "chopping a guy like a cherry tree" – led Meyer to question why it is Elliott plays that way and what he can do to make sure that others follow in his footsteps.

"Why would Zeke Elliott play so damn hard?" Meyer asked. "His blocking, by the way, in the final game was as good as it's

ever been. And I always ask the question and I'm going to ask this team coming back, why did he do that? And he did it for love of teammates, for love of unit and for the culture that's here at Ohio State."

It didn't go unnoticed by teammates, either. Sophomore linebacker Darron Lee, who roomed with Elliott freshman year, called him a "monster," and senior linebacker Joshua Perry said it was obvious to Elliott's peers that his on-field performances came from an unselfish place.

"He goes 100 percent on the field not because he cares about his stats but because he cares about the team and wants to be successful in a team setting," Perry said. "For him to be able to have the stats that he did and play the way that he has is just so amazing because I know how much work he's put into it."

One last postseason torching of a top-10 team helped to cement his legacy at a program that has produced Heisman winners such as Archie Griffin and Eddie George. Elliott never got a stiff-arm trophy of his own – although he might have if the 2014 edition had been awarded following the playoffs – but he passed George for second all-time on the program's career rushing list.

"All I can say is I'm honored to be a part of this history," he said. "I'm honored to continue the running back pedigree at Ohio State. I'm honored to be thought of as one of the best running backs to come here. When you think about the great running backs that came here – Archie Griffin, Eddie George, Beanie Wells – to be mentioned with those names is a dream come true and I'm honored."

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# Buckeyes Hit Irish Early In Fiesta Bowl Win

By **BLAKE WILLIAMS**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

For the second time in as many games, Ohio State showcased a dominant, up-tempo offense that had been absent for much of the season.

The Buckeyes doubled down on their overpowering win over Michigan in the season finale with a big 44-28 win over Notre Dame in the Fiesta Bowl, silencing anyone who doubted how motivated the Scarlet and Gray would be after being shut out of the College Football Playoff.

Ohio State (12-1) gained 496 yards and ran 85 plays on its way to the win over Notre Dame (10-3) in front of 71,123 fans at University of Phoenix Stadium in Glendale, Ariz. The victory moved Urban Meyer to 10-2 in bowl games in his coaching career and pushed the coach's record to 50-4 at Ohio State.

Ezekiel Elliott rushed 27 times for 149 yards in the win, tying a Fiesta Bowl record with four touchdowns. Arizona State's Woody Green also had four against Missouri in the 1972 edition.

Sophomore quarterback J.T. Barrett, the game's offensive MVP, managed 96 yards on the ground, helping Ohio State to 285 rushing yards on the day. He added 211 yards through the air, completing 19 of 31 passes with one touchdown and an interception in a balanced offensive showing for the Buckeyes.

Michael Thomas was Barrett's favorite target, catching seven passes for 72 yards and a touchdown.

The defense, left without the services of Joey Bosa for much of the game after the end was tossed for targeting in the first quarter, was led by Darron Lee. The linebacker managed seven tackles, all solo, to tie for the team lead and added two sacks and a forced fumble.

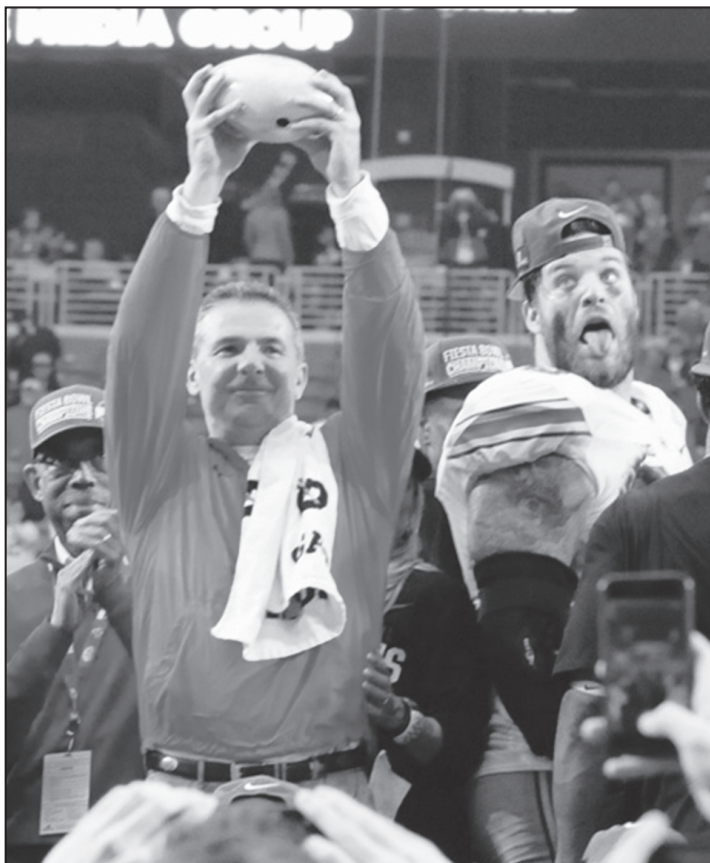
Eli Apple was honored as the game's defensive MVP on the strength of five tackles and a pass breakup.

DeShone Kizer finished with 284 yards passing for Notre Dame with two touchdowns and an interception with 113 of those yards and one of the scores going to Will Fuller.

## How It Happened

Following a three-and-out from Notre Dame to open the game, the OSU offense went to work.

Ohio State got the ball at its own 20 and used an up-tempo attack to march 80 yards



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**JUBILATION – Urban Meyer (left) led the Buckeyes to a 44-28 Fiesta Bowl win in what proved to be the 50th win for Ohio State's seniors, including left tackle Taylor Decker (right).**

in nine plays, needing just 3:01 to find the end zone. Barrett completed all three passes on the drive, one to Thomas to open the drive and one each to Braxton Miller and Jalin Marshall.

Miller also had a 27-yard rush on the drive, getting Ohio State to the Fighting Irish 29, its first trip into Notre Dame territory. After a 7-yard pass to Marshall moved the Buckeyes to the 22, Ohio State used four consecutive runs, two from Barrett and two from Elliott, who found the end zone from 2 yards out to open the scoring with 9:53 left in the first quarter.

"I tucked every guy in last night," Meyer

said in his postgame press conference. "I just remember looking them all right in the eye and saying, 'We need a fast start.' Not that that is the reason we did it. We were more open in the offense. We were throwing it around a little bit in the first drive, getting good spacing, spreading the defense out. That was a very good drive to start the game."

The Buckeye defense responded by forcing another three-and-out from the Fighting Irish as Notre Dame gained just 1 net yard on the ensuing drive before punting back to Ohio State.

The Buckeyes added to their lead on their next possession, needing just three plays to travel 43 yards for the score. Barrett connected on his fourth consecutive pass, a 27-yard strike to tight end Marcus Baugh. Following a Barrett rush on which Notre Dame linebacker Jaylon Smith injured his left knee, Barrett hit Thomas for a 15-yard touchdown to give Ohio State a 14-0 cushion. Smith, a projected top-10 pick in the NFL draft, did not return to the game.

The Notre Dame offense finally got going on the next drive, though the Fighting Irish still didn't score. A pass from Kizer to Torii Hunter Jr. on the first play of the possession gave Notre Dame its initial first down of the Fiesta Bowl 7:25 into the game.

After another first-down catch from Hunter and a 4-yard rush from Josh Adams, it appeared that Tyvis Powell had secured the game's first turnover. The safety's interception, however, was negated by a targeting

call on Bosa. The junior end was forced to leave the game after the penalty, ineligible for all but the first 9:34 of the Fiesta Bowl.

The Buckeyes were already without starting defensive tackles Adolphus Washington and Tommy Schutt due to suspension and injury, respectively.

"Oh, my goodness that was a kidney shot," Meyer said of Bosa's ejection. "We were playing with some cats out there I didn't know were going to play. But they played hard and did fine against a very good team. This team has a way of fighting through adversity, and that was a great example of it."

The Irish couldn't capitalize on the 15-yard penalty that wiped out the interception. Notre Dame penetrated as far as the Buckeye 32 but again was forced to punt.

Ohio State followed with its first scoreless drive, gaining just 33 yards on 10 plays, on the possession that closed the first quarter and opened the second before Cameron Johnston punted for the first time.

Notre Dame responded with by far its best drive to that point, using 13 plays to travel 70 yards, a march capped by a 3-yard touchdown by Adams. It had appeared the Fighting Irish were headed for another stalled drive, but a fourth-and-1 conversion by Kizer kept the drive alive and eventually allowed Notre Dame to get on the board to make it 14-7.

Ohio State had the answer as the Buckeyes went to work on the ground. Barrett and Elliott combined to rush for 59 of the drive's 62 yards with Elliott again finding the end zone, this time from just 1 yard out. Barrett rushed four times for 28 yards on the drive while Elliott had bursts of 14 and 16 yards on the drive to go with the score.

Another Irish three-and-out gave the Buckeyes the ball back with just 3:52 left until the half, plenty of time for Elliott and company to go to work. After a 13-yard completion to Curtis Samuel, Elliott rushed for 2 yards then caught a pass out of the backfield and tiptoed down the sideline for a 30-yard gain. A 15-yard rush from Marshall got the Buckeyes down to the 3-yard line before a 2-yard Barrett rush set up Elliott's third touchdown of the first half to give OSU a 28-7 lead.

Notre Dame, in jeopardy of going to halftime down 21 points and starting the second half on defense, reeled off an efficient nine-play, 75-yard drive that used just 1:19 of the 1:48 that was left on the clock when it started. Kizer found Corey Robinson on consecutive gains of 14, 12 and 15 yards before the quarterback finished the drive with a 14-yard run and a 1-yard score to bring the halftime score to 28-14.

It appeared the Buckeyes were marching for a potential knockout score on the first drive after halftime, but the game's first turnover allowed Notre Dame to stay in the contest.

Ohio State relied on the ground game to help move the ball to the Notre Dame 30 before Barrett dropped back to pass. The quarterback was hit as he threw, and the ball was tipped and intercepted by linebacker Joe Schmidt at the 21-yard line and returned to the ND 42.

The Fighting Irish used a seven-play, 58-yard drive to capitalize on the turnover with a 4-yard completion from Kizer to Chris Brown to pull Notre Dame within one score at 28-21 with 8:58 left in the third quarter.

Again, Ohio State was able to respond, and again it was Elliott who found the end



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**OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME**

zone. The Buckeyes used five plays to cross midfield as a 6-yard completion to Marshall put the ball at Notre Dame's 47-yard line. Elliott finished the drive from there with a touchdown burst that allowed the junior to tie the Fiesta Bowl record for rushing touchdowns with four.

"I think Zeke, all due respect to all the great running backs in Ohio State history, my first-round draft pick, I'd pick Zeke Elliott," Meyer said. "What he does without the ball, his work ethic in practice, just his attitude every day, the way he shows up, bounces around with us. I love him. He's as good a running back as I've ever been around."

The next Irish drive saw Powell get an interception that would stand. Kizer never saw the Ohio State safety, who was playing zone coverage, and the junior hauled in the ball at the Ohio State 37 and returned it 4 yards.

The Buckeyes couldn't make Notre Dame pay for the turnover, however, as they posted their first three-and-out of the day. But the Fighting Irish punted on the ensuing possession, which set up another Buckeye scoring drive.

This one was finished by Sean Nuernberger as the sophomore kicker connected on a 37-yard field goal with 12:10 left in the game to give the Buckeyes a 38-21 lead. The scoring drive, which covered 44 yards in 10 plays, featured a pair of 7-yard rushes from Barrett as well as a 14-yard com-

pletion to Samuel and a 9-yard completion to Thomas.

Notre Dame followed with the quick strike it desperately needed, an 81-yard pass from Kizer to Fuller on the second play of the drive. The standout wide receiver beat cornerback Gareon Conley deep and was able to find the end zone before safety Vonn Bell could close on him, cutting the Ohio State lead to 38-28.

Another Nuernberger field goal followed, this one from 38 yards out. The Buckeyes burned 5:10 off the clock with 13 plays covering 42 yards – all but 14 of which were gained on the ground – to push the score to 41-28.

C.J. Sanders tried to make something happen on the ensuing kickoff but was downed at the 10-yard line, and the Buckeyes were able to force a three-and-out.

Marshall returned the sixth punt of the night from Tyler Newsome 19 yards to give Ohio State great field position at the Notre Dame 23 with just 4:18 left. The Buckeyes were able to run some clock, rushing the ball three times before Nuernberger made it 3 for 3 on field goals, this one from 35 yards out to make it 44-28 with just 2:42 left.

Lee recorded his second sack of the day on the following possession, forcing a fumble from Kizer that was recovered by defensive tackle Tracy Sprinkle at the Ohio State 44-yard line, allowing the Buckeyes to run the clock down to 28 seconds before kicking back to Notre Dame.

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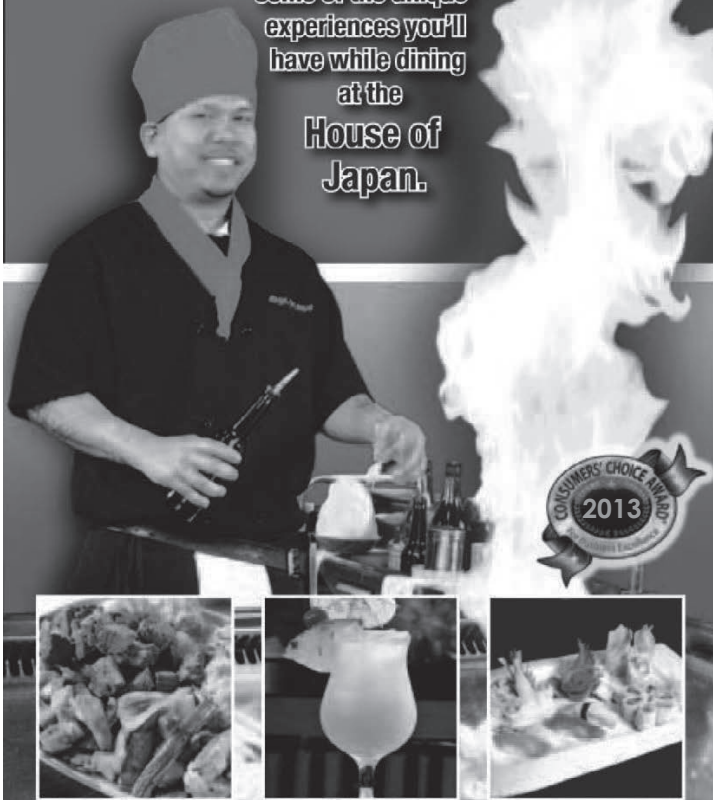


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## OHIO STATE VS. NOTRE DAME

## BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 44, Notre Dame 28

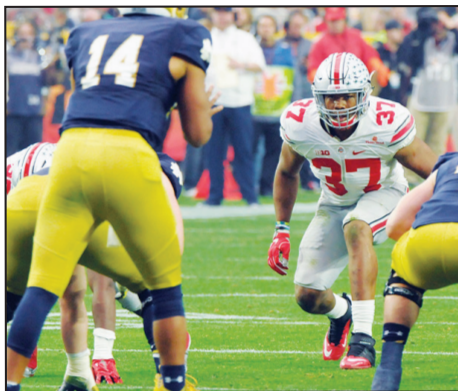
**Ohio State running back Ezekiel Elliott on his performance:** "This would be nothing without the guys around me. They're what made these years special and they're who I thank the most, especially those O-linemen – the five guys from this year and Darryl Baldwin from last year. I'm nothing without those guys. They're a great unit. I think they were the best offensive line the last two years. Like I said, I really believe I'm nothing without them. They made a lot of runs easy for me, and I'm going to miss those guys and I'll miss this university."

**Elliott on defensive end Joey Bosa's ejection:** "I think that rule needs to be revised. I think they need to make it more clear what targeting is. I've seen a couple guys – I think in a Team Up North game but I can't remember who they were playing – get ejected for a bad call and that rule is kind of messed up. That was his last game as a Buckeye, and it was taken away on something that was very questionable. I think the majority of people, unless you're wearing green, would say that wasn't targeting. It's just sad to see his career had to end like that."

**Ohio State defensive coordinator Luke Fickell on Bosa's career:** "I told him out there and the awards ceremony, and we preach all the time about selfless commitment and all the things that we've done. We've been successful on defense because of our guys' unselfishness, and it all starts because of him. I know we've got a lot of other great players, but the reality is for him to mature and be what he has been and not to worry about stats, whether he has five sacks or 12 sacks. He's meant more to us as a defense than his play, that's for sure. His ability to be a leader, that guy who's unselfish, set the tone for everybody."

**Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer on his team's kickoff coverage:** "I thought our coverage units, I think we're number one in the country. Going into the game, we were number two. Somehow our whole goal, we wanted to find a way to be number one. With our performance, I think we might have moved up there."

**Notre Dame head coach Brian Kelly on the program's postseason failures:** "I like



SONNY BROCKWAY

**FIFTY – Joshua Perry (37) and the Ohio State senior class made it to 50 wins with the victory over Notre Dame.**

where we are. We're going to keep banging at the door, keep playing Ohio State, keep playing Florida State, keep playing Alabama, keep playing these teams in these kinds of venues, in these kinds of games. We don't want to be playing directional teams with no profile to them.

"Big names, great traditions, New Year's six games. Keep playing them, get in them. Keep building your program, keep recruiting, keep doing it the way you're doing it, and we're going to win these games."

**Kelly on where Notre Dame fell short:** "I told our football team that it was going to be a physical game today. I thought that we handled ourselves well relative to the physicality of the game, but we didn't execute as well as we needed to to win the game. We couldn't get off the field on third-down situations and had some opportunities offensively that we couldn't capitalize on."

**Kelly on his team's run defense:** "We didn't flinch. That's the mark of this team this year, that they played hard and physical. Regardless of who

was out there, they gave us everything they had. We were a little shorthanded, but they didn't make any excuses for it. They battled. We were missing a rotation inside defensively at the tackle position, but they didn't complain. They took extra reps."

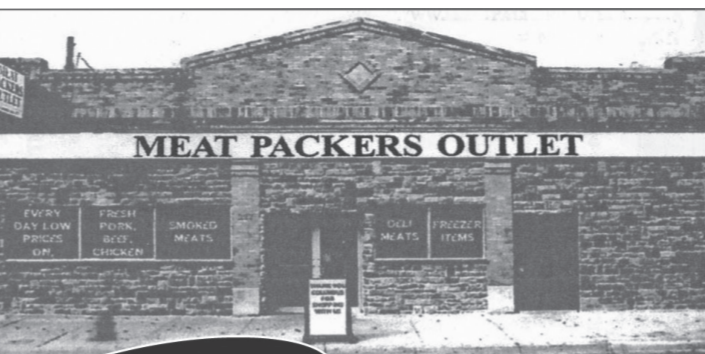
**Elliott on what Notre Dame did well:** "They were blitzing every down, basically. That's what it seemed like, they were blitzing every down. Whenever they're bringing the blitz that much, you're going to have some problems and make some mistakes."

**Ohio State linebacker Joshua Perry on the disappointment of missing the playoff:** "The one thing that keeps me sane is I know God has a plan for us. It wasn't in his plan for us to make it to the playoff or win a national championship this year, but it was in his plan for us to come out here and win this game, get 50 wins for the senior class and have a plan for all these other guys. It's been fantastic."

**Fickell on the backup defensive linemen:** "You've got to give a lot of credit to (defensive line coach Larry) Johnson. Throughout the entire year he's been rolling those guys. Donovan Munger's averaging 15 plays a game, Michael Hill's averaging 20 plays a game during the season. Sometimes as a coach you're like, 'Whoa, why are those guys out there?' But they're out there for a reason. He knows what he's doing, and thank God he did because it paid off."

**Elliott on his NFL future:** "I think I'll be all right. I'm going to go up there and keep working my ass off to become the best player I can be. I think the sky's the limit, and as long as I can, I'm going to keep trying to better myself as a player."

**Ohio State linebacker Darron Lee on his legacy:** "I wouldn't say legacy like that, because I haven't been considered for like the Heisman or anything like that. But I'd say this team's legacy for sure is solidified and I'll just say I'm honestly blessed and honored to be a part of this team's legacy and we'll be remembered forever and I'm happy to have my name be a part of it."



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# Buckeye Game Analysis

## Play Of The Game

Ezekiel Elliott's 47-yard run touchdown run in the third quarter stretched Ohio State's lead back to 14 points just when the Fighting Irish seemed to be ready to make a game of it.

The Buckeyes' junior tailback faked to his left then took a handoff going right. He followed blocks from pulling guard Billy Price and tight end Nick Vannett and found a huge crease in the Notre Dame defense. The 225-pounder may not have been touched as he raced straight up the field to pay dirt.

The swiftness of the score might have been demoralizing for the Fighting Irish after they had avoided the early knockout and managed to get back into the game.

## Hidden Play Of The Game

Notre Dame had a chance to get the ball back with more than eight minutes left in the game and trailing by only 10 points, but a crucial penalty gave Ohio State a first down.

With his kicking game having been shaky all season, Urban Meyer opted to go for it from the Notre Dame 29 on fourth-and-10.

J.T. Barrett called an audible after appearing to recognize a Notre Dame blitz, and the Ohio State quarterback heaved a ball toward Jalin Marshall deep over the middle as a pass rush nearly got to Barrett.

The pass was incomplete, but Notre Dame cornerback Cole Luke had to grab Marshall or risk giving up a touchdown because he had no safety playing behind him. Luke was flagged for holding, giving Ohio State an automatic first down.

Ohio State ended up getting a field goal out of the drive after the following series lost 2 yards, and the Buckeyes stretched their lead back to 13 points with only 6:09 left on the clock.

## What Worked Well

- **Misdirection:** Elliott's long run came on a play that started with the wide receiver going in motion away from where the action would ultimately end up. The Fighting Irish looked frozen by the movement, something that was effective in last season's postseason run and early in the 2015 campaign but seemed to be absent for a long stretch of the season. It set up easier-to-execute blocks that Elliott was able to exploit.

## What Didn't Work

- **Red-zone offense:** Ohio State could have had an even more lopsided victory if the Buckeyes had done a better job finishing drives. They settled for field goals three



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**MVP – J.T. Barrett (16) earned offensive MVP honors after rushing for 96 yards, passing for 211 and helping to guide the Buckeyes to 44 points.**

times in the second half when they had advanced inside the Notre Dame 20-yard line.

## Inside The Numbers

2: Ohio State forced at least two turnovers for the eighth time in 2015.

284: Notre Dame's passing yardage total was the second-highest against Ohio State this season. Michigan threw for 307 yards.

405: The Fighting Irish totaled 405 yards on offense, the most Ohio State allowed in 2015. Indiana had 402.

496: Ohio State narrowly missed its fifth 500-yard game of the season. The Buckeyes also did that against Maryland, when they had 499 yards.

## Reviewing The Matchups

**Ohio State rush offense vs. Notre Dame rush defense:** For the second straight game, the Buckeyes were nearly unstoppable on the ground. Elliott ran for 149 yards while Barrett added 96 on the ground. The Fighting Irish had a hard time holding the point of attack and also suffered from the loss of star linebacker Jaylon Smith early in the game. **EDGE: Ohio State**

**Notre Dame rush offense vs. Ohio State rush defense:** The Fighting Irish managed only 121 yards on the ground, their second-worst total of the season. They had only 111 yards in a loss to Clemson. Even with three starters missing for most of the game, the Buckeyes were able to dominate up front against a strong Notre Dame offensive line. **EDGE: Ohio State**

**Ohio State pass offense vs. Notre Dame pass defense:** The Buckeyes did not push the issue much against a Fighting Irish secondary decimated by injuries and a suspension, but then again they didn't really need to because of how successful the running game was. Notre Dame chose to play soft coverage, and Barrett took advantage by consistently hitting receivers on short routes for solid gains. Barrett missed a read or two and threw an interception, but overall he had a good day with 211 yards and a touchdown through the air. **EDGE: Ohio State**

**Notre Dame pass offense vs. Ohio State pass defense:** Ohio State was able to get a lot of pressure on Notre Dame quarterback DeShone Kizer, who was not as efficient as he was through most of the regular season but still managed to be pretty productive (284 yards, two touchdowns). That was thanks in large part to a big strike to star receiver Will Fuller, who got loose for an 81-yard touchdown in the second half. Kizer was sacked four times and threw one interception that counted while another was wiped out by the targeting penalty on Joey Bosa. **EDGE: Notre Dame**

**Special teams:** Other than a couple of kickoffs out of bounds, Ohio State enjoyed a big afternoon. The kickoff coverage was superb when freshman C.J. Sanders (son of a former Buckeye) was able to bring the ball out of the end zone as his longest return was only 17 yards. Sean Nuernberger had a nice fourth quarter, making three mid-range field goals in as many tries after a season in which neither kicker was reliable for Meyer. Cam Johnston landed two of his three punts inside the 10-yard line. Marshall had a 29-yard punt return and a 36-yard kickoff return. **EDGE: Ohio State**

**Intangibles:** Notre Dame had a chance to prove itself against the defending national champions, but the Fighting Irish appeared to be outclassed most of the afternoon. They remained without a win in a major bowl since the early 1990s while being dominated on both lines of scrimmage. Meyer was thrilled to see his team stay focused and put forth its best effort despite more than a half-dozen Buckeyes considering a jump to the NFL and many seniors playing their last games in scarlet and gray. **EDGE: Ohio State**

– Marcus Hartman

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# The Numbers Game

## Ohio State 44, Notre Dame 28

Jan. 1, 2016 – University of Phoenix Stadium; Glendale, Ariz.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
NOTRE DAME	0	14	7	7	28
OHIO STATE	14	14	7	9	44

### First Quarter

OSU – Elliott, 2 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 9:53; 9 plays, 80 yards, 3:01 TOP.  
OSU – Thomas, 15 yard pass from Barrett (Nuernberger kick), 7:41; 3 plays, 43 yards, 0:45 TOP.

### Second Quarter

ND – Adams, 3 yard run (Yoon kick), 7:34; 13 plays, 70 yards, 5:38 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 1 yard run, (Nuernberger kick), 4:55; 11 plays, 62 yards, 2:30 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 1 yard run, (Nuernberger kick), 1:48; 6 plays, 63 yards, 2:04 TOP.

ND – Kizer, 1 yard run (Yoon kick), 0:29; 9 plays, 75 yards, 1:19 TOP.

### Third Quarter

ND – Brown, 4 yard pass from Kizer (Yoon kick), 8:58; 7 plays, 58 yards, 2:54 TOP.  
OSU – Elliott, 47 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 6:37 TOP; 6 plays, 75 yards, 2:21 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

OSU – Nuernberger, 37 yard field goal, 12:10; 10 plays, 44 yards, 4:14 TOP.

ND – Fuller, 81 yard pass from Kizer (Yoon kick), 11:27; 2 plays, 83 yards, 0:35 TOP.

OSU – Nuernberger, 38 yard field goal, 6:09; 13 plays, 42 yards, 5:10 TOP.

OSU – Nuernberger, 35 yard field goal, 2:42; 4 plays, 5 yards, 1:36 TOP.

Att. – 71,123.

Weather – Indoors.

### Team Statistics

	ND	OSU
First Downs	24	27
Rushing	7	14
Passing	15	12
Penalty	2	1
Rushes-Yards	32-121	54-285
Passing Yards	284	211
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	22-38-1	19-31-1
Offensive Plays	70	85
Total Net Yards	405	496
Third Down Efficiency	5-13	10-18
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-1	1-1
Punts-Avg.	6-48.2	3-41.3
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	1-0
Penalties	3-20	4-45
Time of Possession	27:15	32:45

### Individual Statistics

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – ND: Adams 14-78; Kizer 15-21; Carlisle 1-20; Williams 2-2.  
OSU: Elliott 27-149; Barrett 23-96; Miller 2-26; Marshall 1-15; TEAM 1-(-1).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – ND: Kizer 22-37-1-284-2; Hunter Jr. 0-1-0-0-0.  
OSU: Barrett 19-31-1-211-1.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – ND: Fuller 6-113; Hunter Jr. 4-52; Brown 4-35; Robinson 3-41; Jones 2-24; Carlisle 2-14; Smythe 1-5. OSU: Thomas 7-72; Marshall 5-29; Samuel 2-27; Miller 2-12; Elliott 1-30; Baugh 1-27; Vannett 1-14.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – ND: Newsome 6-48.2-59. OSU: Johnston 3-41.3-46.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – ND: None. OSU: Marshall 4-73.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.)** – ND: Sanders 5-60. OSU: Samuel 2-52; Marshall 1-36.

**MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.)** – ND: None. OSU: None.

**FORCED FUMBLES** – ND: Day. OSU: Lee.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.)** – ND: None. OSU: Sprinkle 1-0.

**INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.)** – ND: Schmidt 1-21. OSU: Powell 1-4.

**SACKS (No.-Yds.)** – ND: Trumbetti 1-0-6; Onwuallu 1-0-5. OSU: Lee 2-0-17; Hubbard 1-0-7; Lewis 1-0-1.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.)** – ND: Trumbetti 2-0-8; Grace 1-0-7; Onwuallu 1-0-5; Cage 1-0-2; Schmidt 1-0-1; Day 1-0-1. OSU: Lee 2-0-17; Hubbard 1-0-7; Lewis 1-0-1.

**TACKLES (Solo-Assst.-Tot.)** – ND: Shumate 9-4-13; Schmidt 10-3-13; Grace 8-1-9; Farley 7-1-8; Luke 6-0-6; Okwara 3-2-5; Rochell 3-2-5; Day 4-0-4; Trumbetti 4-0-4; Watkins 3-0-3; Onwuallu 2-0-2; Coney 1-0-1; Smith 1-0-1; Hunter Jr. 1-0-1; Baratti 1-0-1; Turner 1-0-1; Randolph 1-0-1; Bonner 0-1-1; Cage 1-0-1; Newsome 1-0-1. OSU: Conley 7-0-7; Perry 4-3-7; Lee 7-0-7; McMillan 4-1-5; Apple 4-1-5; Powell 4-1-5; Hubbard 3-1-4; Bosa 2-2-4; Ward 2-0-2; Bell 2-0-2; Hill 0-2-2; Thomas 1-0-1; Webb 1-0-1; Holmes 1-0-1; Booker 1-0-1; Price 1-0-1; Lewis 1-0-1; McLaurin 1-0-1; Sprinkle 0-1-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** – **NOTRE DAME:** Offense, Brown, Fuller, Luatua, Kizer, Adams, Nelson, McGlinchey, Martin, Stanley, Elmer, Smythe, Yoon. Defense, Smith, Onwuallu, Watkins, Shumate, Luke, Schmidt, Farley, Okwara, Rochell, Day, Trumbetti, Newsome. Reserves, Jones, Carlisle, Coney, Morgan, Sanders, Hunter Jr., Hounshell, Proise, Coleman, Fertitta, Baratti, Turner, Ossello, Williams, Recker, Randolph, Cavalaris, Martini, Bonner, Grace, Daly, Bivin, Cage, Weishar, Robinson. **OHIO STATE:** Offense, Miller, Thomas, Marshall, Elliott, Barrett, Boren, Price, Farris, Elflein, Decker, Vannett, Nuernberger. Defense, McMillan, Hubbard, Conley, Bell, Apple, Powell, Perry, Lee, Lewis, Hill, Bosa, Johnston. Reserves, Baker, Ward, Wilson, Webb, Samuel, Prince, Holmes, Campbell, Hooker, Dunn, Booker, Worley, Fada, Haynes, Burger, Hale, Munger, Parry, J. Jones, Lisle, Knox, Clark, McLaurin, Baugh, Greene, Sprinkle, Willoughby.

## Season Statistics

### 2015-16 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd	Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Sept. 7	(1) at Virginia Tech	W, 42-24	65,632	Ezekiel Elliott	23	-	-	-	-	138
Sept. 12	(1) HAWAII	W, 38-0	107,145	J.T. Barrett	11	-	-	-	-	66
Sept. 19	(1) NORTHERN ILLINOIS	W, 20-13	104,095	Jack Willoughby	-	45-45	-	-	7-11	66
Sept. 26	(1) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 38-12	106,123	Michael Thomas	9	-	-	-	-	54
Oct. 3	(1) at Indiana	W, 34-27	52,929	Jalin Marshall	5	-	-	-	-	30
Oct. 10	(1) MARYLAND	W, 49-28	107,869	Sean Nuernberger	-	17-17	-	-	3-4	26
Oct. 17	(1) PENN STATE	W, 38-10	108,423	Braxton Miller	4	-	-	-	-	24
Oct. 24	(1) at Rutgers	W, 49-7	53,111	Curtis Samuel	3	-	-	-	-	18
Nov. 7	(1) MINNESOTA	W, 28-14	108,075	Vonn Bell	2	-	-	-	-	12
Nov. 14	(2) at Illinois	W, 28-3	51,515	Cardale Jones	2	-	-	-	-	12
Nov. 21	(2) MICHIGAN ST. (9) L	17-14	108,975	Br'onte Dunn	1	-	-	-	-	6
Nov. 28	(8) at Michigan (12)	W, 42-13	111,829	Adol. Washington	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jan. 1	(7) vs. Notre Dame# (8) W	44-28	71,123	Darron Lee	1	-	-	-	-	6
* OSU's gameday AP ranking is in parentheses before the opponent, while the opponent's ranking is after the name.										
# – Fiesta Bowl; Glendale, Ariz.										
				<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>62-62</b>	-	-	<b>-10-15</b>	<b>464</b>
				<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>2422-23</b>	-	-	<b>0-1</b>	<b>10-17</b>	<b>196</b>

### Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	280	216
Rushing	151	93
Passing	114	103
Penalty	15	20
Average Per Game/Rush	245.2	126.8
Average Per Game/Pass	188.8	184.5
Total Offense	5,643	4,047
Total Plays	892	899
Average Per Game	434.1	311.3
Average Per Play	6.3	4.5
Penalties-Yards	76-656	68-533
Fumbles-Lost	21-9	16-9
Third Down Efficiency	70-172	74-212
Percentage	41%	35%
Fourth Down Efficiency	11-19	9-23
Percentage	58%	39%
Sacks-Yards	38-217	19-101
Time Of Possession Avg.	29:16	30:44

### Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	73	135	125	131	-	464	35.7
Opponents	20	74	34	68	-	196	15.1

### Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Ezekiel Elliott	289	1821	6.3	23	80
J.T. Barrett	115	682	5.9	11	40
Braxton Miller	42	260	6.2	1	53
Cardale Jones	64	193	3.0	2	38
Curtis Samuel	17	132	7.8	1	40
Br'onte Dunn	14	91	6.5	1	19
Jalin Marshall	2	30	15.0	0	15
Warren Ball	10	28	2.8	0	7
TEAM	14	-49	-3.5	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>567</b>	<b>3,188</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>488</b>	<b>1,649</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>79</b>

### Passing Comp. Att. Pct. Yds. TD-INT Effic.

Cardale Jones	110	176	62.5	1,460	8-5	141.50
J.T. Barrett	93	147	63.3	992	11-4	139.20
Braxton Miller	1	1	100.0	3	0-0	125.20
C. Johnston	0	1	0	0	0-0	0.00
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>62.8</b>	<b>2,455</b>	<b>19-9</b>	<b>139.98</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>411</b>	<b>50.4</b>	<b>2,398</b>	<b>14-12</b>	<b>104.78</b>

### Receiving Rec. Net Avg. TD Long

Michael Thomas	56	781	13.9	9	50
Jalin Marshall	36	477	13.2	5	48
Ezekiel Elliott	27	206	7.6	0	30
Braxton Miller	26	341	13.1	3	54
Curtis Samuel	22	289	13.1	2	40
Nick Vannett	19	162	8.5	0	26
Dontre Wilson	7	63	9.0	0	21
Corey Smith	5	62	12.4	0	22
Marcus Baugh	2	32	16.0	0	27
Johnnie Dixon	1	29	29.0	0	29
Jeff Greene	1	10	10.0	0	10
Warren Ball	1	3	3.0	0	3
Br'onte Dunn	1	0	0.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>204</b>	<b>2,455</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>2,398</b>	<b>11.6</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>81</b>

### FG Distance 0-29 30-39 40-49 50+ Total

Jack Willoughby	4-4	3-4	0-3	0-0	7-11
Sean Nuernberger	0-1	3-3	0-0	0-0	3-4
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>4-5</b>	<b>6-7</b>	<b>0-3</b>	<b>0-0</b>	<b>10-15</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>5-6</b>	<b>3-5</b>	<b>0-3</b>	<b>10-17</b>

### Punting No. Yds. Avg. Bk Long

Cameron Johnston	58	2,549	43.9	1	67
TEAM	2	51	25.5	0	37
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>2,600</b>	<b>43.3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>3,787</b>	<b>41.2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>72</b>

### Interceptions No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Tyvis Powell	3	29	9.7	0	25
Vonn Bell	2	16	8.0	1	16
Gareon Conley	2	0	0.0	0	0
Darron Lee	1	41	41.0	1	41
Joey Bosa	1	28	28.0	0	28
Adolphus Washington	1	20	20.0	1	20
Eli Apple	1	8	8.0	0	8
Sam Hubbard	1	0	0.0	0	0
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>33</b>

### Punt Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Jalin Marshall	28	379	13.5	0	38
Ezekiel Elliott	2	13	6.5	0	10
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>392</b>	<b>13.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>14</b>

### Kickoff Returns No. Yds. Avg. TD Long

Curtis Samuel	9	207	23.0	0	38
Dontre Wilson	7	167	23.9	0	25
Jalin Marshall	1	36	36.0	0	36
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>813</b>	<b>16.3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>30</b>

### Def. Leaders Solo Ast. Tot. TFL-Yds. Sacks

Raekwon McMillan	57	62	119	4-0-11	1.5-5
Joshua Perry	53	52	105	7.5-31	3.5-25
Tyvis Powell	41	30	71	0-5-0	-
Darron Lee	36	30	66	11.0-51	4.5-35
Vonn Bell	43	22	65	1-0-4	-
Tyquan Lewis	31	23	54	14.0-59	8.0-47
Joey Bosa	35	16	51	16.0-60	5.0-23
Gareon Conley	33	16	49	1-0-4	0.5-2
Adol. Washington	23	26	49	7.0-30	4.0-20
Eli Apple	23	10	33	2-0-4	-
Sam Hubbard	16	12	28	8.0-44	6.5-41
Tommy Schutt	7	18	25	5.0-18	2.5-14
Dante Booker	14	8	22	1-0-1	-
Chris Worley	13	4	17	1.5-4	1.0-3
Michael Hill	4	8	12	0-5-1	-
Joel Hale	2	10	12	-	-
Carn Williams	8	4	12	0-5-2	-
Jalyn Holmes	5	6	11	1.5-3	1.0-2
Malik Hooker	6	4	10	-	-
Damon Webb	3	7	10	-	-
<b>OSU Totals</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>885</b>	<b>83-330</b>	<b>38-217</b>
<b>OPP Totals</b>	<b>506</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>930</b>	<b>70-237</b>	<b>19-101</b>

**Fumbles Forced:** 8 – Darron Lee 2, Joey Bosa, Jalyn Holmes, Sam Hubbard, Tommy Schutt, Adolphus Washington, Chris Worley.

**Fumbles Recovered:** 9 – Sam Hubbard 2, Vonn Bell

# OSU Didn't Deserve Top 4, But Season Still A Success

Ohio State's impressive Fiesta Bowl victory over Notre Dame, coupled with the performances of Michigan State and Iowa in the Cotton Bowl and Rose Bowl, respectively, was bound to add fuel to the raging debate over whether the Buckeyes were one of the top four teams in the country and playoff-worthy accordingly, or at the very least the more worthy choice to represent the Big Ten in the Rose Bowl.

And, of course, the play of the Buckeyes in their final two games of the season kept up the debate over whether Ohio State's season was a great one or a disappointing one.

As for the first discussion, after Ohio State's final two games, the Buckeyes could easily make the case they were one of the top four teams in the country. They beat their final two opponents, the No. 15 and No. 8 teams in the final CFP rankings, by a combined score of 86-41, racking up 978 yards of offense in the process, and were never really threatened by either Michigan or the Irish.

Unfortunately for the Buckeyes, the playoff selection was not made after Ohio State's final two games of the season. At the time the top four teams were selected, Ohio State had only the quality win over the Wolverines, and in their other game against a highly ranked opponent, the Buckeyes, of course, had lost to the Spartans.

The committee was left, at the time, to ponder whether the real Buckeyes were the team that played MSU or Michigan. This is not to mention the fact that they couldn't ignore that Ohio State had pretty much sleepwalked through most of its other games, with the notable exception of the season-opening revenge game with Virginia Tech. But that was ancient history by early December.

Which brings up a lesson that Ohio State has learned in the past two years from both sides of the equation. If you are going to lose a game and still make it to the College Football Playoffs, it pays to lose early. And if you don't have a conference championship game to show off your wares, you are at a decided disadvantage.

In 2014, Ohio State lost to the Hokies in the second game of the season. The Buckeyes came storming back, and their incredible 59-0 destruction of Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game made it impossible for the committee to ignore them. Ohio State lost early and had a final audition for the playoff with the Badgers.

Of this year's playoff participants, Clemson was undefeated so the Tigers were in automatically. Alabama, which was going to get every advantage anyway, lost only in week three to Mississippi, which would finish 12th in the CFP rankings, and the Tide went on to win the SEC Championship Game. As if there were ever a doubt, they were in.

Michigan State lost in its ninth game, but it was on a fluke play and the Spartans came back to beat the defending national champion Buckeyes and knocked off undefeated Iowa in the conference championship game. They were in.

Oklahoma, which was upset by Texas in the fifth week of the season, was the only team of the four not to play in a conference championship game, but that is because the Big 12 does not have such a contest. But the Sooners played a three-game de facto conference championship as they closed the season with wins over Baylor, TCU and Oklahoma State, ranked 17th, 11th and 16th in the CFP final rankings, respectively, to leave a fresh impression on the committee. They were in.

Ohio State, with the late-season loss to the

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Spartans and no conference championship game to showcase its end-of-season improvement, was easily left out in the cold – or in the warmth of Arizona as it turned out. And it was of the Buckeyes' own doing. After the games of Dec. 31 and Jan. 1, it is a lot easier for the Buckeyes to make their case that they are one of the best four teams in the country.

The Buckeyes might not have defeated Alabama, but they probably would have put up a better fight than the Spartans, or at the least would have put up a better fight against Stanford in Pasadena. We will never know.

As to the second question, whether the 2015 Ohio State football season was a great one or a disappointment, I have given this a lot of thought. I have finally decided that it was both.

No, this is not a cop-out on my part.

I don't see how one cannot consider a 12-1 season with impressive wins over quality opponents and traditional rivals such as Michigan and Notre Dame a success.

But at schools like Alabama and Ohio State, there are expectations, and given the quality of the personnel returning from last year's championship squad, if there is not a certain amount of disappointment within the Woody Hayes facility, then Urban Meyer is not one of the best coaches in college football – and he is. Of course the players are disappointed, and there's nothing wrong with fans feeling the same way.

However, we should all savor the successes of the 2015 team, especially its ability to bounce back after the loss to the Spartans rather than going into the disappointment tank. But we should also look forward to and maintain the expectations of championships to come.

### Defeating The Irish

Even the most casual college football observer knew that Ohio State had the talent and coaching to defeat Notre Dame. I think the biggest concern among Buckeye fans was whether their team would turn in a lackluster performance after failing to meet the team's obvious goal of defending its national title.

Those fears were put to rest immediately as Ohio State opened the Fiesta Bowl by stopping the Irish on a three-and-out and then took its opening possession and methodically marched 80 yards in nine plays to take a 7-0 lead. The drive featured a little bit of everything as forgotten man Braxton Miller had a 9-yard reception and a 27-yard run, quarterback J.T. Barrett completed all three of his passes and rushed for 14 yards on two carries, and workhorse running back Ezekiel Elliott rushed for 15 yards on three carries, including the 2-yard touchdown run.

The Irish got the ball back and again were stopped on a three-and-out.

This time Ohio State needed only three plays to score on a 43-yard drive that featured another wrinkle – a 27-yard Barrett pass to tight end Marcus Baugh.

It was shaping up to be a rout, as on the next Irish drive star defensive end Joey Bosa came crashing in on quarterback Deshaun Kizer, forcing an errant pass that was intercepted by Buckeye safety Tyvis Powell. As we all know now, the pick was nullified and Bosa was tossed after his hit on Kizer was deemed targeting.

This was a play that could have altered the game's outcome. Arguably the Buckeyes' best

player, certainly the best player on defense, was thrown out of the game. But also, if the interception had stood, Ohio State might have dealt a knockout blow in just the first quarter. While the Irish were unable to score after their reprieve, they certainly slowed the incredible Buckeye momentum that had built up to that point.

As soon as I saw the play, I knew that, by the letter of the rule, Bosa was doomed. But I hate the rule.

While I am all for player safety, I worry that the powers-that-be are legislating defense out of football. Just a few short years ago, Bosa and the Buckeye defense would have been lauded for such a spectacular defensive play. Instead, Bosa's college football career was over and he made the highlight reels for the wrong reasons.

I can maybe live with the penalty aspect of targeting, but to eject someone for playing football the way it is meant to be played is extreme to me.

The Buckeyes, however, trudged on and Ohio State, despite the loss of its star, was never really threatened.

I give credit to Notre Dame for showing the fight in Fighting Irish. Despite the slow start and the loss of their own star defender, Jaylon Smith, they battled on, scoring a late touchdown in the first half to go to the locker room down only 28-14 and pulling to within a touchdown at 28-21 midway through the third quarter.

But Elliott responded on the next OSU drive with one of his patented long runs, going 47 yards to pay dirt to put the Buckeyes back up by 14 points. That was pretty much all she wrote.

Elliott's long run was an example of a key reason that Ohio State scored the big victory. Those who worried that the Buckeyes might lack focus in the game pointed to not only the disappointment that the team was shut out of the playoffs but also the fact that many of the top stars with prospects of leaving early might already be turning their attention to their future pro careers.

That was hardly the case.

Elliott, for instance, rushed 27 times for 149 yards and tied a Fiesta Bowl record with four touchdowns on the ground. He had one of the best all-around games of his career with a 30-yard reception and the outstanding blocking that has become one of his trademarks.

"Zeke Elliott I think may have played one of his best games, complete games – I'm not saying yardage-wise, but complete games – as he did all year," running backs coach Tony Alford said. "When he's out on the perimeter cutting guys down and blocking the way he did, he was just relentless in his play."

Elliott was hardly the only early declaree to take care of business against the Irish.

Jalin Marshall also had one of his best days as a Buckeye. Not only did he catch five passes, but he also had a carry for 15 yards. He didn't stop there. He had four punt returns for 73 yards, including a long of 29, and returned his only kickoff for 36 yards.

Michael Thomas led all receivers with seven catches for 72 yards and a score.

On defense, linebacker Darron Lee, who had a sometimes quiet season, capped off his college career by tying for the team lead with seven tackles, all solos, including two sacks and a forced fumble. Cornerback Eli Apple

had five tackles and a pass breakup, and his outstanding cover performance earned him game defensive MVP honors.

Safety Powell had five tackles and finally got an interception for keeps, and Vonn Bell added a pair of stops.

And of course there was Bosa.

In the few minutes he was in the game, you could tell he was ready to play. He recorded four tackles in less than a quarter of action, bowing out on what should have been – had he lifted his head just a bit higher – yet another in a career of highlight-reel plays. Who knows what kind of stat line Bosa would have posted if he had been available all 60 minutes and what the game's final outcome might have been?

These players might have had their eye on the NFL but they never lost sight of the task at hand, and if anything they improved their stock by demonstrating character and commitment.

I think the other reason that Ohio State was so successful against Notre Dame is that it was firing on all cylinders.

The offense rolled up 496 yards with a nice balance of 285 rushing and 211 passing. The defense was not as effective after the loss of Bosa, but other than yielding an 81-yard scoring reception to Will Fuller in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes bent some yet never broke.

I think it was special teams that really impressed me, however.

In addition to Marshall's returns, Curtis Samuel had a kick return of 38 yards. On the flip side, Notre Dame averaged just 12.0 yards on five kickoff returns with a long of 17. On four of the five times the Irish tried to return kicks, they started at their own 13 or worse!

Punter Cameron Johnston punted just three times but landed two of them inside the 10. And who would have guessed that Sean Nuernberger would have kicked three field goals?

About the only thing to complain about on special teams was the fact that kicker Jack Willoughby landed two of his kicks out of bounds, giving Notre Dame rare good field position at its 35 each time.

Come on, Jack.

All in all, it was a pretty good way to cap off a pretty good year.

### Don't Miss The Coverage

Football recruiting is heating up, with flames fanned by the departure of the nine underclassmen. Buckeye Sports Bulletin will have plenty of coverage between now and National Signing Day.

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be mailed on Jan. 26, followed by our big Football Recruiting Wrap-Up set to be mailed on Feb. 9. However, there is no reason you can't keep up on the latest football recruiting information.

We will have editions of our popular Friday electronic recruiting newsletters on Jan. 15, 22 and 29 and on Feb. 5. Complete issues of the electronic BSB Quickly will be posted on Jan 19 and Feb. 2. All of these electronic issues are free to BSB print subscribers.

If you have not already signed up to enjoy Buckeye Sports Bulletin's additional 36 electronic newsletters, see the instructions on page 5 of this issue or give us a call at (614) 486-2202.

### Holiday Promos Available

Many of you have called since the New Year, wondering if our holiday promotions are still available. Any promotion that you may have received, including all gift promotions, are still available with the exception of the Cyber Monday special, which expired on Dec. 25.