

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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Vol. 39, No. 14

"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Jan. 18, 2020



ANDREW LIND

**SAME OLD STORY** – Ohio State fifth-year senior offensive guard Jonah Jackson walks off the field following Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinals, moving the Buckeyes to 0-4 all-time against the Tigers.

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## Controversial Calls Go Against Ohio State In College Football Playoff Loss To Clemson

By **ANDREW LIND**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There's no doubt fans will debate the controversial calls in Ohio State's 29-23 College Football Playoff semifinal loss to Clemson for years to come, much the same way Miami (Fla.) fans still argue about the defensive pass interference that helped the Buckeyes knock off the top-ranked Hurricanes in the 2003 Fiesta Bowl to win the national title.

But even with cornerback Shaun Wade ejected for targeting, a questionable roughing-the-kicker penalty that allowed a 99-yard scoring drive and safety Jordan Fuller's fumble return for a touchdown overturned by replay, Ohio State still had a chance to win the game late.

After surrendering the go-ahead touchdown with 1:49 left in the fourth quarter, the Buckeyes quickly drove down the field under the direction of quarterback Justin Fields. But

a self-admitted mistake by wide receiver Chris Olave to break off his route led to an interception in the end zone that sent the Tigers to the national championship game instead.

"I thought our guys left it all on the field," head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "We played hard and played bold. But certainly, there were a lot of plays in that game that didn't go our way. It's very hard to swallow right now. We're going to have to really take a look at the film and figure out what really happened on some of those plays, because in a game like this where the margin for error is so tiny, one play can alter the game. It didn't seem like we got any of those plays."

Ohio State was dominant early in the game, driving deep into Clemson territory on four of its first five possessions – including a 68-yard touchdown run by running back J.K. Dobbins – while holding the Tigers scoreless. But the Buckeyes settled for field goals on three of those possessions, turning what could have been a commanding 28-0 lead into a two-score

game that was easy for the defending national champions to overcome.

While Dobbins was an early spark for the Buckeyes' offense, adding a 64-yard run at the end of the first quarter to break Eddie George's school single-season rushing record of 1,927 yards, set in 1995, he also dropped a pair of potential touchdowns.

The first was a diving attempt that was initially ruled a score but overturned after replay showed he did not possess the ball all the way to the ground. The second was on a perfectly devised screen pass with a clear path to the end zone.

"That was tough," Day said. "You score touchdowns there, then it's huge. When you're playing against a good defense, things like that happen. I thought we made some good calls. We were just a little bit off."

The turning point in the game came on Clemson's second possession of the second

Continued On Page 8

## OPINION

# Buckeyes Fall Just Short Of Greatness ... Again

# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

**Vol. 39, No. 14**  
**Jan. 18, 2020**  
**www.BuckeyeSports.com**

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

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

Periodical class postage paid at Columbus, Ohio, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Buckeye Sports Bulletin, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio 43212. Subscription rates: \$99.95/year.

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2019-20 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 39)					
No. 1	Sept. 7	No. 13	Dec. 21		
No. 2	Sept. 14	No. 14	Jan. 18		
No. 3	Sept. 21	No. 15	Feb. 1		
No. 4	Sept. 28	No. 16	Feb. 15		
No. 5	Oct. 5	No. 17	March 7		
No. 6	Oct. 19	No. 18	March 21		
No. 7	Oct. 26	No. 19	April 4		
No. 8	Nov. 9	No. 20	April 18		
No. 9	Nov. 16	No. 21	May		
No. 10	Nov. 23	No. 22	June		
No. 11	Nov. 30	No. 23	July		
No. 12	Dec. 7	No. 24	August		

The next issue (Feb. 1 cover date) will be mailed on Jan. 28.

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

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To be a fan of the Ohio State football team is to bask in a rich history that includes legendary players and coaches as well as a host of thrilling victories, nearly 40 Big Ten championships and six national titles.

To be a fan of the Buckeyes, however, is also to travel a landscape littered with the memories of national championship trophies that somehow managed to slip through the fingers of talented teams that seemed destined to wear the crown only to fall short in excruciating fashion.

Eight times now over the storied history of its football program, Ohio State has lost for the only time in the final game of the season, robbing the program of who knows how many more national championships for its trophy case. It first happened in 1919, and then history repeated itself in 1920, 1969, 1970, 1975, 1979 and 2006.

Such will be the fate of the 2019 team, a squad that rattled off 13 consecutive victories before myriad missed opportunities conspired with a handful of questionable officiating calls to deal the Buckeyes a 29-23 loss to defending national champion Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl serving as one of the College Football Playoff semifinals.

For a team that scarcely made a misstep throughout the regular season, Ohio State suddenly couldn't get out of its own way despite outplaying the Tigers for much of the game. Three early trips to the red zone resulted in field goals rather than touchdowns, missed opportunities that came back to bite the Buckeyes and bite them hard.

A second-quarter targeting call (we'll discuss that in a moment) created a sudden change in the momentum of the game, but even after that controversial penalty, Ohio State still held a 16-0 lead with 4:42 remaining until halftime. Unfortunately, the defense – which had been pretty much lights-out to that point – stumbled down the stretch of the first half and allowed Clemson to score two quick touchdowns.

OSU quarterback Justin Fields, hobbled by a knee injury that rendered him practically useless in the running game, still threw for a career-best 320 yards and directed an up-tempo attack that seemed to confuse the talented Clemson defense almost from the get-go. The Tigers entered the game No. 1 in the country in total defense and gave up 516 yards to the Buckeyes.

But while Ohio State was moving the ball almost at will between the 20s, it couldn't cash in when it got into the red zone. The Buckeyes had a first-and-goal at the 5-yard line on their first possession of the game and couldn't punch the ball into the end zone. Two more possessions early in the second quarter – the first featuring a first-and-goal at the Clemson 8-yard line, the other containing a first down at the 11 – also resulted in field goals.

There were other hiccups such as a punt block attempt early in the third quarter that resulted in a roughing-the-kicker penalty and total defensive breakdowns on three of Clemson's touchdown plays: a 67-run by quarterback Trevor Lawrence just before halftime and short passes from Lawrence that running back Travis Etienne turned into scores of 53 and 34 yards. Those three plays alone represented more than one-third of the Tigers' total yardage for the game.

The offensive play-calling was suspect at times, especially when Ohio State insisted upon running the ball to the short side of the field rather than using its speed advantage to try to get to the edge. And, of course, Fields and receiver Chris Olave being unable to stay on the same page at the end of the game was the final dagger as Clemson safety Nolan Turner grabbed the game-clinching interception.

Still, the entire game could likely be distilled down to just two plays.

On the final play of the first quarter, Dobbins broke loose on a 64-yard burst but was tripped up just short of the goal line by Clemson safety Tanner Muse. The Buckeyes then proceeded to squander a first-and-goal situation at the 8-yard line and had to settle for a field goal.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Then, late in the second quarter, Lawrence broke free on a long run of his own, but he somehow eluded a couple of (supposedly) speedy OSU defenders on his way to a 67-yard touchdown.

One play a near-touchdown; the other a real touchdown. Dobbins gets tripped up short of the end zone and Lawrence does not.

Those two plays might be an oversimplification of what happened in a game that otherwise featured 145 other offensive snaps, but not much of one. Clemson converted when it had a chance, and Ohio State often did not.

### About That Officiating

Football officiating – or at least what passes for football officiating these days – will ultimately cause the demise of the sport. I understand that those who run the game want to make it safer, but the truth is that football is a violent, contact sport, and unless tackling is eliminated altogether, football will never be "safe."

Therefore, the so-called targeting rule with regard to how it is enforced on the college level is what happens when good intentions cross paths with bad implementation.

No player should be allowed to launch himself at an opponent's head or neck area and not suffer the consequences of a 15-yard penalty and subsequent suspension. A perfect example occurred in the College Football Playoff semifinal between LSU and Oklahoma when Sooners linebacker Brendan Radley-Hiles propelled himself headfirst into Tigers running back Clyde Edwards-Helaire instead of chasing LSU quarterback Joe Burrow.

The ACC officiating crew immediately flagged Radley-Hiles for a personal foul, and then after replay confirmed targeting, Radley-Hiles was ejected.

Then came the CFP semifinal between Ohio State and Clemson, and one of the most pivotal plays in the game came in the second quarter. The Buckeyes were holding a 16-0 lead, and the defending national champions were on the ropes.

OSU cornerback Shaun Wade came free on a blitz and sacked Lawrence with a teeth-chattering hit, causing an 8-yard loss and forcing the Tigers to punt. Except that when the SEC officiating crew decided to replay the hit Wade laid on Lawrence, they decided it was targeting. Officials didn't notice two Clemson offensive linemen holding Chase Young most of the night (sometimes by the face mask), but when Wade crashed into Lawrence – something that for most of the past century would have been lauded as an outstanding defensive play – suddenly the sanctity of the game and the safety of the players had to be upheld.

Wade was ejected, Clemson got a new set of downs, and four plays later the Tigers were in the end zone with their first touchdown of the game. It was a momentum-changing play, and one from which the Buckeyes never

really recovered.

Officials on the field and in the replay booth had access to the same replay that I watched, and while Wade's helmet indeed made contact with Lawrence's helmet, the Clemson quarterback contorted his 6-6 frame into almost a sitting position to absorb the blow. When he did that, Lawrence lowered his head right before impact, making it level with the oncoming Wade, who is five inches shorter than the Clemson QB.

At the very most, it could have been called roughing the passer, and I'm not convinced it even rose to that level since no flag was thrown on the play. Only when the replay officials took a second (and maybe third and fourth) look at the hit was the targeting call levied against Wade.

If targeting is going to continue to be a part of college football, then college football is going to have to have some kind of uniformity in the way it is called. If there is malicious intent involved, then by all means level a 15-yard penalty and eject the offending player from the game.

But when there is no apparent intent – such as with the Wade hit on Lawrence – there should be no ejection. And as long as we're on the subject of making the game safer, why does Clemson defensive tackle Tyler Davis, the guy who twisted Dobbins' ankle at the bottom of a pile late in the second quarter, get to keep playing but Wade doesn't?

I learned a long time ago never to blame the officiating for a loss. Your team ought to play well enough that one or two calls should never make the difference between winning and losing. The cold, hard fact is that Ohio State made too many mistakes to dethrone the defending national champions.

Still, when you take Wade's ejection for targeting and couple it with Dobbins' TD catch early in the second quarter, and especially Jordan Fuller's third-quarter fumble return for a touchdown – two other critical plays overturned in the replay booth – it sure seemed that the Buckeyes got the short end of the zebras' stick against Clemson.

### Same Old, Same Old

There is no doubt the Ohio State defense improved dramatically from 2018 to this season, and part of that improvement must be credited to co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hailey, who left the Buckeyes shortly after the Fiesta Bowl to become head coach at Boston College.

That said, some of the same problems that plagued the OSU defense a year ago followed the Buckeyes into 2019 and reared their ugly heads again during the loss to Clemson – missed assignments at crucial junctures, being out of position too many times, and missing tackles.

Ohio State pretty much stymied the potent Clemson offense for the first 27 minutes of the first half but tired in the waning moments and allowed the Tigers to grab two quick scores before the break. The first came on an 8-yard touchdown run by Etienne that should have been a 2-yard loss, and the second came on Lawrence's 67-yard run on a simple quarterback draw.

On what became the eventual winning touchdown, Lawrence took full advantage of Ohio State linebackers cheating toward the line of scrimmage to stop him from running and dumped the ball to Etienne over the middle.

The Clemson running back made the catch and ran untouched until knifing between two defenders at the goal to give the Tigers a lead they would not relinquish.



## COVER STORY

# Familiar Ending For Buckeyes In Fiesta Bowl

Continued From Page 1

quarter, however.

With the Tigers facing 3rd-and-5 from the Ohio State 45-yard line, the Buckeyes dialed up a corner blitz and sacked quarterback Trevor Lawrence. But Wade was called for targeting and disqualified from the game, giving the offense a fresh set of downs.

Clemson scored four plays and a pass interference call against Wade's replacement, Amir Riep, later on an 8-yard run by running back Travis Etienne.

Wade's tackle fit the textbook definition of targeting because he led with the crown of his helmet, though Lawrence dropped his head into the tackle. Momentum quickly shifted as a result, and the Tigers scored 21 consecutive points to take their first lead midway through the third quarter.

"You talk about a change of events when they threw Shaun out of the game," Day said. "He's out of the game, it's fourth-and-15. They get the first down and score. That was a huge change."

Even so, it appeared Ohio State had quelled that momentum with a game-changing play of its own when cornerback Jeff Okudah forced a fumble on a catch by Clemson wide receiver Justyn Ross that was recovered by Fuller and returned 29 yards for a go-ahead touchdown.

That was overturned to an incomplete pass, though, when replay determined

that Ross never fully possessed the ball before Okudah knocked it free.

"I know there were some plays that were called on the field and then overturned, and when they overturn it, there has to be indisputable evidence," Day said. "I think when we look back on it, it is going to be overwhelming. Those game-altering plays that happen in a game, you need those things to go beat a team like Clemson where you're playing in a semifinal game. You need those one or two plays. Then to miss a couple of them, that hurts you."

"I just know when two great teams get together, it comes down to a few plays, and it did again tonight."

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith, Big Ten officiating coordinator Bill Carollo and former NFL referee Terry McAulay were among those who criticized the officials' decision to overturn the call after the game.

"There is absolutely no way replay should have reversed," McAulay posted on Twitter. "Indisputable video evidence' is simply not there."

Carollo added he "hasn't talked to anybody who thought it was an incomplete pass. To reverse it, it has to be really obvious."

The Buckeyes still had opportunities to win the game from there, however, taking a 23-21 lead early in the fourth quarter when Fields found Olave in the end zone after Day opted to go for it on 4th-and-1 at the 23-yard line.



SONNY BROCKWAY

**MISSED OPPORTUNITY** – Sophomore wide receiver Chris Olave kneels in the end zone after Ohio State's final pass attempt is intercepted.

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## COVER STORY

The teams traded possessions before the Tigers responded with a 94-yard touchdown drive of their own with just under two minutes remaining.

Ohio State then drove all the way to Clemson's 23-yard line before Fields was intercepted by safety Nolan Turner in the middle of the end zone with just 37 seconds left.

Olave, who was supposed to run the same route on which he had scored earlier in the corner, thought that Fields was going to scramble out of the pocket and ad lib as he had done so often throughout the season.

"It was my fault," a dejected Olave said after the game. "I was supposed to run a post, but I thought he was scrambling, so I just tried to work the second part of the route. But it ended up he wasn't scrambling. He trusted me to run that post. I didn't. So, it's a mistake on me."

In the end, Ohio State played well enough to beat Clemson. If one of the disputed plays had gone their way, the Buckeyes probably would have won the game. But while it's easy to single out the overturned touchdown, the targeting penalty or the final play, Ohio State also left points on the field.

The Buckeyes also finished with eight penalties for 77 yards, including the 15-yard roughing the kicker on cornerback Cameron Brown, all of which cost the team in the end.

"I'm so proud of the way our team responded," Day said. "We kept swinging all the way to the end. I couldn't be prouder of the way we responded because that was hard to swallow."

"I thought our guys played really well. It wasn't like our guys didn't play hard or our guys didn't execute well, we didn't make big plays. We did all of those things and we just came up short in the end. We

were right there all the way to the end. That's the way it goes."

Now, rather than be listed among the greatest teams in Ohio State history, this year's group will join the likes of the 1969, 1998 and 2015 teams – along with several others – that came up just short of a national title.

"(It's) tough to go into a locker room with such a great team who played their hearts out and not be able to celebrate a victory, but our guys played hard," Day said. "(I'm) certainly feeling a range of emotions right now: proud, sad and certainly angry."

## NCAA Targeting, Catch And Replay Rules

Controversial calls played a key role in Clemson's 29-23 victory over Ohio State at the Fiesta Bowl. The following are the rules in question:

### Targeting

ARTICLE 3. No player shall target and make forcible contact against an opponent with the crown of his helmet. This foul requires that there be at least one indicator of targeting (See Note 1 below). When in question, it is a foul.

ARTICLE 4. No player shall target and make forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless opponent (See Note 2 below) with the helmet, forearm, hand, fist, elbow or shoulder. This foul requires that there be at least one indicator of targeting (See Note 1 below). When in question, it is a foul.

**Note 1:** "Targeting" means that a player takes aim at an opponent for purposes of attacking with forcible contact that goes beyond making a legal tackle or a legal block or playing the ball. Some indicators of targeting include but are not limited to:

- Launch – a player leaving his feet to attack an opponent by an upward and forward thrust of the body to make forcible contact in the head or neck area
- A crouch followed by an upward and forward thrust to attack with forcible contact at the head or neck area, even though one or both feet are still on the ground
- Leading with helmet, shoulder, forearm, fist, hand or elbow to attack with forcible contact at the head or neck area
- Lowering the head before attacking by initiating forcible contact with the crown of the helmet

**Note 2:** Defenseless player (Rule 2-27-14). When in question, a player is defenseless. Examples of defenseless players include but are not limited to:

- A player in the act of or just after throwing a pass.
- A receiver attempting to catch a forward pass or in position to receive a backward pass, or one who has completed a catch and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier.
- A kicker in the act of or just after kicking a ball, or during the kick or the return.
- A kick returner attempting to catch or recover a kick, or one who has completed a catch or recovery and has not had time to protect himself or has not clearly become a ball carrier.
- A player on the ground.
- A player obviously out of the play.
- A player who receives a blind-side block.
- A ball carrier already in the grasp of an opponent and whose forward progress has been stopped.
- A quarterback any time after a change of possession
- A ball carrier who has obviously given himself up and is sliding feetfirst.

### Catch

ARTICLE 3. a. To catch a ball means that a player:

1. Secures firm control with the hand(s) or arm(s) of a live ball in flight before the ball touches the ground, and
  2. Touches the ground in bounds with any part of his body, and then
  3. Maintains control of the ball long enough to enable him to perform an act common to the game, i.e., long enough to pitch or hand the ball, advance it, avoid or ward off an opponent, etc., and
  4. Satisfies paragraphs b, c, and d below.
- b. If a player goes to the ground in the act of catching a pass (with or without contact by an opponent) he must maintain

complete and continuous control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, whether in the field of play or in the end zone. This is also required for a player attempting to make a catch at the sideline and going to the ground out of bounds. If he loses control of the ball which then touches the ground before he regains control, it is not a catch. If he regains control inbounds prior to the ball touching the ground it is a catch.

c. If the player loses control of the ball while simultaneously touching the ground with any part of his body, or if there is doubt that the acts were simultaneous, it is not a catch. If a player has control of the ball, a slight movement of the ball, even if it touches the ground, will not be considered loss of possession; he must lose control of the ball in order for there to be a loss of possession.

d. If the ball touches the ground after the player secures control and continues to maintain control, and the elements above are satisfied, it is a catch.

e. An interception is a catch of an opponent's pass or fumble.

f. A catch by any kneeling or prone inbounds player is a completion or interception (Rules 7-3-6 and 7).

g. A player recovers a ball if he fulfills the criteria in paragraphs a, b, c, and d for catching a ball that is still alive after hitting the ground.

h. When in question, the catch, recovery or interception is not completed.

### Replay Procedure, Targeting

ARTICLE 5 a. The replay official shall review all targeting fouls, Rules 9-1-3 and 9-1-4. For a player to be disqualified and the Targeting foul to be enforced, all elements of a Targeting foul must be confirmed by the Instant Replay Official. There is no option for stands ??? as a part of a Targeting review. If any element of Targeting cannot be confirmed, then the Replay Official shall overturn the targeting foul.

Targeting elements include:

1. Rule 9-1-3:
    - (a) A player takes aim at an opponent for the purposes of attacking with forcible contact with the crown of the helmet.
    - (b) An indicator of targeting is present.
  2. Rule 9-1-4:
    - (a) A defenseless opponent (Rule 2-27-14).
    - (b) A player takes aim at a defenseless opponent for the purposes of attacking with forcible contact to the head or neck area.
    - (c) An indicator of targeting is present.
- b. The replay official may create a targeting foul from the booth when the targeting action is clear and obvious and the foul is not called by the officials on the field. Such a review may not be initiated by a coach's challenge.

### Replay Procedure, Catch

ARTICLE 3. Reviewable plays involving potential dead balls and loose balls include:

- a. Loose ball by a potential passer ruled a fumble.
  - b. Loose ball by a passer ruled incomplete forward pass when there is clear recovery or the ball goes out of bounds in the immediate continuing action after the loose ball.
1. If the replay official does not have indisputable video evidence as to which team recovers or the ball going out of bounds, the ruling of incomplete pass stands.
  2. If the replay official rules fumble and the ball is recovered, the ball belongs to the recovering team at the spot

of the recovery and any advance is nullified.

c. Live ball not ruled dead in possession of a ball carrier.

d. Loose ball ruled dead (Rule 4-1-2-b-2), or live ball ruled dead in possession of a ball carrier, when the clear recovery of a loose ball occurs in the immediate continuing football action.

1. If the ball is ruled dead and the replay official does not have indisputable video evidence as to which team recovers, the dead-ball ruling stands.

2. If the replay official rules that the ball was not dead, it belongs to the recovering team at the spot of the recovery and any advance is nullified.

e. Ball carrier's forward progress, spot of fumble, or spot of out-of-bounds backward pass, with respect to a first down or the goal line.

f. Catch or recovery of a fumble by a Team A player other than the fumbler before any change of possession during fourth down or a try.

g. Ball carrier in or out of bounds. If a ball carrier is ruled out of bounds, the play is not reviewable, except as in Rules 12-3-1-a and 12-3-3-d.

h. Catch, recovery or touching of a loose ball by a player in bounds or out of bounds.

i. A loose ball touching on or beyond a sideline, goal line, or end line, touching a pylon, or breaking the plane of a goal line.

j. Catch or recovery of a loose ball in the field of play or an end zone.

k. Forward fumble that goes out of bounds with respect to a first down.

l. Live ball declared dead under Rule 4-1-2-b-2 and b-3 (inadvertent whistle).

### Replay Process

ARTICLE 1. Instant replay personnel shall consist of the number of persons needed to operate the replay equipment within the necessary time constraints. There shall be a minimum of three persons to ensure that all plays are reviewed in an efficient and timely manner. Such persons are normally referred to as replay official, communicator and technician. Additional personnel may be used as needed.

ARTICLE 2. The type of equipment used to carry out necessary instant replay duties shall be determined by each conference or member institution using instant replay.

ARTICLE 3. a. All equipment used to review a play during the replay process and the personnel using that equipment shall be located in a separate, secure location in the press box. This room shall not be available or accessible to any person not directly involved in instant replay. As an ongoing experiment, a collaborative decision-making model during instant replay reviews that is in full compliance with Rule 12 is not limited to the press box of a stadium.

b. Additional telephonic equipment needed to allow instant replay personnel to communicate with the game referee when a game has been stopped for a play review shall be located on a sideline near the field of play and preferably outside a team area. Such equipment shall provide the game referee and the replay official a secure and private means of communication.

### Criteria To Overturn

ARTICLE 1. To reverse an on-field ruling, the replay official must be convinced beyond all doubt by indisputable video evidence through one or more video replays provided to the monitor.



## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

# Controversial Calls, Mistakes Down Ohio State

Facing third-and-5 from the Ohio State 45-yard line, sophomore Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence dropped back to pass with just 4:47 until halftime trailing 16-0. Sophomore Ohio State cornerback Shaun Wade came through on a blitz and drilled Lawrence for an eight-yard sack.

However, when the Clemson quarterback crouched to avoid contact, Wade hit him helmet to helmet and drew a targeting call, disqualifying him from the game.

"The play with Shaun Wade, that was

## GAME NOTEBOOK

Joe Dempsey

a fourth-down play," said Ohio State head coach Ryan Day. "It was such a huge play in the game. I'm not crying about it. But at the same time, those were big plays that didn't go our way. And certainly again, a range of emotions about that.

"We had all of the momentum. Then when we got the sack and then the penalty was called on Shaun, the momentum swung right there. We thought we really were doing a great job on defense."

Wade was not available for interviews after the game, but Ohio State senior safety Jordan Fuller relayed what Wade had told him about the hit.

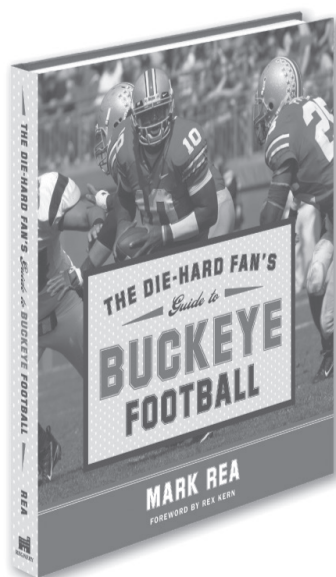


ANDREW LIND

**GAME CHANGER** – Cornerback Shaun Wade (24) was ejected for targeting after sacking Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence (16) in the second quarter of Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl.

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## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

## Game Analysis

**What Worked Well**

Ohio State junior running back J.K. Dobbins persevered through a painful first-half ankle injury and put together an excellent performance in what was his final game as a Buckeye. Dobbins gained 221 yards from scrimmage, surpassing 200 yards for the fourth time in the 2019 campaign.

Dobbins gashed Clemson in the first quarter, scoring on a 68-yard touchdown, where he juiced and burst past the Tiger defense. He also set up the Buckeyes at the Clemson 8-yard line with a 64-yard run later in the frame.

On the game, the La Grange, Texas, native gained 174 yards on 18 carries for a 9.7 yards-per-carry average with one score. He also snagged a career-high six receptions for 47 yards in the Buckeyes' loss to Clemson.

Also performing well for Ohio State was junior punter Drue Chrisman. After his first punt traveled just 38 yards, Chrisman responded with punts of 53, 51, 44, 52 and 34 yards respectively. The 44- and 34-yard punts downed Clemson at the 1- and 6-yard lines, respectively.

**What Didn't Work**

Ohio State struggled to stop Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence on the ground, with the sophomore signal caller rushing for a team-high 107 yards and one touchdown on 16 carries.

With the Tigers trailing 16-7, the 6-6, 220-pound quarterback made one of the plays of the game. Lawrence broke through the Buckeye defense to the second level, faked sophomore safety Josh Proctor and outran a slew of Ohio State defenders on his way to a game-changing 67-yard touchdown.

Lawrence completed 18 of 33 passes for 259 yards and two touchdowns with no interceptions, but his performance in the running

game brought the Tigers back from behind and kept the Ohio State defense off-balance all game. Even though he suffered a stinger in the second quarter that took him off the field, Lawrence showed toughness and composure in the Tigers' come-from-behind victory.

Lawrence led Clemson on a four-play, 94-yard drive in just 1:18 late in the fourth quarter to beat the Buckeyes. On the game-winning drive, Lawrence rushed for 11 yards and threw for 83 more, including a 34-yard touchdown pass to talented tailback Travis Etienne.

**Play Of The Game**

The play of the game is one that will live in infamy in Ohio State history. With Clemson trailing 16-0 and just 4:47 until halftime, Ohio State had all of the momentum on its side.

The Tigers had the ball at the Ohio State 45-yard line facing third-and-5, where a stop would likely force them to punt. Lawrence dropped back to pass and did not see a blitzing Shaun Wade until the last moment.

The third-year sophomore cornerback drilled Lawrence with a helmet-to-helmet hit, although it appeared the 6-6 quarterback ducked when the 6-1 corner went to deliver the hit, prompting the head-to-head collision. Wade sacked Lawrence for an eight-yard loss, which would have forced Clemson to punt down 16-0, but the play was reviewed for targeting.

The officials called Wade for a targeting penalty, disqualifying him from the remainder of the game and giving the Tigers first-and-10 at the Ohio State 30. Clemson went on to score a TD on the drive and added another score before the half, cutting the deficit to just two points.

After that penalty, Clemson seized all momentum and carried it into a 29-23 victory against the Wade-less Buckeyes.

— Joe Dempsey

"He said he was going for his shoulder area," Fuller said of Wade, "but the quarterback crouched as soon as he saw Shaun, and he ended up hitting him in the head."

Referee Ken Williamson was asked about the targeting call after the game and firmly defended the ruling.

"This was a crown-of-the-helmet targeting foul," Williamson said. "So it did eliminate a lot of other factors. Initial contact was with the crown of the helmet. Then he wrapped up for the tackle. So at that point, targeting was properly called."

Lawrence did not sugarcoat just how important that targeting call was in flipping the script of the game.

"We knew we had to score there," Lawrence said. "The game was getting a little out of hand. We just had to put a drive together, and we can take anything we can get. That targeting call was huge. Being able to finish that drive and score and then the next drive put it in again really gave us some momentum going into halftime."

Fuller agreed with Lawrence's perspective of how important that drive was for Clemson and gave credit to junior cornerback Amir Riep for stepping up when his number was called.

"It changed a lot," Fuller said of the call. "Amir did great, but I think that penalty in general — we were going to be off the field — and then they score that drive. I think the penalty hurt us."

Beyond giving Clemson life and setting up the Tigers' first touchdown, the targeting call cost Wade the remainder of the game. Fuller and the Buckeyes missed the standard defensive back, who became a spectator after his ejection.

"He's really valuable," Fuller said of Wade. "Obviously, he's one of our best players, but Amir did phenomenal. When Amir's in the game, I have no doubt that he's going to get the job done. You saw they tried to throw deep on him a few times, allowed no completions. It just sucked not being able to be at full strength and have our full arsenal, having one of our guys in the locker room."

**Overtaken Scoop And Score Pivotal**

Ohio State appeared to have seized momentum and the lead in the third quarter when junior cornerback Jeff Okudah stripped Clemson sophomore wideout Justyn Ross and Fuller scooped and scored with the fumble.

Instead of a touchdown that would have put the Buckeyes up 23-21, Clemson got the opportunity to punt the ball out of its territory. When Ohio State gained possession, sophomore quarterback Justin Fields threw an interception.

"It is too close right now, and I'm probably too emotional to really talk about those," Day said of the overturned fumble and the targeting call. "I'll have to look at the film and see what that was. But I know there were some plays that were called on the field and then overturned, and when they overturn it, there has to be indisputable evidence. If that's what they deemed it was, it's going to be something we'll have to take a look at."

"The thing about those plays were certainly that the catch that was returned for a touchdown was such a huge play in the game."

A visibly upset Fuller fielded questions following the game and was left without an answer to why his touchdown was overturned.

"I heard no explanation," Fuller said. "I just heard we didn't get the call."

Williamson explained the officials' ruling following the game.

"After the video, instant replay in the stadium as well as back at the video center, they both looked at it slow and fast and they determined when he moved, the ball was becoming loose in his hands and he did not complete the process of the catch," Williamson said.

**Dobbins Sets Tone, Toughs It Out**

Ohio State junior running back J.K. Dobbins erupted for 141 rushing yards on six carries in the first quarter alone, including runs of 68 and 64 yards, with the first ending in the end zone.

Dobbins suffered an ankle injury in the second quarter, however, sending him to the locker room, where he received a tape job. The talented co-captain showed toughness returning to the game and finishing with 221 yards from scrimmage.

BSB asked Thayer Munford, Ohio State's left tackle, what Dobbins' return from injury showed about the talented tailback.

"That he's the best," Munford said. "I love him to death. We all love him to death. We all love each other to death. Just seeing him coming back after a really bad ankle sprain, it shows the heart he has for the game, and we appreciate him for that."

The La Grange, Texas, native totaled 174 rushing yards on 18 carries with the one score, averaging 9.7 yards per carry. Dobbins displayed his versatility by adding a career-high six receptions for 47 yards in the passing game, including three catches for 31 yards on Ohio State's final drive.

"He had an ankle (injury) there," Day said of Dobbins. "He had to fight through that. He got it taped up. He came in, he came out. He was really working through that. But I think it did affect his play a little bit."

"He didn't have that explosion. On a couple of those first runs in the first half, he came out of the back end of those things, he looked powerful. What a gritty

performance by him to come back in the game and play."

Fifth-year senior right tackle Brandon Bowen echoed the sentiment of Munford and Day, pointing toward Dobbins' ability to practice what he preaches when it comes to the brotherhood.

"I was just happy to see him back," Bowen said. "It's a testament to his toughness and what he would do for his brothers. I would go to war with him any day."

Third-year sophomore right guard Wyatt Davis, a classmate of Dobbins, hinted to the fact that Dobbins could have packed up his stuff and started thinking about the NFL draft once he went down. Instead, the junior running back risked further harm to his body by toughing it out for his teammates.

"He just showed his toughness and the love that he has for everyone on the team," Davis said of Dobbins. "He could have easily just gone in the locker room and protected himself. But he's selfless, and that's why we love him."

**Final, Fatal Interception**

After Clemson drove 94 yards for the go-ahead touchdown in just 1:18, Ohio State received the ball at its 25-yard line with just 1:49 to play.

The Buckeyes, down 29-23, quickly drove down the field, setting up a second-and-7 from the Tigers 23-yard line with 43 seconds left.

Fields looked to find sophomore wide receiver Chris Olave in the end zone, but the speedy wideout wasn't where Fields thought he'd be. Instead of a game-winning touchdown, Clemson junior safety Nolan Turner picked off Fields' pass, ending the Buckeyes' season.

"Chris played a great game," Day said. "He's very upset in the locker room right now. He thought Justin was scrambling. He was running a post route right there. Actually, we had exactly the call on that we wanted. He felt like Justin was in a scramble mode."

"Justin does a lot of creating, so they weren't on the same page. They're playing football, and they're competing. Things like that happen. Unfortunately, that happened to us on the last play of the game when we needed it the most."

"Chris Olave is an unbelievable competitor. He loves his teammates. Nobody feels worse than Chris right now. When you play games like this, you put yourself out there, and that's what happened at the end of the game. Our guys were competing all the way down to the end."

Fields agreed with his coach's perspective, and even though he thought he had a chance at a score, he emphasized the fact that it does not do him or the team any good to dwell on the miscue.

"Like Coach Day said, it was the look we wanted," Fields said. "Then Chris, it was basically just a miscommunication. That happens in life, and you really can't do anything about it now. You just have to move on."

**Roughing-The-Kicker Penalty Damaging**

With the Buckeyes leading 16-14 in the third quarter, they forced Clemson to punt on fourth-and-6 from its own 15-yard line.

Ohio State had been successful earlier in the season with punt blocks and tried to get another one to swing the momentum back in its favor. However, sophomore cornerback Cameron Brown crashed into Clemson punter Will Spiers after he booted the ball, drawing a roughing-the-kicker penalty.

The penalty gave the Tigers life with a fresh set of downs at their 30-yard line, and they capitalized, scoring two plays later on a 53-yard receiving touchdown by tailback Travis Etienne.

"We were trying to be aggressive," Day said. "We thought we could get after the punt, and we've done a good job of staying off the punter and being aggressive. We didn't there. That was a big play in the game as well."



## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

## Ohio State Loses Heartbreaker To Clemson

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Difficulties scoring six in the red zone, miscues, several controversial calls that went against them, and a quarterback named Trevor Lawrence conspired to end Ohio State's national title hopes in stunning fashion with a 29-23 loss to No. 3 Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal in the Fiesta Bowl at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Ariz., on Dec. 28.

Instead of playing top-ranked LSU, a 63-28 winner vs. No. 4 Oklahoma in the Peach Bowl in Atlanta on Dec. 28, in the title game Jan. 13 in New Orleans, the No. 2 Buckeyes suffered one of the more stinging defeats in program history.

Lawrence passed 34 yards to Travis Etienne for the go-ahead score with 1:49 left in the game, and the two-point conversion provided the final margin for the Tigers.

No. 2 OSU (13-1) drove to the Clemson 23, but Justin Fields threw his second interception of the game – just his third of the season – with 37 seconds remaining. Nolan Turner had the game-sealing pick.

"A lot of disappointment," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said after his first career loss as a college head coach in his 17th game. "There's a lot of people angry in that locker room right now. There's a lot of throwing helmets. A lot of just 'Can't believe it's over.'"

Clemson had overcome a 16-point deficit to take the lead midway through the third quarter on an Etienne catch-and-run for 53

yards to make it 21-16.

The Buckeyes then rallied for a 23-21 lead on a 23-yard pass by Fields to Chris Olave on fourth-and-1 with 11:46 left in the fourth quarter to cap a 13-play, 84-yard, 4:52 drive.

A targeting call and ejection of OSU sophomore nickel back Shaun Wade was the key play of the game. He had just sacked Lawrence to seemingly force a Clemson punt with the Buckeyes up 16-0 with under five minutes left in the second quarter.

The momentum completely shifted, and the Tigers (14-0) scored twice to trail 16-14 at the half.

It got worse for the Buckeyes when junior J.K. Dobbins, whose 141 first-quarter yards included a 68-yard TD and a 64-yard run, injured his ankle late in the second quarter before a largely pro-OSU crowd of 71,330.

Playing with a heavily taped ankle in the second half, Dobbins finished with 174 yards and a score on 18 carries and a career-high six catches for 47 yards. He finished the season with a school record 2,003 rushing yards.

Fields was 30 of 46 for 320 yards (all career highs), a TD and the two interceptions, and K.J. Hill (67 yards) and Austin Mack (54) also had six receptions.

Lawrence was 18 of 33 for 259 yards and two touchdowns plus the two-point conversion to Tee Higgins. Lawrence also ran for 107 yards. Etienne had three catches for 98 yards and two TDs, although he was held to 36 yards on 10 rushes.

The Buckeyes amassed 516 total yards (320 passing, 196 rushing), while the Tigers gained 417 yards (259 passing, 158 rushing).



ANDREW LIND

**SOARING THROUGH THE AIR** – True freshman wide receiver Garrett Wilson made an acrobatic catch on Ohio State's first possession of the game to move the Buckeyes into the red zone.

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## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

## How It Happened

Ohio State came away with three points on the game's first possession but was disappointed it wasn't more.

Starting at its 25, OSU quickly reached first-and-goal at the 5-yard line on an acrobatic 22-yard catch at the right sideline by freshman Garrett Wilson on a play that was initially ruled incomplete.

Prior to that, Fields came out throwing. On the first play he hit Hill for nine yards, enabling the senior receiver to tie Gary Williams' school record of a reception in 48 straight games.

Binjamin Victor had an eight-yard catch for a first, Dobbins ran for four and tight end Luke Farrell gained 11 on a grab. Fields then hit Olave for 16 to the Clemson 27-yard line before Wilson's reception.

Dobbins lost two yards on a backfield catch and rushed for three to the 4-yard line. On third down, Fields scrambled and threw incomplete to Olave to set up a 21-yard field goal by Blake Haubeil and the 3-0 lead at 12:03 of the first.

Clemson's first drive ended with a missed 49-yard field-goal try by B.T. Potter at the 8:44 mark.

Just nine seconds later, Dobbins was in the end zone after a 68-yard TD run on the first play. He took the handoff, went up the middle, juke a defender and raced untouched to make it 10-0.

Later, after Clemson punted twice and OSU once, the Buckeyes faced a third-and-2 from their 28 when Dobbins slashed and gashed his way for 64 yards to the 8-yard line before being tripped up by Tanner Muse.

On the play, Dobbins surpassed Eddie George's single-season school rushing record of 1,927 yards, set in 1995 when he won the Heisman Trophy.

But once again, the Buckeyes could not cash it in for six. A Fields' incompleteness to Hill and a Dobbins run for three set up a third-down diving catch in the end zone by Dobbins, but it was overturned upon review and Haubeil made a 22-yard field goal at 14:11 in the second quarter at the end of a seven-play, 75-yard, 1:42 drive to make it 13-0.

Following the Tigers' third punt to the OSU 14-yard line, the Buckeyes went on the attack with a 24-yard highlight-reel catch by Mack to the OSU 45. On third-and-1 from the Clemson 46, Fields gained three yards on a QB sneak, and two plays later he avoided the blitz and ran for 21 to the 23-yard line.

The Buckeyes would reach the 11-yard line, as Master Teague gained five yards on third-and-3 from the 16.

But Clemson would not concede the end zone. A false start on first down pushed OSU back to the 16-yard line. Fields couldn't connect with Mack on first, and Dobbins dropped what possibly could have been a TD pass on second down. Another incompleteness to Victor led to a 33-yard field goal by Haubeil for a 16-0 lead at 7:20 of the second.

Clemson's comeback began on the ensuing series with the targeting call after Wade's third-down sack of eight yards at the Clemson 47.

Instead of another Tigers punt on fourth-and-13, the Buckeyes lost a pivotal player and the Clemson got a first down. Two plays later Lawrence, who had missed one play when he was shaken up on the apparent sack, got a pass interference on Wade's replacement, Amir Riep, to put the ball at the OSU 16.

Etienne scored on a bruising run from the 8 to make it 16-7 with 2:45 left for a 10-play, 75-yard, 4:35 drive.

Clemson forced OSU into its first three-and-out and Drue Chrisman put the Tigers

deep with a 53-yard punt to the 17. A 16-yard third-and-10 catch by wide receiver Justyn Ross moved Clemson to its 33, and Lawrence spun his magic to pull the Tigers to within two at 16-14 with 1:10 left on a 67-yard gallop.

## Rough Second Half

Clemson took the lead on its second series of the third quarter. Chrisman again pinned the Tigers with a 44-yard punt to the 1-yard line but a roughing the kicker penalty kept the drive alive.

The Tigers faced a fourth-and-6 from their 15, and the Buckeyes went for the block only for Cameron Brown to be penalized 15 yards.

Lyn-J Dixon immediately ran for 17 yards to the 47. On the next play, Etienne took a short flip from Lawrence and outran everybody for a 53-yard TD and a 21-16 lead at the 7:54 mark. The drive was 99 yards in seven plays and 2:45.

Like the targeting on Wade, another controversial call went against the Buckeyes later in the third quarter. Cornerback Jeff Okudah stripped Ross after an apparent catch and safety Jordan Fuller returned it 29 yards for a TD and a 22-21 lead, but after review, it was ruled to be an incomplete pass.

"I thought it should have stood," Fuller said, "but I'm not paid to be a referee."

Clemson punted, but Fields was intercepted for only the second time this season when All-America linebacker Isaiah Simmons stepped in front of his pass at the Tigers' 33 and returned it three yards. It was Fields' first INT in 190 throws.

The OSU defense forced a punt, and Fields, starting from his 16-yard line, made amends by helping the Buckeyes retake a 23-21 lead. Needing nine yards on third down, he hit Dobbins for 11 yards to the OSU 43 on the first play of the fourth quarter. After a 5-yard sack, Fields found Victor for 17 and Mack for nine to the Clemson 36.

Dobbins earned four on the ground for a first at the 32. He then had a catch for seven yards and a run for two with an incompleteness by Fields in between to set up a fourth-and-1. The Buckeyes went for it, and Fields hit Olave for a 23-yard TD strike at 11:46 to cap the 13-play, 84-yard drive in 4:52.

After making Clemson punt, the Buckeyes started at their 11 with 9:59 remaining. A pair of holding calls by the Tigers helped OSU move the sticks and negated an interception, and a 12-yarder to Mack gave the Buckeyes a first at the Clemson 45.

Dobbins gained a total of five yards on two carries before a pass to Mack netted just a yard. Clemson got the ball back at the 6 after a Chrisman punt of 34 yards and a yard return.

There was 3:07 remaining after the Buckeyes used 10 plays to go 50 yards in 6:52.

Ross began the drive with a catch for 11, and Lawrence ran for 11 to the Tiger 28. Amari Rodgers had a grab-and-go for 38 to the OSU 34, and Etienne took a pass and scored from there with 1:49 left to finish a 94-yard, four-play, 1:18 drive.

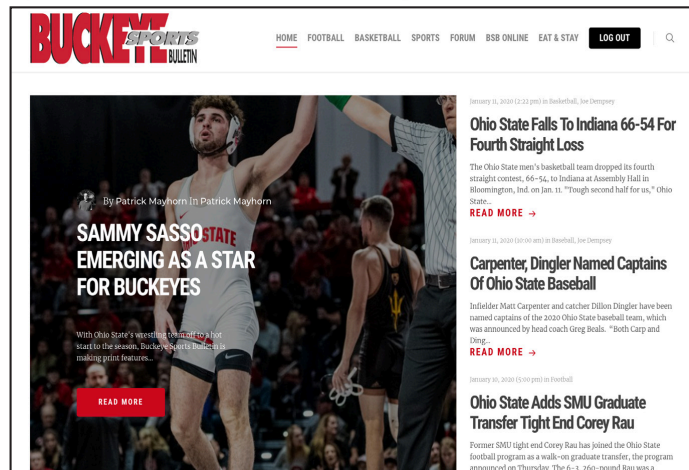
The Buckeyes had one final chance, driving to the Clemson 23-yard line from their own 25. Dobbins had three catches for 31 yards and Hill one for 13 to move the Buckeyes to the Clemson 31.

Fields gained eight yards on two carries to the 23-yard line. After an OSU timeout, he looked for Olave on a crossing pattern in the end zone, but Olave thought Fields would run and broke his route, leaving Turner to make the interception to crush OSU's dreams.

Clemson took a knee to end the game and run its record to 4-0 vs. Ohio State, all in bowl games.

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## OHIO STATE VS. CLEMSON

## BSB Quotebook: Clemson 29, Ohio State 23

**Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on how he had to adjust the offense with the injury to junior running back J.K. Dobbins:** "Well, they made some good adjustments up front. We were throwing the ball a lot in the second half. Receivers and the protection and (sophomore quarterback) Justin (Fields), they made some big plays. But it was hard to run the ball. They were kind of coming at us different ways. (Clemson defensive coordinator Brent) Venable does a good job. He made some good adjustments.

"J.K. (Dobbins) had an ankle there. He had to fight through that. He got it taped up. He came in, he came out. He was really working through that. But I think it did affect his play a little bit. He didn't have that explosion. A couple of those first runs in the first half, he came out of the back end of those things, he looked powerful. What a gritty performance by him to come back in the game and play."

**Day on if he thought about going for it when junior punter Drue Chrisman lined up under center on 4th-and-4:** "I thought the defense was playing good at the time. I felt if we could pin them inside the 10-yard line, that would give our defense a chance to get a stop. Then in a four-minute drill, we could end the game. I felt confidence in the defense. I would still make the same decision now."

**Day on what the locker room was like and what he told his team after the first loss of his head coaching career:** "A lot of tears. A lot of disappointment. A lot of people angry in that locker room right now. There's a lot of throwing helmets. A lot of just 'Can't believe it's over.' So, what do you say to a bunch of guys like that, other than you love them? And the older guys, the seniors have left a legacy, and the younger guys have to learn from it. Wake up in the morning, the sun will come up and we'll regroup."

**Day on how much not scoring touchdowns on early red-zone trips ultimately played a factor down the stretch of the game:** "That was tough. You score touchdowns there, then it's huge. And the one to J.K. that they called a touchdown first and then they overturned, that was a tough one. That was four points there. And then the one to Austin (Mack) in the back of the end zone, we just missed it. When you're playing against a good defense, things like that happen. I thought we made some good calls. The one to K.J. (Hill) there we had and Justin got scrambled a little bit. We were just a little bit off."

**Fields on where his health was coming into this game:** "I felt pretty good going into the game. There really wasn't any pain in my knee, but it was just the knee brace actually being there. But I felt pretty good going in."

**Ohio State sophomore wide receiver Chris Olave on what went wrong on the final offensive play that led to a Clemson interception:** "It was a one-on-one with me on the safety, and I was supposed to run the post, but when I looked back, I thought he scrambled, so I tried to work the second part of my route. He ended up throwing it, and that's how the game ended."

**Ohio State junior linebacker Tuf Borland on what caused the big plays on defense and if the running ability of Clemson sophomore quarterback Trevor Lawrence came as a surprise:** "I give Clemson a lot of credit. They've got a lot of good players. They made plays. As far as Lawrence running, it was not really a huge surprise. We saw that on film, extending plays and being able to find open guys. So, credit to them."

**Ohio State senior safety Jordan Fuller on the overturned fumble return:** "I'm not paid to be a ref, but it looked like he caught it to me. But I'm not paid to do that. I'm not even paid to play football."

**Fuller on the targeting penalty that ejected sophomore defensive back Shaun Wade:** "It shifted momentum, but at the end of the day, we had a chance to win regardless of that."

**Lawrence on his experience during, and following, the Wade targeting call:** "I just got a bad stinger, so it kind of scared me a little bit. I hadn't gotten one in a while and couldn't really move my arm for a second. That's why I laid there. Then just got kind of mad and popped up. I didn't know it was targeting, either. I thought it was – I don't know if it was a three-and-out. We would have had to punt. So I was kind of pissed off."

"We're off the field, and I see it is targeting then had to sit out one play and just came back. We knew we had to score there. The game was getting a little out of hand. Just had to put a drive together, and we can take anything we can get. That targeting call was huge. Being able to finish that drive and score and then the next drive put it in again really gave us some momentum going into halftime."

**Referee Ken Williamson on how many angles he looked at on the overturned fumble recovery that would have gone for an Ohio State touchdown and if it was viewed in slow motion:** "We had a lot of good looks on it. We put on fast motion and slow motion. The player did not complete the process of the catch, so, therefore, the pass was incomplete."

**Ohio State fifth-year senior wide receiver K.J. Hill on the emotions of losing his final game with the Buckeyes:** "I just feel like I ripped my chest open, gave Ohio State everything I had in me. I wanted it bad. One of my goals was to play in the national championship and win a national championship. I fell short of that. I feel like I left it all on the field."

**Ohio State junior left tackle Thayer Munford on the motivation next year's Ohio State team is going to draw from the Fiesta Bowl defeat:** "Just know that it's going to be a different mind-set. It's going to be the same, kind of like this, what we had this past year, but it's going to be really different."

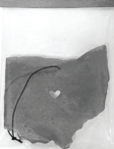
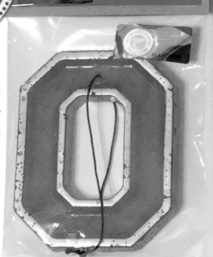
**Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney on what his game plan for the Fiesta Bowl was coming into the matchup:** "I wrote two things down on my call sheet this morning. I wrote down 'quarterback run' and 'running back pass.' And as it turns out, Trevor had 107 yards rushing. (Junior running back) Travis Etienne had three catches for 98 yards and two touchdowns receiving. It is just amazing how it all kind of came together, like I hoped it would."

**Swinney on why the quarterback run became such a key for the Clemson offense against the Buckeyes:** "They're a one-safety team and we knew that – and they're really good in the secondary. Probably everybody on that defense is going to be drafted, literally – probably every single one of those guys, and most of the backups. That's a really good defense and really good guys on the outside. We felt like Trevor would be an equalizer a little bit for us. We knew they would play a lot of man coverage. The quarterback draw, they have to run with us."

**Swinney on what he thought of Ohio State after the six-point win:** "Congratulations to Ohio State on an unbelievable season. Their quarterback, that defense, their running back – is special. It was a back-and-forth game. A tough one for either team to lose, but in the end, these guys found a way to get it done."



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# The Numbers Game

## Clemson 29, Ohio State 23

Dec. 28, 2019 – State Farm Stadium, Glendale, Ariz.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
CLEMSON (14-0, 9-0)	0	14	7	8	29
OHIO STATE (13-1, 10-0)	10	6	0	7	23

### First Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 21-yard field goal, 12:03; 10 plays, 71 yards, 2:57 TOP.

OSU – Dobbins, 68-yard rush (Haubeil kick), 8:35, 1 play, 68 yards, 0:09 TOP.

### Second Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 22-yard field goal, 14:11; 7 plays, 75 yards, 1:42 TOP.

OSU – Haubeil, 33-yard field goal, 7:20; 14 plays, 70 yards, 4:55 TOP.

CLEM – Etienne, 8-yard rush (Potter kick), 2:45; 10 plays, 75 yards, 4:35 TOP.

CLEM – Lawrence, 67-yard rush (Potter kick), 1:10; 5 plays, 83 yards, 0:45 TOP.

### Third Quarter

CLEM – Etienne, 53-yard pass from Lawrence (Potter kick), 7:54; 7 plays, 99 yards, 2:45 TOP.

### Fourth Quarter

OSU – Olave, 23-yard pass from Fields (Haubeil kick), 11:46; 13 plays, 84 yards, 4:52 TOP.

CLEM – Etienne, 34-yard pass from Lawrence (Potter kick), 1:49; 4 plays, 94 yards, 1:18 TOP.

Att. – 71,330

Weather – Indoors.

### Team Statistics

	CLEM	OSU
First Downs	21	28
Rushing	7	9
Passing	10	16
Penalty	4	3
Rushes-Yards	29-158	39-196
Passing Yards	259	320
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	18-33-0	30-46-2
Offensive Plays	62	85
Total Net Yards	417	516
Third Down Efficiency	5-14	7-18
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Punts-Avg.	7-44.9	6-45.3
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	0-0
Penalties	6-47	8-77
Time of Possession	26:33	33:27

### Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – CLEM: Lawrence 16-107; Etienne 10-36; Dixon 1-17; TEAM 2-(-2). OSU: Dobbins 18-174; Fields 14-13; Teague 7-9.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – CLEM: Lawrence 18-33-0-259-2. OSU: Fields 30-46-2-320-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – CLEM: Ross 6-47; Higgins 4-33; Etienne 3-98; Overton 2-30; Rodgers 1-38; Ngata 1-11; Dixon 1-2. OSU: Hill 6-67; Mack 6-54; Dobbins 6-47; Wilson 4-47; Olave 3-50; Victor 3-38; Farrell 1-11; Ruckert 1-6.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – CLEM: Spiers 7-44.9-53. OSU: Chrisman 6-45.3-53.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: Rodgers 2-3; Kendrick 1-1. OSU: Wilson 2-3.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: Etienne 1-16. OSU: None.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – CLEM: Potter (49). OSU: None.

FORCED FUMBLES – CLEM: None. OSU: None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: None. OSU: None.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: Simmons 1-3; Turner 1-0. OSU: None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: Spector 2-12; Wallace 1.0-11; Skalski 0.5-3; Foster 0.5-3. OSU: Hamilton 1.0-10; Browning 1.0-8; Friday 1.0-7.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – CLEM: Spector 2.0-12; Foster 1.5-4; Thomas 1.5-2; Wallace 1.0-11; Davis 1.0-2; Kendrick 1.0-2; Skalski 0.5-3. OSU: Hamilton 1.0-10; Browning 1.0-8; Friday 1.0-7; Landers 1.0-1; M. Harrison 0.5-1; Werner 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – CLEM: Smith 8-4-12; Kendrick 8-1-9; Skalski 5-4-9; Terrell 5-1-6; Spector 4-1-5; Foster 4-1-5; Wallace 4-1-5; Davis 4-0-4; Simmons 3-1-4; Thomas 1-3-4; Muse 3-0-3; Williams 2-1-3; TEAM 1-0-1; Turner 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Rudolph 1-0-1. OSU: Harrison 5-1-6; Werner 2-4-6; Okudah 4-1-5; Fuller 3-2-5; Proctor 3-1-4; Borland 2-1-3; Browning 2-1-3; Hamilton 2-1-3; Riep 1-2-3; Young 1-1-2; Harrison 1-1-2; Hausmann 1-0-1; Olave 1-0-1; Hilliard 1-0-1; Friday 1-0-1; Arnette 1-0-1; Landers 1-0-1; Smith 0-1-1; Cornell 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – CLEM: Offense, Carman, Simpson, Pollard, Cervenka, Anchrum, Chalk, Higgins, Lawrence, Etienne, Ross, Rodgers. Defense, Foster, Davis, Pinckney, Thomas, Simmons, Skalski, Smith, Kendrick, Wallace, Muse, Terrell. Reserves, Spector, Johnson, Swinney, Phillips, Ladson, Henry, Jones, Mascoll, Brice, Ngata, Overton, Venables, Powell, Rencher, Dixon, Turner, Jones, Potter, Goodrich, Rudolph, Zanders, Spiers, Upshaw, Phibbs, Williams, Bockhorst, McFadden, Price, Allen, Galloway, Jefferies. OSU: Offense, Fields, Dobbins, Victor, Olave, Hill, Farrell, Munford, Jackson, Myers, Davis, Bowen. Defense, Young, Hamilton, Cornell, Z. Harrison, Werner, Borland, M. Harrison, Arnette, Okudah, Wade, Fuller. Reserves, Berry, Mack, Teague, McCall, Wilson, Browning, Jean-Baptiste, Riep, Smith, Banks, Harris, Gant, Williamson, Wint, Brown, Hooker, Rossi, Proctor, Hilliard, Friday, Landers, Togiai, Hausmann, Ruckert, Chrisman, Haubeil.

## Season Statistics

2019-20 Game-By-Game				
Date	Opponent	Result	Crowd	
Aug. 31	(5)FLORIDA ATLANTIC	W, 45-21	103,228	
Sept. 7	(5)CINCINNATI	W 42-0	104,089	
Sept. 14	(6)at Indiana	W, 51-10	47,945	
Sept. 21	(6)MIAMI (OHIO)	W, 76-5	103,190	
Sept. 28	(5)at Nebraska	W, 48-7	89,379	
Oct. 5	(4)MICHIGAN STATE (25)	W, 34-10	104,797	
Oct. 18	(4)at Northwestern	W, 52-3	47,330	
Oct. 26	(3)WISCONSIN (13)	W, 38-7	102,998	
Nov. 9	(3)MARYLAND	W, 73-14	101,022	
Nov. 16	(2)at Rutgers	W, 56-21	33,528	
Nov. 23	(2)PENN STATE (8)	W, 28-17	104,355	
Nov. 30	(2)at Michigan (10)	W, 56-27	112,071	
Dec. 7	(2) WISCONSIN (10)	W, 34-21	66,649	
Dec. 28	(2) vs. Clemson (3)	L, 29-23	71,330	

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			397	217
Rushing			192	99
Passing			172	89
Penalty			33	29
Average Per Game/Rush			266.8	103.7
Average Per Game/Pass			263.1	156.0
Total Offense			7419	3636
Total Plays			1069	881
Average Per Game			529.9	259.7
Average Per Play			6.9	4.1
Penalties-Yards			81-770	76-665
Fumbles-Lost			21-13	20-10
Third Down Efficiency			101-183	60-206
Percentage			55%	29%
Fourth Down Efficiency			8-13	7-20
Percentage			62%	35%
Sacks-Yards			54-354	35-224
Time Of Possession Avg.			31:47	27:51

Score									
By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.		
Ohio State	146	237	142	131	0	656	46.9		
Opponents	38	51	58	45	0	192	13.7		

Rushing						Individual Statistics			TD	Long
	Att.	Net	Avg.							
J.K. Dobbins	301	2003	6.7	21	68					
Master Teague	135	789	5.8	4	73					
Justin Fields	137	484	3.5	10	51					
Marcus Crowley	25	237	9.5	1	53					
Steele Chambers	19	135	7.1	1	15					
Demario McCall	18	122	6.8	2	32					
Amari McMahon	1	10	10.0	0	10					
Chris Olave	2	5	2.5	0	4					
K.J. Hill	1	1	1.0	0	1					
Gunnar Hoak	4	-6	-1.5	0	3					
Chris Chugunov	4	-10	-2.5	0	0					
TEAM	16	-35	-2.2	0	0					
OSU Totals	663	3735	5.6	39	73					
OPP Totals	488	1452	3.0	14	67					

Passing									
	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.			
Justin Fields	238	354	67.2	3273	41-3	181.4			
Chris Chugunov	26	43	60.5	286	6-0	162.4			
Gunnar Hoak	6	6	100.0	104	1-0	300.2			
TEAM	0	2	0	0	0-0	0			
Drue Chrisman	1	1	100.0	21	0-0	276.4			
OSU Totals	271	406	66.7	3684	48-3	180.5			
OPP Totals	200	393	50.9	2184	9-15	97.5			

Receiving									
	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long				
K.J. Hill	57	636	11.2	10	53				
Chris Olave	49	849	17.3	12	58				
Binjimen Victor	35	573	16.4	6	60				
Garrett Wilson	30	432	14.4	5	47				
Austin Mack	27	361	13.4	3	38				
J.K. Dobbins	23	247	10.7	2	28				
Jeremy Ruckert	14	142	10.1	4	25				
Luke Farrell	7	119	17.0	2	22				
Jameson Williams	6	112	18.7	1	61				
Jaelen Gill	6	51	8.5	1	32				
Master Teague	4	60	15.0	0	28				
Demario McCall	4	28	7.0	0	11				
Rashod Berry	2	20	10.0	0	16				
Jake Hausmann	2	13	6.5	1	9				
Sam Wigiuz	1	11	11.0	0	11				
Elijah Gardiner	1	10	10.0	0	10				
Mitch Rossi	1	8	8.0	0	8				
Marcus Crowley	1	7	7.0	1	7				
Jaylen Harris	1	5	5.0	0	5				
OSU Totals	271	3684	13.6	48	61				
OPP Totals	200	2184	10.9	9	53				

Scoring									
	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS			
J.K. Dobbins	23	-	-	-	-	138			
Blake Haubeil	-	85-85	-	-	-	124			
Chris Olave	12	-	-	-	-	74			
Justin Fields	10	-	-	-	-	60			
K.J. Hill	10	-	-	-	-	60			
Binjimen Victor	6	-	-	-	-	36			
Garrett Wilson	5	-	-	-	-	30			
Master Teague	4	-	-	-	-	24			
Jeremy Ruckert	4	-	-	-	-	24			
Austin Mack	3	-	-	-	-	18			
Demario McCall	2	-	-	-	-	12			
Luke Farrell	2	-	-	-	-	12			
Marcus Crowley	2	-	-	-	-	12			
Damon Arnette	1	-	-	-	-	6			
Jameson Williams	1	-	-	-	-	6			
Steele Chambers	1	-	-	-	-	6			
Jake Hausmann	1	-	-	-	-	6			
Jaelen Gill	1	-	-	-	-	6			
D. DiMaccio	0	2-3	-	-	-	2			
OSU Totals	88	87-88	-	-	-	13-15	656		
OPP Totals	23	19-20	1-1	1-1	9-13	192			

FG Distance						0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Blake Haubeil	4-4	3-5	3-3	1-1	13-15					
OSU Totals	4-4	3-5	3-3	1-1	13-15					
OPP Totals	5-6	2-3	2-4	0-0	9-13					

Punting						No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Drue Chrisman	46	2037	44.3	0	61					
TEAM	1	13	13.0	1	13					
OSU Totals	47	2050	43.6	1	61					
OPP Totals	102	4159	40.8	2	70					

Interceptions						No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeff Okudah	3	0	0.0	0	0					
Jordan Fuller	2	26	13.0	0	26					
K'Vaughan Pope	2	4	2.0	0	3					
Damon Arnette	1	96	96.0	1	96					
Tuf Borland	1	42	42.0	0	42					
Amir Riep	2	11	5.5	0	11					
Josh Proctor	1	0	0.0	0	0					
Sevyn Banks	1	0	0.0	0	0					
Shaun Wade	1	0	0.0	0	0					
Justin Hilliard	1	0	0.0	0	0					
OSU Totals	15	184	12.3	1	96					
OPP Totals	3	37	12.3	0	34					

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# College Football World Stunned By Fiesta Bowl

By **PATRICK MAYHORN**  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal was an instant classic, marked by big-time plays made by big-time players, a true heavyweight fight. However, it was not without its fair share of controversy.

Questions around a targeting call that ejected defensive back Shaun Wade and a Clemson fumble call that was determined to actually be an incomplete pass have painted the discourse around the game, and media in Ohio and around the country were quick to share strong opinions about the polarizing matchup.

"The Buckeyes were itching to get back on this stage after a three-year hiatus, and despite the targeting penalty and a questionable overturned call by the SEC officiating crew, it still had a chance to win in the final minute – before Justin Fields threw an interception to Clemson's Nolan Turner in the end zone.

"If Wade doesn't get called for targeting, or Justin Ross' fumble isn't ruled an incomplete pass, then maybe the Buckeyes win. Running back J.K. Dobbins' ankle injury was also a huge factor.

"This game was different than the 31-0 beatdown the Buckeyes took against Clemson three years ago. Ohio State under (head coach Ryan) Day proved it belonged on the big stage, and

chances are this team will be back next year with Fields and a defense that has owned the Big Ten for the past three seasons."

– **Bill Bender,**  
**The Sporting News**

"Ohio State fans will debate the calls for years, the same way Miami fans still curse the infamous end-zone pass interference in 2003 and Michigan devotees insist J.T. Barrett came up short of a first down in 2016.

"Ohio State benefited from those two borderline calls. But the Buckeyes got done in Saturday night by two monumental rulings that went Clemson's way. One was valid, the other perplexing.

"The valid one: With Ohio State leading 16-0, cornerback Shaun Wade came free on a third-and-5 blitz. He sacked Trevor Lawrence but used the crown of his helmet.

"The replay review ended Wade's night and flipped the game. The Tigers, then down 16-0, outscored Ohio State 29-7 the rest of the way.

"The perplexing one: Justyn Ross received a pass from Lawrence – 'caught' would be more accurate – and took several steps with the ball. Cornerback Jeff Okudah pried it loose, and Jordan Fuller scooped it up and ran 29 yards.

"Touchdown? Not in the eyes of the replay officials."

– **Teddy Greenstein,**  
**Chicago Tribune**

"Ohio State football let a golden opportunity to play for a national championship slip through its fingers. What else is new?

"After losing the Fiesta Bowl 29-23 to Clemson on Saturday night, the 2019 Buckeyes will not be known as one of the best Ohio State teams of all time.

"Instead of rivaling the 1968 and 2014 squads (among others) that got the job done, the '19 Buckeyes' peers will be the teams of '69, '73, 2015 and more than a dozen others that came up just short."

– **Marcus Hartman,**  
**Dayton Daily News**

"There were many plays in that game that the Buckeyes will rue for a long time. Shaun Wade's targeting ejection was a game-changer, as was the reversal of Jordan Fuller's scoop-and-score and the final interception. But Clemson is a great program led by a superstar quarterback in Trevor Lawrence. Still, the Buckeyes allowed the Tigers to go 94 yards in four plays for the winning drive. It was a magical season that won't be forgotten. But it will always be bittersweet.

"The targeting rule is a tricky one because the intent – preventing helmet-to-helmet contact – is so important. But inadvertent or unavoidable hits like that are an unfortunate part of the game. There was no malicious intent with Wade's hit; Lawrence lowered his head. The fumble forced by OSU's Jeff Okudah

should have stood. Ross had made the catch."

– **Bill Rabinowitz,**  
**The Columbus Dispatch**

"Though it launched a thousand conspiracy theories in the great state of Ohio, the targeting call in the second quarter of Saturday's Fiesta Bowl was 100 percent correct. A replay official noticed something he had been trained to watch for. As he is required to, he stopped the game. He looked at the play again, applied the rule to the situation and found the officiating crew had no choice but to eject Ohio State defensive back Shaun Wade, who had hit Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence in the head with the crown of his helmet on a third-down sack.

"The call was correct, but the result was still wrong. That's why something needs to change.

"A rule designed to make the game better has worked as intended in spite of one major side effect, and it's time to find a better way to enforce it."

– **Andy Staples,**  
**The Athletic**

"This is the type of game that will keep talk radio buzzing for months, overload the message-board servers and prompt enough conspiracy theories that it could be memorialized in Roswell. But the primary feeling for Ohio State dovetailed with (wide receiver Chris) Olave's emotion – emptiness from missed opportunity, rage for one crucial overturned touchdown call and the aching void of unfulfilled potential."

– **Pete Thamel, Yahoo Sports**

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# Local Media, Historian Share Reactions To Season, Loss

Following Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal, the staff of Buckeye Sports Bulletin asked members of the local media – including The Athletic's Ari Wasserman and Letterman Row's Tim May – as well as historian Jack Park for their thoughts on the Buckeyes' season and the controversial Fiesta Bowl.

Below is what they had to say.

**What were your thoughts on Ohio State's season, which included an eighth straight win over Michigan and third consecutive outright Big Ten title?**

**JP:** "This was the 130th season of Ohio State football, and I think without question this is one of the greatest seasons and one of the greatest teams of all time. And I think everybody expected a good team this year. There were a lot of transitions happening: Urban Meyer retiring after seven very, very successful seasons, and Ryan Day taking over, 40 years old, had never been a head coach before. But he made some very, very insightful and very important changes in the coaching staff, particularly on the defensive side. I think a lot of the success of this season started with basically what he did soon after he became head coach.

"He has brought a togetherness in this program, at least for right now. And I don't mean that to say that it won't be there forever. But he's brought a togetherness that's pretty unique. And that in no way is saying that the team wasn't all together under Meyer. But I think it's a little bit different culture right now. It's maybe a little bit less intense and yet just as difficult to achieve greatness. He just – he's his own personality. Every head coach I've ever followed and studied, and some of them I've gotten to know pretty well, every one of them has a different personality and the team to a certain extent reflects that personality.

"Mike Vrabel is a pretty good friend of mine. And if you're following Tennessee, I think that Tennessee team is taking on his personality and he's a strong guy. I mean he's a no-nonsense guy and a good guy, just a really good guy. Fair but very strong and demanding. And that Tennessee Titans team is, I think to a certain extent, taking on that personality. And I think we're seeing that here at Ohio State.

"Now obviously another thing that really, really may (have helped) make this season so successful is the tremendous amount of talent that Urban Meyer left. He was here seven seasons. He did not have a bad recruiting class. And I don't know if this is the best Ohio State team of all time. It's certainly one of the best. But I don't remember an Ohio State team that had the depth that this one has. I mean there's kids that were there – we had several third-stringers who could be playing first team on some other Big Ten teams.

"And then I guess the third thing you'd have to say is basically – and this goes partly to coaching – but we had so many really excellent players step up and have their best seasons. And certainly, the three of them that come to mind obviously are J.K. Dobbins, Justin Fields and, of course, Chase Young. I have never seen a better defensive lineman at Ohio State than Chase Young. I just haven't. And I've seen a lot of great ones over the years, and Vrabel would be one of them. There's no question about it."

**AW:** "I think people have to understand

that there are so many programs in America that are struggling to find the right leadership and the right coach, and if you look back at just like what Tennessee did, or every other program in the country that is hiring and recycling and firing coaches every three or four years, how hard it is to find an identity and maintain it.

"For Ohio State to lose one of the best coaches in the game in Urban Meyer and then turn around and hire a 40-year old coordinator who's never been a head coach, and then for them to go undefeated and beat the crap out of everybody on their schedule and make the playoff in their first year. Like I think they underachieved for what this team was good enough to do, but I also think that just making the playoffs in any shape or form makes it a successful season from here on out.

"So not only did Ohio State make the playoff in a playoff-or-bust era, they also feel good about the fact that they have the right coach leading the program, which is an invaluable thing, maybe even more valuable than winning a national championship. Because you've seen coaches win national championships and they get fired a few years later because they're not the right person."

**TM:** "I thought they would win the Big Ten for the third straight time back when everyone was picking Michigan – are you kidding me? Are you paying attention or are you just going whimsically? A lot of sportswriters in those preseason polls wanted anybody other than Ohio State, it looked like. I understand that, something new to talk about. But they had Michigan playing Nebraska for the Big Ten championship. Whoops.

"The bad thing about the BCS and now the College Football Playoff is if you don't win it all, you could have done better. Without a doubt, the members of this team will look back and won't have the huge, glorious reunions like the 2014 team or the 2002 team, because they got beat by Clemson. I do believe they had a great chance to win it all. I thought they were going to do well against LSU.

"That's what's too bad, because otherwise they won every other game – they won every other game by double figures – are you kidding me? I've never covered an Ohio State team like that. The closest one might have been 1998; 1996 was like that team but one loss kind of sullied it all; 2015, without a doubt, that's one of the great assemblies of talent in Ohio State history, didn't get it done. As Archie Griffin said on my podcast, the 1975 team – that was a helluva team – they beat UCLA soundly in the regular season, then got upset by UCLA in the Rose Bowl and they didn't win a national championship. Even though that was a ridiculous collection of talent, they fall into that second-tier category of what could have been but was still a great team."

**What are your thoughts on Ohio State's 29-23 loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl, which ended the Buckeyes' season and sent the Tigers to the national championship?**

**JP:** "Well, I think this is the first time I've ever said this about a game that I've covered for Ohio State, because I'm not a complainer and I realize that people in life make mistakes and I've made mistakes. And you know, you're going to have officials. They're human, they're going to make a bad call once in a while.

"I have never seen a game where there were so many bad calls that all went against Ohio State. And it's to the place that I somewhat question if it was deliberate. I just can't understand how everything, every time Ohio State has made a big play – not every time, but many times that they made a key play, all of a sudden, they find a way to turn the thing around.

"And, to me, there was so much holding by the Clemson (line). There was so much holding by the Clemson players that in my opinion was never called. And I think, and again, I've never said this before but you could make a pretty strong argument that basically the officiating took that game away from Ohio State.

"I feel as strong about the holding and some things that weren't called as I am the things that were called, that I thought were called incorrectly. I mean, you've got, what, six officials on the field. I mean, it's like playing against 17 men out there. I mean, there was just something about that that didn't meet the test of reasonable to me in terms of fairness. I don't know. I don't know. I would hate to think that this has ever gotten to the place that – ESPN obviously has an interest with the SEC and the games on ESPN.

"I mean, a lot of people have written about that. This is not coming from me originally. You've read about it. I've read about it and I understand that. I would hope that's not the situation, but it just seemed that the Big Ten teams seem to never get a break that way. Is there a bias against the Big Ten? I think that's a very legitimate question. I really do."

**AW:** "I think it was pretty evident to me that Ohio State was the better football team. It's one of the oddest games I think I've covered in 10 years on the beat. You know, if you could take 10 instances or 10 plays in that game, and they all went against Ohio State, if you change the outcome to go for Ohio State in any one of those 10 plays, Ohio State arguably wins the football game.

"I mean the two J.K. (Dobbins) drops, the targeting penalty, which shifted the momentum, I would say, even more than that quarter. The ball bounced off the return man at the end of the game for Clemson before they went 94 yards, and of course the questionable fumble that they overturned. The scoop and score they overturned.

"So, I think that it was a successful season overall, but I think that might have been one of the most gut-wrenching, unsatisfying losses Ohio State's endured on the football field in the last 20 or 25 years.

"I'm not a penalty-first person, I'm an opportunity-first person, so I think that had J.K. Dobbins caught a touchdown pass instead of dropping it, I think the complexion of the game changes. If Ohio State's defense didn't give up 94 yards in four plays or whatever it was at the end of the game. And of course (Chris) Olave would have caught a touchdown pass if he didn't break off the route at the end of the game.

"Ohio State had its opportunities to win the football game, regardless of all the things that occurred, and I think that's a testament to how much better of a football team they were than Clemson. To get those 10 breaks not going their way and still having the ball at the end with a chance to win is a testament to how good they are."

**TM:** "I thought Ohio State was ready to play. Ohio State played very hard in that game. There is no doubt that having to settle for three field goals in the first half,

when they could have stretched the lead to 28- or at least 24-0, that would have put that game away without a doubt. But the bottom line was they were still up 16-0.

"What also stands out is the fact that a defense that had pretty much put the big-play bugaboo behind them from the previous season, they lost that game in terms of giving up points because they gave up a huge number of big plays to Clemson. And Clemson just had the skill guys that at the right moment made huge plays, not the least of which was Travis Etienne, and definitely not the least of which was Trevor Lawrence.

"Lawrence can flat run, and that long touchdown run he had was remarkable in two ways. No. 1, he got Clemson back in the game. No. 2, it was Trevor Lawrence just saying he was willing to do whatever it takes to win the game. And then of course, when they got the ball back at their 6-yard line when Ohio State's trying to run out the clock and they go 94 yards in four plays – are you kidding me? I think everybody that had thought the Ohio State defense finally had its act together was stunned by that.

"And then, of course the last offensive play of the game where it looked like Ohio State was going to reciprocate was just a head-scratcher that Chris Olave looks over his shoulder, thinks Justin Fields is scrambling and cuts off his route. Wow, that was crazy the way that game ended because I really thought Ohio State was about to pull it out of the fire.

"But, all that said, there is no doubt about it that this game will be known as the Fiesta Fiasco when it comes to the officiating, and by that, I mean the replay official. I can see the Shaun Wade targeting call, although I thought that was iffy, and a couple other calls. But what should have been a catch, strip, scoop and score by Jordan Fuller when they take six points off the board will go down in infamy as one of the great wrong replay review calls in college football history. Because that was a joke. A flat joke. And at the moment, I just want to blame it on incompetence, not anything else, but man, that was borderline blaming it on something else."

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# Loss Doesn't Diminish Great Season For OSU

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

At some point during this recently completed Ohio State football season, I started telling people that regardless of the final outcome, I was going to have thoroughly enjoyed this version of the Ohio State Buckeyes. It must have been before what was going to be a season-defining, regular-season-ending gantlet of Penn State and archrival Michigan on the road.

Regardless of the outcome in those final two games, I was still going to enjoy this team and this season, and I let anyone who would listen to me know it. I loved the group of guys, the team's camaraderie, the coaching staff, the great defense, the stars on the team (big stars, who were all so humble), the team's grit—everything about the team made watching them and covering them enjoyable.

Of course, the Buckeyes knocked off the Nittany Lions and Wolverines, as well as Wisconsin for a second time, and it was becoming clear that a national championship was really the only fitting end for this team.

We all know what ultimately happened, as the Buckeyes lost in excruciating fashion to their postseason nemesis Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinals.

And I remain true to my word. I thoroughly enjoyed this season and am clearly less despondent than many in Buckeye Nation.

In the days just before the game, some savvy Buckeye fans had started to tell me that they were concerned that the defending national champion Clemson might be too much for Ohio State. Working on Saturdays in football season, I hadn't really seen the Tigers play. But I had seen Ohio State play 13 games and I knew that if Clemson was better than the Buckeyes, it was a darn good football team.

Win or lose, I think Ohio State proved that it was every bit as good as the Tigers. If the teams played 10 times, the Buckeyes would win a minimum of five and probably seven games. I spoke to Greg Powers, proprietor of the Shade Restaurant group who is a more savvy observer than me, who completely unprompted said he thought "if the teams played 10 times, the Buckeyes would win eight."

As well as they might have played, however, and as crippling as some of the calls that went against them might have been, Ohio State did enough on its own to lose the ballgame. Yes, it seemed like the Tigers got a little bit of a boost from the booth, but I don't think there was an Ohio State fan watching who, while excited that the Buckeyes were leading 16-0, didn't have in the back of their minds that those three field goals in the first half might come back to haunt them.

In the context of those field goals, what about the surefire touchdown pass that J.K. Dobbins—in my mind the best player on the team other than Chase Young—dropped, leaving the Buckeyes to settle for one of those threes. No controversy there.

And there was the roughing-the-punter call in the third period that gave the Tigers new life and ultimately their first lead of the game. That one was on the Buckeyes, though my first reaction was that I hoped the play wouldn't cause Ryan Day to shy away from his aggressive style going forward.

And what about after the Buckeyes, despite everything seemingly going against them, took the lead back with 11:46 to play? They stopped Clemson on a three-and-out and then milked 6:50 off the clock before Drue Chrisman buried the Tigers back at their 6-yard line with only 3:07 remaining.

That's when one of the best defenses in the country, and maybe in Ohio State history, allowed Clemson to march 94 yards in just four plays to take the lead with only 1:49 to

play. Again, that was on the Buckeyes, not the officials.

That should have been the backbreaker.

But despite all the adversity in the game with the Tigers—some self-inflicted, some otherwise—there was Ohio State at the end, driving down the field like a team without an ounce of quit in its collective body.

On Ohio State's final offensive play of the season, Chris Olave zigged, Justin Fields zagged and suddenly it was all over. In a big game like that, one team is going to win and one is going to lose. That doesn't take anything away from the incredible seasons that Olave, Fields and the Buckeyes had.

And let me repeat. This was one of my most gratifying seasons covering the Buckeyes, despite the difficult loss against Clemson.

Let's take a look at some of the controversial plays Buckeye fans will be talking about as long as there are Buckeye fans.

The most pivotal play in the game, to my way of thinking, was the targeting call in the second quarter. The Buckeyes were up by 16 and had appeared to stop Clemson for the fifth straight time on a sack by Shaun Wade that, as managing editor emeritus Mark Rea says elsewhere in this issue, was "something that for most of the past century would have been lauded as an outstanding defensive play."

Upon further review, Wade was called for targeting. Not only was Clemson's drive extended, but one of the Buckeyes' best defenders was tossed from the game.

Wade's value was shown almost immediately when Tiger quarterback Trevor Lawrence went after his replacement, Amir Riep, who was called for pass interference, putting Clemson in business at the OSU 16. Three plays later the Tigers had their first score, and the game was never the same.

As a public service, we have printed the rules pertaining to several of the controversial plays on page 9 of this issue. If you follow the letter of the law, I can see how officials made the targeting call. It is the rule with which I have a problem.

I am all for player safety. Very much so. But I am concerned about the way defense is being legislated out of football. Pretty soon all of the great sport of college football will look like the Big 12, with 52-49 scores the norm.

I think if you are going to maintain this rule you have to look at intent. The only intent I saw on Wade's part was to make a good—no, great—defensive play. The fact that Lawrence lowered his head into the path of Wade's helmet makes the Buckeye defender's intent even more questionable. In fact, if I read the rule right, you could have tossed Lawrence for "lowering the head before attacking by initiating forcible contact with the crown of the helmet."

Tossing Lawrence would have evened things up!

Turning to Rea again, "the so-called targeting rule with regard to how it is enforced on the college level is what happens when good intentions cross paths with bad implementation."

This is really a rule that needs to be reviewed, and I felt the same way when Joey Bosa was thrown out of this same Fiesta Bowl vs. Notre Dame after the 2015 season for what was another outstanding defensive play.

But as the rule reads, "When in question, it is a foul." Off to the showers, Shaun.

As for Dobbins' catch crossing the goal line

that was overturned, I think that was the right call. Buckeyes fans seem 50-50 on that one.

"If a player goes to the ground in the act of catching a pass (with or without contact by an opponent) he must maintain complete and continuous control of the ball throughout the process of contacting the ground, whether in the field of play or *in the end zone* (my italics)."

But the one that every Buckeye fan and most football fans and observers seem to agree on is the negated scoop and score.

According to the rules, a catch occurs when a receiver "maintains control of the ball long enough to enable him to perform an act common to the game, i.e., long enough to pitch or hand the ball, *advance it*, avoid or ward off an opponent, etc. (again, my italics)."

I looked at every angle they showed on that play and I had to wonder what the replay officials were looking at. In each replay it appeared that Justyn Ross caught the ball and was heading upfield, "advancing" it, before Jeff Okudah knocked it away. I always ask myself if I am just being a homer, but at the very least there was not enough evidence to overturn the call on the field.

One other rule we printed was one concerning the process of a replay. After the game, a couple of different people told me that they were surprised to hear that it was the official on the field who ruled on a replay. I had never heard of such a thing either. In fact that seemed quite strange to me.

"To reverse an on-field ruling, *the replay official* must be convinced beyond all doubt by indisputable video evidence through one or more video replays provided to the monitor (again, my italics)."

That sounds like the decision is made in the booth.

I just hope that 20 years from now, Buckeye fans don't sound like Miami Hurricane fans who are *still* (my italics) complaining about that pass-interference call in the 2002 national championship game. Despite all the controversy, the Buckeyes, like the Hurricanes before them, had their chances to win that game.

It was a great game and a great season, and as promised, I am going to savor it.

### Easy Way To Miss The End

With all the big plays, controversial plays and twists and turns in the Fiesta Bowl, action on our BuckeyeSports.com "Official Game Thread" was lively during the game. Interestingly, much of the chatter had to do with former Buckeye quarterback Kirk Herbstreit's repeated mention of Clemson defensive coordinator Brent Venables.

The old drinking game of having to drink a shot every time a name or phrase is mentioned was brought up and it was noted that if you downed one each time Herbstreit mentioned Venables, you would have passed out in the first quarter or shortly thereafter and would not have had to endure the painful ending of the game.

Conspiracy theorists might point out that one of Herbstreit's sons is a walk-on defensive back, playing under Venables.

For the record, Venables and his Clemson defense entered the game yielding 244.7 yards per game. Despite all of Herbie's props to the DC, Ohio State racked up 516 yards of total offense, more than double what the Tigers had been giving up.

In fairness to Venables, the Tiger defense did stiffen when it had to, yielding only the three pivotal field goals in the first half. Many Buckeye fans, however, would point out Clemson's red-zone defense was aided by Dobbins' butterfingers as much as Venables' coaching.

Herbstreit has come a long way from his early days on the national television scene, when he seemed to go overboard in his intent to prove he was not a homer for his alma mater, a demeanor that caused many Buckeye fans to turn against him. I believe most in Buckeye Nation now find him a source of pride.

But if ESPN does any sort of quality control of their broadcasts and Herbstreit reviews his call of the game, he may find, indeed, that he was a little caught up in Venables-mania.

Speaking of defense, the Buckeye defense held Clemson to 131 yards less than it had gained per game up to that point and better than 17 points below their scoring average.

However, last year's ugly problem reared its head at the Fiesta Bowl as Ohio State, seemingly for the first time all season, was vulnerable to the big play.

Most visible was Lawrence's 67-yard touchdown run to pull Clemson within two before the break. But the Tigers put the game away with touchdown receptions of 53 and 34 yards by Travis Etienne. In fact, on the game-winning touchdown drive, Lawrence had a 38-yard pass to Amari Rodgers to set up Etienne's 34-yard score.

When not yielding those long plays, the Ohio State defense clicked, forcing four three-and-outs and six total drives of 21 yards or under, not counting running out the clock at the end of the half and the game. The Buckeyes put on one of the hardest-hitting displays of defense that I can remember. I kept waiting for all that pounding to take its toll on Lawrence, but it never did. He proved as tough as the Buckeyes who faced him.

By the way, heading into the national championship game between Clemson and LSU, Ohio State was No. 1 in the country in total defense, giving up 259.7 yards a game as compared to the 264.1 by No. 2 Clemson.

In fairness to Venables and his troops, Clemson was leading the country in scoring defense, giving up 11.5 points a game, while Ohio State checked in at No. 4 with 13.7.

But despite all of Herbstreit's babbling about the master Clemson defensive coordinator, I think most Buckeye fans were perfectly content with the defensive staff of Jeff Hatley, Greg Mattison, Larry Johnson and the rest of the crew. How about a little love for them, Kirk?

### My Surprise, Disappointment

The Buckeye who most surprised me in the Fiesta Bowl was Chrisman, a weapon for Ohio State who had been somewhat of a nonfactor down the stretch this season.

Chrisman averaged 45.3 yards on six punts with three inside the 20 and did his job to try to secure the victory when, as mentioned, he buried the Tigers at their 6-yard line to start their game-winning drive.

My biggest disappointment was Master Teague, who had been masterful all season but gained just nine yards on seven carries with a long of five. A big game from Teague might have eased the pressure on the gimpy Dobbins to produce and paved the way to a Buckeye victory.

On the two drives between the time Dobbins left the game late in the second quarter and hobbled back on the field in the third, Ohio State had a three-and-out and a drive that stalled at the Tiger 45 with Teague carrying a combined four times for three net yards.