

OPINION

Sermon Bails Out Mistake-Prone Buckeyes



Vol. 40, No. 12

Dec. 26, 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.

PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

PRINT PRODUCT COORDINATOR
Andrew Lind

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow
Andrew Lind

CONTRIBUTORS
Wyatt Crosher Patrick Mayhorn
Bob Roehm David Breithaupt
Bill Conley Mark Schmetzer
Joe Dempsey Steve Siegfried
Rich Exner Jeff Svoboda
Mike Wachsman Craig Merz

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Jan Jager Dave Tebay
Ron Friedman

2020-21 PUBLICATION SCHEDULE (VOL. 40)

No. 13 Jan 16 or 23	No. 19 April 10
No. 14 Jan. 30	No. 20 April 24
No. 15 Feb. 12	No. 21 May
No. 16 Feb. 27	No. 22 June
No. 17 March 13	No. 23 July
No. 18 March 27	No. 24 August

The 2021 Buckeye Sports Bulletin schedule is subject to change.

The next issue will be mailed on Jan. 12 or Jan. 19.

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

Wachsman Elite Donor:



BSB is a charter member of the College Sports Publishers Association.

Sometimes the clichés write themselves, but it almost goes without saying that Ohio State head coach Ryan Day finally got religion during the second half of the Big Ten championship by repeatedly handing the ball to Trey Sermon.

Sermon ran 29 times for 331 yards – both an all-time OSU single-game record as well as a new conference title game record – and two touchdowns to strap the Buckeyes on his back and lead them to a 22-10 victory Dec. 19 against No. 15 Northwestern.

After repeatedly trying to pound a square peg into a round hole for much of the game, Day finally shelved a sputtering passing attack in favor of a ground-and-pound attack the Wildcats never really stopped all afternoon. OSU rushed for only 94 yards in the first half, but that came on just 17 attempts, good for an average of 5.5 yards per carry.

That average went up just a bit to 11.3 yards per carry in the second half as a tiring Northwestern defense obviously had no answer for Sermon, whose 271 yards after halftime would have still ranked as the fourth-best single-game output in program history. The graduate transfer from Oklahoma broke off runs of 21, 65, 33, 28, 25 and 23 yards during the game. As a team, Ohio State previously had only 15 rushes of 20 or more yards all season.

That the Buckeyes didn't rely on their punishing ground game until crunch time was a bit mystifying in that quarterback Justin Fields was clearly having an off-day.

Missing from the lineup, most likely due to testing positive for COVID-19, were nearly two dozen players including sure-handed receiver Chris Olave as well as valuable backup Jaxon Smith-Njigba, and the OSU passing attack fizzled as a result. In addition, there were some poor throws and questionable decisions on the part of Fields, who apparently sprained the thumb on his throwing hand, while on more than one opportunity a young member of the receiving corps appeared to run the wrong route.

Fields wound up throwing for only 114 yards, his lowest total since arriving at Ohio State, and no touchdowns – another OSU career first. Entering the game as one of the nation's most accurate passers at 78.1 percent, Fields at one point experienced a 4-for-16 stretch and finished with only 12 completions in 27 attempts. That 44.4 completion percentage was another low mark since the 6-3, 228-pound junior transferred from Georgia and joined the Buckeyes in 2019.

Fields also threw two more interceptions, giving him five picks over his last 79 passes. Prior to that, he had thrown only three interceptions in 478 career attempts.

It appeared – at least in the first half – that the Buckeyes were conflicted on what kind of offensive attack they wanted to use against Northwestern. The Wildcats entered the game boasting the No. 2 pass defense in the Big Ten, and Day seemed intent upon testing that ranking as Fields threw the ball on each of OSU's first five plays from scrimmage.

Then after the first rushing attempt of the game, a modest 4-yard gain by starting running back Master Teague, Fields threw the ball again, an 11-yard completion to freshman Julian Fleming, who started in place of Olave. But that was followed by six straight running plays in perhaps one of the most disjointed drives of the disjointed 2020 season.

A holding call wiped out a 7-yard touchdown run by Fields, and the Buckeyes wound up settling for a 41-yard field goal from kicker Blake Haubeil, something of a letdown after holding the ball for nearly 8½ minutes to start the game.

What followed was a series of missteps by the Ohio State defense, which fell into its old habit of missing tackles, missing assignments and missing opportunities. The Wildcats took full

advantage and jumped out to a 10-3 lead midway through the second quarter.

Sprinkled in were some excellent individual plays such as an end-zone interception by linebacker Justin Hilliard, who leapt in front of Northwestern tight end John Raine early in the third quarter to prevent the Wildcats from going up by a 17-6 margin.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

Hilliard later recovered a Northwestern fumble on the second play of the fourth quarter, part of a day that included a career-high nine tackles for the fifth-year senior. Junior safety Josh Proctor also had his first interception of the season after dropping what would have been a pick-six earlier in the game.

Meanwhile, defensive tackle Haskell Garrett was a disruptive force for much of the game, helping the Buckeyes hold the Wildcats to only 105 yards rushing one week after they had torched Illinois for 411 yards on the ground. And while we're on the subject of Garrett – he was only third-team All-Big Ten from the coaches and honorable mention from the media? Are you kidding?

Aside from Hilliard, Proctor and Garrett, it would be difficult to single out any other OSU defender in what is becoming an alarmingly norm of surrendering big plays to average offensive teams. Early in the third quarter, facing a third-and-6 situation, Northwestern put running back Cam Porter behind center in a Wildcat formation. Everyone from coast to coast, including my grandmother who doesn't know a football from a footstool, knew a running play was coming, yet Ohio State linebackers Pete Werner and Tuf Borland seemed confused on where to line up. The result: a 16-yard gain by Porter to the OSU 11.

Three plays later, Hilliard grabbed his interception in the end zone, but two linebackers – one a first-team All-Big Ten performer according to conference coaches as well as a Butkus Award semifinalist and the other a three-time team captain and four-year starter – out of position on an obvious run? That's equal parts baffling and unacceptable.

The Buckeyes also gave up several other chunk plays, including a 34-yard run by Northwestern quarterback Peyton Ramsey and a 31-yard pass from Ramsey to wideout Ramaud Chiao Khiao-Bowman on a third-and-9 play in the third quarter. Chiao Khiao-Bowman had eight receptions for 103 yards, the third time in six games this season Ohio State has allowed an opposing receiver to crack the century mark. Last year, that happened only once in 14 games.

OSU also reverted to sloppy tackling against the Wildcats. That was especially true among linebackers and defensive backs, allowing Northwestern receivers to gain 108 of their 224 yards after the catch.

When the Buckeyes make a giant leap in competition, that stuff is going to have to get cleaned up or someone's going to get their doors blown off.

Anyone watching the ACC championship game – and hopefully that included the entire Ohio State defense including the coaching staff – has to be a little bit queasy about entering the College Football Playoff with a rematch against Clemson. The Tigers pretty much had their way with second-ranked Notre Dame, rolling up 541 total yards on the way to a 34-10 rout.

Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence made a particular statement, accounting for 412 yards and three touchdowns through the air and on the ground. Running back Travis Etienne rushed for 124 yards and one score, and receiver Amari Rodgers caught eight balls for 121 yards and a touchdown.

Ohio State coaches, players and fans might remember those three dudes. After falling behind the Buckeyes by a 16-0 margin in the first half of last year's playoff semifinal, the Tigers came back to win a 29-23 decision with Lawrence, Etienne and Rodgers being the difference-makers.

Lawrence completed only 18 of 33 pass attempts and was sacked three times, but it was his 67-yard touchdown run just before halftime that set the tone for his team's second-half comeback. Likewise, Etienne was held to just 36 yards rushing by Ohio State, but he turned a short flip from Lawrence into a 34-yard touchdown with just 1:49 remaining. One snap earlier, it was Rodgers with a 38-yard reception to set up Etienne's game-winning romp.

Those are exactly the type of plays that exploited the aforementioned weaknesses in the Ohio State defense, weaknesses such as sloppy tackling and constantly being out of position. Those are fundamental errors the kinds of which championship-caliber teams do not make – especially against championship-caliber opponents.

Title Game History

If you think for a minute that Ohio State is not the elite team in the Big Ten, take a look at the brief 10-year history of the Big Ten Championship Game.

The Buckeyes have appeared in six of the 10 games, tying Wisconsin for the most appearances, and have won it a record five times, including the last four in a row. Michigan State (three) and Northwestern (two) are the only other teams with multiple appearances while Iowa, Nebraska and Penn State have each made the title game once.

Sermon and his 331 yards obliterated the championship game rushing record of 220 set by Ezekiel Elliott against Wisconsin in 2014. Meanwhile, Braxton Miller holds the record for most yards rushing by a quarterback (142 vs. Michigan State in 2013), and Dwayne Haskins set passing records with 499 yards and five touchdowns against Northwestern in 2018.

The pass efficiency record also belongs to a Buckeye. Cardale Jones finished at 255.8 with his performance against Wisconsin in 2014. Devin Smith was on the receiving end of three touchdowns passes from Jones in that game, and that ties him for most TD catches in the title game.

Sean Nuernberger kicked a record eight PATs in that 59-0 rout of the Badgers and added a field goal to give him 11 kicking points in the game, another record. And as if Wisconsin hadn't had enough from OSU's offensive onslaught, Cameron Johnston got off a 73-yard punt in that game, another title-game record.

How ugly was that 2014 game for the Badgers? Doran Grant grabbed two interceptions (another record) and Michael Bennett forced two fumbles. That's also a record. Oh, and Jerome Baker tallied 12 solo tackles among his 16 total stops – both title-game records. That was also the game in which Joey Bosa returned a fumble for a touchdown, a record that has been equaled but never broken.

The Buckeyes even own the best punting average in the Big Ten Championship Game. That came courtesy of Drue Chrisman, who averaged 54.8 yards on four attempts against Northwestern in 2018.

Matching Ohio State's record five championships are a record five game MVP awards – Jones (2014), J.K. Dobbins (2017), Haskins (2018), Fields (2019) and Sermon (2020).

OHIO STATE VS. NORTHWESTERN

Buckeyes Use Sermon To Mount Comeback

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Trey Sermon took a wounded passing game and a depleted roster on his back and broke the Ohio State and Big Ten Championship Game rushing records with 331 yards when the No. 4 Buckeyes defeated No. 14 Northwestern 22-10 in Indianapolis on Dec. 19 for their fourth straight conference title.

Quarterback Justin Fields struggled without star receiver Chris Olave, and the Buckeyes (6-0) trailed 10-6 at the half against the stout Northwestern (6-2) defense before Sermon came to the rescue.

Sermon, who had two second-half touchdowns among 29 carries for the game, bettered Eddie George's mark of 314 yards in 1995 and the championship game record of 220 by Ezekiel Elliott in OSU's 59-0 win vs. Wisconsin in 2014.

Sermon's first TD made it 13-10 late in the third quarter, and he extended the margin to the final score with just over four minutes to play. After gaining 60 yards on seven carries (8.6 average) through two quarters, he rushed 22 times for 271 yards (12.3) in the second half.

"I was able to get in a groove and keep it rolling," Sermon said. "My teammates were there to support me. They made it easy."

The Buckeyes were shorthanded for a second straight game with 22 players, including Olave, starting linebacker Baron Browning and first-team punter Drue Chrisman, unavailable because of possible COVID-19 issues, other illnesses or injuries. The school did not specify.

OSU was down 23 players, including three starting offensive linemen, when it defeated Michigan State 52-12 on Dec. 5.

It appeared the Buckeyes would not miss a beat when they opened the game with authority vs. the Wildcats.

Ohio State took the kickoff and held the ball for 16 plays, covering 51 yards and running 8:26 off the clock, but for the first time this season, the Buckeyes did not get a touchdown on their opening drive.

Fields did pop into the end zone on a 7-yard run, but left guard Harry Miller was called for holding, pushing the line of scrimmage back to the 17. On third down from the 9, Fields suffered a 15-yard sack by Cameron Mitchell and Chris Bergin to force Blake Haubeil's 41-yard field goal for a 3-0 lead at 6:34.

True freshman Julian Fleming had three catches for 30 yards on the aborted drive.

Northwestern shredded the defense to take a 7-3 lead at 4:02 of the first on a 9-yard run by Cam Porter to complete the Wildcats' first possession of seven plays and 75 yards in 2:32. Quarterback Peyton Ramsey kept the drive alive on third-and-2 from the OSU 43 when he escaped pressure and ran 34 yards to the 9 on the play prior to Porter's score.

Northwestern continued in the second quarter to chunk yardage to take a 10-3 lead at 8:46 on a 47-yard field goal by Charlie Kuhbander. Starting from their 6, the Wildcats reached the OSU 24 but were pushed back to the 29 on a third-down after a 5-yard loss on a screen pass.

The big play of the 14 that used 6:00 in the series was a 22-yard catch to the NU 42 by Rameau Chiaokhiao-Bowman when the Wildcats needed 7 yards on third down. Bryce Kirtz contributed two catches for 16 yards, and Ramsey added a 9-yard rush.

Ohio State squandered another opportuni-



WORKHORSE BACK – Senior running back Trey Sermon rushed for a school single-game-record 331 yards in Ohio State's 22-10 win over Northwestern in the Big Ten Championship Game.

COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

ty later in the quarter. Consecutive passes of 21 yards to Garrett Wilson and 23 to Fleming put the Buckeyes at the NU 25. Fields was sacked for 9 yards, got 8 back on the next play with a run but threw incomplete to Wilson on third down to set up a 43-yard field goal by Haubeil to make it 10-6 with 5:23 to go at the end of an eight-play drive that consumed 3:23.

After a Wildcat punt, for the third time in the first half the Buckeyes drove to the 25 or better but this time came away with nothing because Brandon Joseph made his NCAA-leading sixth interception, a spectacular one-handed grab falling backwards while guarding Wilson in the end zone with 28 seconds left to preserve the lead.

The Buckeyes had driven deep thanks to a 21-yard run by Sermon, Fields' scramble for 24 and a pass interference that placed the ball at the Northwestern 25. Wilson had two receptions to set up second-and-5 from the 9 before the pick.

Fields, who completed five of his first seven passes for 21 yards, was 9 of 20 for 101 yards with that interception in the first half. Hampered by an injury to the thumb on his right (throwing) hand, he finished 12 of 27 for 114 yards and two interceptions.

Northwestern got a taste of its own medicine on the first possession of the second half. Chiaokhiao-Bowman had a third-down catch for 31 yards, and later Porter converted another third down with a 16-yard run to the 11. But on third-and-8 from the 9, Ramsey was intercepted in the end zone by Justin Hilliard.

The Wildcats almost immediately got the ball back when Fields was intercepted by Mitchell at the Northwestern 49.

The real fault was that receiver Jameson

Williams broke his route near the right sideline.

NU punted the ball back to Ohio State, but the Buckeyes wasted a 65-yard run by Sermon and got nothing when Haubeil missed from 42 yards with 7:27 left in the third.

Sermon's jaunt from his own 7 to the Northwestern 28 was followed by Fields' running for 8. On second down, he threw incomplete to Wilson. A delay of game then pushed the ball back to the 25 on third down, and another incompletion ensued.

The Wildcats failed to extend the lead on their next try after back-to-back penalties on Tyreke Smith (roughing the passer) and Jonathon Cooper (horse collar tackle) gave Northwestern the ball at the OSU 25. A 9-yard loss on a run by Riley Lees on first down eventually led to a missed 46-yard attempt from Kuhbander.

Ohio State eschewed the pass entirely to take a 13-10 lead on Sermon's 9-yard run with 2:41 left in the third.

He ran for 3, 5, 6 and 33 to the Wildcat 24. Fields then rushed for 5 before true freshman Miyan Williams came in for Sermon and on his only carry of the game went 10 yards to the 9. Sermon scored on the next play. The Buckeyes went 71 yards on seven plays in 2:23.

OSU could not take advantage of Josh Proctor's interception at the NU 41 on the ensuing series and went three-and-out.

The Buckeyes increased the advantage to 16-10 on Haubeil's 26-yarder with 12:07 remaining in the game after Ramsey's fumble was recovered at the NU 40 by Hilliard after it was forced by Pete Werner.

Sermon went 28 yards on the first play to

the 12. He then lost a yard, Fields gained 7 back but Sermon lost 3 on a catch to stall the drive at the 9.

After a touchback on an NU punt with 8:49 left, Sermon took over.

He carried the ball on seven of nine plays and gained 64 of the 80 yards, including a 3-yard TD with 4:03 to go. He had a 25-yard run on the second snap. Wilson had a 12-yard grab, and Fields ran for 4.

A two-point conversion was unsuccessful, and the score remained 22-10.

OSU stopped the Wildcats on the next possession. The Wildcats got to their 38 before a fourth-down incompletion sealed the Buckeyes' win.

Ramsey was 24 for 37 for 224 yards with two picks and a fumble lost.

OSU got the ball with 2:24 left, and Sermon ran for 7 yards. He then bulled his way for 23 to the 8 to break George's record. He added 6 more yards on two attempts before the Buckeyes let the clock run out at the 2-yard line.

"That's a heck of a football team to come in here shorthanded and play the way they did," Northwestern coach Pat Fitzgerald said of the Buckeyes.

Numbers

The Buckeyes had 513 total yards to 329 for the Wildcats. OSU rushed for 399 yards on a 9.1 average. Northwestern entered yielding 121.9 yards and a 3.8 average. NU ran for 105 yards (3.1), 10 more yards than the Buckeyes had been giving up. ... Fleming (53 yards) and Wilson (49) each had four catches. In addition to his pick and fumble recovery, Hilliard had a team-high nine tackles (five solo).

OHIO STATE VS. NORTHWESTERN

Sermon Has Historic Day To Win Big Ten Title

In the early part of the season, Ohio State's run game was considered the weak point of the offense as junior quarterback Justin Fields put up strong passing numbers in games against Nebraska, Penn State and Rutgers, throwing for 11 touchdowns and zero interceptions with just 11 incompletions as the lone blemishes on his stat line.

During that three-game opening stretch, neither of the Buckeyes' primary rushing options – sophomore running back Master Teague and senior running back Trey Sermon – made a large impact, with Teague's 211 rushing yards and four touchdowns holding an advantage over Sermon's 172 yards on the ground.

GAME NOTEBOOK

Wyatt Crosher

Both had strong performances against Indiana, though Sermon's (nine carries, 60 yards) came in much fewer opportunities than Teague (26 carries, 169 yards, two touchdowns).

Then, it was the senior grad transfer from Oklahoma's chance to show something against Michigan State, rushing 10 times for 112 yards and a score, outpacing Teague's output (14 rushes, 46 yards), even with fewer carries.

However, even a recent stretch of strong performances did not prepare even the most optimistic Ohio State fans for what Sermon was going to do in the Big Ten Championship Game.

In the game against Northwestern, Sermon ran the ball 29 times for 331 yards and two touchdowns in the 22-10 win, breaking both the Big Ten Championship Game record and the Ohio State single-game record in the process.

"Trey had a lot of explosive runs out there," Fields said. "I mean he played his



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

OUT OF NOWHERE – Running back Trey Sermon had just 344 rushing yards and one touchdown in Ohio State's first five games but nearly matched his season total with 331 yards and two scores in the 22-10 win over Northwestern.

ass off. He did a great job today. I think when you have a player that's in a rhythm like that, you just have to keep feeding him the ball, and that's what we did."

The yardage surpassed a 314-yard output from College Football Hall of Fame inductee Eddie George, who set the record in a 1995 matchup against Illinois, rushing the ball 36 times in the 41-3 win.

Sermon, who broke the record on his 27th carry – nine fewer than it took George – had just 344 yards on the ground

heading into the game and nearly doubled his season output by the end of his game at Lucas Oil Stadium.

"When I'm in the zone, I just feel like, personally, everything just really slows down," Sermon said. "The game really just slows down, and I'm able to just see everything develop and just continue to be decisive and just make the right reads and make the right cuts. I was able to really just get in a groove and just keep it rolling, and my teammates were there to support me, so they just kind of made it easy for me."

The Oklahoma transfer found himself with so many rushing opportunities partially because of an injury to Teague that took the third-year sophomore out of the game after just two carries for 23 yards.

The other reason Sermon became the focal point of the offense was a rare off game by Fields, who finished the day completing 12 of his 27 passes for 114 yards and two interceptions. He also ran the ball 12 times for 35 yards in a down performance for the Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year, a lackluster showing that was

partially due to what Fields believes is a sprained thumb.

But the injury was not enough for Fields to push the blame entirely off of his down performance on the day.

"It's pretty stiff right now," Fields said. "I really can't move it, but I think it's just a sprain, so I'll probably just get some ice on it and it should be good within a few days."

"In the first half it wasn't even the thumb. I think it was just overall execution, and again that falls on me. I'm not blaming it on my thumb because I don't want people to look at my thumb as an excuse. It's just flat-out me."

Fields said he was happy about Sermon's breakout performance, especially considering the two have known each other since they were on opposing high school football teams in the state of Georgia.

"I'm very proud of him," the quarterback said. "I mean we've been working out since like junior year of high school. We played against each other in high school. Just seeing his hard work pay off, I know the kind of guy he is, I know how hard he

Press
Pub + on 5th
GOOD FOOD + FINE DRINKS

Press good food
fine drinks **Grill**

Both locations open for lunch & dinner daily!

1505 W. 5th Ave
Near Grandview Ave
614-817-1198

Monday - Saturday:
11 AM - 10 PM

Sunday:
NOON - 10 PM
KITCHEN UNTIL 9:30 PM NIGHTLY

741 N. High St
In the Short North
614-298-1014

Monday - Saturday:
11:30 AM - 10 PM

Sunday:
NOON - 10 PM
KITCHEN UNTIL 9:30 PM NIGHTLY

presscolumbus.com



Robert Bowen



THE
CASE BOWEN
COMPANY

James Case



COMMERCIAL & ASSOCIATION
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT
Brokerage Services | Sales | Leasing

www.CaseBowen.com | 614.799.9800
6255 Corporate Center Drive | Dublin, OH

OHIO STATE VS. NORTHWESTERN

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

On offense, it can be summed up in two words: Trey Sermon. The Oklahoma grad transfer running back had a historic performance against Northwestern, rushing 29 times for 331 yards and Ohio State's only two touchdowns in the 12-point win. The yardage was not only a Big Ten Championship Game record but also a program record, passing Eddie George's 314 yards on the ground against Illinois. George reached that total in 36 carries. Sermon took over for an injured Master Teague and built on a strong first half with an absolutely explosive final 30 minutes, amassing 271 of his yards on the ground in the third and fourth quarters to help put the game away.

Defensively, the Buckeyes forced three turnovers, including an interception and a fumble recovery by sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard. Hilliard, who was replacing senior linebacker Baron Browning, finished with a team-high nine tackles, five of which were solo, and two tackles for loss along with the pick and recovered fumble. Junior safety Josh Proctor had the other interception and finished with four tackles (three solo).

What Didn't Work

It was not a day to remember for junior quarterback Justin Fields, who finished the day completing just 12 of 27 passes for 114 yards and two interceptions, while also adding 35 yards on 12 carries. Fields was also sacked three times for 29 yards and was out of sync with his receivers through the air. Some of that can be attributed to a thumb injury Fields suffered, but prior to that, the third-year

quarterback was still having issues with the Wildcats' defense, completing just nine of his 20 attempts in the first half. Without junior wide receiver Chris Olave in the offense, Fields threw to sophomore wideout Garrett Wilson 10 times, but the pair connected on only four of those attempts for 49 yards.

It was not a perfect day for the defense, with Northwestern going 75 yards in seven plays for a TD on its first offensive drive of the game. Senior wide receiver Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman had a big day, hauling in eight passes for 103 yards, both numbers that were game highs.

Play Of The Game

Northwestern threatened to take a 17-6 lead on the team's opening drive of the third quarter. The Wildcats drove down to the Ohio State 9-yard line in nine plays thanks to a 31-yard connection between Peyton Ramsey and Chiaokhiao-Bowman, as well as a 16-yard run by Cam Porter. Facing third-and-8, Ramsey threw into the end zone hoping to push the lead to 11. Instead, Hilliard made an impressive defensive play and intercepted the pass to stop the drive and to keep the Buckeyes within a touchdown. Ohio State would not directly score off the turnover, but it was the closest the Wildcats would get to putting up seven points after scoring on their opening offensive drive.

The interception was Hilliard's first of the season and the first since his pick against Penn State in 2019, a play that also helped to seal that Buckeye victory.

— Wyatt Crosher

works. Seeing him having success on the field is just great to see."

Sermon's 331-yard outburst was not against a bad Northwestern rush defense, either. The Wildcats ranked No. 21 in the country and fourth in the Big Ten with 121.2 yards allowed per game on the ground, while also allowing just two rushing touchdowns through seven games.

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day knew it was not a defense that the Buckeyes expected to be able to run through, and that led to an effort to get the pass game going maybe longer than most thought it should, considering how well Sermon was playing.

"We were always going to be aggressive," Day explained. "That's just the way we are, and we didn't execute great. I think we'll probably look back and have a lot to coach off of and to fix, but the run game started to go, and to run for over 300-plus yards. We wanted to throw on them early, wear them down a little bit and then run it a little bit in the second half, and that's kind of what played out. It wasn't clean, and not making excuses, it's just what it was. That's what this whole season's been. I mean this game was a microcosm of what these kids have been through this season."

Even in a game that wasn't clean, Day had plenty of compliments for his veteran running back, as well as the Joe Moore Award-nominated offensive line for their efforts on the ground.

"He ran hard, and the offensive line played unbelievable," the coach said. "The tight ends played really hard, and they're the guys that get lost in the mix, too, these tight ends. I mean they block their tails off."

"There was a time probably after Week 2 or Week 3, we really weren't sure what's going on," Day said of Sermon. "Just maybe not hitting the hole right, didn't have a lot of confidence, and we didn't know Trey, so we weren't sure exactly what we had there. And then to see him persevere again, through all that, to play the way he did in this game and break records like that? That's tremendous, against a really good run-stopping defense."

After a difficult start to the season for this rushing attack, a performance like this by Sermon, as well as the offensive line, was a major accomplishment for the group, at least according to junior center Josh Myers.

"Early on there were a lot of questions about our running game, and I have to tell you guys, it was just the best feeling," Myers said. "(Northwestern) allowed 3.8 yards per rushing attempt, and we averaged over nine on 44 rushing attempts, so I can't even express how happy I am about that."

"With Trey, we see it from a different angle than you guys do, but we see it the

same way you guys do. After he broke a couple out, even in the first half, I was like 'Oh, he's about to go off.' I knew it was just a matter of time and, man, did it feel good."

This type of performance was not something that had been seen from Sermon in his short time with the Buckeyes, or even during his tenure at Oklahoma. He came into this game with a career high of 206 yards, which he achieved in 2018 against Texas Tech on 26 carries.

But Sermon said he knows what he brings to the team and that this is the type of performance he was envisioning when he made the transfer over to Ohio State this past offseason.

"I am aware of my ability and I know I'm more than capable of making plays and just playing my game, which is making guys miss and winning at the second level," Sermon said. "They brought me here for a reason. They know that I'm a great player and I can make an impact, and I just had to really believe that in myself as well, just trust my coaching and just trust my teammates around me."

Hilliard Excels In Starting Role

Ohio State was without 24 total players against Northwestern, with 22 listed as unavailable and safeties Marcus Hooker and Ronnie Hickman also missing the game entirely. One of those unavailable players was senior linebacker Baron Browning, which led to the start of sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard.

Hilliard not only earned his place in the lineup, but he became the star of the defense, leading Ohio State with nine tackles (five solo) and two tackles for loss while also intercepting a pass and recovering a fumble to help keep Northwestern at 10 points on the day.

The impressive showing is a bright spot in what has been a tumultuous collegiate career for Hilliard, a former five-star who has spent much of his time with the Buckeyes recovering from injuries.

"This whole journey has been something," Hilliard said. "It's been tough, but it's been such a blessing at the same time. Just the journey I've been on and the guys that have been here with me to stick with me and push me through some of those tougher times, and same thing as today. I knew I had to step up today in a bigger role and I'm glad I was able to."

There were many big plays made by Hilliard against the Wildcats, but likely

none bigger than his pick of quarterback Peyton Ramsey in the end zone to stop a drive that was threatening to put Ohio State down by two scores.

"It's something that we practice," Hilliard said. "Our coaches put us in the best positions to make plays. I was ready for him to run that fade, and I was glad I was able to make that play."

The career-best effort from Hilliard, who nearly doubled his previous single-game high of five tackles, earned plenty of praise from his head coach following the victory. Day sounded thrilled to be asked about the performance from his veteran linebacker and team captain.

"Oh my god, how about the interception he had in the one-on-one? I mean he played his tail off," Day said. "Because of the game and because of all the things that people are going to want to talk about, there's a lot of things that happened today that people need to really respect."

2021 Buckeye Road Trips

OSU at Rutgers with New York City Tour
October 21-24

OSU at Indiana plus Beautiful Brown County & Columbus, IN
November 5-7

BOOK YOUR TRAVEL NOW FOR 2021

- Family & Small Group Private Tours
- "Close to Home" Tours including: Ohio, Pennsylvania, and That State Up North
- 2 Cruises: Hawaii & France Riverboat
- Ireland, Scotland & Italy

www.GoPrimeTours.com
614-766-5553
Doing Buckeye road trips
since 1996!



GRANDAD'S
PIZZA

(614)
488-9700

1254 W. 3rd Ave.
Columbus, OH 43212
Sunday - Thursday 11am - Midnight
Friday & Saturday 11am - 2am

OHIO STATE VS. NORTHWESTERN

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 22, Northwestern 10

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the Buckeyes' struggles on offense and playing without key players on short notice: "We certainly didn't execute the way we wanted to, but at the same time, at the end of the week we're losing guys. And we had 10 days of practice with certain guys in certain spots, and then we had to move people around."

Northwestern head coach Pat Fitzgerald on his initial thoughts after the 12-point loss against the Buckeyes: "Incredibly disappointed in the outcome of the game. First and foremost, I want to credit Ryan, his staff and his players. With them being shorthanded and the injuries we had in-game, we kind of had a short-handed game on both sides. I want to credit them. I want to credit their players. This was a hard-fought battle. They earned it and they're Big Ten champs for a reason, so congratulations to them. I'm just hurting for our seniors. We didn't come down here to play hard, we came down here to win. And not to get the job done is bitterly disappointing, but I'm really proud of them. They've led us to this point, they've done a terrific job, and now through adversity they're going to have to lead us again as we get ready for a couple weeks from now the privilege to represent the Big Ten at whatever bowl game destination that we get the privilege to go to."



Pat Fitzgerald

Ohio State junior quarterback Justin Fields when asked about having to play without standout junior wide receiver Chris Olave: "When you don't have one of your top receivers on the team, of course it's going to make my job harder, but I just think Northwestern did a great job on defense. They're a sound defense. They did a great job doing their jobs, but it's really on me, to be honest with you. I wish I could say that they just had it locked down, but again, I just have to be flat-out better and that's that. I'm not trying to make any excuse. I just have to be better."

Fitzgerald on how the Wildcats were able to limit Fields and the typically potent Ohio State passing attack: "Justin's not a good player; he's a great player. He's a top-10 pick for a reason. I just think we were able to get some pressure early, we tipped some balls, we had good coverage concepts, our guys competed. I mean, he was maybe off on a couple throws, it wasn't very much. But down the stretch is probably where I'll spend most of my time in our run fits and our gap fits and our block destruction and our tackling. It didn't look like us there the last quarter and a couple minutes. We've got to get those things fixed. It's something we pride ourselves in. And again, I'll credit the

Buckeyes there, they're really, really good."

Day on his team's overall performance and the defense's ability to create turnovers: "The defense really did a great job getting us the ball back, and they played really, really well in the second half. The run game and the defense were excellent. I thought special teams was solid. We just didn't do as good a job in the pass game. But hey listen, that's kind of how it goes. They have a really good team, too."

Ohio State sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard on the tough first half and how the defense responded to adversity: "There's panic around everywhere except for on the defensive sideline and in the defensive huddle, because we're trying to figure stuff out, we're trying to make adjustments and things like that. The whole attitude on the sideline was mostly just trying to figure out what adjustments we needed to make."

Ohio State senior running back Trey Sermon on what changed in the second half for the Buckeyes: "Our coaches just came and talked to us and really told us that only we were stopping ourselves. We just had a couple penalties and just made a couple mistakes, and our mentality was just to make the most of every opportunity and execute, and I mean I feel like we came out and did that in the second half."

Fitzgerald on the performance of Sermon and the Buckeye rushing game, and what went wrong for his defense: "He's a heck of a player, number one. He's a very talented guy. We had guys there one-on-one, he ran through them, and credit to him. But then we had some misfit gaps, we had some guys out of position, and then that put a lot of pressure on our linebackers to fit the right gaps, and we were falling off tackles. We weren't running our feet. And we really pride ourselves fundamentally and technically on those things, and we did not accomplish that. But first and foremost, I've got to give credit to Ohio State, and their talent and their players. We have to get that fixed when we want to put that beautiful Big Ten championship trophy in our case. We have to get that fixed. But there were two Big Ten teams here, and there were a bunch of other Big Ten teams watching, so we're where we want to be. We just have to continue to put the work in to get over this next hurdle, and I know our guys will, because they have a lot of pride and they have an amazing brotherhood."

Sermon on the performance of the Ohio State offensive line: "It was amazing, man. Those guys played their tails off. They fought hard from start to finish, and I'm just

grateful. They made my job easy just moving the line of scrimmage, controlling it and just dominating up front."

Day on the performance of fifth-year senior punter Zach Hoover, a former walk-on: "How about Zach Hoover stepping up? I mean he'd never punted before in a game, I don't think. I think that was the first time he's ever punted. He did a great job."

Fields on the play where he injured his thumb: "I think it was a third down in the red zone when I hit that dude and tried to put my hand down to brace myself for the ground, but I kind of landed straight on my thumb and it just bent backwards. But after that, I told Coach (Day) that I really couldn't throw the ball. I mean it was getting stiffer by the second. I think the last ball I completed was that out route to Garrett (Wilson), and then after that, I mean it was killing me. Hopefully, we have a good amount of time, so I can get it recovered and healed up."

Day on the injuries to Fields and running back Master Teague: "I think it looked to me, I mean just talking to (Fields) quickly, like it was just a sprain, so I think hopefully he'll recover pretty quickly from that. But we'll have to see. I don't know much about it. Master (Teague) was out of the game. We'll have to see what the doctors are saying about him over the next couple of days, and then we'll try and get you an update."

Fitzgerald when asked if Ohio State deserves a spot in the College Football Playoff: "I believe the Buckeyes deserve to be in the College Football Playoff because number one, they're undefeated. Number two, they have an incredibly talented team. They've overcome a bunch of adversity through COVID and running the gamut of the Big Ten season with the ups and downs. And I don't think everyone understands the emotion that goes into the challenges that they've been through. And then, when you look at their skill, they had to put some new guys in today, and they played outstanding. It wasn't like they really skipped a beat with a lot of those guys out. One guy goes down and there goes another four- or five-star talented player. I think they have as much talent as anybody to go compete for a national championship. And they're Big Ten champs. There's a lot of really good football teams out there, but to play the Big Ten gauntlet and the physicality that our brand of football plays in this league, if you're an undefeated champion here, in my humble opinion, you deserve the privilege to play for the national championship, and I believe they should be in the final four. And I look forward to the day when we get ourselves there."



TAILGATING'S FINEST

Upgrade your snacks!

BBQ Sauces • Mustards • Salsas
Pie Fillings • Fruit Spreads

Find us in select Kroger, Hills, Weiland's and other grocery/specialty stores across the region.
Can't find us? Ask your store to order us.
Crafted with pride in Athens, Ohio

BrownwoodFarms.com • (866) 589-6456

You Can Count On These Services From

THE QUICKPRINT CENTRE

1399 GRANDVIEW AVENUE • COLUMBUS, OHIO 43212
614-488-2683 • FAX 614-488-0059 • qpoh@aol.com

Offset-Printing	Digital Color Copies	Digital B&W Copies
Typesetting	Ship UPS	Rubber Stamps
NCR Forms	Fax Service	Business Cards
Laminating	Announcements	Binding
Brochures	Wedding Invitations	Labels

...a full service graphics facility

The Numbers Game

Ohio State 22, Northwestern 10

Dec. 19, 2020 – Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, IN

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
NORTHWESTERN	7	3	0	0	10
OHIO STATE	3	3	7	9	22

First Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 41-yard field goal, 6:34; 16 plays, 51 yards, 8:26 TOP.

NU – Porter, 9-yard rush (Kuhbander kick), 4:02; 7 plays, 75 yards, 2:32 TOP.

Second Quarter

NU – Kuhbander, 47-yard field goal, 8:46; 14 plays, 65 yards, 6:00 TOP.

OSU – Haubeil, 43-yard field goal, 5:23; 8 plays, 49 yards, 3:23 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Sermon, 9-yard run (Haubeil kick), 2:41; 7 plays, 71 yards, 2:23 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Haubeil, 26-yard field goal, 12:07; 5 plays, 31 yards, 2:19 TOP.

OSU – Sermon, 3-yard run (Wilson pass from Fields failed), 4:03; 9 plays, 80 yards, 4:46

Att. – 3,178

Weather – Indoor

Team Statistics

	NU	OSU
First Downs	19	24
Rushing	6	17
Passing	11	6
Penalty	2	1
Rushes-Yards	34-105	44-399
Passing Yards	224	114
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	24-37-2	12-27-2
Offensive Plays	71	71
Total Net Yards	329	513
Third Down Efficiency	7-16	4-11
Punts-Avg.	4-42.2	3-39.3
Fumbles-Lost	1-1	1-0
Penalties	2-15	5-45
Time of Possession	28:40	31:20

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – NU: Porter 16-61; Ramsey 10-28; McGowan 5-26; Bowser 1-1; TEAM 1-(-2); Lees 1-(-9). **OSU:** Sermon 29-331; Fields 12-35; Teague 2-23; Williams 1-10.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – NU: Ramsey 24-37-2-224-0. **OSU:** Fields 12-27-2-114-0.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – NU: Chiaokhiao-Bowman 8-103; Raine 4-35; McGowan 4-33; Porter 3-15; Kirtz 2-16; Mangieri 1-16; Lees 1-7; Hull 1-(-1). **OSU:** Fleming 4-53; Wilson 4-49; Sermon 3-4; Teague 1-8.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – NU: Adams 4-42.2. **OSU:** Hoover 3-39.3.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – NU: None. **OSU:** None.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) NU: McGowan 1-17. **OSU:** None.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – NU: Kuhbander (46). **OSU:** Haubeil (42).

FORCED FUMBLES – NU: None. **OSU:** Werner.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – NU: None. **OSU:** Hilliard 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS – NU: Joseph 1-0; Mitchell 1-0. **OSU:** Hilliard 1-0; Proctor 1-0.

SACKS – NU: Saunders 1.0-9; Brown 1.0-5; Bergin 0.5-8; Mitchell 0.5-7. **OSU:** Cooper 1.0-16; Garrett 1.0-4; Vincent 0.5-4; Borland 0.5-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – NU: Saunders 2.0-10; Brown 2.0-7; Adebawore 1.0-4; Hampton 1.0-3; Bergin 0.5-8; Mitchell 0.5-7. **OSU:** Hilliard 2.0-10; Garrett 2.0-7; Cooper 1.0-16; Hamilton 1.0-5; Borland 1.0-5; Vincent 1.0-4; Banks 0.5-1; Harrison 0.5-0.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – NU: Bergin 8-3-11; Gallagher 5-4-9; Fisher 4-5-9; Hampton 5-3-8; Brown 4-1-5; Joseph 4-1-5; Pace 3-2-5; Mitchell 2-2-4; Saunders 2-0-2; Adebawore 1-0-1; Leota 1-0-1; Ruiz 1-0-1; Spivak 0-1-1. **OSU:** Hilliard 5-4-9; Williamson 5-2-7; Borland 2-5-7; Cooper 5-1-6; Wade 5-1-6; Werner 5-0-5; Garrett 2-3-5; Proctor 3-1-4; Togiai 2-1-3; Banks 2-1-3; Vincent 0-3-3; Harrison 0-3-3; Ransom 2-0-2; Hamilton 1-0-1; Potter 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

NU – Raine, McGowan, Ramsey, Lees, Porter, Gerak, Urban, Vogel, Wiederkehr, Skoronski, Chiaokhiao-Bowman, Newsome, Pace, Hampton, Joseph, Bergin, Fisher, Adebawore, Gallagher, Saunders, Spivak, Brown, Brown, Kuhbander, Kirtz, Ruiz, Mitchell, Jackson, Niro, Heard, Bowser, Hull, Azema, Haskins, Gallagher, Mueller, Adams, McIntyre, Gillikin, O'Rourke, Hudetz, Butler, Leota, D'Antonio, Priebe, Schmidt, Wrather, Franks, Dennis, Gordon, Mangieri.

OSU – Fields, Fleming, Wilson, Williams, Teague, Davis, Myers, Munford, Miller, Petit-Frere, Farrell, Cooper, Banks, Smith, Werner, Williamson, Wade, Borland, Proctor, Hilliard, Togiai, Garrett, Mitchell, McCall, Cavazos, Vincent, Sermon, Harrison, Ransom, Johnson, Stover, Babb, Gant, Johnson, Watts, Williams, Hoover, Rossi, Pope, Simon, Robinson, Jackson, Jones, Cupp, Vimahi, Wray, Jones, Hausmann, Hamilton, Cage, Ruckert, Haubeil, Potter.

Season Statistics

2020-21 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Oct. 24	(5) NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	1,344
Oct. 31	(3) at Penn State (18)	W, 38-25	1,500
Nov. 7	(3) RUTGERS	W, 49-27	1,275
Nov. 14	(3) at Maryland	Canceled	N/A
Nov. 21	(3) INDIANA (10)	W, 42-35	635
Nov. 28	(3) at Illinois	Canceled	N/A
Dec. 5	(3) at Michigan State	W, 52-12	0
Dec. 12	(3) MICHIGAN	Canceled	N/A
Dec. 19	(3) Northwestern (15)	W, 22-10	3,178

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

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	154	110
Rushing	73	30
Passing	65	71
Penalty	16	9
Average Per Game/Rush	275.7	96.7
Average Per Game/Pass	253.5	261.3
Total Offense	3175	2148
Total Plays	436	396
Average Per Game	529.2	358.0
Average Per Play	7.3	5.4
Penalties-Yards	36-311	36-350
Fumbles-Lost	8-3	12-10
Third Down Efficiency	41-80	28-82
Percentage	51%	34%
Fourth Down Efficiency	5-7	6-11
Percentage	71%	55%
Sacks-Yards	17-103	18-116
Time Of Possession Avg.	33:39	26:15

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	59	83	62	51	0	255	42.5
Opponents	20	20	37	49	0	126	21.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Trey Sermon	84	675	8.0	3	65
Master Teague	89	449	5.0	6	41
Justin Fields	67	274	4.1	5	44
Steele Chambers	8	86	9.6	0	38
Garrett Wilson	2	67	33.5	0	62
C.J. Stroud	1	48	48.0	1	48
Miyani Williams	7	43	6.1	0	11
Jack Miller	2	23	11.5	1	21
Xavier Johnson	4	17	4.2	0	7
Demario McCall	1	12	12.0	0	12
Chris Olave	1	0	0.0	0	0
TEAM	5	-40	-8.0	0	0
OSU Totals	272	1654	6.1	16	65
OPP Totals	173	580	3.4	6	66

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Justin Fields	119	164	72.6	1521	15-5	174.6
OSU Totals	119	164	72.6	1521	15-5	174.6
OPP Totals	140	223	62.8	1568	9-6	129.8

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	38	621	16.3	5	65
Chris Olave	36	528	14.7	5	49
Jeremy Ruckert	9	60	6.7	3	13
Trey Sermon	8	34	4.2	0	13
Julian Fleming	7	74	10.6	0	23
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	6	17	2.8	1	7
Jameson Williams	5	78	15.6	1	38
Master Teague	4	45	11.2	0	23
Luke Farrell	3	26	8.7	0	16
Demario McCall	1	27	27.0	0	27
Jake Hausmann	1	13	13.0	0	13
Wyatt Davis	1	-2	-2.0	0	-2
OSU Totals	119	1521	12.8	15	65
OPP Totals	140	1568	11.2	9	68

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Master Teague	6	-	-	-	-	36
Blake Haubeil	-	17-17	-	-	5-7	32
Chris Olave	5	-	-	-	-	30
Garrett Wilson	5	-	-	-	-	30
Justin Fields	5	-	-	0-1	-	30
Jeremy Ruckert	3	-	-	-	-	18
Trey Sermon	3	-	-	-	-	18
Jake Seibert	-	13-13	-	-	0-1	13
Jameson Williams	1	-	-	-	-	6
Dominic DiMaggio	-	3-3	-	-	1-2	6
Jack Miller	1	-	-	-	-	6
Haskell Garrett	1	-	-	-	-	6

C.J. Stroud	1	-	-	-	-	6
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	1	-	-	-	-	6
Shaun Wade	1	-	-	-	-	6
Seyn Banks	1	-	-	-	-	6
OSU Totals	34	33-33	-	0-1	6-10	255
OPP Totals	16	10-10	0-1	0-5	6-7	126

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Blake Haubeil	2-3	1-1	2-3	0-0	5-7
Dominic DiMaggio	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2
Jake Seibert	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-1
OSU Totals	3-5	1-1	2-4	0-0	6-10
OPP Totals	1-1	3-3	1-2	1-1	6-7

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Drue Chrisman	18	813	45.2	0	74
Zach Hoover	3	118	39.3	0	43
OSU Totals	21	931	44.3	0	74
OPP Totals	34	1515	44.6	0	56

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Shaun Wade	2	36	18.0	1	36
Marcus Hooker	1	31	31.0	0	31
Josh Proctor	1	0	0.0	0	0
Justin Hilliard	1	0	0.0	0	0
Haskell Garrett	1	0	0.0	1	0
OSU Totals	6	67	11.2	2	36
OPP Totals	5	57	11.4	0	33

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	4	34	8.5	0	22
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	3	11	3.7	0	7
OSU Totals	7	45	6.4	0	22
OPP Totals	3	80	26.7	1	58

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Demario McCall	5	78	15.6	0	29
Xavier Johnson	1	11	11.0	0	11
Garrett Wilson	1	4	4.0	0	4
OSU Totals	7	93	13.3	0	29
OPP Totals	15	283	18.9	0	39

Def. Leaders	Solo	Asst.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Pete Werner	19	18	37	2.5-10	1.0-5
Tuf Borland	11	15	26	3.5-16	1.5-12
Baron Browning	15	8	23	1.0-3	-
Marcus Williamson	16	6	22	-	-
Shaun Wade	16	6	22	-	-
Jonathan Cooper	9	11	20	2.5-23	2.5-23
Tommy Togiai	8	11	19	3.5-14	3.0-13
Justin Hilliard	10	7	17	2.0-10	-
Haskell Garrett	10	7	17	4.0-13	2.0-9
Marcus Hooker	12	2	15	-	-
Josh Proctor	11	3	14	1.0-5	-
Dallas Gant	6	7	13	0.5-0	-
Seyn Banks	9	3	12	0.5-1	-
Zach Harrison	5	7	12	4.5-12	2.0-3
Taron Vincent	1	6	7	2.0-5	0.5-4
Teradja Mitchell	4	3	7	0.5-2	-
Tyrece Smith	5	2	7	1.0-9	1.0-9
Jerron Cage	1	5	6	0.5-1	0.5-1
Javontae Jean-Baptiste	3	3	6	2.0-12	1.0-8
Antwuan Jackson	1	5	6	-	-
Ronnie Hickman	2	3	5	-	-
Craig Young	5	0	5	-	-
Tyler Friday	1	4	5	-	-
Tyrece Johnson	2	3	5	-	-
Ryan Watts	4	0	4	-	-
Lathan Ransom	4	0	4	-	-
Cade Stover	3	1	4	-	-
Cody Simon	2	1	3	-	-
Cormontae Hamilton	2	1	3	2.0-17	1.0-12
TEAM	1	1	2	-	-
Chris Olave	2	0	2	-	-
K'Vaughan Pope	1	1	2	-	-
Tommy Eichenberg	0	2	2	-	-
Dominic DiMaggio	2	0	2	-	-
Darrion Henry-Young	1	0	1	1.0-4	1.0-4
Cameron Brown	1	0	1	-	-
Trayvon Wilburn	1	0	1	-	-
Chris Booker	1	0	1	-	-
Steele Chambers	1	0	1	-	-
Julian Fleming	1	0	1	-	-
Bryson Shaw	0	1	1	-	-

OSU Totals	210	156	366	36-164	17-103
OPP Totals	253	184	437	41-172	18-116
Fumbles Forced:	7	-	Werner (2), Browning, Stover, Gant, Hilliard, Fleming.		
Fumbles Recovered:	10	-	Jean-Baptiste, Hilliard, Hooker, Banks, Proctor, Browning, Gant, Harrison, Hilliard, Munford.		

OPINION

Running The Ball Paid Off In The End (Zone)

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

I write a column in an Ohio State sports paper. It's my job to Monday-morning quarterback. Our readers are the most rabid of Ohio State fans. It's in their nature to Monday-morning quarterback when their beloved Buckeyes struggle.

The funny thing is that in today's electronic, social media driven world, you don't even have to wait until Monday morning to quarterback. Now you can critique the Buckeyes in real time. And boy, that's what was happening in the first half of Ohio State's Big Ten championship win over a game, well-coached, but over-matched Northwestern team.

It was clear early that Justin Fields and the Ohio State passing attack were not clicking on all cylinders. Whether it was because of the absence of the steady Chris Olave or it just wasn't Fields' day, the Buckeyes were only 9 of 20 for 101 yards passing in the first half with an interception and three sacks totaling 29 yards. Five of those completions came on Ohio State's first drive of game, a 16-play, 8:26 affair that should have set the tempo for the game but, after a costly holding penalty, unfortunately ended up yielding just three points.

While the aerial attack was looking completely out of sync, Trey Sermon carried seven times in the first half for 60 yards and Master Teague added a pair of carries for another 23 net yards and was last seen ripping off a 27-yard run before leaving the game with an unspecified injury. That's nine carries for 83 yards between the two running backs, good for a 9.2-yard average if you were wondering.

Posters on our BuckeyeSports.com "Official Game Thread" were pleading for the Buckeye coaches to just run the ball. But time and time again, after Sermon or Teague would log a solid run, the Buckeye staff would call another pass. Later, when I got in the car to drive to the office, the guys on the 97.1 The Fan postgame show were talking about how Twitter had blown up with fans also pleading for the Buckeyes to run the ball. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I don't really understand Twitter, but I got the drift.)

Woody Hayes has been gone for over 30 years now and last coached over 40 years ago. He would barely recognize the game as it is played today. But if he had come back to this earth on Dec. 19, he would have seen the way the Ohio State offensive line was overpowering the Northwestern defense, the way Sermon and Teague were hitting the holes, and he would have said, "Men, we're going to ram the ball down their darn (my word, not his) throats and we are going to keep ramming it and we are going to wear them down and we are going to win this darn game, ah-hunh."

And that's what the Buckeyes ultimately did, though it took them a long time to decide to do it.

On Ohio State's first possession of the second half, Sermon opened with runs of 13 and 12 yards. So Ohio State calls a pass on the next play, and Fields is promptly picked off. On the Buckeyes' next possession, Sermon dashed for 65 yards and Fields added an 8-yard run to the Wildcat 20. Two more incompletions and Blake Haubeil misses a field goal, and Northwestern is still leading 10-6 midway through the third quarter.

That's when Ohio State finally got with the program.

After the Wildcats missed a field goal of their own, the Buckeyes marched 71 yards on seven plays, all on the ground, with Sermon going in from the 9 to give Ohio State a 13-10 lead, one it would never relinquish.

The rest, as they say, is history – literally – with Sermon racking up 331 yards on 29 carries, breaking records set by two of the greatest

running backs in Ohio State history, Eddie George and Ezekiel Elliott.

"We were always going to be aggressive," head coach Ryan Day explained of the early attempts to pass the ball. "That's just the way we are, and we didn't execute great. I think we'll probably look back and have a lot to coach off of and to fix, but the run game started to go, and to run for over 300-plus yards. We wanted to throw on them early, wear them down a little bit and then run it a little bit in the second half, and that's kind of what played out."

Coach, you want to "wear them down a little bit"? Try pounding on them from the get-go.

I love what Day and Kevin Wilson have brought to the Ohio State offense and the quarterbacks and receivers who are suddenly coming to Ohio State because of it. But as John Cooper used to say, "Win the surest way."

This is one of the rare times I have been critical of the popular Day. But Woody passed stubbornness on to Earle Bruce and Bruce passed it on to Urban Meyer. I hope Urban didn't pass it on to Day.

Sermon had shown flashes, including rushing for 112 yards on 10 carries in Ohio State's previous game against Michigan State, what seems like months ago. But I'm not sure anyone saw his game against the Wildcats coming, with his name suddenly being mentioned in the same breath as George and Elliott. If let loose earlier, Sermon might have gained 431 yards.

After the game, Buckeye announcers Paul Keels and Jim Lachey mentioned to defensive end Jonathon Cooper that he sees Sermon in practice every day and asked what the Oklahoma transfer had shown him. I don't think the broadcast team got the answer they exactly expected.

"I'm not going to lie," Cooper said of watching Sermon in the Northwestern game. "I was like, who is that guy? Who is that?"

Day admitted that in this pandemic-ravaged season, with limited preseason practice, the coaches didn't really know what they had in Sermon either.

"There was a time probably after week two or week three, we really weren't sure what was going on," Day said of Sermon and his slow start as a Buckeye. "Just maybe not hitting the hole right, didn't have a lot of confidence, and we didn't know Trey, so we weren't sure exactly what we had there. And then to see him persevere, again through all that, to play the way he did in this game and break records like that? That's tremendous, against a really good run-stopping defense."

The Buckeyes will need a lot more than just Sermon to beat Clemson in the CFP playoffs, including a return to Heisman-contending form by Fields. But Ohio State's newfound star running back will give the Clemson coaches one more thing to worry about and make the Ohio State coaches less reluctant to lean on Sermon if the sledding gets tough.

And while I'm thinking about Clemson, a couple of thoughts on how not to beat the Tigers.

Against Northwestern, the Buckeyes were flagged for five penalties, not an egregious number. But two of them really stick out to me.

The first, as mentioned, came on Ohio State's opening possession – a hold on a Fields' touchdown run that called the score back and resulted in just a field goal. It was truly a penalty that might have altered the trajectory of

the entire game. The second penalty was an inexcusable delay-of-game penalty as the play clock ran out, costing the Buckeyes 5 yards on a third-and-2 at the Wildcat 20. Ohio State had to settle for a field-goal attempt, the one Haubeil missed.

If you want to beat a great team like Clemson, you can't make penalties like those.

But the other thing to remember is both those penalties led to field-goal tries. Think back to last year against the Tigers. Ohio State settled for three field goals in the first half. Score touchdowns on those trips into the red zone and bad calls couldn't have kept the Buckeyes from victory in what proved to be a 29-23 Clemson win.

When you have the opportunity, you must get six, not three.

Other Standouts

Sermon was not the only player to excel against Northwestern.

While the Buckeye defense seemed bewildered at times, several players stood out to me on that side of the ball.

Anyone who reads this column regularly knows that I always pull for Justin Hilliard, who has toughed out a tough-luck career at Ohio State. It seems like when he gets into a game, he generally makes things happen. He may have turned in his best game as a Buckeye against Northwestern.

Hilliard was credited with a team-leading nine tackles, including two for loss, a fumble recovery and an interception, both coming at key times. Not bad for a guy who was seeing significant minutes only because Baron Browning was out. If Sermon hadn't exploded, Hilliard could have very easily taken home game MVP honors.

Safety Josh Proctor also had a solid game. He was credited with four tackles and an interception.

And what more can I say about Haskell Garrett? I'm still trying to figure out how he landed on only the All-Big Ten third team. I know interior defensive linemen don't rack up huge stats, but have the Big Ten coaches and media been watching? The guy has been a disruptive force in every game, and his play against Northwestern was no different. He was in on five tackles and had a pair for loss with a sack.

You're on my first team, Haskell.

I was also admittedly concerned when it was announced that punter Drue Chrisman, a special teams weapon for the Buckeyes, was not going to play. Kudos to Zach Hoover for filling in admirably, putting two of his three punts inside the 10. If you weren't paying attention, you would have assumed that was Chrisman out there.

And in my weekly tight end watch, for the third game in a row, the group did not have a reception. But if the offensive line was dominating like that, you know the tight ends had a hand in it.

"The tight ends played really hard, and they're the guys that get lost in the mix, too, these tight ends" Day said. "I mean they block their tails off."

40th Anniversary Roses

Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 40th anniversary season has reached the postseason. In this issue we feature the top bowl game in our first 39 years that were not associated with the BCS

or CFP. The choice of the Rose Bowl following the 1996 season was an easy one. It was perhaps the biggest win in the John Cooper era and the first trip to Pasadena in 12 years, and it ended up being the first Rose Bowl win for the Buckeyes since the 1973 season.

Not only did the Buckeyes beat an undefeated Arizona State team led by a dynamic quarterback in Jake "The Snake" Plummer, but they won in dramatic fashion. Joe Germaine marched his team 65 yards in the final 1:40, connecting with David Boston for the winning touchdown with 19 seconds left for the 20-17 victory.

As is explained in our revisit with that contest on page 34 of this issue, the game had added significance for the Buckeyes because in their previous game they had suffered another difficult loss to archrival Michigan, all but knocking the then-undefeated team out of national championship contention. Ohio State had a really good team that year, as good as or maybe even better than the 1998 squad that famously missed out on the national crown, so it was a bitter pill to swallow.

The win helped ease some of the pain from that loss and allowed the Buckeyes to finish runner-up to champion Florida in the final AP poll.

The game also takes on significance, in retrospect, because it was in what proved to be the waning days of Rose Bowl glory. Younger people have a hard time understanding the grandeur and stature of the Rose Bowl in its heyday. Looking back at that 1996 game, former BSB editor Steve Helwagen sums it up quite nicely.

"The Rose Bowl is a special game," Helwagen said. "It doesn't mean as much today because we have the playoff and everything, but back then, the Big Ten champion went to the Rose Bowl every year. And Ohio State hadn't been there in 12 years and hadn't won one in 23 years. So for them to break through and win one, that was the story. That was just unheard of. A whole generation of Ohio State fans had never seen them win a Rose Bowl. That kind of started what became the golden age, this modern era."

Championship Schedule

Just a reminder that this is the last weekly issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin for 2020. There are two possible mailing dates for the next print issue.

If Ohio State defeats Clemson and advances to the College Football Playoff championship game Jan. 11, the next print issue of BSB will be published Jan. 19. If Ohio State loses to the Tigers, BSB will be published on the regularly scheduled date of Jan. 12.

Either way, there will be a large gap between this issue and the next BSB. Don't forget to check out our BuckeyeSports.com website daily for any news between now and then, especially with the possible COVID impact.

Happy Holidays from the entire Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff. We know that 2021 will be a better year for all of us.

A Friend Passes

I am saddened by the recent passing of our neighbor, Joe Hanna. There are few people in this world gentler, kinder and more generous than Joe was. He had a bit of a tough way to go toward the end, but he faced his last days with the dignity that anyone who knew him would have expected.

I will remember Joe most for his intense love of his family and the fact that was able to carve out a little bit of that love for his crazy neighbors Frank and Heidi.

Joe, we miss you already.