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BSB'S 2024 MICHIGAN MEMORIES ISSUE

The Real Deal

Bucks' Pass Rush Dismantles No. 5 Indiana In 38-15 Win

SONNY BROCKWAY

SIMON SAYS STOP — Fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon may have had his best game as a Buckeye with 10 tackles and 2½ sacks as part of a dominating performance in the 38-15 win against Indiana on Nov. 23.

By GREG WILSON
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Associate Editor

Indiana starting the season 10-0 was one of the biggest surprises of this college football season. Going into the year, Big Ten media had the Hoosiers finishing 17th out of 18 teams, ahead of only Purdue.

But first-year head coach Curt Cignetti just kept winning with his team full of transfers and came into Columbus with a zero in the loss column. The schedule they played to get to that point might not have been as tough as other teams played, but they were prepared to come into Ohio Stadium and prove they were for real by beating the No. 2 team in the country, brushing off comments that it was "the biggest game in Indiana football history" as many were referring to it.

"This is just a football game," Cignetti said on ESPN before the game. "Sixty minutes between the white lines. We have a veteran group. We earned the right to be here. There's no magic wand. We have the largest victory margin in college football. There's a narrative out there that's created another chip for us. People can stick that narrative up their you know what."

He finished that short interview by parroting his famous quote that was shared all over the college football world when he was initially hired by Indiana.

"Google me," he said. "I win."

The Buckeyes are accustomed to having that type of target on their backs, and head coach Ryan Day seemed like he might have been tired of hearing about just how good Indiana was in the week leading up to the game.

On ESPN's "Pat McAfee Show" on Nov. 22, McAfee finished Day's guest appearance by reminding the coach, "This Hoosiers team is the real deal."

"So are we," Day responded.

That energy bled into the Buckeyes' 38-15 win over the No. 5-ranked Hoosiers the next day with Ohio State dominating every aspect of the football game after Indiana scored the first touchdown to take a 7-0 lead in the first quarter.

OSU seemed to be playing with an edge that wasn't around for most of its games – understandably so for many of the blowouts they have been on the winning end of – and Day understands that is something they are going to need for the rest of this season if they want to reach their goals.

"That's the way you've got to play the game of football," he said. "That's the mentality that we have to have. We know that we want to be playing our best football. We also know what's at stake. If we don't win this game, we have no chance to go to Indianapolis and play in the Big Ten championship. That's real. We've had that approach for a few weeks now, more than that."

It was one of the more complete performances by the Buckeyes this season coming against a team ranked in the top five, but what stood out above all else in the win was Jim Knowles' defensive unit, specifically the pass rush.

Finishing with five sacks, eight tackles for loss and a quarterback hurry, the Buckeyes were in the backfield on seemingly every play, causing Ohio University transfer Kurtis Rourke to struggle in a way that he hadn't so far with Indiana.

Fifth-year linebacker and team captain Cody Simon was one of the biggest factors causing Rourke to struggle. After a relatively quiet first half of the season for Simon in which he played well enough, he seems to have been a big part of the re-engineering that Ohio State did after the loss to Oregon. Since then, he has been much more visible on the defensive end and has been extremely effective getting into the backfield.

His 10 tackles against the Hoosiers led the team, as did his 2½ sacks in what may have been the best game of his Buckeye career. He came around the left side of Indiana's offensive line for one of his solo sacks, taking Rourke – who never saw Simon coming – down and punching the ball out of the quarterback's hands and into the hands of OSU's Ty Hamilton.

Simon credited both his defensive coordinator and the defensive line for the success he's been having recently.

"Whatever (Knowles) puts up in front of us, we just try to do it to the best of our ability, and I trust everything he does," Simon said. "Whatever he puts in front of us, we're just going to try to execute to the best of our ability and go from there.

"I'm 100 percent thankful for the defensive line because for me to make plays, they have to make plays too," he added. "They're holding gaps off for me. I'm thankful we have them up front because they do the dirty work.

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OPINION

Statement Win Still Had Blemishes

Many of the strengths that make Ohio State a national championship contender were on full display Nov. 23 during a 38-15 statement win against upstart Indiana. Unfortunately, a handful of the bothersome warts that could conspire to throw a king-sized monkey wrench into those title plans also reared their ugly heads.

First and foremost, the second-ranked Buckeyes exposed the weaknesses of the previously undefeated Hoosiers, a team that enjoyed a program-record 10 victories to begin the season under first-year head coach Curt Cignetti, a cocksure 63-year-old Pittsburgh native who has never experienced a losing season in what is now 14 years as a college head coach.

Cignetti used the tools available to him in today's game to assemble a roster that almost overnight turned the Hoosiers from an afterthought in the Big Ten race to the No. 5-ranked team in the nation. But while featuring a transfer-heavy roster from such programs as Ohio University of the Mid-American Conference and James Madison of the Sun Belt Conference, someone should have pointed out to Cignetti that Ohio State is 44-1 all-time against current teams in the MAC and Sun Belt, and the only blemish on that record came 130 years ago.

Indiana put up a game effort, especially during the first quarter when it marched 70 yards to score a touchdown and a take a 7-0 lead. But from there, the Hoosiers were simply outclassed in the categories of talent and athletic ability.

The Ohio State defense put on a performance that could best be described as dominant as it completely stifled Indiana after that opening march. The Hoosiers managed only 81 yards the rest of the way, finishing with 151 total yards after averaging 453.2 yards over their first 10 games, a figure that ranked second in the Big Ten in total offense.

Senior linebacker Cody Simon, a team co-captain who wears the ceremonial Block "O" jersey, had himself a whale of a first half, registering eight of his game-high 10 tackles and 2½ sacks. Simon's 2½ sacks were worth 23 yards of lost yardage, the most by any Ohio State defender since Chase Young had four sacks for losses totaling 25 yards during a 38-7 win against Wisconsin on Oct. 26, 2019.

Simon was a main beneficiary of defensive coordinator Jim Knowles finally deciding that consistent pressure on the opposing quarterback is a winning formula, and the Buckeyes came from a variety of angles to sack IU quarterback Kurtis Rourke five times and limit the Big Ten leader in passer rating to just 68 yards through the air on 8-of-18 passing. Rourke entered the game averaging 267.8 yards through the air.

Conversely, Ohio State QB Will Howard appeared to be everything Rourke was not – calm, comfortable, collected and confident. Howard completed each of his first 14 attempts in the game on his way to a 22-for-26 afternoon, his program-record sixth game this season with a completion rate of 80 percent or better.

With the only possible exceptions of checking down too soon on his team's opening possession, leading to a three-and-out, and a red-zone interception that bounced off the hands of tight end Jelani Thurman, Howard was nearly perfect. He wound up with 201 yards and two touchdowns through the air and scored the final touchdown of the game for his seventh rushing score of the season.

It was also reportedly Howard who was most vocal in his locker-room leadership when starting center Seth McLaughlin went down the Tuesday before the game with a season-ending Achilles tear. More than one of his teammates reported that Howard carried himself the way a team leader should despite the fact he's a one-and-done player after transferring in from Kansas State.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

Perhaps it was what Howard said or did that seemed to assuage the massive loss of McLaughlin, who was playing at an All-America level. Not that the Ohio State offensive line was forced to play untested players against Indiana. Carson Hinzman moved from left guard to the center spot he occupied for nearly all of last season, while Austin Siereveld took over for Hinzman at a position where he had logged a couple of starts earlier this season.

Simply plugging and playing offensive linemen at different positions might sound easy, but it definitely is not. Still, the line protected Howard well, giving up only one sack to the Hoosiers, who started the afternoon as the Big Ten's leading defense in sacks.

Moreover, the line continued its steady play with regard to penalties – or, more accurately, a lack of penalties. Of the eight accepted infractions levied against the Buckeyes in the game, only three were called on offensive linemen. Right guard Tegra Tshabola had one false start, while left tackle Donovan Jackson and Hinzman were each flagged for questionable illegal blocks in the back.

No holding calls, no delays and no bad snaps. In other words, just what the doctor ordered during a big game with an offensive line rebuilt on the fly for the third time since mid-October.

More Positive Takeaways

The tenor of the game actually changed on a couple of special teams plays, most specifically a late second-quarter gaffe committed by Indiana.

With the score tied at 7-7, Simon sacked Rourke and caused a fumble that was recovered by OSU defensive tackle Ty Hamilton at the IU 18-yard line. But the Buckeyes squandered their good fortune when Howard's third-down pass bounced off Thurman and into the hands of Indiana linebacker Jailin Walker.

The Hoosiers managed a couple of first downs, but Simon surprised Rourke with a first-down blitz that resulted in an 8-yard loss, and Indiana was eventually forced to punt. The snap was good enough, but apparently IU punter James Evans took his eye off the football, which slipped through his hands, bounced off his face mask and fell to the turf.

Junior Caden Curry, who has become something of a special teams star for the Buckeyes the past couple of games, swarmed over Evans to give Ohio State possession at the IU 7. Three plays later, TreVeyon Henderson knifed his way into the end zone from 4 yards out to give the Buckeyes a 14-7 lead, an advantage from which they never really looked back.

Later in the game, Ohio State special teams came up big again with something not seen in a decade.

Full disclosure. I have not been a fan of exposing star safety Caleb Downs to the perils of punt returns, especially when Downs is acknowledged by most observers as the best safety in college football. Now, the sophomore transfer from Alabama can add another line to his already impressive résumé – electrifying return man.

Early in the third quarter, with the Buckeyes still protecting that 14-7 advantage, Downs let a punt bounce in front of him at about his own 30-yard line before deciding to pick it up at the 21. He first split two defenders and then spun away from a third before getting a block from linebacker Gabe Powers that sprung him up the sideline.

Getting another downfield block from linebacker C.J. Hicks, Downs cut back toward the middle of the field, and with Curry waving his arms wildly in the air in celebration, the junior crossed the goal line with a 79-yard backbreaker of a punt return.

With the touchdown, Downs became the first OSU player to return a punt for a touchdown since Jalin Marshall ran one back 54 yards during a 42-27 win against Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014, and his 79-yarder was the longest punt return by a Buckeye since Ray Small ran one back 80 yards (but did not score) during a 42-7 win against Michigan on Nov. 22, 2008.

Maybe had I known Downs returned a punt 85 yards for a touchdown last year while he was still at Alabama, I would never have been so reluctant to see him back there.

About Those Warts

Any victory, especially a dominating one against a No. 5-ranked opponent, is to be savored. Yet, especially at this time of the year, with one supremely huge game remaining on the regular-season schedule, Ohio State should not be repeating the same mistakes it has seemingly made since the opener against Akron.

As dominating as it was for much of the game, the defense started slowly for the second week in a row, allowing an opponent to march almost unabated for an early touchdown. Against Northwestern, it was a 92-yard drive that consumed 13 plays and 5:30 off the clock, and it was a bit of déjà vu against Indiana, which had 70 yards in 11 plays that ate up more than six minutes.

The Buckeyes recovered both times, of course, and another sluggish start might not be fatal against an offensively-challenged Michigan. But I wouldn't bet on that, especially in a game that means so much to Ohio State in terms of getting to the Big Ten Championship Game for a rematch with Oregon, not to mention the overall team psyche with regard to the rivalry game the Buckeyes haven't won since 2019.

Additionally, Howard scored the final touchdown of the game on a quarterback sneak from the 1-yard line, raising this question: Why sneak it for a meaningless score at the end of the game when you lined up in a shotgun formation on fourth-and-1 early in the second quarter only to get turned away?

With a 6-4, 237-pound quarterback behind an offensive line that averages nearly 320 pounds per man, and big backs pushing during the perfectly legal "Tush Push" play perfected by the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles, I would think the Buckeyes would run the quarterback sneak every time they needed a yard or less.

Finally, I'm not sure how long cornerback Davison Igbinosun can keep his job if he is going to continually commit major penalties. Igbinosun was flagged for three more pass-interference calls against the Hoosiers, and the penalties led to both Indiana touchdowns.

Igbinosun, who now has 10 pass-interference penalties, appears to grab on every play, something Indiana certainly targeted at different points during the game, and something for which Big Ten officials are definitely on the lookout from here on out.

OHIO STATE VS. INDIANA

Downs' Return Provides Spark For Win Over Hoosiers

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Caleb Downs was sensational, Will Howard efficient. The special teams were impactful, and the defense after another slow start was stout.

Put it all together as No. 2 Ohio State did, and it was a convincing 38-15 victory over fifth-ranked Indiana in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23 to move a step closer to a spot in the Big Ten Championship Game after facing off against Michigan on Nov. 30, the only roadblock to a rematch with top-ranked Oregon.

The special teams came through again when the Buckeyes rallied from an early deficit to score 31 straight points on a gray, 46-degree afternoon.

Ohio State (10-1, 7-1) took a 14-7 lead late in the second quarter on a 4-yard run by TreVeyon Henderson after a fumbled snap on a punt attempt by Indiana (10-1, 7-1).

Safety Caleb Downs energized the crowd of 105,751 with the Buckeyes' first punt-return touchdown (79 yards) in a decade for a 21-7 lead early in the third quarter.

The defense, after allowing a TD on Indiana's first drive, had five sacks for 46 yards.

SONNY BROCKWAY

TWO EASY — Caleb Downs strides into the end zone with several Indiana players vainly in pursuit to cap his 79-yard punt return – the first for the Buckeyes since 2014 – for a 21-7 lead in the third quarter at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23.

Slow Going

Henderson returned the opening kickoff 19 yards to the 25. Two passes and a run netted just 8 yards, and Joe McGuire's 49-yard punt was returned 12 yards to the 30.

The Hoosiers showed no nerves on the big stage, marching 70 yards on 11 plays in 6:12 to take a 7-0 lead at 6:52 on a 2-yard run by Ty Son Lawton. The drive was aided by a pair of penalties on cornerback Davison Igbinosun.

Kurtis Rourke's third-down completion to Myles Price gained 13 yards to the IU 44. On second down, Igbinosun per usual was flagged for pass interference to put the ball at the OSU 38.

On third-and-6 from the 34, Elijah Sarratt had a 19-yard reception. Justice Ellison had three runs for 11 yards for a first down at the 4, and Igbinosun committed another pass interference on the next snap for 2 yards. Lawton carried it in from there as the Buckeyes' slow starts on defense continued.

The Buckeyes then squandered an up-and-down drive by being stopped 2 yards shy of the goal line.

At the onset, Quinshon Judkins made a 5-yard catch on third-and-2 from the 33 to keep the drive alive. Later, Carnell Tate had a 10-yard catch to the Indiana 35, but a long gain on a catch by Henderson was negated by an illegal block in the back by center Carson Hinzman, moving OSU back to the 45. A 5-yard loss on a pass to Henderson and an intentional-grounding penalty made for a third-and-35 from the OSU 40. Tate gained 25 back on a catch to the original line of scrimmage.

On fourth down, Tate was wide open for a 24-yard catch and a first down at the 11. Judkins ran 2 to end the quarter. He then rammed his way for 5 to the 4, and Henderson rushed for 2 more, setting up fourth-and-1 from the 2. Judkins got the handoff out of the shotgun and was stopped for no gain, turning the ball over to the Hoosiers after a 73-yard drive.

They were forced to punt when on third-and-6 from the 21, Rourke was sacked for 11 yards by JT Tuimoloau and Cody Simon at the 10. Downs' 12-yard return of a 46-yard punt gave the Buckeyes the ball at the Indiana 44 with 9:42 left in the half.

The Buckeyes went the distance using five plays and 2:20 to tie it 7-7 on an 11-yard catch by Egbuka. Howard was 5 for 5 for 44 yards to make him 14 for 14 for 116 yards up to that point in the game.

Emeka Egbuka made a catch for 8, Henderson's grab added 4 yards, and Jeremiah Smith's first catch went for 12 yards to the 20. Egbuka had a 9-yarder before the score on a fade to the left corner.

The Buckeyes would soon be denied in the red zone a second time.

Rourke on third-and-8 from the IU 27 was strip-sacked by Simon for 9 yards, and Ty Hamilton recovered the fumble at the 18.

Howard threw to Smith on the left side of the end zone, but the ball was barely out of his reach for his first incompletion on his 15th pass. Judkins lost 4 and on third down, Jelani Thurman bobbled a pass and Jailin Walker intercepted it at the 11.

The Buckeyes entered the game No. 1 nationally in red-zone scoring at 97.3 percent (37 of 38) with 33 touchdowns. To this point they were 1 of 3.

For the third straight game, a miscue on a punt snap or blocked punt benefited the Buckeyes, and they took advantage for a 4-yard touchdown run by Henderson for a 14-7 lead with 21 seconds left in the half.

Under rainy conditions, punter James Evans had the ball slip through his hands. He picked the ball up but was tackled by Caden Curry for a 23-yard loss to the 7. Howard ran for 3 and Judkins gained nothing before Henderson went through the left side of the line.

Ohio State had 138 yards in the first half compared to 53 for the Hoosiers, who had 3 rushing yards.

"After the first drive, we got in a rhythm," defensive end Jack Sawyer said. "We were playing tough, physical football, and that's what we do here at Ohio State."

Off To The Races

After an IU three-and-out after the second-half kickoff, Downs picked up a bouncing 52-yard punt, headed up the right sideline then crossed midfield and zoomed left for the Buckeyes' first punt-return TD since Jalin Marshall against Indiana on Nov. 22, 2014, to make it 21-7 at 12:44 of third quarter.

The Buckeyes got the ball at their 25 after another three-and-out and methodically moved downfield to use 10 plays and 5:45 to extend the lead to 28-7 at 6:02 with Thurman catching a third-down, 1-yard pass at the back of the end zone.

Egbuka began the drive with a 25-yard catch. Smith's reception went for 13 to the IU 34. Henderson ran for 5 and Judkins 8 to the 21 before Smith on an end-around rushed for 12 to the 9. Henderson gained 5 then on the next snap twisted and turned for 3 more before the touchdown.

After an exchange of punts gave Indiana possession at its 41, the Buckeyes got a 7-yard sack by Tuimoloau and Sawyer as well as an 11-yard sack from Sawyer to end the quarter.

After another Evans punt, OSU held the ball for 11 plays and 5:51 in order to get a 45-yard field goal by Jayden Fielding with 8:56 to play.

The big play was a 25-yard catch by Egbuka to the IU 25 on a fourth-and-1 from the 50.

Indiana proceeded to go 75 yards in 15 plays and 7:03 to make it 31-15 on a 2-yard TD run by Lawton and a two-point conversion with 1:53 left.

On fourth-and-1 from the OSU 43, Rourke ran for 8 yards. Later, Igbinosun was guilty of his third pass interference to place the ball on the 2.

After a failed onside kick, Henderson ran up the middle for 39 yards before sliding to the ground as it appeared the Hoosiers wanted him to score to get the ball back. After a timeout, Howard had no gain before he carried for the score with 35 seconds left.

IU after the kickoff used a Lawton run for 3 yards to the 28 to end the game.

Howard was 22 of 26 for 201 yards, two touchdowns and an interception, and Egbuka made seven catches for 80 yards.

Notes

Indiana has not beaten Ohio State since back-to-back wins in 1987-88. The Buckeyes are 31-0-1 since with 30 straight wins. ... The game was played on the anniversary of the first game in the series on Nov. 23, 1901, with Indiana winning 18-6 in Columbus. ... Tate had four catches for 68 yards and Smith 3 for 34. ... All but 29 of Henderson's 68 yards on nine carries came on his final run. Judkins ran for 36 yards on 14 attempts. ... Rourke was 8 of 18 for 68 yards. ... OSU had 316 yards (201 passing, 115 rushing). Indiana gained 151 yards (68 passing, 83 rushing). ... Simon had a game-high 10 tackles (four solo) and 2½ sacks for 23 yards as well as a forced fumble.

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COVER STORY

Buckeye Defense Dialed-In After First Drive

Continued From Page 1

I always try to give thanks to the D-line."

Simon is right that the defensive line was making plays too. JT Tuimoloau combined with Simon for a sack and teamed up with Jack Sawyer for another one later on in the game, the three of them accounting for all five of the sacks in the game.

After facing criticism stemming from the loss to the Ducks on Oct. 12 – mainly regarding the lack of pass rush the Buckeyes showed in a zero-sack performance – it has seemed like the game plan has changed when it comes to getting pressure into the backfield.

Sending blitzers more often and even utilizing the Jack in some scenarios, Knowles and defensive line coach Larry Johnson seem to have come to some sort of compromise with the pass rush, finding a middle ground that has been extremely effective in the five games since.

"I felt like the plan going in was excellent, and I felt like the defensive staff did a great job with it," Day said. "I thought Jim had a great plan. I thought Larry's guys played with their hair on fire. Everybody on the defensive side deserves credit.

"But this game is played by players. Not coaches, players. The players played hard today. The defensive line won the line of scrimmage. I felt like we got after their offensive line in terms of getting to the backfield. I thought the linebackers, at least it looked like it on film, were timing up the blitzes really well and getting into the backfield."

The defense was also helped out by the Ohio State fans in the stadium, at least according to both Day and Buckeye quarterback Will Howard. As loud as the 105,751 mostly-Buckeye fans inside Ohio Stadium were, Indiana was unable to communicate on offense and had to transition to a silent cadence, which the Hoosiers did seem to struggle with. They had just two penalties the entire game, but they both came in third-and-short situations when the fans were most engaged, a false start by offensive lineman Bray Lynch and a delay of game in the third quarter.

SONNY BROCKWAY

QUITE A HAUL — Wide receiver Emeka Egbuka was the favorite of Will Howard with seven catches on seven targets for 80 yards and an 11-yard TD in the second quarter in the 38-15 rout of Indiana on Nov. 23.

"I have to say, I thought the crowd was awesome," Day said. "Our guys played with a great passion. The two of them just played off of each other the entire game. The fact that (Indiana) had to go to a silent cadence did make a difference in this game. They tried the clap early, they couldn't, and they went to the silent cadence and that made a huge difference in the game."

The Hoosiers were able to score on their first drive of the game, helped along by two pass interference penalties on Davison Igbinosun. The drive took 6:12 and 11 plays to make it 70 yards on 38 rushing yards and 32 yards through the air.

It seemed at first like Indiana was making an early statement that it was for real and was going to play the Buckeyes tough in their home stadium. But OSU didn't waver. Throughout the rest of the game, the Buckeyes allowed just one more score and a total of 81 more offensive yards through 3½ quarters of football, 75 of those coming on the other scoring drive Indiana managed in the fourth quarter to bring the score within 16 points.

"I just think we had to settle in a little bit," Simon said. "That first drive we didn't really get off the field that time, but we just wanted to settle in and knock them back up front and really win first down. I think we did a good job. When we're able to pass rush, a lot of good things happen."

Opponents have seemed to have an easier time scoring on the Buckeyes early in games, a trend that has been present all season. But Sawyer explained that early score for Indiana was due to the script it had coming into the game, which many teams come prepared with for the first few plays of a game.

"That first offensive drive is always scripted, the first 10-15 plays," he said. "So they had some good stuff scripted. And we also could have gotten off the field on a third down, got a flag or something there, but that's just stuff that happens in the game of football. We just have to tighten it up. And once we did, once we slowed down a little bit – you kind of get amped up from losing yourself there for a first drive or two. So once we settled and just started playing ball, you saw this team go to a different level."

"After the first drive, I don't think (Indiana) barely moved the ball 20 yards," Howard said. "They couldn't do anything."

The Hoosiers were second in the country in scoring offense coming into this matchup, putting up 43.9 points per game, and Rourke's name was being mentioned in the Heisman Trophy conversation, although he was far behind the favorites for the award. In his chance to make up some ground in that race and prove that he and the Hoosiers offense were no joke, he finished with just 68 total passing yards on 8-of-18 passing, looking completely lost at times.

"It was nothing we hadn't seen on tape, and we practiced all week," Cignetti said after the game about his team's struggles with pass protection. "You couple it with the noise and having to go to a silent count, the center couldn't hear. And the speed of which (the Buckeyes) do it at compared to our scout team, the pressure of the moment, our guys just didn't respond well. Sometimes we had missed assignments, sometimes we had communication errors, sometimes we got physically beat, but it wasn't very pretty.

"We couldn't protect the quarterback," he added. "We had communication errors in pass pro. Every time we dropped back to pass, something bad happened. It seemed like we were in that end zone to our left for nine years. It was like a nightmare."

As surprised as Cignetti seemed after the game that his team couldn't compete at the level the Buckeyes did, it seemed to be the opposite on the other sideline. Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka said as much after the win.

"This is not a game that we didn't expect to win," he said. "We expected to win this game. In fact, we expected to dominate. We're the better team, bar none. We played more physical than them. We ran the ball better, we executed better, so we won the game."

Last Chance

A top-five win – the Buckeyes' second of the season – is usually something a team would celebrate, especially with how convincingly Ohio State beat the Hoosiers. But knowing what's coming next, Sawyer said that won't be what the Buckeyes are doing. Instead, the focus goes right to Michigan.

"I don't think there's going to be much celebrating going on for anybody because everything that we've worked for since I've been here, the agony of defeat that we've been in the last three years, has pushed us to this moment that we've got coming up Saturday," he said. "It's for all the marbles. It's our last shot to play them. There's no more going back. That's what we came back to do."

That attitude is reflected by all of Buckeye Nation, evidenced by the scoreboard in the Horseshoe right after the win. As soon as the band finished playing "Carmen Ohio," a

countdown to kickoff flashed onto the screen, with over six days and 20 hours remaining on the clock.

Those are likely going to be grueling hours for the Buckeyes. There isn't a single player on the roster who has a win over Michigan in his Ohio State career. The senior class for the first time since the 1990s doesn't know how beating their archrival feels.

Sawyer – a tried-and-true Buckeye who was the first high school prospect to commit to Day, helping bring in a great 2021 recruiting class while also serving as the catalyst behind so many members of the class returning for one more year – was very clear that Indiana was out of his mind as soon as the clock showed zeros.

"Right now, I couldn't really care less – no offense – talking about (the win over Indiana) because I mean, (Michigan) is the game you come back for," he said. "This is a game that has impacted so many lives in the last few years, and I want this one so bad for so many different reasons."

As is always the case in college football's biggest rivalry, that sentiment was echoed by Sawyer's teammates, especially those who have been through the same three crushing defeats that he has been a part of, like Egbuka.

"I have a lot of emotions toward this game. The adversity that we face as a team, and just seeing all the hardships that people who I love have had to go through, including my teammates, my head coach, the Team Up North's fans being nasty to my parents as we're leaving the stadium," he said. "There are a lot of emotions I feel towards this moment. So trying to harness those and just let it all rip on the field on Saturday."

It's not just the returning Buckeyes who want to beat Michigan this year, but the many newcomers as well who joined through the transfer portal, Howard being one of them. One of his biggest motivators in the game on Nov. 30 is trying to make sure his teammates who have gone through the past three years can say they finished on top.

"This one's for those guys who came back. This one's for Buckeye Nation. I feel it, I can just feel it. There's been that hurt. This rivalry game, it's the first thing that I heard on my visit when I came here: Beat The Team Up North. It's the first goal we have every single year: Beat The Team Up North.

"You can say anything about records – that's going to be a hard game every single year. They're going to bring it; we're going to bring it. I want to do this for Coach Day. I want to do this for the guys that came back, for Emeka, for (TreVeyon Henderson), for JT, for Jack, for all of those guys that came back. Tyleik (Williams), Ty, I could go on. But I want this for them so bad because they've been here."

The approach to The Game that Howard has is a complete 180 from how the Buckeyes quarterback approached it in 2023. Kyle McCord prepared himself differently, saying that he did want to beat the Wolverines, but the rivalry matchup was "just football."

Howard, in just one season in Columbus after four at Kansas State, is already treating it like the biggest game of the season, which he said it is.

"I've seen it from a distance, and I feel it, and I'm a part of it now, and I want this for me too, but I want this for those guys," he said. "I want it for Coach Day to shut up the haters and be able to say, 'This is the Ohio State Buckeyes.' This rivalry game means everything. We talk about it all the time. It's all over the place in our building. I'm just honored to be able to be a part of it. I won't take it lightly. This is the biggest game of our season, and I'm looking forward to it."

Michigan is coming off a season in which it won its first national championship since 1997, but it has struggled to do much in 2024. With a 6-5 record coming into Columbus, the Wolverines opened as 23.5-point underdogs against Ohio State. But with a 50-6 win over Northwestern in Michigan Stadium on Nov. 23, they seem to be gearing up for the rivalry game the same way that the Buckeyes are.

"Absolutely nothing. It means absolutely nothing," Howard said when asked if the Wolverines' record this season is important. "This game is as big as they come. It's the Michigan-Ohio State game. I'm sorry I just said that. It's the Team Up North and Ohio State game. It's everything. I can't wait."

"We're going to attack them. We know they're going to come in here swinging, too," Sawyer said. "They still have a good team, even though the record doesn't indicate it. This game, it never matters what the records are. It's a battle. It's a war. So, man, I can't wait. I love playing in this game. It's just different playing this game. I love it."

Even though it seemed like the Buckeyes might have played their best game of football against the Hoosiers, Howard believes they are going to have to be even better when Michigan steps foot in Ohio Stadium on Nov. 30, which he believes they are fully capable of.

"We're going to need to turn it up. I still don't think you've seen our best. That's the mindset this team has," Howard said. "When you go into the locker room and you look in the eyes of every single guy, you see it. You see that edge. The last time I saw this edge in people's eyes is when (Kansas State) won the Big 12 (with Howard). I see that and I know we have more in the tank. We're fired up."

Day is on the same page as each of his players and has his attention turned toward Michigan, but he is still going to take some time to recognize the performance his players put together on Nov. 23 against Indiana.

"The minute it hit triple zeroes on the clock, it was on to The Team Up North, onto the rivalry game," he said. "We know what's coming and how important this week is for everybody in the state of Ohio and Buckeye Nation and most importantly our team. We have an obligation to play really well next week and to win that game.

"But we also need to make sure we take a deep breath and recognize the things that happened today. We'll do that tomorrow during our champions meeting, celebrate the guys who played really well and then move on. It's easy just to move on, but there's a lot of work that gets put into a win like this. It's a top-five win. We'll get some good rest tonight, make sure we get to bed early, then we'll wake up tomorrow and make sure we get back to work."

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Downs Gives OSU First Punt Return TD In Decade

Just two days before the 2024 season kicked off with a home game against Akron, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day delivered a strikingly bold prediction for his team on his weekly radio show on 97.1 The Fan, telling the public that the Buckeyes would do something that had not been accomplished in a decade: return a kickoff or punt for a touchdown.

GAME NOTEBOOK
Patrick Engels

"I'm going to guarantee it this year," Day said on Aug. 29. "I'm putting it out there."

Day's proclamation came just a season after the Buckeyes had one of their worst special teams performances in recent memory, ranking near the bottom of the FBS in multiple categories, a reality that led to the firing of special teams coordinator Parker Fleming in the offseason and a changed approach for the program when it comes to who is overseeing the unit.

With Parker no longer a part of the team and Day both taking more of a role within the unit and assigning his assistants to manage the group rather than a single coordinator, the Buckeyes did not necessarily produce immediate results on special teams this year, especially on punt and kick returns.

But in Ohio State's win over No. 5 Indiana, Day's prediction proved correct.

With 13:06 left in the third quarter, the Buckeyes were set to get the ball back off a punt from Indiana's James Evans where they would look to extend their 14-point lead on offense, but Ohio State's Caleb Downs had other plans.

Lining up as punt returner, the standout OSU safety let the football bounce twice before picking it up near the Buckeyes' 20-yard line, spun past a diving IU defender near the 25 and raced away from other Hoosiers down the sideline for about 45 yards before finally cutting to his left and finding his way into the end zone for the game-changing – and streak-ending – 79-yard score.

Downs' sprint toward the end zone electrified the Ohio State crowd of 105,751, giving the Buckeyes a commanding 21-7 lead and the program its first punt-return touchdown in almost 10 years to the day. The last score came by way of former OSU wideout Jalin Marshall on Nov. 22, 2014, against none other than Indiana.

When asked about the score after the game, Day said he had a good feeling his team finally would break through against the Hoosiers with a punt-return touchdown, especially given the talents of their punt returner.

"Give Caleb all the credit he deserves," Day said. "I felt like we had a chance to return it based on what had happened earlier in the game if the jammers gave us a chance. The punt was a little short, and I said, 'Ah, here we go again,' because we've had a lot of short punts. It bounced off the turf, and Caleb decides he's going to return it. He made a few guys miss and then made just a great effort on that play to go turn good into great. A game-changing play."

SONNY BROCKWAY

CENTER OF ATTENTION — Last season's starting center, Carson Hinzman (75), returned to his old spot against Indiana when Seth McLaughlin sustained a season-ending torn Achilles tendon on Nov. 19, forcing another reshuffling of the offensive line.

Downs said after the game that he didn't think twice about fielding the punt off the turf and was able to keep running and eventually get into the end zone due to some elite blocking by his teammates.

"There was no doubt that I was going to field it," he said. "There was space there, and everybody did a really good job blocking on the punt return unit. And we talked about it all week that we had a real opportunity to do it this week. Just a true blessing from God to be able to put it in the end zone."

While Downs' score was by far the most memorable play of Ohio State's 38-15 win over the Hoosiers, it wasn't the only high-impact play made by the special teams unit.

One quarter before Downs' touchdown, Evans botched a clean snap on a punt attempt on IU's 30-yard line, causing the ball to roll all the way down to the 7-yard line. Evans would corral it, but it wasn't before sophomore defensive end Caden Curry broke through Indiana's shield to bring down the IU punter for a turnover on downs and a loss of 23 yards.

Curry's aggressive stop on Evans – which led to Ohio State's second touchdown of the game three plays later – was at the time the third impact play made by the team's punt return unit in as many games, with the Buckeyes' blocking punts both against Purdue on Nov. 9 and Northwestern on Nov. 16, all of those plays involving Curry.

Day said all of this recent special teams success serves as validation for the hard work and big changes put in by the team during the offseason to improve the unit, ones which are beginning to pay off in the most important stretch of Ohio State's season.

"When you're in the special teams meetings every day and putting the work in that these guys are putting in, it's a great example to the other players that you might not see the results, but if you trust the process, good things are going to happen," Day said. "Now we've had three weeks in a row a punt block and now a punt return for a touchdown. Those are big plays in matchup games. Those are the things we have got to have."

New-Look OL Passes First Test

Ohio State's offensive line has had to undergo some serious makeovers this year, and none were more drastic than the changes the Buckeyes had to make when Seth McLaughlin went down with a season-ending torn Achilles tendon on Nov. 19, forcing last season's starting center Carson Hinzman to reclaim his role and move over from left guard and backup Austin Siereveld to take over for Hinzman.

McLaughlin's injury caused many who follow the team to raise major concerns about the state of the Buckeyes' ravaged offensive line heading into the most important portion of the schedule, especially when considering that the next opponent on the schedule, Indiana, came into Columbus leading the Big Ten in both sacks (31) and tackles for loss (73).

Despite these concerns from the Buckeye faithful all week, Ohio State's new-look offensive line, for the most part, passed its first test.

The makeshift group of left tackle Donovan Jackson, Siereveld, Hinzman, right guard Tegra Tshabola and right tackle Josh Fryar mostly held their own against a formidable Hoosiers' front, paving the way for the Buckeyes to rush for 115 rushing yards on 29 carries (4.0 per tote) while allowing just three tackles in the backfield.

Day said that although it was difficult to make a full evaluation of the group due to the team running only 55 plays on offense, overall he was pleased with the fight and physicality his group showed for most of the game.

"I'll go off of what I felt I saw on the field, and I felt like guys were getting after it," he said. "I felt like some of the plays, guys were just straining. Indiana's style of defense, there were people just moving every play and shifting and changing the fronts. There were times where there were free guys in a hole.

"I think they played hard, and I thought they protected well when Will (Howard) was in (passing situations)."

Howard echoed a similar sentiment regarding the offensive line, saying that he was proud of the way both Hinzman and Siereveld performed at their new positions given the circumstances and confident in any combination of linemen the team decides to put out on the field.

"I'm so proud of those guys," he said "For (Hinzman) and Austin to step into new roles – Austin was playing right guard early in the season and now he's playing left guard. For those guys to be able to step in like they did, I was just so proud of them.

"And really all week, I just told those guys, 'Dude, I'm not worried. I'm not worried about you guys. You guys have played a ton of football.' Carson started 12 games last year, and he's a good football player. I wasn't worried about it at all."

Despite this major vote of confidence, the new front five still played far from a perfect game. In addition to there being an obvious step back in the push made by the front on certain run plays, as evidenced by Indiana's fourth-down stop of Quinshon Judkins at the Hoosiers' 2-yard line early in the second quarter, the group also committed three penalties on the day that brought the Buckeyes back a combined 25 yards.

Perhaps the most impactful penalty of the three was the first one, an illegal block in the back foul on Hinzman on Ohio State's second drive of the game that turned a TreVeyon Henderson 26-yard gain to the IU 9-yard line into a 10-yard penalty that brought the Buckeyes all the way back to the IU 45.

Ohio State was able to overcome this flag and eventually get back into the red zone before the previously mentioned turnover on downs. But in the fourth quarter, it committed its second illegal block in the back foul, this time on Jackson that negated a Gee Scott Jr. 3-yard catch.

These types of penalties were uncharacteristic for the group when it had all of its starters healthy earlier in the season, a development that could negatively impact the Buckeyes in The Game on Nov. 30 or in postseason play.

Penalty Struggles Continue For Igbinosun

Ohio State had perhaps its most impressive defensive performance of the season in the win against the Hoosiers, but there was one notable blemish on the group's Week 13 report card, one that has become a common trend in recent weeks.

As was the case in many games down the stretch this year, Ohio State junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun negatively impacted the game with his over-aggression, committing three pass-interference calls on the day – including two on one drive – that resulted in 28 Hoosier yards and three automatic first downs.

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

In their first game against an elite passing offense since a 32-31 loss to Oregon on Oct. 12, the Buckeyes had their best game in pass defense all season. Coming into the game, Indiana quarterback Kurtis Rourke was second in the country in passing efficiency, but against the Buckeyes, the Hoosiers' signal-caller never found a rhythm. Led by fifth-year linebacker Cody Simon as a blitzer, the Buckeye pass rush and the secondary linked up to allow Rourke to throw for only 68 yards in Ohio State's 38-15 win on Nov. 23. Thirty-two of Rourke's yards came on two passes during the team's first drive. Rourke attempted only 18 passes the entire game, in large part because the Buckeyes' pass rush didn't allow him enough time to try to complete a pass.

Defensive coordinator Jim Knowles had yet another aggressive day as a play caller, dialing up blitz after blitz, and the Buckeyes recorded what tied for a season high of five sacks. Especially in the first half, Simon was the most effective player at wreaking havoc on Rourke. Simon navigated through the Hoosiers' offensive line virtually untouched to bring down Rourke for sacks on back-to-back third downs. The second of the two sacks caused Rourke to fumble the ball, which was recovered by defensive tackle Ty Hamilton. Simon sacked Rourke once more before the first half was over, bringing his total sacks for the game to 2½, a career high for the linebacker.

Simon's team-leading performance will certainly be the headliner, but defensive ends Jack Sawyer and JT Tuimoloau were strong contributors, finishing the game with 1½ and one sacks, respectively. The Buckeyes' sack production couldn't have been possible without the efforts of their teammates in the secondary. Despite three pass-interference penalties committed by junior cornerback Davison Igbinosun and some issues as a whole on the Hoosiers' first drive of the game, Ohio State's cornerbacks rarely allowed Indiana receivers to create separation. The Buckeye secondary and pass rushers should be licking their chops ahead of a matchup with Michigan, which possesses the 127th-ranked passing offense in the country after its 50-6 win over Northwestern on Nov. 23.

What Didn't Work

In arguably its most well-rounded performance against a great opponent to this point in the season, the only area where Ohio State struggled was in committing penalties. In an uncharacteristically sloppy performance, the Buckeyes committed eight penalties, many of which cost the Buckeyes points on offense or led to touchdowns for the Hoosiers. Starting in the first quarter, Igbinosun was flagged for a 15-yard pass-interference penalty when he made too much contact with Indiana receiver Elijah Sarratt, giving the Hoosiers an automatic first down and the ball inside Ohio State territory. Later in the drive, Igbinosun made a similar error against Indiana receiver Ke'Shawn Williams. Because the Hoosiers were already at the Buckeyes' 4-yard line on the play, the penalty cost Ohio State only 2 yards, but Indiana scored a touchdown the next play. Two more penalties on the next Ohio State drive – a disputed block-in-the-back call on redshirt sophomore center Carson Hinzman and an intentional-grounding call on quarterback Will Howard – backed the Buckeyes up 35 yards behind the first-down marker ahead of third down. Howard found Tate with two straight passes to pick up the first down, but the drive ultimately stalled at Indiana's 2-yard line.

Ohio State's last two penalties of 10 yards or more were committed in the fourth quarter while the game was out of reach, but they also played a part in the Hoosiers momentarily cutting into the lead. A block-in-the-back penalty from Gee Scott Jr. early in the final quarter put the Buckeyes in a second-and-22 situation, which ultimately led them to settle for a field goal. Right before the two-minute timeout, Igbinosun then committed his third pass-interference penalty of the game to give the Hoosiers the ball at the Buckeyes' 2-yard line. The Hoosiers scored their second touchdown of the game one play later and picked up the two-point conversion on the next play to cut Ohio State's lead to 31-15. Some thought penalty issues could cost the Buckeyes a win over Indiana, and although that was clearly not the case, Day will want those issues patched up with the Big Ten Championship Game and the College Football Playoff looming.

Play Of The Game

With Indiana set to get the ball first to start the second half and Ohio State up only 14-7, the game was far from decided at halftime. The Buckeyes created a much more comfortable lead almost immediately in the second half with a three-and-out and an increasingly common special teams splash play. On fourth-and-8 from their own 27-yard line with 13:06 left in the third quarter, Indiana punter James Evans launched a low line-drive punt that landed at the Ohio State 30-yard line. Sophomore safety Caleb Downs fielded the bouncing football at the OSU 21-yard line before he immediately got through the first wave of defenders by putting an Indiana defender in the spin cycle. Downs found a lane to pick up plenty more yards down the Ohio State sideline. After surging past another defender, the former Alabama transfer broke free on a cutback to take it the rest of the way for a 79-yard return touchdown. That gave the Buckeyes a 21-7 lead, and the program its first punt return touchdown since Jalin Marshall's 54-yard return for a touchdown almost exactly 10 years ago on Nov. 22, 2014, in a 42-27 win over Indiana.

— Bobby Gorbett

The Ole Miss transfer, who had been previously wearing oven mitts in practice to try to learn how to cover pass catchers without grabbing, seemed to leave those positive habits on the practice field on Nov. 23 at Ohio Stadium.

Igbinosun's penalty issues were apparent early and often against the Hoosiers, where he helped them keep moving forward and eventually score the game's first touchdown on an 11-play, 70-yard opening drive with two key flags.

His first penalty occurred on a second-and-7 from the IU 47-yard line when Hoosier quarterback Kurtis Rourke targeted the cornerback on a deep ball intended for wideout Elijah Sarratt. Igbinosun had solid coverage on the James Madison transfer, but – like many times this year – he failed to turn his head around and instead made contact with Sarratt to draw the flag.

Igbinosun's penalty set up the Hoosiers at the Ohio State 38, and after they methodically moved the ball all the way to the 4-yard line in seven plays, he put Indiana in an even better position to score with his second interference call in nine snaps.

On first-and-goal from the OSU 4, Igbinosun got beat on a Ke'Shawn Williams slant route and grabbed a hold of the wideout's jersey, causing the officials to throw another flag on the corner, this time in the end zone, giving Indiana a fresh set of downs at the OSU 2-yard line.

The Hoosiers would capitalize on the very next play on a Ty Son Lawton score to give them the 7-0 lead, putting a cap on a scoring drive that continued in large part due to Igbinosun's mistakes.

Igbinosun would be penalty-free until the fourth quarter when he committed his third pass interference on Hoosiers wide receiver Omar Cooper Jr., which put Indiana in position to score its second touchdown of the game one play later on a Lawton 2-yard rush.

Day did not seem pleased with the three pass-interference calls on Igbinosun after the game, saying that these types of fouls simply cannot happen if they want to compete for a championship.

"I thought our guys in the secondary covered well because we knew they were going to take shots downfield," he said. "We still have too many of these pass-interference calls that we have to get cleaned up. That's just the truth."

Day Leaves No Doubt On Last Possession

Throughout the season, Day has been using the motto "leave no doubt" to describe the way the Buckeyes want to play this season, where the team shows no mercy to the opponent by playing with an aggressive and focused mindset from start to finish.

That mentality seemed to be on full display at the end of the Buckeyes' convincing win over the Hoosiers, where, with the team already up 31-15 with just 1:53 left in the fourth quarter, they left their foot on the gas pedal to find the end zone for the fifth time in the game, scoring on a 1-yard Howard rush to cap a scoring drive that lasted just three plays.

The Buckeyes seemed hesitant at first to extend the lead, with Henderson after a 39-yard gain on first down choosing to give himself up and slide at the 1-yard line rather than run into the end zone for what would have been an easy score. Henderson likely opted to slide in an effort to run out the clock and not give the ball back to the Hoosiers with a potential chance to score, a decision that Howard said would have been a tough one for him to make.

"I said, 'You're a better man than me, dude,' " Howard said of his running back's slide. "If I got that far down the field, I don't know if I would have slid down at the 1, but he's being a smart football player."

Ohio State had a bit of a different mentality at the 1-yard line, however. Instead of running out the clock or taking a knee, the Buckeyes decided to try for the end zone, rushing two times with Howard before eventually getting in on the second attempt.

When asked about this sequence after the game, Howard said that the offense decided to score with the game already squarely in hand to finish on a strong note and show future opponents that the team isn't taking a play for granted at any point this season, blowout or not.

"We wanted to put an exclamation point on that thing and remind them what the Buckeyes are about," Howard said. "You accept what you ask for. I have a ton of respect for (Indiana). That was not in any way disrespectful. We were just trying to put an exclamation point on the game. It was just, 'We're on the 1-yard line, let's go score.' "

Ohio State's late-game showing of confidence – which also included Howard poking fun at Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti by acting out smoking and stomping on a cigarette – did not seem to bother the Hoosiers coach, who said after the game that Day needed to "do what he has to do for his team."

Day had a similar response to Howard after the game, saying he wanted the offense to execute an end-of-game goal-line possession and put an emphatic end to a blowout top-five win.

"At the end of the game, we're in a four-minute drill like you saw in the Penn State game. We call that downtime. Once we get the first down in that moment, we feel like the game is probably over.

"(Henderson broke) free and brought it all the way down to the 1-yard line, and I think maybe it triggered at the last second, 'Oh boy, I've got to get down here,' so we didn't have to put our defense back on the field. Then we decided to milk at least 45 seconds off the clock. We're on the 1-yard line and we just felt like we wanted to put an exclamation point on the win by sneaking it in."

BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 38, Indiana 15

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on what he's seeing from fifth-year quarterback Will Howard and his preparation: "I think Buckeye Nation is now seeing, after 11 games, this guy is a winner. He's tough. He cares about his teammates. He's a leader. It was a tough spot when we lost Seth (McLaughlin) the week leading up to the game in practice, and he, along with the offensive line, (Donovan Jackson) and Josh (Fryar), really just raised the spirits of everybody. That's hard to do when you lose somebody who has made such an impact like Seth. But (Howard has) got great resilience, great toughness. He's the heart and soul of our team."

Howard on being the first player in program history to complete 80 percent of passes in six different games: "That's cool, but it really doesn't mean that much to me as long as we're winning games. That's really all that matters to me. If it's a good completion percentage, then that means I'm making good decisions with the football and keeping us on track. As long as we're winning games I'm not really worried about stats."

Howard on the team converting a first down after facing third-and-35: "That one, I don't have many answers for that. You just have to make a play and Carnell (Tate) did a great job on the scramble drill restarting. We had a concept, our third-and-long concept, but 35 yards is damn hard to get. The fact that we were able to get 25 to put us in a situation to go for it on fourth down and get that fourth down, that was huge. That really set the tone for the game and said, 'OK, we're here to play.' I don't really have any answers on how that happened. It's just players making plays and guys getting open for me down the field. Shout-out to Carnell for that. He did a heck of a job on that drive."

Howard on how the offensive line stepped up after McLaughlin's injury: "That was the biggest thing on my heart was that I just hurt for my brother who just lost the rest of his season. I told those guys that you can say whatever you want about who we throw in there, I don't care. It's 'next man up' mentality. It's competitive excellence. I was so proud of those guys, how they stepped up, and I think they did a heck of a job."

Senior wide receiver Emeka Egbuka on Ohio State winning the last four minutes of the first half and first four minutes of the second half: "Coach Day, he doesn't just make stuff up. He does football studies, and he shows us the cut-ups. He shows us the percentages. The team that has the most rushing yards is going to win the game. The team that wins the turnover battle is going to win the game, and the team that wins the middle eight is going to win the game. So it's something that we practice. We practice sudden-change moments. We practice those four minutes entering halftime and those four minutes coming out and just being very dominant in those phases. It's something that we really take to heart. It's part of our culture. It's part of who we are. So we really take pride in the middle eight."

Sophomore safety Caleb Downs on what it felt like to get out in the open field on his punt return: "It felt like it was normal. It felt like it was the right thing for me to have the ball in my hands and be in the field of play. And then (my teammates) did a really good job blocking. C.J. (Hicks) told me that he put somebody on the ground at the end of the play. So I have to go back and look at that."

Downs on the run defense the last four or five games: "(We're just) process-oriented, just truly trying to get prepared every week, trying to get ourselves in the best position and the best mindset to play and really go into the game like, 'They're not going to score. We're dominating the whole game.' At the end of the game, we left them a few plays that we really shouldn't have, so we can't do that again. We have to finish and play the full 60 minutes. But just going into the game, we were saying, 'We're dominating and nobody's going to move the ball and score the ball on us. And that's what we're going to do.' "

Senior defensive end Jack Sawyer on when things started to go Ohio State's way: "I'd say the first sack we had was big. The crowd got into it. The crowd was awesome today. So that was great to see – not that they haven't been, but today was a different level, which we need here in November. I think it really affected (Indiana). We saw them get the delay of game the one time that pushed them back, then we got the sack. Once you had that, our offense goes down and scores, and then we come out and Caleb returns a punt. We were all just feeding off each other, like you do here in late November. So it was good to see."

Indiana head coach Curt Cignetti on if he was surprised his team didn't handle the crowd noise well: " I thought we'd be able to handle it with our normal cadence based on the reports that we had gotten. Some of the linemen could hear, but the center couldn't. We had to go silent. It wasn't a problem. We had the ball snapped (on the delay of game call)."

Cignetti on the turning point of the game: "We came up with a turnover on defense and a fourth-down stop, and then we got a first down on offense at 7-7 and then we come up third-and-1, and by all indications, they jumped offsides, which would have given us a first down. But we got called for the penalty. I'm not sure they made the correct call. We came up third-and-6 and we got sacked. From that point on, and really, I'm not saying the game would have been different on that call. That's not what I'm saying at all. That's where the game changed. It was around that point."

Cignetti on whether Indiana should still be considered to be one of the 12 teams in the College Football Playoff after this loss: "Is that a serious question? I'm not even going to answer that. The answer is so obvious."

Sawyer on how it feels to be coming off a performance like this heading into the Michigan game: "I think that we're playing our best football right now – all of us, collectively. You saw the defense kind of going through a different gear in this game after the first drive. So that's what we're capable of. And it feels great to be playing like that right now, I just can't wait. It's crazy it's already here this fast, and we've been waiting for this game for 364 days. So I can't wait."

Sawyer on why he can't wait for the Michigan game: "It's everything. This is what you come to Ohio State for, to beat those guys up North. I just can't wait. We have them at home, our senior year, my class. After what has gone on these last few years, you wouldn't want it any other way. We'd play this game anywhere, it doesn't matter. So we're excited. We're excited."

Egbuka on what Nov. 30 is going to be like against Michigan: "It's going to be everything that I've anticipated the last 365 days."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 38, Indiana 15

Nov. 23, 2024 – Ohio Stadium, Columbus, Ohio

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
INDIANA	7	0	0	8	15
OHIO STATE	0	14	14	10	38

First Quarter

IU – Lawton, 2-yard rush (Radicic kick), 6:52.

Second Quarter

OSU – Egbuka, 11-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 7:22.

OSU – Henderson, 4-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:21.

Third Quarter

OSU – Downs, 79-yard punt return (Fielding kick), 12:44.

OSU – Thurman, 1-yard pass from Howard (Fielding kick), 6:02.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Fielding, 45-yard field goal, 8:56.

IU – Lawton, 2-yard rush (Cooper Jr. pass from Rourke), 1:53.

OSU – Howard, 1-yard rush (Fielding kick), 0:35.

Att. – 105,751

Weather – Cloudy, 46 F

Team Statistics

	IU	OSU
First Downs	16	14
Rushing	10	5
Passing	3	9
Penalty	3	0
Rushes-Yards	41-83	29-115
Passing Yards	68	201
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	8-18-0	22-26-1
Offensive Plays	59	55
Total Net Yards	151	316
Third Down Efficiency	6-14	4-11
Fourth Down Efficiency	1-2	2-3
Punts-Avg.	5-42.8	2-47.0
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	0-0
Penalties	3-15	8-58
Time of Possession	30:40	29:20

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – **IU**: Lawton 15-79; Ellison 17-62; Team 1-(-2); Evans 1-(-23); Rourke 7-(-33). **OSU:** Henderson 9-68; Judkins 14-36; Smith 1-12; Howard 5-(-1).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – **IU:** Rourke 8-18-0-68-0. **OSU:** Howard 22-26-1-201-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – **IU:** Sarratt 3-40; Lawton 2-9; Williams 2-6; Price 1-13. **OSU:** Egbuka 7-80; Tate 4-68; Smith 3-34; Henderson 3-5; Judkins 2-7; Scott Jr. 2-6; Thurman 1-1.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – **IU:** Evans 5-42.8-52. **OSU:** McGuire 2-47.0-49.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Price 1-12. **OSU:** Downs 3-91.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** None. **OSU:** Henderson 1-19.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** None. **OSU:** Hamilton 1-0.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Walker 1-0. **OSU:** None.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – **IU**: None. **OSU**: Simon 2.5-23; Sawyer 1.5-14; Tuimoloau 1-9.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – **IU:** Mangum-Farrar 1-5; West 1-4; Walker 1-1. **OSU:** Simon 2.5-23; Sawyer 1.5-14; Curry 1-23; Tuimoloau 1-9; Styles 1-3; Williams 1-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – **IU:** Walker 4-4-8; Carr Jr. 4-3-7; Asbury II 3-4-7; Ponds 4-2-6; Fisher 3-1-4; Ferrell 3-1-4; Jones Jr. 2-2-4; Hardy 1-2-3; West 1-2-3; Carpenter 0-3-3; Kamara 0-3-3; Vanhorse 2-0-2; Tucker 0-2-2; Becker 1-0-1; Mangum-Farrar 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Bonds 0-1-1. **OSU:** Simon 4-6-10; Styles 3-5-8; Downs 2-3-5; Tuimoloau 0-5-5; Curry 4-0-4; Ransom 3-1-4; Sawyer 2-2-4; Hamilton 0-4-4; Mathews Jr. 2-1-3; Williams 1-2-3; Igbinosun 0-3-3; Reese 1-1-2; Burke 1-1-2; Hicks 1-0-1; Styles Jr. 1-0-1; Thurman 1-0-1; Smith Jr. 1-0-1; Hancock 0-1-1; Kanu 0-1-1; McDonald 0-1-1; Malone 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – **IU**: Sarratt, Cross, Cooper Jr., Horton, Katic, Ellison, Smith, Lynch, Wedig, Stephens, Rourke, Asbury II, Walker, Hardy, Ferrell, Fisher, Carr Jr., Ponds, Kamara, West, Johnson, Carpenter, Coby, Jones Jr., Doss, Lawton, Vanhorse, Sanguinetti, Bonds, Utzinger, Radicic, Price, McCormick, Walker, Jones, Langston, Bomba, Williams, Mangum-Farrar, Jones, Black, Becker, Foley, West, Ndukwe, Burris Jr., Evans, Tucker, Landino. **OSU:** Judkins, Howard, Egbuka, Smith, Siereveld, Fryar, Jackson, Hinzman, Tshabola, Christian, Scott Jr., Simon, Igbinosun, Burke, Downs, Sawyer, Tuimoloau, Hamilton, Styles, Hancock, Ransom, Williams, Inniss, Hicks, West, Thurman, Tate, Melton, McClain, Reese, Simpson-Hunt, Stover, Mathews Jr., Pierce, Styles Jr., Henderson, Powers, Fielding, Velazquez, McGuire, Ferlmann, Gurd, Montgomery, Smith Jr., Padilla, Fitzpatrick, Adolph, Kacmarek, Hartford, Curry, Kanu, Malone, Houston, Jackson Jr., McDonald.

Season Statistics

2024 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Aug. 31	(2) AKRON	W, 52-6	102,011
Sept. 9	(2) WESTERN MICHIGAN	W, 56-0	102,665
Sept. 21	(3) MARSHALL	W, 49-14	103,871
Sept. 28	(3) Michigan State	W, 38-7	71,114
Oct. 5	(3) IOWA	W, 35-7	105,135
Oct. 12	(3) Oregon (2)	L, 32-31	60,129
Oct. 26	(4) NEBRASKA	W, 21-17	104,830
Nov. 2	(4) Penn State (3)	W, 20-13	111,030
Nov. 9	(3) PURDUE	W, 45-0	103,463
Nov. 16	(2) Northwestern	W, 31-7	38,147
Nov. 23	(2) INDIANA (5)	W, 38-15	105,751
Nov. 30	(2) MICHIGAN	12 p.m.	

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	232	157
Rushing	101	65
Passing	124	74
Penalty	7	18
Average Per Game/Rush	177.5	90.0
Average Per Game/Pass	261.5	151.7
Total Offense	4830	2659
Total Plays	690	648
Average Per Game	439.1	241.7
Average Per Play	7.0	4.1
Penalties-Yards	50-462	38-270
Fumbles-Lost	12-5	18-8
Third Down Efficiency	55-127	49-152
Percentage	43%	32%
Fourth Down Efficiency	17-24	8-20
Percentage	71%	40%
Sacks-Yards	35-231	12-75
Time Of Possession Avg.	30:13	29:47

Score By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	73	143	135	65	0	416	37.8
Opponents	33	43	9	33	0	118	10.7

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Quinshon Judkins	135	759	5.6	8	86
T. Henderson	98	730	7.4	6	53
James Peoples	42	191	4.5	2	18
Will Howard	68	121	1.8	7	19
S. Williams-Dixon	7	53	7.6	0	31
Jeremiah Smith	4	47	11.8	1	19
Julian Sayin	2	24	12.0	0	19
Emeka Egbuka	5	21	4.2	0	13
Devin Brown	7	13	1.9	0	10
Carnell Tate	0	6	0.0	0	6
Mason Maggs	1	3	3.0	0	3
Team	10	-15	-1.5	0	0
OSU Totals	**379**	**1953**	**5.2**	**24**	**86**
OPP Totals	**366**	**990**	**2.7**	**8**	**38**

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
Will Howard	208	281	74.0	2685	26-6	180.5
Devin Brown	10	19	52.6	108	1-0	117.7
Julian Sayin	5	11	45.5	84	1-0	139.6
OSU Totals	**223**	**311**	**71.7**	**2877**	**28-6**	**175.3**
OPP Totals	**170**	**282**	**60.3**	**1669**	**4-7**	**109.7**

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Jeremiah Smith	52	899	17.3	9	70
Emeka Egbuka	56	692	12.4	9	68
Carnell Tate	35	525	15.0	4	40
Brandon Inniss	12	151	12.6	1	27
Gee Scott Jr.	14	144	10.3	2	34
T. Henderson	7	110	6.5	0	32
Quinshon Judkins	15	109	7.3	1	21
Bennett Christian	2	61	30.5	1	55
Will Kacmarek	5	58	11.6	0	32
Bryson Rodgers	5	46	9.2	0	12
Jelani Thurman	4	42	10.5	1	19
Jayden Ballard	2	18	9.0	0	12
David Adolph	1	10	10.0	0	10
Kojo Antwi	1	8	8.0	0	8
Patrick Gurd	1	6	6.0	0	6
James Peoples	1	-2	-2.0	0	0
OSU Totals	**223**	**2877**	**12.9**	**28**	**70**
OPP Totals	**170**	**1669**	**9.8**	**4**	**69**

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Jayden Fielding	–	53-53	–	–	8-9	77
Jeremiah Smith	10	–	–	–	–	60
Q. Judkins	9	–	–	–	–	54
Emeka Egbuka	9	–	–	–	–	54
Will Howard	7	–	–	–	–	42
T. Henderson	6	–	–	–	–	36
Carnell Tate	4	–	–	–	–	24
James Peoples	2	–	–	–	–	12
Gee Scott Jr.	2	–	–	–	–	12
Bennett Christian	1	–	–	–	–	6
Gabe Powers	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jack Sawyer	1	–	–	–	–	6
Lathan Ransom	1	–	–	–	–	6
Brandon Inniss	1	–	–	–	–	6
Jelani Thurman	1	–	–	–	–	6
Caleb Downs	1	–	–	–	–	6
Austin Snyder	–	3-3	–	–	–	3
OSU Totals	**56**	**56-56**	**–**	**–**	**8-9**	**416**
OPP Totals	**13**	**9-9**	**–**	**2**	**9-14**	**118**

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Jayden Fielding	1-1	2-2	5-6	0-0	8-9
OSU Totals	**1-1**	**2-2**	**5-6**	**0-0**	**8-9**
OPP Totals	**3-4**	**1-2**	**4-6**	**1-2**	**9-14**

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Joe McGuire	29	1246	43.0	0	61
Nick McLarty	2	65	32.5	0	35
OSU Totals	**31**	**1311**	**42.3**	**0**	**61**
OPP Totals	**61**	**2567**	**42.1**	**2**	**60**

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Denzel Burke	2	31	15.5	0	31
Davison Igbinosun	2	45	22.5	0	45
Lathan Ransom	1	24	24.0	0	24
Jordan Hancock	1	0	0.0	0	0
Gabe Powers	1	29	29.0	1	29
OSU Totals	**7**	**129**	**18.4**	**1**	**45**
OPP Totals	**6**	**101**	**16.8**	**1**	**36**

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Brandon Inniss	12	109	9.1	0	36
Caleb Downs	5	102	20.4	1	79
Jayden Ballard	1	0	0.0	0	0
David Adolph	1	0	0.0	0	0
Caden Curry	1	0	0.0	0	0
OSU Totals	**20**	**211**	**10.6**	**1**	**79**
OPP Totals	**7**	**43**	**6.1**	**0**	**14**

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
T. Henderson	4	58	14.5	0	19
Brandon Inniss	3	47	15.7	0	18
Jayden Ballard	2	23	11.5	0	23
Emeka Egbuka	1	16	16.0	0	16
OSU Totals	**11**	**144**	**13.1**	**0**	**23**
OPP Totals	**8**	**135**	**16.9**	**0**	**25**

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Sonny Styles	31	40	71	6.5-35	4.0-29
Cody Simon	30	35	65	8.0-49	5.0-44
Caleb Downs	30	21	51	6.5-11	0.5-2
Lathan Ransom	29	19	48	5.5-8	0-0
Jack Sawyer	18	24	42	4.5-28	4.5-28
Denzel Burke	27	10	37	2.0-2	0-0
Ty Hamilton	12	23	35	3.5-14	2.5-10
JT Tuimoloau	18	17	35	11.0-57	6.0-38
Arvell Reese	15	15	30	2.5-8	0.5-5
Jordan Hancock	20	10	30	1.5-4	0.5-3
Davison Igbinosun	16	12	28	2.0-6	0-0
Tyleik Williams	8	17	25	5.0-15	2.5-9
C.J. Hicks	9	12	21	2.0-14	2.0-14
Caden Curry	11	7	18	2.5-39	1.5-16
J. Mathews Jr.	10	5	15	2.5-6	1.0-3
Kayden McDonald	6	8	14	1.0-3	0-0
Lorenzo Styles Jr.	8	5	13	0-0	0-0
Jaylen McClain	6	6	12	1.0-1	0-0
Mitchell Melton	6	5	11	3.5-15	2.0-12
K. Jackson Jr.	5	6	11	2.0-11	1.5-11
Tywone Malone	1	6	7	1.0-1	0-0
Malik Hartford	3	4	7	0-0	0-0
Gabe Powers	4	1	5	0-0	0-0
Eddrick Houston	2	2	4	0-0	0-0
Payton Pierce	-	3	3	0-0	0-0
Joshua Mickens	2	1	3	1.0-7	1.0-7
C. Simpson-Hunt	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Aaron Scott Jr.	1	1	2	0-0	0-0
Hero Kanu	-	2	2	0-0	0-0
Bryce West	-	1	1	0-0	0-0
Dominic Kirks	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
Will Smith Jr.	1	-	1	0-0	0-0
OSU Totals	**337**	**322**	**659**	**75-334**	**35-231**
OPP Totals	**371**	**312**	**683**	**37-138**	**12-75**

Fumbles Forced: Ransom (3), Hancock (2), Sawyer (2), Curry, Hamilton, Simon, Tuimoloau.

Fumbles Recovered: Hamilton (2), Sawyer (2), Igbinosun, Jackson Jr., Ransom, Simon, Styles.