

BUCKEYE FLASHBACKS

Alabama Ruined First Sugar Trip

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

While Ohio State will go into the Sugar Bowl ranked ninth nationally for the second time in school history, the Buckeyes have to hope for a different result this time around.

Twenty years ago, OSU's 1977 team ran into a buzz saw in the form of No. 3-ranked Alabama, losing to the Crimson Tide 35-6 in the 44th Sugar Bowl game played on Jan. 2, 1978, in the Louisiana Superdome.

Ohio State came into the Sugar Bowl that season reeling after a 14-6 loss at Michigan that denied the Big Ten co-champion Buckeyes a Rose Bowl berth.

Still, this Sugar Bowl was billed as a battle of two college coaching legends, pitting Alabama's Paul "Bear" Bryant against OSU's Woody Hayes. The pair would go on to end their careers as the Division I-A game's top and fourth-winningest coaches, respectively. Bryant still holds the top spot with 323 wins, while Hayes, with 238, has been passed by active coaches Joe Paterno and Bobby Bowden in recent years.

But Bryant dismissed the buildup as "overdrawn."

"I didn't play a down, block a punt or score a touchdown," Bryant said. "I don't think anything that happened today had anything to do with how good or bad a coach I am or Woody is."

"He's a great coach and he always will be — and I ain't bad."



COURTESY: THE SUGAR BOWL

COACHING LEGENDS — OSU's Woody Hayes (left) and Alabama's Paul "Bear" Bryant shake hands and prepare the traditional Cafe Brutot toast at a New Year's Eve party before the 1978 Sugar Bowl.

At least on the OSU side, the day was one of the darkest in Hayes' 28 years at the helm. "They beat us with a team that had half the talent we had," Hayes said afterward.

"Our team had about a quarter of the coaching their team got."

Alabama, which finished 11-1 and ranked second to Notre Dame in the final AP poll, did have a little bit of talent. Game MVP Jeff Rutledge completed 8 of 11 passes for 109 yards and two touchdowns. Alabama got rushing touchdowns from three members of its running back fleet in Tony Nathan, Major Ogilvie and Johnny Davis. The Tide also had a tight end named Ozzie Newsome who wasn't too shabby.

"I think our team reached its peak today," said Bryant, whose team fumbled 10 times but lost only two of them.

After a scoreless first quarter, OSU fell behind 13-0 at halftime. The Buckeyes failed to score on a key fourth-and-4 situation at the Alabama 5 with 30 seconds left in the half.

Only a 38-yard touchdown pass from Rod Gerald to Jimmy Harrell in the fourth quarter kept OSU from being shut out.

Gerald was especially abysmal, completing just 7 of 17 passes for 103 yards with three interceptions. Years later, he would blame his performance on the fact he played the game under the influence of cocaine.

Ron Springs was OSU's top rusher with 74 yards on 10 carries. Jeff Logan added 57 yards on 13 carries.

"I've never been more frustrated than I am today," Logan said afterward. "I thought we had a great team, but great teams should be able to win the big games."

"They outplayed us in almost every area,"

Alabama 35, Ohio State 6

Jan. 2, 1978 The Sugar Bowl					
Louisiana Superdome; New Orleans, La.					
Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	0	0	6	6
ALABAMA	0	13	8	14	35
Second Quarter					
ALA — Nathan 1 run (Chapman kick)					
ALA — Bolton 27 pass from Rutledge (kick failed)					
Third Quarter					
ALA — Neal 3 pass from Rutledge (Nathan pass from Rutledge)					
Fourth Quarter					
OSU — Harrell 38 pass from Gerald (run failed)					
ALA — Ogilvie 1 run (Chapman kick)					
ALA — Davis 5 run (Chapman kick)					
Att. — 76,811					
Team Statistics		OSU		ALA	
First Downs		13		25	
Rushes-Yards		38-160		68-280	
Passing Yards		103		109	
Passes (Att.-Comp.-Int.)		17-7-3		11-6-0	
Total Net Yards		263		369	
Punts		4-37.5		1-33.0	
Fumbles-Lost		0-0		10-2	
Penalties		4-40		1-5	
Individual Statistics					
RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — OHIO STATE: Springs 10-74; Logan 13-57; Campbell 4-14; Donley 1-12; Harrell 1-2; Gerald 9-1. ALABAMA: Davis 24-95; Crow 5-46; Nathan 11-35; Ogilvie 6-29; Ferguson 6-24; Shealy 4-23; K. Jones 2-14; Bolton 1-6; Turpin 1-6; Rutledge 8-2.					
PASSING (Att.-Comp.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — OHIO STATE: Gerald 17-7-3-103-1. ALABAMA: Rutledge 11-6-0-109-2.					
RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — OHIO STATE: Hunter 2-25; Springs 2-6; Harrell 1-38; Moore 1-22; Jaco 1-12. ALABAMA: Newsome 2-45; Ferguson 2-28; Bolton 1-27; Nathan 1-9; Ogilvie 1-7; Neal 1-3.					

Hayes added. "Their defense rose to the occasion and our offense didn't."

The crushing defeat dropped Ohio State to 9-3 on the season, but only lowered the Buckeyes two spots to 11th in the final AP poll.

Florida State Holds 2-0 Lead In OSU Series

By STEVE HELWAGEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State's upcoming Sugar Bowl match-up with Florida State will be only the third-ever meeting between the Buckeyes and Seminoles on the gridiron.

The Buckeyes will be looking to take their first win in the series, having lost back-to-back home games to FSU in 1981-82.

In search of national respect, FSU agreed to a pair of games against Ohio State in Columbus. Bobby Bowden was in only his sixth year as the Seminoles coach when he brought his unranked team into Ohio Stadium the first time. FSU rocked the seventh-ranked Buckeyes 36-27 that season and returned a year later to knock off OSU again, 34-17.

When this latest OSU-Florida State match was made, Bowden recalled details of those first two meetings against coach Earle Bruce's Buckeyes.

"I remember (Art) Schlichter was there in '81 and (Mike) Tomczak was there the next year," Bowden said. "They were a ball-control team back in those days a little bit more, and we were fortunate enough to go into their great stadium and beat them."

There was talk that Ohio State and Florida State would meet again in a non-conference match-up in 1996, but those plans were quashed when FSU joined the ACC in 1992 and had to free most of its available dates for conference games.

Here is a look at the first two OSU-Florida State meetings:

Oct. 3, 1981

Florida State 36, Ohio State 27

FSU quarterback Rick Stockstill used

an underneath passing game to confound the Buckeyes. Stockstill, a native of Sidney, Ohio, who attended OSU games as a child before moving out of state, completed 25 of 41 passes for 299 yards and two interceptions.

His heroics upstaged those of Schlichter, the OSU All-American and Big Ten MVP who established OSU single-game records for completions (31), passes (52) and yards (458). Schlichter's key target was Gary Williams, who set OSU single-game marks for catches (13) and yards (220).

"I know Schlichter and our player, Stockstill, got into a real good air battle," Bowden said. "I think Ohio State threw for a lot more yards than we did, but we blocked a punt for a touchdown and had a fake field goal go for a touchdown."

FSU led 23-21 at halftime after notching the pair of special teams touchdowns. Ron Hester blocked a punt and returned it 35 yards for a score, and place-kick holder Kelly Lowrey bootlegged 5 yards for a touchdown on a fake field goal.

Stockstill's second TD pass of the day, a 7-yarder to tight end Sam Childers, helped the 'Noles grab a commanding 36-21 lead after three quarters. OSU trimmed the final margin on Schlichter's 18-yard TD pass to Cedric Anderson with 12:45 left, but never moved closer than the FSU 40-yard line after that.

The loss spoiled tremendous efforts by OSU linebackers Marcus Marek and Glen Cobb, who were credited with 19 and 16 tackles, respectively.

Bowden said OSU was primed for an upset after notching a 24-19 win at Stanford the week before, while Nebraska had dismantled FSU 34-14 two weeks prior.



FILE PHOTO

LANE ON THE RETURN — OSU's Garcia Lane (12) returns a punt against Florida State in the 1982 game. OSU dropped back-to-back games to the Seminoles in 1981-82.

"When they saw that Nebraska film, they couldn't have thought we were very good," Bowden said.

OSU went on to finish that season 9-3, edging Navy in the Liberty Bowl. OSU ended up ranked 15th in the final Associated Press poll. The win was one of the few bright spots for FSU, which finished 6-5.

Oct. 2, 1982

Florida State 34, Ohio State 17

An Ohio Stadium-record crowd of 89,491 watched the Buckeyes fall at home for the second consecutive week after losing to Stanford a week earlier. The slide would continue a week later with a 6-0 loss to Wisconsin, a loss that marked the

longest home losing streak for the Buckeyes in 15 years.

Bruce played musical chairs at quarterback on this day, starting Tomczak but yanking him in the second quarter in favor of Brent Offenbecher. Neither QB found his stride, though. They combined to complete just 13 of 32 passes for 217 yards with four interceptions and just one touchdown.

"I can't say it's all centered around the quarterback," Bruce said afterward. "I don't like to put the blame on one position. This is a team game."

Offenbecher scrambled for a 31-yard TD pass to tailback Tim Spencer, who finished with 99 yards rushing, to cut the halftime deficit to 21-17. But he threw INTs on OSU's first two, second-half possessions and the

Seminole, led by stars such as receivers Jesse Hester and Dennis McKinnon and tailback Ricky Williams, cruised to the win.

OSU, playing on a hot artificial surface, wilted in the 80-degree heat.

"They were tired," Bowden said. "The heat got 'em."

The defeat dipped OSU's mark to 2-2, the first time OSU had lost two of its first four games in 15 years. The Buckeyes rebounded, though, to finish 9-3 after beating BYU in the Holiday Bowl. OSU was ranked 12th in the final AP poll. Florida State also finished 9-3 that season and ranked 13th in the final poll after a Gator Bowl win over West Virginia.

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

Buckeyes Knock Off SEC Champions

By JEFF SVOBODA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The irony, in many ways, was palpable.

The man who had almost single-handedly started the SEC dynasty helped destroy it, and he did it in the conference's own back yard against its marquee team.

Urban Meyer directed his fired-up Florida team to a 41-14 win against Ohio State in the 2006 BCS National Championship Game, kick-starting an era of SEC dominance that included seven consecutive national championships, and the belief that the league was the best in college football in that span was so strong that the conference once had both teams in the title game.

And that reputation was built on the back of Ohio State, which not only dropped that championship game to the Gators but lost the 2007 version as well to LSU. That contest cemented the narrative of the SEC as the dominant league in the sport and the Big Ten, represented by OSU, as the antiquated conference struggling to keep up.

The Jan. 1 Sugar Bowl turned all of that on its head, so it was notable that it was Meyer again rewriting the script. His Ohio State team turned aside an early 21-6 deficit against No. 1 Alabama in the Superdome, using an offense that combined speed with power and an opportunistic defense to post a 42-35 victory in a College Football Playoff semifinal.

That Ohio State advanced to the first-ever CFP National Championship by slaying Alabama – which had won three of the previous five national crowns – and the SEC was not lost on anyone in the aftermath of the game.

"We talk about that," OSU linebacker Joshua Perry said. "I think that we all take it to heart when other teams in the Big Ten get disrespected because of how much pride we take in our conference. This is a tradition-rich conference. A lot of great players come out of this conference. We have a lot of great players playing right now, so for people to say that one conference is head and shoulders way better than us, that stuff eats at us."

"There were times throughout the season when we were like, it would be cool to get a matchup against an SEC team as a benchmark to compare ourselves. These games make statements. We weren't given a ton of respect, we weren't given a big shot, and this is the Big Ten across the board. We were underdogs in every bowl matchup, right? But Big Ten teams were able to win games. I think it proves the perception isn't exactly what everybody thinks it is."

For Ohio State safety Vonn Bell, who grew up in Chattanooga, Tenn., and attended high school just across the border in Georgia, the rivalry hit home. A five-star safety in the class of 2013, Bell trimmed his list to Ohio State and SEC schools



SONNY BROCKWAY

KNOCKOUT – Ohio State sophomore tailback Ezekiel Elliott (15) races past Alabama's Nick Perry (27) en route to a game-sealing touchdown run, much to the delight of junior tight end Nick Vannett (81).

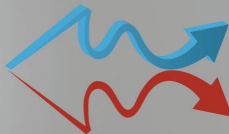
Heating & Cooling • Ice Machines • Residential and Commercial

Congratulations BUCKEYES

• 2014 NATIONAL CHAMPIONS •

CLEAN AND CHECK SPECIAL

\$79.95



MASTER AIR

HEATING, COOLING & REFRIGERATION

masteraircolumbus.com
(614) **775-9505**



The Numbers Game

Ohio State 42, Alabama 35

Jan. 1, 2015 – Superdome, New Orleans

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	6	14	14	8	42
ALABAMA	14	7	7	7	35

First Quarter

OSU – Nuernberger, 22 yard field goal, 11:32; 10 plays, 80 yards, 2:26 TOP.

UA – Henry, 25 yard run (Griffith kick), 9:25; 2 plays, 33 yards, 0:28 TOP.

OSU – Nuernberger, 21 yard field goal, 5:17; 11 plays, 71 yards, 4:08 TOP.

UA – Cooper, 15 yard pass from B.Sims (Griffith kick), 2:06; 8 plays, 79 yards, 3:05 TOP.

Second Quarter

UA – Yeldon, 2 yard run (Griffith kick), 8:07; 5 plays, 15 yards, 2:02 TOP.

OSU – Elliott, 3 yard run (Nuernberger kick), 2:55; 12 plays, 71 yards, 5:07 TOP.

OSU – Thomas, 13 yard pass from Spencer (Nuernberger kick), 0:12; 6 plays, 77 yards, 1:20 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – D.Smith, 47 yard pass from Ca.Jones (Nuernberger kick), 12:44; 6 plays, 75 yards, 2:16 TOP.

OSU – S.Miller, 41 yard interception return (Nuernberger kick), 3:21.

UA – B.Sims, 5 yard run (Griffith kick), 1:01; 7 plays, 84 yards, 2:15 TOP.

Fourth Quarter

OSU – Elliott, 85 yard run (Thomas pass from Ca.Jones), 3:24; 4 plays, 95 yards, 2:00 TOP.

UA – Cooper, 6 yard pass from B.Sims (Griffith kick), 1:59; 6 plays, 65 yards, 1:17 TOP.

Att. – 74,682. Weather – 57 degrees, indoors.

Team Statistics

	OSU	UA
First Downs	23	21
Rushing	12	12
Passing	10	8
Penalty	1	1
Rushes-Yards	42-281	34-170
Passing Yards	256	237
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	19-36-1	22-36-3
Offensive Plays	78	70
Total Net Yards	537	407
Third Down Efficiency	10-18	2-13
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	2-2
Punts-Avg.	6-46.5	7-55.0
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	0-0
Penalties	4-24	4-36
Time of Possession	31:19	28:41

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Elliott 20-230; Ca.Jones 17-43; Marshall 3-11; Samuel 1-1; N.Brown 1-(-4). UA: Henry 13-95; Yeldon 10-47; B.Sims 10-29; TEAM 1-(-1).

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Ca.Jones 18-35-1-243-1; Spencer 1-1-0-13-1. UA: B.Sims 22-36-3-237-2.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Thomas 7-66; Marshall 5-55; D.Smith 2-87; Vannett 2-23; Elliott 1-13; Spencer 1-7; C.Smith 1-5. UA: Cooper 9-71; White 3-65; Henry 2-54; Howard 2-14; Fowler 2-14; Black 2-10; Vogler 2-9.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – OSU: Johnston 6-46.5-60. UA: JK Scott 7-55.0-73.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Marshall 2-10. UA: Ch.Jones 2-10.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Samuel 2-23. UA: Ch.Jones 7-102.

MISSED FIELD GOALS (Yds.) – OSU: None. UA: None.

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: None. UA: Jackson.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES (No.-Yds.) – OSU: None. UA: Collins 1-4.

INTERCEPTIONS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: S.Miller 1-41; Powell 1-29; Bell 1-7. UA: Cy.Jones 1-32.

SACKS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Da.Lee 2.0-8; Bennett 1.0-9. UA: Dickson 1.0-12; Pettway 1.0-5; Allen 1.0-4.

TACKLES FOR LOSS (No.-Yds.) – OSU: Da.Lee 3.0-11; Bennett 1.5-10; Washington 0.5-0. UA: Dickson 2.0-15; Allen 2.0-9; Ragland 2.0-5; N.Perry 1.0-11; Collins 1.0-8; Pettway 1.0-5; DePriest 1.0-1; Anderson 1.0-1.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – OSU: C.Grant 5-5-10; Bell 8-0-8; Da.Lee 7-0-7; D.Grant 6-1-7; J.Perry 4-1-5; Apple 4-1-5; Bennett 2-2-4; Bosa 3-0-3; Powell 2-1-3; Conley 2-0-2; C.Smith 2-0-2; A.Washington 1-1-2; Elliott 1-0-1; Booker 1-0-1; Samuel 1-0-1; C.Williams 1-0-1; E.Smith 1-0-1; Dunn 1-0-1. UA: Collins 9-3-12; Ragland 2-5-7; N.Perry 5-1-6; DePriest 4-2-6; G.Smith 4-2-6; Dickson 5-0-5; E.Jackson 4-0-4; Reed 3-0-3; Foster 2-0-2; Cy.Jones 2-0-2; J.Williams 2-0-2; Allen 2-0-2; A.Robinson 2-0-2; Devall 1-1-2; T.Brown 1-0-1; Fowler 1-0-1; Anderson 1-0-1; Nysewander 1-0-1; Howard 1-0-1; J.Washington 1-0-1; Pettway 1-0-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – OHIO STATE: Offense: Decker, Price, Boren, Elflein, Baldwin, Heuerman, Ca.Jones, Elliott, Thomas, Spencer, D.Smith. Defense: Bosa, A.Washington, Bennett, S.Miller, Da.Lee, C.Grant, J.Perry, Apple, D.Grant, Powell, Bell, Johnston. Reserves: E.Smith, Samuel, Burrows, Marshall, Conley, Tanner, Dunn, Reeves, Ball, Booker, Worley, Fada, Clinton, Haynes, Burger, Munger, C.Williams, Farris, Lewis, N.Brown, Vannett, C.Smith, Baugh, Schutt. ALABAMA: Offense: C.Robinson, Kouandjio, Kelly, L.Brown, Shepherd, Vogler, Howard, B.Sims, Henry, Fowler, Cooper, Griffith. Defense: Allen, A.Robinson, Reed, Dickson, DePriest, Ragland, E.Jackson, Cy.Jones, Collins, N.Perry, G.Smith, JK Scott. Reserves: Black, T.Brown, White, Sylve, Yeldon, L.Jones, Anderson, Ro.Foster, Re.Foster, Hamilton, Cook, Stewart, Bateman, T.Jones, J.Williams, M.Smith, Ch.Jones, J.Washington, Di.Lee, Tenpenney, Devall, Evans, Nysewander, A.Taylor, Tomlinson, Mazza, Pettway, Barrineau, B.Greene, Ivory.

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

OSU Overcomes Early Deficit, Turns Back Tide

Continued From Page 35

first-and-goal at the 1, though, and lost 8 yards after the recovery, and the drive ended with a 21-yard field goal by Nuernberger that made it 7-6 with 5:17 on the clock.

While the Buckeyes settled for a second field goal at the end of a promising drive, the Tide had little trouble reaching the end zone on its next possession. Alabama needed just 3:05 to march 79 yards over eight plays, and Cooper caught a 15-yard touchdown pass on an out pattern from Sims that, following a Griffith PAT, gave the Tide a 14-6 lead with 2:06 left in the opening quarter.

Ohio State committed its second turnover of the game early in the second quarter, giving the Tide another short field. Miscommunication between Jones and Smith, who never looked back for a pass that was picked off by Cyrus Jones, led to an interception that was caught at the OSU 47 and returned to the 15. T.J. Yeldon found the end zone five plays later on a 2-yard TD run, and Griffith's PAT made it 21-6 with 8:07 remaining before halftime.

The Buckeyes got back in the game on their next possession. Two 26-yard passes from Jones to Jalin Marshall put the ball in the Alabama red zone, and Ohio State converted on third-and-goal at the 3 as Elliott ran up the middle and plunged in for a touchdown. The PAT by Nuernberger made it 21-13 with 2:55 left before the half.

The OSU defense forced a three-and-out after the touchdown, giving Jones and the offense one more possession before halftime. The Buckeyes took momentum into the break thanks to an impressive six-play, 77-yard drive – and an unbelievable touchdown throw and catch. Jones helped the cause with a key 27-yard scramble to the Alabama 13, and after an incompleteness, the Buckeyes used a trick play to reach the end zone.

With 19 seconds on the clock and the Buckeyes facing second-and-10, Jones took a shotgun snap and handed the ball off to Marshall, who was running right. He then pitched the ball to Evan Spencer, who threw the ball to a leaping Thomas, who made an acrobatic catch and got his left foot down in the end zone before falling out of bounds.

"I knew when it would get called I had a great chance to make it happen," Spencer said. "When I saw it coming it started to look pretty good. I just hoped that he would go get the ball and get his feet in bounds."

Nuernberger added the extra point with 12 seconds left on the clock, cutting the Alabama lead to 21-20 at halftime.

The momentum Ohio State took into the break continued into the third quarter.

The Buckeyes took their second lead of the game on the first possession of the second half. Facing a third-and-8 at the UA 47, Jones heaved a deep pass down the right sideline toward Smith. Alabama cornerback Eddie Jackson fell as the ball reached Smith, allowing the senior to walk into the end zone with a 47-yard touchdown strike – Smith's 30th and final TD grab as a Buckeye.

Nuernberger's PAT gave Ohio State a 27-21 lead with 12:44 on the third quarter clock.

Later in the third, Sims dropped back to pass on third-and-7 and threw the ball directly to senior defensive lineman Steve Miller, who had positioned himself in front of Cooper on a zone blitz. Miller picked up

some blocks and returned the pick 41 yards for a touchdown, sending the OSU supporters at the Superdome into a frenzy as Ohio State's lead grew to 34-21 with 3:21 left in the third quarter.

Alabama answered when the Tide went back on offense. Sims led a seven-play, 84-yard drive that lasted just 2:15. A 52-yard gain on a screen pass to Henry put the Tide in the red zone, and Sims later called his own number on a 5-yard rush up the middle for a touchdown. A Griffith PAT made it 34-28 with 1:01 remaining before the fourth quarter.

Alabama had a prime opportunity to retake the lead in the early portion of the fourth quarter when a Cameron Johnston punt took an inopportune bounce back toward the OSU end zone and was downed at the OSU 23. But the Tide quickly squandered the opportunity when Sims' first-down pass was picked off by Bell at the 1. Bell returned the pick to the 8 with 9:44 left on the clock.

The teams traded punts from there, and Ohio State took over at its own 5 with 5:24 to play and the six-point lead still on the board. The Buckeyes turned to their run game, gaining 4 on an Elliott carry on first down and 5 more on a Jones keeper. On third-and-1, Jones kept on an option run and ran through All-America safety Landon Collins to barely gain the yard necessary for a much-needed first down.

Then, on the ensuing first-down play, Elliott took a handoff and got a crucial block from Spencer that allowed the running back to race for an 85-yard touchdown. Elliott broke a tackle attempt by Xavier Dickson near the line of scrimmage and went the rest of the way untouched.

Jones completed a two-point conversion pass to Thomas to make it 42-28 with 3:24 on the clock.

Alabama did not quit, however, marching down the field thanks in large part to a 51-yard pass from Sims to DeAndrew White, who broke wide open on a double move. On fourth-and-2, Sims found Cooper for a 6-yard touchdown pass on a crossing pattern to cap a quick-strike drive that lasted just 1:17. Griffith's PAT cut the OSU lead to 42-35 with 1:59 remaining.

Alabama attempted an onside kick after the TD, and for a brief second, everyone in the Superdome held their breath as Spencer outjumped Ardarius Stewart for the bouncing ball. Ohio State couldn't get a first down, though, and had to punt to Alabama, which took over at its own 18 with 1:33 on the clock and no timeouts left.

The drive never got close to the end zone, though, as Sims' first two passes were caught both inbounds and short of the line to gain, keeping the clock moving. A pass to White and a Sims scramble moved the ball to the 50, and Sims hit O.J. Howard on the next play for 8 yards to get into OSU territory with 15 seconds left.

Sims' first Hail Mary was batted down by Eli Apple near the goal line, and on the final play, the Alabama senior threw to a scramble of bodies in the front right corner of the end zone. Powell outjumped everyone for the ball then raced to the OSU 29 before falling to the turf with the win literally in hand.

"There was going to be no way in the world I was going to let them score a touchdown," Powell said with his trademark smile afterward.

OHIO STATE VS. ALABAMA

Buckeye Toughness Trumps Tide Rushing

By RYAN GINN

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

To understand how Ohio State defensive tackles Michael Bennett and Adolphus Washington ended up walking off the Superdome field together, victorious, it's important to understand where they came from earlier in the season.

Although they were bookended with solid performances against Illinois and Michigan, the three mid-November games were not exactly a glowing endorsement of the Ohio State rushing defense.

Against Michigan State, the Buckeyes allowed 178 yards. That was followed up by a 218-yard showing from Minnesota. Things got even worse the following week when Indiana hit the Buckeyes for 281 yards on the ground. In that one, Tevin Coleman broke off runs of 90 and 52 yards. In each of those three games, opponents scored three touchdowns on the ground.

For those reasons, the Big Ten title game performance against Wisconsin couldn't have come at a better time. Facing an eventual Heisman Trophy finalist in Melvin Gordon, Ohio State held him to 76 yards on 26 carries. He didn't find the end zone – and neither did any of his teammates. After the game, he admitted that his chances of taking home the Heisman were likely nonexistent.

That win put the Buckeyes into the first College Football Playoff, and No. 1 Alabama awaited them in the Sugar Bowl. No team in recent history has done a better job of bullying opposing defensive fronts than the Tide. Wave after wave after wave of big, physical running backs cascade in the fourth quarter, when opposing defenses are too fatigued to do anything about it.

It's a recipe that Crimson Tide head coach Nick Saban rode to three national championships in a four-year span in Tuscaloosa. With running backs such as Mark Ingram (the school's first Heisman winner), Trent Richardson and Eddie Lacy, Alabama often has suffocated opposing teams by putting them in a run-heavy stranglehold that killed clocks and spirits.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that the 2014 edition of Alabama was built in the mold of its predecessors. As was often the case, the Tide boasted a pair of running backs so close in talent that fans often clamored for the backup to see more playing time. When it came time to win games, first-year offensive coordinator Lane Kiffin knew how to pour it on against broken teams. With both games close late in the third quarter, Alabama scored four straight touchdowns to defeat Auburn in the Iron Bowl and three straight touchdowns against Missouri one week later to claim the SEC Championship Game.

Film sessions did nothing to diminish Alabama's talent, but Bennett still knew how the war would be won. A couple of days before OSU's semifinal against the Tide, he was asked about how to stop the fourth-quarter onslaught that had punished so many other squads. He pinned OSU's chances on toughness and discipline. In those areas, he figured, the Buckeyes would shine.

"Stopping Alabama comes with toughness," Bennett said. "That comes with not letting them do that. That has nothing to do with game plan or anything. That's just them deciding to run the clock out and the other team not being able to stop them. I



SONNY BROCKWAY

WELL-EARNED PRAISE – Ohio State defensive linemen Michael Bennett (53) and Adolphus Washington (92) walk off the field together after helping the OSU defense limit Alabama's rushing attack.

don't think we're in that situation, and I don't predict that will happen."

He was right. It didn't happen.

Ohio State won the Sugar Bowl, and it did so by bottling up the Alabama running backs who had terrorized so many defenses this season. Sure, junior T.J. Yeldon and sophomore Derrick Henry both had their moments and collected a touchdown apiece. But both of those scores came in the first half as the Tide raced out to a 21-6 advantage. In the rushing battle, it was all OSU from that point on.

Ezekiel Elliott ran all over the SEC champs, racking up 230 yards. Meanwhile, neither 'Bama back hit the century mark. Henry finished with a team-high 95 yards on 13 carries and Yeldon managed just 10 carries for 47 yards.

"Their front did a really good job," Saban said. "We didn't handle them well in running the football like we thought we might be able to when we spread them out, and they did a good job on our perimeter screens and smokes. We made the blocks but they made the plays, and you've got to

give their players a lot of credit for the way they executed."

When the stakes were highest, Alabama couldn't crack the Ohio State defensive front. The Tide outscored opponents by a 102-55 margin in the final frame this season but could muster only nine carries for 32 yards in the fourth quarter against OSU. Bennett and Washington gave Alabama fits all night long but got better as the time got shorter.

The same could be said for their entire season. Although it didn't show immediately, something clicked in the Michigan State game, which was right about the time the two switched spots in the OSU defense. As the Buckeyes powered full-steam ahead toward the postseason, Washington and Bennett became a two-headed monster in the trenches. The duo proved inseparable the night of the Sugar Bowl, speaking together to reporters in the locker room after the win.

"That's why we're doing all these interviews together," Bennett said. "All year, we've been getting closer and closer. We personally feel like we have a big hand in these games. I think Alabama respected us. They knew they couldn't run it up the middle that much. My teammates bailed us out because I think a couple of times today they did get up the middle. This is my dude, and we shut down the middle as much we could."

Bennett credited the success to defensive line coach Larry Johnson Sr., the first-year Buckeye assistant whom he called the best coach at his position in the country. He also said OSU benefited from the group of guys on the line, none of whom lost hope when the game looked like it might be slipping away.

"I think the biggest thing is believing in your guys and believing in what your coaches tell you," Bennett said. "When we were down 21-6, a lot of teams would be like, 'Dang, this is over. This is Alabama we're playing and they're crushing us.' We all talked on the sideline and said, 'You know what? The score doesn't matter. You go win your individual battle every time.' That's what we did for the rest of the half, and that's what we did for the rest of the game."

What happened earlier was finished and erased from memory. In the late stages of the game and the season, Bennett and Washington were at their best.

Let our friendly staff take care of you before, during & after the game.

Enjoy your favorite team on our many HD flat-screen TVs

Shade RESTAURANTS

Friends, Fun & Great Food!

NFL Ticket

NFL Ticket

Shade on the Canal
19 S. High St.
Canal Winchester
614-837-9873

Shade on Muirfield
7148 Muirfield Dr.
Dublin
614-766-5503

Shade on 30th St.
850 S. 30th St.
Heath
740-788-9287

Shade on State St.
994 E State St.
Athens
740-566-1009