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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Oct. 29, 2016



PHOTOS BY TIM MOODY

OUT OF REACH – Ohio State sophomore receiver Parris Campbell briefly lost control of the final kickoff during the Buckeyes' game against Penn State, one of a variety of miscues that led to a 24-21 loss Oct. 22.

Slipped Away

Special Teams, Offensive Issues Lead To OSU's 1st Loss

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Two keys to winning football games are controlling the line of scrimmage and executing on special teams. Just ask Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer.

Against Penn State on Oct. 22, the Buckeyes didn't control the line of scrimmage, and they certainly didn't execute well on special teams. That added up to a crushing, 24-21 loss for the previously second-ranked Ohio State squad in State College, Pa., snapping an eight-game winning streak for Meyer's program.

The Buckeyes were 6-0 overall and 3-0 in the Big Ten heading into the game, but the problems that had shown up in spots this season piled up, and Ohio State proved it has a long way to go to be a playoff contender.

"We're not a great team right now," Meyer admitted.

The coach was morose in the postgame press conference. Rarely does he forgo an opening statement after a game, but Meyer didn't have any words when he first sat down.

For two weeks there had been question marks surrounding the Buckeyes. First, Ohio State struggled – especially on offense – in a 38-17 win over Indiana on Oct. 8. Then the Buckeyes struggled on both sides of the ball in a 30-23 overtime win at Wisconsin the following week.

Even after those two tough games, fifth-year senior center Pat Elflein said he felt like the Buckeyes were ready to go against Penn State, at least before the game began.

"I thought we were rolling," Elflein said.

The difference? Ohio State found a way to win those two games, but the Buckeyes hit a road block they simply couldn't move at Beaver Stadium.

It's not like Penn State went out and controlled the game from the start, though. Ohio State took the night's first lead, 3-0, just seconds into the second quarter. That was before the special teams problems unfolded.

Ohio State accounted for the next two scores in the game as well. First, junior quarterback J.T. Barrett hit junior tight end Marcus Baugh for a 26-yard touchdown on which Baugh showcased his athletic ability to

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OPINION

OSU Should Focus On Improving, Not Playoff



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EDITOR & PUBLISHER
 Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
 Becky Roberts

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
 Tim Moody

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
 Mark Rea

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
 Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
 Sonny Brockway Terry Gillingham
 Kevin Dye Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
 Bill Armstrong Bob Roehm
 David Breithaupt Julie Roy
 Rich Exner Mark Schmetzer
 James Grega Steve Siegfried
 Eric Loughry Jeff Svoboda
 Ryan McGlade Mike Wachsman
 Craig Merz Blake Williams

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Charter Member

Just about the time Penn State was beginning to celebrate its 24-21 upset victory against No. 2 Ohio State, three famous (and wholly appropriate) quotes about football ran through my mind.

"Football is a 60-minute game," Paul Brown once said. "If you're not prepared to give maximum effort for 60 minutes, don't waste your teammates' time."

Vince Lombardi was thinking along the same lines when he said, "Winning is not a sometime thing; it is an all-the-time thing. You don't do things right once in a while. You do them right all the time."

And then there was John Cooper, who fell back on a favorite maxim whenever his team lost a late lead and suffered an excruciating defeat: "We didn't go for the jugular. We let 'em live."

There's really no way to soft-sell it, so let's just get right to the cold, hard truth. Ohio State gave away a game Oct. 22 it should have won. But since the Buckeyes did not give Penn State their undivided attention for a full 60 minutes, a game the oddsmakers had OSU winning by nearly three touchdowns turned into one of the biggest upsets for the Nittany Lions in a long, long time.

Like Wisconsin the week before, Penn State maximized every drop of talent from its players to stay within shouting distance of Ohio State despite trailing 9-0 late in the first half and 21-7 early in the fourth quarter. At each of those junctures, the Buckeyes had a golden opportunity to land knockout punches. Those blows never came, however.

Instead of building upon those advantages, OSU systematically defeated itself. That started with maddeningly-conservative and utterly-predictable play-calling exacerbated by poor pass protection on the part of the offensive line. Couple that with a receiving corps that continues to struggle to get off the line of scrimmage and create separation from defenders, a quarterback forced to hurry his decision-making, and a burgeoning reluctance to utilize any kind of power running game, and what you get is an offensively-challenged performance.

Throw in a couple of brain-freezes by OSU defensive backs on jump balls and about a half-dozen special teams gaffes, and you begin to wonder how the final score was as close as it was.

Just two weeks ago, when some pundits were already guaranteeing an Alabama-Ohio State showdown in the national championship game, I wrote in this space, "What we have truly witnessed through the first five games of the 2016 campaign is that Ohio State has played two junior varsity teams (Bowling Green and Rutgers), one decent mid-major opponent (Tulsa), one defensively-challenged team (Oklahoma) and one up-and-comer that still isn't quite there (Indiana)."

"That the Buckeyes have met each of those challenges in varying ways is testament to the talent gap that existed between them and their opponents. And even though OSU is perceived to be the second-best team in the country ... early-season rankings are meaningless. Despite the fact it now has five games under its belt, Ohio State remains very much a work in progress."

Since I wrote those words, the Buckeyes managed to shake off a poor first-half performance at Wisconsin to score a 30-23 overtime victory and then made mistakes by the boatload in Happy Valley, uncharacteristically blowing a two-touchdown lead in the fourth quarter.

A friend of mine texted me immediately after the game to offer the opinion that Ohio

State remains very much (his words, not mine) in the hunt for one of four College Football Playoff spots. He was right, of course. If the Buckeyes win out, which would include beating now-No. 2 Michigan and then winning the Big Ten Championship Game, it would be difficult to see how Ohio State would be kept out of the playoff.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

First things first, however, and priority one is now spending some time thinking about how the Buckeyes are going to beat a Northwestern team that has scored 116 points during its current three-game winning streak.

And that brings me to another famous quote from Lombardi.

"It's not whether you get knocked down; it's whether you get up."

More Game Musings

- Spotty officiating did not lose the game for Ohio State, but it would have been nice to get a pass-interference call inside the final two minutes when Penn State cornerback Jordan Smith clearly held the arm of receiver James Clark on a deep sideline route.

- Speaking of missed calls, someone needs to clarify the horse collar rule. OSU defensive end Tyquan Lewis was hit with a 15-yard penalty in the fourth quarter despite bringing Penn State tailback Saquon Barkley down by the back of his jersey. If that was a head-scratcher, try this one: If a defender grabs the quarterback by the neck and pulls him down, a horse collar penalty is not called as long as the QB is still in the pocket. Seems to me a horse collar is a horse collar no matter where on the field it is committed.

- The offensive line, which features a couple of guys who will be playing in the NFL next year, got absolutely shredded by the Penn State defense. J.T. Barrett and the receiving corps are due their share of the blame for what happened in the game, but when a quarterback is never afforded a moment's peace while dropping back to throw, you can expect his timing to be off slightly. Barrett was sacked six times, the most the Buckeyes have given up in a single game since Barrett was dumped seven times during the 2014 debacle against Virginia Tech.

- Why did it take the Buckeyes so long to get Curtis Samuel involved in the game? The speedster wasn't targeted until the team's 13th play from scrimmage and didn't get his first touch until play No. 20. Then, after Samuel hit a 74-yard home run early in the third quarter, Ohio State never tried that same play again. Whatever happened to running a play until the opposing defense stops it?

- While we're on the subject of play-calling, what happens to Ohio State's offensive mind-set when the weather is uncooperative? Dating back to last year's still-inexplicable loss to Michigan State and continuing this year against Tulsa and Penn State, wind and rain seems to send the OSU play-callers into a virtual fetal position. Is it because when you have winning streaks, lofty rankings and play-off aspirations on the line, perhaps sometimes you play not to lose? The Nittany Lions took the exact opposite approach, swinging for the fences on occasions, and that go-for-broke mentality paid off in a huge upset win.

- Ohio State had its consecutive streak of regular-season road victories snapped at 20. It was seeking to become the first team in more than four decades to win at least 21 straight regular-season games on the road, a number achieved by the Bear Bryant-coached Alabama teams of 1970-75.

- The victory for Penn State was the program's first against a No. 2 team while unranked since the Nittany Lions went into Ohio Stadium and shut out second-rated Ohio State by a 27-0 final on Nov. 7, 1964.

- The Buckeyes had not had a punt and a field-goal attempt blocked in the same game in 20 years. The last time it happened was during the 29-16 victory at Notre Dame on Sept. 28, 1996.

- With 245 yards through the air against Penn State, Barrett moved into the all-time top 10 in passing yardage at Ohio State. Barrett now has 5,278 yards for his career, pushing him past Jim Karsatos (5,089, 1984-86). Barrett needs only 18 more yards to move into ninth place all-time, the spot currently occupied by Braxton Miller (5,295, 2011-15).

- Barrett's modest rushing total of 26 yards against the Nittany Lions increased his career total to 2,080, and that ties him with Cornelius Greene (1972-75) for third all-time among OSU quarterbacks. Miller is the career leader with 3,284 while Terrelle Pryor (2,164, 2008-10) is second.

- With 71 yards on just two carries, Samuel increased his career rushing total to 1,042 yards and became the 59th player in Ohio State history to amass at least 1,000 career rushing yards. Of those 59 players with 1,000 yards or more, Samuel boasts the best average per carry at 7.5. A distant second is Ezekiel Elliott (6.7, 2013-15) while perhaps a surprising third is Joe Montgomery (6.2, 1996-98).

And Finally

- Iowa's 17-9 loss to Wisconsin was the third straight at home this season for the Hawkeyes, who hadn't lost three in a row at Kinnick Stadium since 2012. Iowa now will be forced to try to break that streak Nov. 12 when it hosts Michigan. The Hawkeyes haven't lost four straight at home since 1999, head coach Kirk Ferentz's first season during which Iowa finished with a 1-10 record.

- There are more ways to rub it in against your opponent than running up the score. With 2:04 remaining in the game and his team leading Illinois by a 41-8 margin, Michigan head coach Jim Harbaugh called a timeout to challenge a third-down spot before his team went for and converted a fourth-and-2 play. Earlier this season, Harbaugh called time with 1:05 remaining in the third quarter to challenge a fourth-down spot when his team enjoyed a 35-3 lead during an eventual 49-10 win against Penn State. That's the kind of petty stuff opposing coaches file away for future reference.

- Michigan State's woes continued with a 28-17 loss at Maryland, the team's first loss to the Terrapins since 1950. To be fair, the two teams didn't play one another from 1950 until 2014 when Maryland joined the Big Ten, but the Spartans had won six of the previous seven meetings in the series.

- Adding salt to Sparty's wounds was the fact that the loss to Maryland marked a fifth straight defeat this season, something MSU hasn't experienced since losing five in a row in 1991. It also kept Michigan State searching for its first win in Big Ten play this year. The Spartans haven't experienced a winless conference season since 1958.

COVER STORY

Buckeyes Surrender 21-7 Second-Half Lead

Continued From Page 1

fight to the end zone. Senior kicker Tyler Durbin missed the extra point, though, which might have been a sign of things to come.

Durbin made up for that, at least partially, when he nailed his second field goal of the game with 1:14 remaining in the first half, giving Ohio State a 12-0 lead.

The Nittany Lions accounted for the first big blip on the radar before the break, though. Despite having only just over a minute to work with, Penn State quarterback Trace McSorley guided his team down the field on a seven-play, 74-yard drive that was capped by a 20-yard touchdown pass to Chris Godwin.

After it looked like the Buckeyes would lead by 12 at the half, the game was suddenly well within reach for Penn State with 30 minutes to play.

Ohio State bounced back to start the second half, striking first after the break via a 74-yard touchdown run by junior H-back Curtis Samuel. Then a bad Penn State snap on a punt led to a safety for Ohio State, making it 21-7 with 8:31 to play in the third quarter.

The game seemed well in hand.

Then McSorley led another scoring drive, which he capped with a 2-yard touchdown run, and Tyler Davis tacked on a 34-yard field goal with 9:33 to play set up by a blocked Ohio State punt.

Ohio State had the lead, but it was just 21-17 and nothing seemed to be going right for the Buckeyes. That trend continued when Ohio State embarked on what seemed to be a solid offensive drive. Eventually Ohio State lined up for a 45-yard field-goal try on fourth-and-7 as Meyer elected not to play it safe and punt.

The kick was blocked, though, and Penn

State's Grant Haley returned the loose ball for 60 yards and a 24-21 lead – the final margin.

"Obviously it didn't work out," Meyer said of the decision to kick the field goal.

That blocked kick came after the Buckeyes had already had a punt blocked in a key situation. Tack on the missed extra

point and you've got a sure losing effort from the special teams.

Add in six sacks for Penn State, plus a 3.4-yards per carry average for running back Mike Weber and 1.5 yards per carry for Barrett and you've got a, well, less than stellar performance from the offensive line. When drawing up the plan to



SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT QUITE – Ohio State wide receiver James Clark (82) couldn't haul in a key pass on the Buckeyes' final drive of the game.

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COVER STORY

win, Meyer probably didn't have any of that in mind.

It all amounted to a loss for the Buckeyes, and it seemed like they had a crushing feeling similar to what happened after the Michigan State loss last year. Sophomore defensive end Sam Hubbard admitted it felt the same.

"This feeling, I can't describe this feeling," Hubbard said. "This is what we're going to feel until the end of the season when we keep winning games. This pit in our stomach is just terrible."

Moving On

Though Hubbard and the rest of his teammates talked about a feeling of frustration after the game, the loss doesn't quite have the same overarching meaning that Ohio State's tumble against the Spartans did a year ago.

That loss meant the Buckeyes' goals for the season were most likely gone. This year, that's not the case. If Ohio State wins out, it will in all likelihood end up in the College Football Playoff. That's always been the team's goal, to compete for championships in November and beyond. When the calendar turns, that's what the Buckeyes will be doing – pending the result against Northwestern on Oct. 29.

"Every goal is still alive," Meyer said. "We've got to regroup and get guys healthy and come back and keep swinging. I talked to the team and then Raekwon McMillan and some of the other leaders talked to the team and let's go, time to get to work."

Easier said than done, at times.

Elfein had a similar mind-set to his head coach. He was a starting guard on the 2014 Ohio State team when the Buckeyes lost in week 2 to Virginia Tech. At the time, it likely felt like the world was falling in around them, but the players regrouped and went on an unlikely run to the national title. Players such as Elfein who were on that team can use that experience to get the younger Buckeyes ready to go going forward.

"Tell them to get to work," he said. "Use that experience. You have to tell them how that went, what we did to bounce back from that and this is what we train for, is adversity like this. So it's going to be a test and we've got to go back and get to work tomorrow."

Again, easier said than done.

The Buckeyes certainly have room for improvement, but that's not a new idea. But a loss to Penn State – on the road or not – likely proved that room for improvement is a little greater than expected.

Had the offense struggled at times before that game? Yes, especially when it came to passing the ball. But the offensive line hadn't been overpowered before, and the Buckeye special teams had been mostly stellar throughout the first half of the regular season.

Now the Buckeyes have a little more figuring to do when it comes to what went wrong and how to fix those mistakes.

"I think you go back to the drawing board," junior guard Billy Price said. "Some things that didn't work you have to redesign

and re-evaluate ... I think you have to focus back on the little things. If we miss a block in practice, the guy that we really should've got, we need to emphasize that more because the little things show up in games like this, especially when they become close."

Price was pretty reasonable about the loss, despite the crushing feeling felt throughout the team. He even said it's important for Ohio State to hold onto that feeling, to thrive off the frustration.

"We go out to the next team and it's motivation for us," he said. "All of our goals are still attainable and that's the nice thing about it, even though you take a hard loss against a good team, just go out the next game and execute and do the little things that we didn't do tonight."

The Buckeyes didn't leave Beaver Stadium until the early hours of Sunday morning after the game. They got back to Columbus later that day, which meant there was a gap of time before they could begin preparing for their next game – a home matchup against the Wildcats.

With a loss now on the record and a lot of work to be done, that gap of time between crushing defeat and getting back to the grind likely felt like eternity for some of the players.

The loss happened, and it hurt. Now the Buckeyes are in a position to find their way back.

"I want to go in and watch the film right now," Hubbard said. "I feel that terrible. Everybody feels that way, and we're just going to get back to work."

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OHIO STATE VS. PENN STATE

Special Teams Mistakes Cost Buckeyes In Loss

Special teams have been a calling card for Ohio State football ever since Jim Tressell arrived on campus in 2001. Urban Meyer took that torch and ran with it, taking on special teams duties in practice.

GAME NOTEBOOK

James Grega

After Ohio State's 24-21 loss to Penn State, Meyer was asked what concerned him the most in a game in which the Buckeyes had a field goal and punt blocked and botched an extra-point hold and kick. His answer was obvious.

"We had two blocked kicks, two blocked kicks," Meyer said, repeating the unthinkable to himself.

The second blocked kick cost Ohio State the game as up 21-17, Meyer elected to line up a 45-yard field goal to go up by a touchdown with just under five minutes to play in the game. The low kick by walk-on kicker Tyler Durbin was blocked and returned 60 yards for the game-winning score.

Meyer said after the game that while he thought about punting and trying to pin the Nittany Lions, he felt confident in sending Durbin out to extend a slim lead.

"It was a 45-yarder and he hits that easily in practice," Meyer said. "It was a little bit breezy, it was rotating wind a little bit. Earlier in the game they kind of jumped



SONNY BROCKWAY

TOUGH OUTING – Punter Cam Johnston (95) and kicker Tyler Durbin (92) each had attempts blocked against Penn State.

over us and we got that fixed on the next one. It was zero penetration. I can't tell if he kicked it low or what happened. I was going back and forth. That would've put us up by seven.

"If you punt it there – I think he was on

the 30-some yard line – it went through my mind. I've got enough confidence in Durbin to kick that thing because he does it in practice all the time."

On the Buckeyes' previous drive, Cam Johnston's punt attempt was blocked inside

their own 30-yard line, which set up a Penn State field goal.

All in all, special teams blunders cost the Buckeyes double-digit points, but the Penn State special teams were far from perfect. On the Nittany Lions' opening drive of the game, Ohio State blocked a 39-yard field-goal attempt to keep PSU off the board early. A fumbled punt by Penn State returner John Reid set up the first points of the game on a Durbin field goal.

And in the third quarter, Ohio State's lead was extended from 19-7 to 21-7 after an errant snap went over Penn State punter Blake Gillikin's head and he fell on it for a safety. It was not until the fourth quarter that the pair of blocked kicks doomed the Buckeyes.

Pass Protection Struggles

The Ohio State offensive line allowed six sacks against Penn State, the most allowed by a Buckeye offensive front since a 35-21 loss to Virginia Tech in 2014.

Quarterback J.T. Barrett was under constant pressure for most of the night, and Penn State ended the game with back-to-back sacks on the OSU signal caller. Outside of special teams, the lack of pass protection is what concerned Meyer the most.

"I just thought the pressure more than anything (was the problem)," Meyer said. "I did think we had some guys open, but I'll know more after watching the film. I'll let you know more next week."

Senior center Pat Elflein put a lot of the blame for the loss on him and his unit, which

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OHIO STATE VS. PENN STATE

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Not a whole lot. Early on, the Ohio State "Rushmen" package seemed to get pressure on Trace McSorley, and it appeared the Buckeyes might have another big day in the opponent's backfield. However, the Buckeyes got just one sack as McSorley escaped pressure multiple times. Offensively, Ohio State's biggest plays seemed to come when the ball was in the hands of Curtis Samuel, which comes as no surprise. Unfortunately for OSU, Penn State did a good job (outside of one play) of containing Samuel in the running game. Ohio State's offense for most of the game was predictable and not very creative.

What Didn't Work

Pass protection. In the fourth quarter especially, Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett was under constant pressure, and on the final two offensive plays of the night, he failed to get off a pass. Isaiah Prince especially struggled, as the Penn State defensive ends seemed faster and stronger than the sophomore. Even the running game struggled for Ohio State, as the Buckeyes totaled less than 100 yards rushing if you take away the big 74-yard run from Samuel.

Play Of The Game

Penn State's blocked field goal. Despite playing poorly for most of the game, Ohio State was largely in control. Until the blocked kick returned for a score, Penn State was playing from behind the entire night, and had Ohio State converted the 47-yard attempt, the Buckeyes would have carried a touchdown lead into the final four minutes of the game, in which Penn State largely struggled to move the ball. You could also throw in Penn State's blocked punt, which resulted in three points for the Nittany Lions.

— James Grega

failed to produce a 100-yard rusher in addition to the sacks allowed.

"The offensive line didn't show up," the veteran center said. "We didn't play very well and we weren't, like we say, nine units strong. Where every unit is operating at maximum capacity, we weren't doing that tonight. And when you don't do that at a place like Penn State where guys play really hard, it was all just what it is."

"The heart and soul of this team is the O-line, and right now we're letting the team down. So we're going to get back to work tomorrow."

Perhaps the lineman who struggled the most against Penn State was right tackle Isaiah Prince. The sophomore was constantly beat off the edge by Nittany Lion defensive ends and was whistled for a crucial false start in the red zone.

Elfle said he spoke with Prince after the game to try to encourage him after the rough night.

"We talked. He's going to – we'll take care of him and we'll get back to work. We'll keep grinding and he'll get better," Elfle said.

The offense was put into multiple passing situations throughout the night after the Buckeyes failed to pick up yards on first down. Barrett said part of that falls on him and not the offensive line.

"I didn't do a good job of keeping us in positive yardage," he said. "There were times where I could have run for plus 5, or got 3 yards. There were times where we were behind the chains. I could have done a better job helping our O-line."

Elfle remained confident that his unit and the team can get the season turned back in a positive direction. He said after the game that Ohio State has shown it can come back from tough losses before and he is hopeful the Buckeyes can do it again.

"This is what we train for all year is adversity and when stuff's not going your way, how are we going to respond to it? And we have great leaders on this – our coaches are really good leaders, we have some really good leaders on this team," Elfle said. "So we'll get back to work tomorrow and we have a big one ahead of us, so learn from this and just the way we do it is fully loaded for the next one and be ready to go."

Fellow veteran offensive lineman Billy Price shared Elfle's optimism. He said that

since the Buckeyes have been in this situation each of the last two seasons, it should help them make the adjustments they need to moving forward.

"That's the interesting part of it," Price said. "Being that we've been here before, been here before last year, been here before with Virginia Tech, we've got to come together. And that's what it comes down to. We have to execute. We have to execute better, take care of things better in practice. It's just a tough loss and a lot of hard work goes into it, and the whole entire team feels it."

Samuel's Touches Remain Low

Ever since Meyer called Curtis Samuel the Buckeyes' No. 1 playmaker, he has been scrutinized anytime Samuel fails to get a large number of touches.

The dynamic junior touched the ball just 10 times, eight of which came on receptions. His first carry of the night came in the third quarter when he broke free for a 74-yard touchdown run. He carried just one more

time after that, losing 3 yards to finish with 71 rushing yards on the evening.

Meyer said part of the reason Samuel did not get more touches was the play of the Penn State defense, which limited Ohio State to under 100 yards rushing if you exclude Samuel's big run.

"(Penn State's) defense was doing a decent job of – they know when we put him in the backfield, they know where he's at all the time," Meyer said. "So we just have to do a better job of it."

While Meyer said Ohio State has to get better at getting Samuel the ball, Barrett was not so sure. When asked whether the Buckeyes did a good enough job of getting Samuel the ball, Barrett said OSU needs to simply execute the offense.

"It's not like, Curtis has to touch the ball, Dontre (Wilson) has to touch the ball," he explained. "We just run our offense. We are not doing that. From here on out, there is not going to be, 'Hey, let's get Curtis the ball on this play.' It is not going to be like that. We are going to run our plays, and if Curtis happens to get the ball, then Curtis gets the ball. That is how our offense runs very well, when that happens. We are not going to start going backwards into, this person has to get the ball, or that person has to get the ball. Then you are predictable and that is not good football."

PSU Shows New Wrinkles

For the second straight week, Ohio State's opponent had an open week to prepare for the Buckeyes, and Penn State took full advantage. The Nittany Lions threw

a few new looks at the Buckeyes, including moving running back Saquon Barkley around in the backfield and even lining him up as a slot receiver at times.

"They did a lot of motioning him into the backfield so we couldn't get a feel of what they were going to do, which kind of threw us off a little bit," defensive end Sam Hubbard said. "But they definitely had some stuff we hadn't seen and we just had to adjust."

Barkley ran for 99 yards on just 12 carries while quarterback Trace McSorley added another 63 yards and a score on the ground.

Ohio State got pressure on numerous occasions on McSorley when he dropped back to pass but tallied just one sack. His ability to break tackles and escape pressure was something defensive end Tyquan Lewis said gave the Buckeyes problems.

"Guys like that, you want to try to contain them in the pocket," Lewis said. "He stepped up and was making plays off his feet. So we have to do better at containing him."

Although McSorley completed just 8 of 23 passes, the passes he connected on were backbreakers for Ohio State. Five of his eight completions came on Penn State's two touchdown drives against the Buckeye defense, including multiple jump balls and back-shoulder throws that Ohio State defensive backs failed to get their heads around on.

Penn State also did a good job of taking safety Malik Hooker out of the football game in the passing game, as the majority of the Nittany Lions' completions came between the numbers and the sideline.



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OHIO STATE VS. PENN STATE

Mistakes Add Up To OSU Loss Vs. Penn State

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The white-out at Penn State turned into a knockout as the Nittany Lions took advantage of uncommon special teams errors by Ohio State for a stunning 24-21 upset of the No. 2 Buckeyes at Beaver Stadium on a misty and breezy Oct. 22 night.

With the 107,280 white-clad fans screaming at ear-splitting decibels, PSU – a 19-point underdog – handed the Buckeyes (6-1, 3-1 Big Ten) their first road loss in 21 games under head coach Urban Meyer.

"We had two blocked kicks, two blocked kicks," Meyer said. "Offensively we didn't control the line of scrimmage. (Junior quarterback J.T. Barrett) was under pressure all night when we threw it. We didn't move them off the ball in the run game, and we gave up some big pass plays."

The Buckeyes led 12-7 at the half and 21-7 heading into the fourth quarter before falling apart. Penn State (5-2, 3-1) completed a 90-yard drive for a touchdown and used a blocked punt that led to a field goal to pull to within 21-17.

But the play that will be immortalized in Happy Valley was a blocked field-goal attempt by senior Tyler Durbin of 45 yards. Marcus Allen got a hand on it, and Grant Haley returned the ball 60 yards for a touchdown with 4:27 left in the game for the final score.

"Big-time play in a big-time game," said OSU junior right guard Billy Price.

Both teams had problems with their special teams, but OSU's errors were more egregious. In addition to the two blocked kicks, senior returner Dontre Wilson fumbled one punt and made unwise decisions on several others that led to poor field position throughout the first half.

Durbin also missed an extra point because of a sloppy hold. But PSU kicker Tyler Davis had a field goal blocked on the game's first drive, and later Ohio State recovered a bobbled punt return that led to a field goal.

OSU's offense continues to have questions, most notably why junior H-back Curtis Samuel had only 10 touches. His first carry wasn't until the third quarter, and that went 74 yards for a touchdown for a 19-7 lead.

Other than a safety for OSU shortly thereafter when the long snap by PSU flew into the end zone and was covered by Penn State punter Blake Gillikin, the remainder of the game was dominated by the Nittany Lions for the signature win coach James Franklin craved.

"I'm happy for our kids and the assistant coaches, the community," Franklin said. "This community has been through a lot. To see that stadium come together, we don't beat the No. 2 team without everybody."

Barrett completed 28 of 43 passes for 245 yards and one TD. He ran for 26 more yards.

Samuel had just two carries for 71 yards, despite the long touchdown. He also had eight catches for a team-high 68 yards as no deep threat emerged. Freshman running back Mike Weber had eight receptions as well for 36 yards, but his 21 carries netted only 71 yards (3.4 average).

OSU had 413 total yards, 168 of it on the ground. Penn State had 122 rushing yards and 154 passing for 276 total yards.

PSU quarterback Trace McSorley was 8 for 23 for 154 yards and a TD and ran 19 times for 63 yards and another score. Saquon Barkley carried 12 times for 99 yards.



Curtis Samuel

How It Happened

The Nittany Lions, after marching 54 yards on eight plays on the opening possession, attempted a 39-yard field goal by Tyler Davis, who had made 18 straight. However, the low kick was blocked, and OSU junior safety Damon Webb picked it up at the Ohio State 11.

Later, a punt by Gillikin traveled 30 yards to the OSU 10 where Wilson fumbled the ball only to see his junior teammate Gareon Conley recover it.

Penn State wasn't so fortunate a few minutes later. The OSU offense continued to struggle, gaining only 5 yards in three plays, before Cameron Johnston's 44-yard punt was mishandled by John Reid and sophomore Terry McLaurin recovered for OSU at the Penn State 38.

A 23-yard Weber run got the Buckeyes to the Lion 15, but Ohio State settled for Durbin's 33-yard field goal five seconds into the second quarter for a 3-0 lead.

OSU extended the advantage to 9-0 with 4:53 left until halftime on a 26-yard TD pass from Barrett to sophomore tight end Marcus Baugh, but Durbin missed the extra point at the end of the 78-yard, 11-play drive.

Late in the half, Barrett completed a 14-yard pass to Samuel, ran for 19 yards and hit McLaurin for 19 yards to the

Nittany Lion 13, but the Buckeyes again stalled in the red zone. Durbin booted a 30-yard field goal with 1:14 left in the half for a 12-0 lead, but Penn State responded by going 74 yards in seven plays to make it 12-7 with nine seconds left. McSorley found DaeSean Hamilton for 34 yards before hitting Chris Godwin for the score from 20 yards.

On OSU's second series of the second half, Samuel turned a third-and-2 from the OSU 26 into 74-yard TD, and the Buckeyes led 19-7 with 10:10 remaining in the third.

Ohio State took a 21-7 lead on the safety with 8:31 to go in the third.

It remained that way until early in the final quarter when McSorley capped an efficient five-play, 90-yard drive with a 2-yard scamper to make it 21-14 with 13:32 to play in the game. The score was set up by a 37-yard Barkley run to the OSU 37 followed by a 35-yard McSorley pass to Saeed Blacknall on the next play.

OSU averted one disaster on its next possession when Weber recovered a bad exchange from Barrett but not another when Cam Brown blocked Johnston's punt, giving the Nittany Lions the ball at the OSU 28. The Buckeyes' defense stiffened, and Davis made a 34-yard field goal with 9:33 to go.

Ohio State needed a sustained drive to regain momentum, quiet the crowd and maybe add to its lead. The Buckeyes were in position to do all three when they reached the PSU 31, sparked by a 34-yard pass from Barrett to Noah Brown. But the best OSU could do was add 3 yards from a Samuel run.

The field-goal unit was sent in, although the decision from the sideline seemed rushed.

That's when the kicking game failed again.

OSU got the ball one more time after the botched field goal, but on fourth-and-23 at its own 29, Barrett was sacked for a 6-yard loss and PSU ran out the final 62 seconds.

"I feel like guys came out and competed," said junior defensive end Tyquan Lewis. "We just didn't seal the deal."

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OHIO STATE VS. PENN STATE

BSB Quotebook: Penn State 24, Ohio State 21

Penn State head coach James Franklin on the blocked punt and field goal by PSU: "To be honest with you, I didn't even know it happened. I just heard the thud and from there, chaos. Then later, the blocked field goal and (junior cornerback) Grant Haley stumbles 40 yards for a touchdown. It's just awesome. The whole thing is a blur right now, to be honest with you."

PSU junior safety Marcus Allen on blocking Ohio State senior placekicker Tyler Durbin's 45-yard field goal in the fourth quarter: "They did it before and I jumped over. It was a call for me to block the kick. I jumped over, clean, nobody touched me or anything but I missed it. It was a little left for me. I went back to the sideline, this was the first quarter, and I was talking to (special teams coordinator and running backs coach Charles) Huff. I said, 'Where am I supposed to be to block the kick?' and he said, 'If they are on the right hash they are going to try to kick it onto the defense's left guard because it is on the uprising.' So, me going to him during halftime, because I knew it was going to come again and I just did the same thing I did. I came clean. I went with the adjustment that Coach Huff gave me, and I blocked it."

Haley on returning the blocked field goal for the game-winning touchdown: "It was just a relief I mean just for our players, the coaches, the team, and it's all the hard work that we put in throughout the season. Our preparation didn't start this week, it started like in January. Just all of that hard work and being able to assist to that success that we had tonight, it was awesome."

OSU junior right guard Billy Price on the turning point of the game: "I think the blocked field goal. Again, got to give credit to Penn State. They made a great play – big-time play in a big-time game. I think that's when the tide changed, and going out to that next drive it was more or less, we believed we were going to go out and win this game. We're going to have to execute highly. Unfortunately, we just didn't in that last series."

OSU fourth-year junior quarterback J.T.



SONNY BROCKWAY

OFF HIS FEET – Ohio State quarterback J.T. Barrett (16) was sacked six times during the Buckeyes' 24-21 loss to Penn State.

Barrett on the offense's struggles in the game: "I think it was just mental errors, mental mistakes not looking for a hat. Not clearing out on some routes so someone else could get open, that was part of it. I think overall, the passing game, overall we put the O-line in bad spots early on in drives. We were in second-and-long and then we had to pass. I think that hurt us. But overall in the passing game, I don't see what you saw (the struggles)."

Franklin's message to his team after the win: "I just want to enjoy tonight, and I told these guys in the locker room I want them to go out and enjoy themselves tonight and I want them to make good choices and all that kind of stuff, but before you leave this locker room, nights like this don't happen often, savor it. Stay in this locker room, turn the music up, and enjoy each other, because there's nothing outside that locker room that is better than what we've got going on in that locker room right now."

PSU running back Saquon Barkley on his

feelings about the game: "I've never been so laid-back and relaxed because we were prepared, we knew that obviously a lot of people didn't believe in us, people had it down to lose by 17-21 points, didn't really give us a chance to get in the game and not only myself but the whole team was just laid-back and relaxed. Even when it was 21-7, we had no change of heart. We knew that we were going to win the game no matter what."

OSU junior defensive end Tyquan Lewis on what was said in the locker room after the loss: "The main thing for me and the rest of the guys is it's a journey, it's a stretch, it's a stretch run. It's a season. Season's last awhile so that's the main thing. Just keeping your head up, going back to work, focusing on the goal."

Barrett on what the next step for the team is: "We have to go to work. It is as simple as that. We have to put our hard hats on. I think we are blue-collar people, and we understand this is a strong test that we have and understand that this is not the end. It is time to get to work and get better."

OSU head coach Urban Meyer on how he felt going into the game: "I did feel good. I thought our guys, under the circumstances, getting back at 5:30 a.m. after the Wisconsin game – we changed up our routine a little bit. I felt good in practice, I felt good – when the game started."

Barrett on how well the coaches prepared them for the matchup: "I think we were well prepared, we just didn't execute and play like we should have. I think the coaches did a great job of scouting this team and I think the game plan was what we wanted, we just didn't execute down the stretch."

Franklin on the environment and the impact of the win: "I couldn't be more proud. I've worked in every major conference as well as the NFL. I can't imagine there's a better environment than what that was out there tonight, so I just couldn't be more proud. This is for everybody. This community has been through so much in the last five years, and this is a big step in the right direction in terms of healing."

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The Numbers Game

Penn State 24, Ohio State 21

Oct. 22, 2016 – Beaver Stadium; State College, Pa.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	12	9	0	21
PENN STATE	0	7	0	17	24

First Quarter

No Scoring.

Second Quarter

OSU – Durbin, 33 yard field goal, 14:55; 5 plays, 22 yards, 0:43 TOP.

OSU – Baugh, 26 yard pass from Barrett (Durbin kick failed), 4:53; 11 plays, 78 yards, 5:09 TOP.

OSU – Durbin, 30 yard field goal, 1:14; 9 plays, 58 yards, 2:22 TOP.

PSU – Godwin, 20 yard pass from McSorley (Davis kick), 0:09; 7 plays, 74 yards, 1:00 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Samuel, 74 yard run (Durbin kick), 10:10; 3 plays, 82 yards, 1:24 TOP.

OSU – TEAM safety, 8:31.

Fourth Quarter

PSU – McSorley, 2 yard run (Davis kick), 13:32; 5 plays, 90 yards, 1:20 TOP.

PSU – Davis, 34 yard field goal, 9:33; 6 plays, 12 yards, 2:09 TOP.

PSU – Haley, 60 yard block field goal return (Davis kick), 4:27.

Att. – 107,280.

Weather – 43 degrees, cold, windy, brisk; wind WNW 15-20 mph.

Team Statistics

	OSU	PSU
First Downs	19	13
Rushing	9	6
Passing	9	6
Penalty	1	1
Rushing-Yards	40-168	37-122
Passing Yards	245	154
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	28-43-0	8-23-0
Offensive Plays	83	60
Total Net Yards	413	276
Third Down Efficiency	9-22	2-13
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	0-1
Punts-Avg.	8-39.8	7-37.7
Fumbles-Lost	2-0	2-1
Penalties	8-45	1-5
Time of Possession	37:19	22:41

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Weber 21-71; Samuel 2-71; Barrett 17-26. **PSU:** Barkley 12-99; McSorley 19-63; Godwin 1-13; Sanders 1-(-10); TEAM 4-(-43).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Barrett 28-43-0-245-1. **PSU:** McSorley 8-23-0-154-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Samuel 8-68; Weber 8-36; Baugh 5-55; Brown 3-45; Wilson 2-16; McLaurin 1-19; Campbell 1-6. **PSU:** Gesicki 4-46; Godwin 2-39; Blacknall 1-35; Hamilton 1-34.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Johnston 7-45.4-54; TEAM 1-0-0-0. **PSU:** Gillikin 7-37.7-47.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Wilson 2-(-4). **PSU:** Garrity 2-11; Reid 2-4; Brown 1-0.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Campbell 4-67; Burger 1-13. **PSU:** Sanders 4-89.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – OSU: TEAM (45, blocked). **PSU:** Davis (39, blocked).

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: None. **PSU:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU: McLaurin 1-0. **PSU:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. **PSU:** None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Bosa 1.0-1. **PSU:** Sickels 2.5-12; Cabinda 1.0-13; Schwan 1.0-8; Bell 1.0-2; Givens 0.5-3.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Hooker 2.0-10; Baker 1.0-2; Hamilton 1.0-2; Bosa 1.0-1; Holmes 0.5-5; Webb 0.5-5. **PSU:** Sickels 3.5-15; Cabinda 2.0-15; Schwan 1.0-8; Bowen 1.0-3; Bell 1.0-2; Miller 1.0-2; Givens 0.5-3; Brown 0.5-1; Cothren 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: Hooker 2-5-7; McMillan 5-1-6; Hubbard 4-2-6; Baker 2-2-4; Holmes 2-2-4; Arnette 2-1-3; Lewis 2-1-3; D. Jones 0-3-3; Bosa 1-1-2; Conley 1-1-2; Burger 1-1-2; Ward 0-2-2; Webb 0-2-2; Lattimore 0-2-2; Goins 1-0-1; E. Smith 1-0-1; Hamilton 1-0-1; Glover-Williams 1-0-1; Wilson 1-0-1; Worley 0-1-1; Clark 0-1-1; Norwood 0-1-1; M. Hill 0-1-1. **PSU:** Bell 8-11-19; Cabinda 2-10-12; Bowen 4-7-11; Sickels 3-6-9; Allen 2-5-7; Golden 3-3-6; Bucholz 2-1-3; Miller 2-1-3; Smith 1-2-3; Brown 1-2-3; Schwan 1-2-3; Reid 1-2-3; Haley 0-3-3; Walker 0-2-2; Farmer 1-1-2; Windsor 0-2-2; Cothren 0-2-2; Monroe 0-2-2; Givens 0-2-2; Taylor 1-0-1; Castagna 0-1-1; Cothren 0-1-1; Chavis 0-1-1; Julius 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OHIO STATE: Offense, J. Jones, Jordan, Elflein, Price, Prince, Baugh, Alexander, Barrett, Weber, Brown, Campbell, Durbin. Defense, Hubbard, D. Jones, M. Hill, Lewis, Worley, McMillan, Baker, Conley, Hooker, Webb, Lattimore, Johnston. Reserves, Fuller, Wilson, Arnette, Samuel, Holmes, Ward, Berry, K. Hill, Hounshell, Glover-Williams, Norwood, Goins, E. Smith, Turnure, Fada, Harrison, Burger, McCullough, Hamilton, Parry, Landers, Trout, Lisle, Bowen, Taylor, Clark, McLaurin, Bosa. **PENN STATE:** Offense, Godwin, Gesicki, Palmer, Bates, Gaia, McGovern, Mahon, Hamilton, Thompsons, McSorley, Barkley, Davis, Defense, Schwan, Cothren, Cothren, Brown, Bell, Cabinda, Bowen, Reid, Allen, Golden, Haley, Gillikin. Reserves, Smith, Campbell, Charles, Garrity, Scott, Farmer, Miller, Julius, Blacknall, Taylor, Monroe, Sanders, Walker, Apke, Givens, Brown, Gulla, Yazujian, Castagna, Smith, Miller, Dowrey, Windsor, Chavis, Gonzalez, Simpson, Wright, Johnson, Pancoast, Sickels, White, Bucholz, Thrift.

Season Statistics

2016 Game-By-Game				Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS	
Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd								
Sept. 3	(6) BOWLING GREEN	W, 77-10	107,193	Tyler Durbin	–	39-41	–	–	–	10-10	69
Sept. 10	(4) TULSA	W, 48-3	104,410	Curtis Samuel	7	–	–	–	–	–	42
Sept. 17	(3) at Oklahoma (14)	W, 45-24	87,979	J.T. Barrett	6	–	–	–	–	–	36
Oct. 1	(2) RUTGERS	W, 58-0	105,830	Noah Brown	6	–	–	–	–	–	36
Oct. 8	(2) INDIANA	W, 38-17	107,420	Dontre Wilson	5	–	–	–	–	–	30
Oct. 15	(2) at Wisconsin (8)	W, 30-23 (OT)	81,541	Mike Weber	4	–	–	–	–	–	24
Oct. 22	(2) at Penn State	L, 24-21	107,280	Demario McCall	3	–	–	–	–	–	18
Oct. 29	NORTHWESTERN	3:30 p.m.		Marcus Baugh	2	–	–	–	–	–	12
Nov. 5	NEBRASKA	8 p.m.		Parris Campbell	1	–	–	–	–	–	6
Nov. 12	at Maryland	TBA		Terry McLaurin	1	–	–	–	–	–	6
Nov. 19	at Michigan State	TBA		Johnnie Dixon	1	–	–	–	–	–	6
Nov. 26	MICHIGAN	Noon		Rodjay Burns	1	–	–	–	–	–	6
Dec. 3	B1G Championship	8 p.m.		Malik Hooker	1	–	–	–	–	–	6

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

Team Statistics		OSU	Opp
First Downs		175	107
Rushing		108	49
Passing		60	51
Penalty		7	7
Average Per Game/Rush		281.6	121.0
Average Per Game/Pass		220.1	158.7
Total Offense		3,512	1,958
Total Plays		549	465
Average Per Game		501.7	279.7
Average Per Play		6.4	4.2
Penalties-Yards		56-440	28-220
Fumbles-Lost		11-2	11-4
Third Down Efficiency		52-107	30-104
Percentage		49%	29%
Fourth Down Efficiency		10-14	2-11
Percentage		71%	18%
Sacks-Yards		16-122	11-63
Time Of Possession Avg.		35:08	24:52

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	50	112	86	62	7	317	45.3
Opponents	30	33	14	24	0	101	14.4

Rushing		Individual Statistics			TD	Long
		Att.	Net	Avg.		
Mike Weber	115	683	5.9	4	49	
Curtis Samuel	64	527	8.2	4	74	
J.T. Barrett	108	460	4.3	6	27	
Demario McCall	20	144	7.2	2	39	
Dontre Wilson	12	75	6.2	1	21	
Joe Burrow	9	50	5.6	0	11	
Antonio Williams	6	28	4.7	0	8	
Parris Campbell	1	5	5.0	1	5	
Johnnie Dixon	1	5	5.0	1	5	
TEAM	3	-6	-2.0	0	0	
OSU Totals	339	1,971	5.8	19	74	
OPP Totals	262	847	3.2	2	68	

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
J.T. Barrett	124	195	63.6	1,452	17-4	150.8
Joe Burrow	10	13	76.9	89	1-0	159.8
TEAM	0	2	0.0	0	0-0	0.0
OSU Totals	134	210	63.8	1,541	18-4	149.9
OPP Totals	94	203	46.3	1,111	6-11	91.2

Receiving		Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Curtis Samuel	37	471	12.7	3	79	
Noah Brown	19	258	13.6	6	37	
Dontre Wilson	18	248	13.8	4	43	
Mike Weber	14	55	3.9	0	7	
Marcus Baugh	12	155	12.9	2	29	
Parris Campbell	9	81	9.0	0	16	
Terry McLaurin	8	91	11.4	1	19	
Johnnie Dixon	5	24	4.8	0	10	
James Clark	4	29	7.2	0	12	
K.J. Hill	3	68	22.7	1	47	
Demario McCall	1	36	36.0	1	36	
Alex Stump	1	8	8.0	0	8	
Austin Mack	1	7	7.0	0	7	
Binjamin Victor	1	7	7.0	0	7	
A.J. Alexander	1	3	3.0	0	3	
OSU Totals	134	1,541	11.5	18	79	
OPP Totals	94	1,111	11.8	6	50	

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Tyler Durbin	3-3	6-6	1-1	0-0	10-10
TEAM	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-1
OSU Totals	3-3	6-6	1-2	0-0	10-11
OPP Totals	3-4	4-5	1-1	0-0	8-10

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Cameron Johnston	28	1,385	49.5	0	70
TEAM	1	0	0.0	1	0
OSU Totals	29	1,385	47.8	1	70
OPP Totals	46	1,812	39.4	0	60

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Malik Hooker	4	117	29.2	1	47
Marshon Lattimore	3	61	20.3	1	40
Gareon Conley	2	0	0.0	0	0
Jerome Baker	1	68	68.0	1	68
Rodjay Burns	1	75	75.0	1	75
OSU Totals	11	321	29.2	4	75
OPP Totals	4	94	23.5	1	63

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Dontre Wilson	15	102	6.8	0	27
Demario McCall	2	-1	-0.5	0	0
Corey Smith	1	-9	-9.0	0	0
OSU Totals	18	92	5.1	0	27
OPP Totals	8	37	4.6	0	12

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Parris Campbell	12	306	25.5	0	91
Dontre Wilson	3	62	20.7	0	25
Joe Burger	1	13	13.0	0	13
OSU Totals	16	381	23.8	0	91
OPP Totals	33	641	19.4	1	97

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Jerome Baker	25	18	43	6.0-18	1.5-7
Raekwon McMillan	18	24	42	2.5-3	–
Malik Hooker	22	14	36	4.0-49	0.5-7
Chris Worley	16	15	31	1.5-2	–
Dre'Mont Jones	8	19	27	–	–
Marshon Lattimore	18	8	26	–	–
Damon Webb	16	10	26	0.5-5	–
Sam Hubbard	13	10	23	4.5-30	2.5-25
Jalyn Holmes	9	12	21	6.0-29	2.0-19
Tyquan Lewis	12	6	18	5.5-27	4.0-26
Nick Bosa	10	7	17	6.0-30	4.0-26
Gareon Conley	11	2	13	–	–
Robert Landers	11	2	13	7.0-27	1.0-7
Michael Hill	3	9	12	0.5-1	–
OSU Totals	229	170	399	42-178	15-121
OPP Totals	285	206	491	16-51	5-25
Fumbles Forced: 5 – Tyquan Lewis (2), Raekwon McMillan, Jalyn Holmes, Chris Worley.					
Fumbles Recovered: 3 – Joshua Alabi, Jerome Baker, Jalyn Holmes, Terry McLaurin.					

OPINION

An Undefeated Run Was Always Going To Be Tough

Just a thought that has been on my mind for a couple of weeks.

Heading into this season, Buckeye fans talked about how tough Ohio State's schedule was this year. In particular they pointed to four difficult away games at Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Penn State and Michigan State, as well The Game with upwardly-trending Michigan.

Then the young Buckeyes got off to a flashy start with a 77-10 opening victory over Bowling Green and two weeks later went on the road and knocked off the mighty Sooners convincingly, 45-24.

With the nemesis Spartans stumbling out of the blocks and teams such as Penn State and Northwestern having their ups and downs, people seemed to forget about the land mines on the schedule and put their Buckeyes on a collision course with the archrival Wolverines in a game that was weeks away.

Ohio State is still on a collision course with the Wolverines, but the Buckeyes and their fans got a rude reminder about the tough games between now and Nov. 26 with the 24-21 loss at Penn State.

One need only look at the way Nittany Lions fans stormed the field after their team's win to be reminded that not only does Ohio State have good teams remaining on its schedule – don't count out the struggling Spartans, the Urban Meyer nemesis who will be looking to salvage their season with a win over the Buckeyes – but that those teams will all be gunning to make their year by upsetting Ohio State. Fans don't storm the field after wins over Rutgers. All the upcoming teams will bring their A-game.

I think that all of us, myself at the top of the list, were probably guilty of overrating the Buckeyes after the first three weeks of the season – not that they aren't a good team and can't still be championship contenders. The question is not where they were then, or where they are now, but where they will be in the weeks to come. Either the team was overrated or it is not making the weekly progress good teams make over the course of a season.

The simplest reason for Ohio State's loss to Penn State was a breakdown in special teams. A missed extra point, a punt blocked and the game-winning touchdown scored on a blocked field goal all played into the outcome of the game. That's the good news, because the chances of a Meyer-coached team, schooled in the importance of special teams, having multiple breakdowns like that in a game again are very slim.

The Buckeyes could have overcome those gaffes, however, especially given the fact that the Lions were making special teams errors of their own.

The offense and the defense also failed the Buckeyes.

At this point in the season, I remain more impressed with the Ohio State defense than its mates on the other side of the ball.

Ohio State held Penn State to just 276 total yards and forced seven Penn State punts on drives that averaged four plays and just over 14 yards. Plus the Lions scored only 17 points against the Buckeye defense. After the blocked punt gave the Lions the ball at the OSU 28, the defense stiffened and held Penn State to just a field goal, leaving the visitors with a 21-17 lead with 9:33 left in the game.

While stops like the one following the blocked punt, the fourth-quarter, fourth-down stop at the Buckeye 4 against Indiana, and the overtime stand against Wisconsin are all signs of a solid defense, the Ohio State defenders have also demonstrated a knack for giving up quick-strike drives fueled by big plays that

keep opponents in ballgames, as well as long drives also featuring big plays.

The Buckeyes could have taken control of their game with the Hoosiers before the half but yielded a seven-play, 65-yard scoring march that included a 32-yard pass to set up an 18-yard scoring strike from Richard Lagow to Mitchell Paige to pull IU to within 17-10 with 1:03 left before the break. The Buckeyes responded with a touchdown of their own just prior to halftime, but on the Hoosiers' first drive after the intermission, they drove 89 yards on 13 plays to pull to 24-17 and keep it a game. That drive had a 17-yard Lagow completion on third down followed by a 19-yard run on the next play.

The Badgers had the ultimate quick drive, going 95 yards on just four plays in 1:08 to take a 10-0 lead over the Buckeyes midway through the first quarter. Big plays were a 68-yard run by Corey Clement and a 24-yard scoring strike from Alex Hornibrook to Jazz Peavy.

Ohio State stormed back in the second half and looked to be in command of the momentum and the game as it led 20-16 early in the fourth quarter. But the Buckeye defenders yielded an 11-play, 81-yard touchdown drive that again featured big plays by Peavy and Clement, this time a 36-yard reception and a 20-yard run, respectively, to yield momentum and the lead.

Penn State never put together a long drive against Ohio State, but the Nittany Lions didn't need to as they had quick drives featuring big plays as well.

The Buckeyes were rolling at the end of the first half, taking the amped-up home crowd out the game with three straight scores to lead 12-0 with just 1:09 left. However, the Lions were able to move 74 yards on seven plays with Trace McSorley completions of 19, 34 and 20 yards to set up a TD.

The crowd was right back into it. Still, the Buckeyes moved out to 21-7 lead midway through the third period.

But another quick, long drive to start the final frame put the Lions and the crowd back into it and set up the special teams-disaster finish. This time it was a 90-yard, five-play march that featured a 16-yard McSorley pass, a 37-yard Saquon Barkley run and a 35-yard pass on consecutive plays. Once McSorley scored from the 2, the Lions were right back in business.

While the Buckeye defense has been stout for much of the last three games, it has been giving up big plays at inopportune times while failing to come up with the big plays of its own that were the hallmark of the team in the early going. Ohio State had nine interceptions in the first four games, returning four of them for scores. In the last three games it has had two picks, with none against Penn State. I think opposing teams have figured out where Malik Hooker is on the field, especially the Badgers and Lions, who had two weeks to prepare for Ohio State and its big-play safety.

But while defense is not playing up to the standards it set earlier in the season, I think most Buckeye fans are more concerned with the offense.

I am not sure I have figured out a rhyme or reason to what the offensive brain trust is trying to do. It doesn't seem, lately, like the

Buckeyes ever have the opposition off balance. Against Wisconsin, the coaches seemed to forget about bruising Mike Weber until later in the game. Against the Nittany Lions, the scenario was flipped, as they seemed to forget about big-play man Curtis Samuel. Those two seem to have better success working in tandem, and when they don't have consistent success, the coaches seem to turn to quarterback J.T. Barrett to carry the bulk of the load – a high-reward but high-risk strategy.

And what about the passing game? What was first identified as possible concern in the win over Indiana has now clearly become a problem. Buckeye fans are suddenly questioning the abilities of Barrett.

Let's be honest, when it comes to passing Barrett is no Johnny Unitas, but he has proved more than adequate throwing the ball during his time at the helm. His greatest attribute is seeing all of his receivers and finding the open man. Judging from the way things have gone in the last couple of games, as he looks out over the field he must not be seeing anyone in the clear. His biggest success has been coming when he scrambles and his receivers scramble with him, eventually working free. That's no way to have a consistent passing attack.

Barrett was 28 of 43 passing against Penn State for 245 yards and a touchdown without an interception. But let's take a closer look at these statistics. Of his completions, 16 went to running backs or H-backs and another five went to tight end Marcus Baugh, including the lone passing touchdown. While using the tight end is promising for more variety in the future, having only seven completions go to wide receivers would seem to indicate that those guys are not getting open.

Noah Brown looked like he might be the next great Ohio State receiver with his four-touchdown coming-out party against Oklahoma. Since then, however, Barrett has been able to find Brown only 10 times in four games for 124 yards and a score, hardly the type of numbers you are looking for from a featured receiver. Brown did have a nice 34-yard reception against the Lions on the drive that ultimately ended with the game-winning blocked field goal.

It was one of the rare times Barrett has been able to connect on a downfield pass of late. Ironically, perhaps Barrett's best recent long pass, a pass that might have changed the outcome of the game with the Lions, bounced off the helmet of a streaking James Clark in the waning moments. Clark might have been held up by a PSU defender on the play, but you have to be able to fight through that if you are going to be able to pull out the tight ones.

The lack of open receivers is an issue for the coaching staff as much as the young receivers. If what the Buckeyes are doing now is not working to get guys open downfield, then they need to do something else or continue to work with the receivers to make what they are doing work.

Both the running game and the passing game would be helped if the offensive line were playing up to its potential. Penn State was in clear control of the line of scrimmage in the upset victory.

Last year when the offense struggled in the loss to Michigan State, Meyer stepped in and

made changes himself, including moving coordinator Ed Warinner up into the press box. The Buckeyes responded. Maybe it's time for Meyer to be more hands-on again.

One person who seems to be thinking about the offensive big picture is Barrett himself. When questioned about why Samuel didn't get the ball more against Penn State, Barrett responded like a coach.

"It's not like Curtis has to touch the ball, Dontre (Wilson) has to touch the ball," he explained. "We just run our offense. We are not doing that. From here on out, there is not going to be, 'Hey, let's get Curtis the ball on this play.' It is not going to be like that. We are going to run our plays and if Curtis happens to get the ball, then Curtis gets the ball. That is how our offense runs very well, when that happens. We are not going to start going backwards into, this person has to get the ball, or that person has to get the ball. Then you are predictable and that is not good football."

The Buckeyes can't continue to count on Barrett to bail them out of each game on his own. It's time for all cylinders to start firing again.

There are plenty of big games ahead, and the Buckeyes are hardly out of the Big Ten or national discussion.

The Katzenmoyer Experiment

We continue our celebration of the 20th anniversary of Ohio State's 1996 Rose Bowl championship team with stories in each issue of BSB as well as reprints of stories from 1996 BSBs in our electronic BSB Quickly.

By this time 20 years ago, freshman middle linebacker Andy Katzenmoyer had already established himself as a mainstay on the Ohio State defense. After six games of that season, he found himself the subject of a lengthy cover feature in the Oct. 26, 1996, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin titled "The Katzenmoyer Experiment."

The experiment was obviously a success, as the 6-4, 250-pounder had recorded 42 tackles, just three behind the team leader, safety Damon Moore. What was more eye-popping than his number of tackles were his 11 tackles for 53 yards in losses, including six sacks. He also had an interception and forced a fumble in the early going.

"He's had a great year," OSU coach John Cooper said at the time. "How many true freshmen do you think can come in and start like that? He's played better than any of us thought he would."

Cooper and his staff shouldn't have been that surprised. He had been the USA Today defensive player of the year as a senior at nearby Westerville South High School and garnered Mr. Football honors in Ohio. Once on the team he was mentored by Ohio State's hard-nosed defensive coordinator, Fred Pagac.

"He's an old-style coach, a very mean, physical kind of guy," Katzenmoyer said of Pagac in the article. "He just tells you, 'Run them over, kick them when they're down,' that kind of coach. That was the way he played as a player. I shouldn't expect anything different from his coaching style."

One of Pagac's other charges that season was current Buckeye defensive coordinator Luke Fickell. I'm not sure how mean Fickell is, but I am sure he preaches Pagac's hard-nosed play.

The complete cover story on Katzenmoyer was reprinted in the Oct. 21 electronic BSB Quickly and is archived for your information and enjoyment. Access to BSB Quickly is free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin print subscribers. Simple sign-up instructions can be found on page 5 of this issue.