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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

January 12, 2008

Tough Two Take

Mental Mistakes Cost Buckeyes In 38-24 Loss

By MARCUS HARTMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The BCS National Championship Game was supposed to be the Ohio State football team's chance to prove it could run with any of the best teams from the nation's top conferences — one conference in particular. The trouble is, the Buckeyes lost their heads too many times in the effort, leading to a 38-24 loss to LSU Jan. 7 in New Orleans.

Thus, six minutes into the third quarter the Buckeyes and their fans who made the trek to the Louisiana Superdome had to endure chants of "S-E-C" from the largely pro-LSU crowd after Tiger Early Doucet caught a short pass in the flat, broke a couple of tackles and scampered across the goal line.

The purple-and-gold clad horde had reason to be excited because Doucet's 4-yard touchdown catch completed a run of 31 straight LSU points and put the Tigers ahead, 31-10. They were well on their way to victory, but it did not appear that happened because Ohio State was outclassed from a talent standpoint, as many national observers might have guessed would be the case.

No, Doucet's touchdown and the crowd's delight were made possible by two OSU personal fouls that kept that particular drive alive, and the margin of the lead was inflated by a multitude of similar foul-ups in the first half.

By the time confetti began falling on yet another opponent, the Buckeyes had been whistled for five personal fouls, committed three turnovers and had a field goal blocked during an un-Tresselbalesque evening on the bayou.

As he walked off the field following his final college game, Buckeye linebacker Larry Grant confirmed that he felt the Buckeyes had done as much to beat themselves as the Tigers had.

"We made too many mental mistakes," Grant said. "We basically hit ourselves in the back with all the penalties we had, but I can't take anything away from LSU. That's a great team coached by some great coaches. That's just a crazy loss today."

In the locker room a few minutes later, captain Dionte Johnson said he felt the same way.

"Of course — I mean I'm not taking away from LSU or their defense; they did a great job," Johnson said. "They executed, and that's 90 percent of the game. They were able to bait us, and we got some stupid sportsmanlike conduct penalties. They did a great job with the turnovers. You can't win a game when you lose the turnover ratio. All that plays a factor. I feel our guys gave a great effort. We just came up short."

Short for a second year in a



SONNY BROCKWAY

THE HAT BESTS THE VEST — Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel (center) greets LSU's white-capped head coach Les Miles after the Tigers defeated the Buckeyes 38-24 in the 2008 BCS National Championship Game.

row, of course. But this 14-point loss looked nothing like the 41-14 shellacking Florida handed Ohio State 364 days earlier in Glendale, Ariz.

In that contest, Florida seized control quickly and ran circles around the Buckeyes, who may have decided by that time that they enjoyed just a little too much looking at themselves in the mirror with the No. 1 ranking they had held all season and might have let their pregame preparations slide. As a result, the Gators had the look of a vastly more talented team at many positions.

This season, Ohio State returned to the national title game promising to be a more focused group. The Buckeyes spoke of their time in the Big Easy as a business trip, saying they would pass on seeing the neon lights of Bourbon Street in favor of concentrating on the task of beating LSU.

Though they played a far better game in the dome than in the desert, the mental lapses proved to be deadly, particularly on defense and special teams.

"They were critical, oh yeah, they were critical, no doubt about it," offensive coordinator Jim Bollman confirmed. "That was certainly a big factor a couple of times, taking us out of position and giving them some position."

The mental errors began in the first quarter when left guard Steve Rehring was whistled for a false start prior to a second-and-5 at the Tigers' 10-yard line.

Already leading 7-0 thanks to a 65-yard touchdown run by Chris "Beanie" Wells, the Buckeyes were poised to tack on perhaps seven more points, but Rehring's penalty had them essentially starting over again on that set of downs with one less play with which to work.

They ultimately would settle for a 25-yard field goal by Ryan Pretorius after two Todd Boeckman scrambles yielded

just 6 yards.

The Tigers responded with a field goal, and after an Ohio State punt they put together an 84-yard drive that took just 2:07 and, capped by a 13-yard touchdown pass from Matt Flynn to tight end Richard Dickson, knotted the score at 10.

That scoring drive included 28 free yards after Ohio State's first two personal fouls of the evening, a late hit committed by defensive tackle Todd Denlinger and a half-the-distance 13-yarder on linebacker James Laurinaitis for grasping the facemask.

Ohio State's ensuing drive got off to a promising start as Wells broke off a 29-yard run and Boeckman hooked up with Brian Robiskie for a 19-yard pass play that ended at the LSU 28.

Brian Hartline picked up a personal foul on the next play, however, and though the Buckeyes were able to get a large chunk of that yardage back on a 22-yard pass from Boeckman to Brandon Saine, Robiskie dropped a potential touchdown pass on third-and-3.

The Buckeyes' momentum was stifled and they were eventually forced to settle for a 38-yard field-goal try by Pretorius.

"My emotions got the best of me," Hartline said of the penalty call. "It was uncharacteristic of me. I deserved that penalty."

The damage was compounded when Ricky Jean-Francois broke through the OSU protection and blocked Pretorius' kick, a play that reignited the LSU fans' enthusiasm and sent the Tigers on an 84-yard march that would yield their go-ahead touchdown.

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OPINION

How Will OSU Explain This Loss?

In some respects, Ohio State's loss in this year's BCS National Championship Game may prove to be a tougher obstacle to overcome than last year's trip to the Florida woodshed.

It will certainly be more difficult to explain.

From a lengthy layoff to a stale routine in Arizona to too many linemen gorging themselves on too many fast-food hamburgers, the beatdown that has come to be known as "The Debacle in the Desert" could at least be explained in a variety of ways. It was a painful loss but Jim Tressel, his coaching staff and players were supposed to have learned from the mistakes they made that night.

The coaches and players said this year's visit to New Orleans was a business trip. Changes were made, both in the way they approached the assignment and the way they prepared themselves for it – less time at the venue, no partaking in the Bourbon Street experience, etc.

But whatever changes the Buckeyes made, they had the same net result of their hedonistic ways in the Arizona desert.

So, in the wake of a second straight failure on college football's biggest stage, the Buckeyes will enter the 2008 season with their previous two years' worth of work – back-to-back outright Big Ten champions, 23 wins in 26 games, consecutive appearances in the national championship game – perceived as nothing more than a fluke.

That's a shame, too, because Tressel and Ohio State have accomplished an awful lot these past two seasons. Unfortunately for them, they happen to play football in a conference whose national perception these days ranks somewhere between Britney Spears and Vladimir Putin.

It's like broadband vs. dial-up, the iPod vs. the Sony Walkman, the Blackberry vs. the Rolodex. Haven't you heard? They play stale, vanilla football in the Big Ten. So what if you win that championship? So what if you win it three years running? The South is where it's at as far as college football is concerned, and the SEC is where you'll find all the star power.

Is that a fair assessment of Ohio State's accomplishments these past two seasons? Of course not. The fact of the matter is that it's damned unfair. Last year's team spent the entire regular season at No. 1 and produced two first-round NFL draft choices and the Heisman Trophy winner. This year's team overachieved. It wasn't picked to do better than third place in the Big Ten, yet ascended all the way to a second consecutive berth in the national championship game.

For those accomplishments alone, there are about 115 other Division I-A football programs that would be dancing in the streets.

But the expectations are a little higher at Ohio State. No one in Columbus is going to suggest building a statue in anyone's honor for merely making an appearance in a big game. Here – and I would dare say in college football as a whole – you are judged on the number of championship banners that hang from your walls. And in this day and age, while Big Ten championships and victories over Michigan are extremely gratifying, they may no longer be enough.

Of course, the jaded way Ohio State fans assess each season nowadays is Tressel's fault. Had he not set the bar so high for his own program by winning the national title in 2002 – only his second year on the job – perhaps an achievement such as back-to-back berths in the national championship game would be sufficient.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

with
Mark Rea

But once fans get the taste of winning in their mouths, and get used to that savory taste, they become insatiable. That is why Tressel incurred the wrath of the Buckeye Nation last January and why that wrath will make it an even colder winter this year for the OSU coach.

The funny thing is that the Buckeyes have a very real chance of getting to the championship game again next year. Only two seniors – offensive tackle Kirk Barton and linebacker Larry Grant – started against LSU, leaving Tressel with the potential for a star-studded veteran team in '08. The coach is also in the process of signing a talent-filled recruiting class that should bolster the roster even more.

Next year's schedule seems a little more daunting than this year's turned out to be. The team must make a visit to Southern Cal for the third game of the season and also has to play on the road at Wisconsin and Illinois. Both Penn State and Michigan come to Columbus, but the Buckeyes will face opponents next season that combined for a 90-60 record in 2007 – as if that will cut any mustard in the national media because anything Ohio State accomplishes will be questioned from now until it wins another national championship.

Last year at this time, I wrote in this space that you could chalk up the loss to Florida as simple fate. If you coach as many games as Tressel has during his career, sooner or later there are going to be instances when the other team shows up with an unbeatable game plan. You simply have to give them credit, try to learn from what happened and move on. I still believe that was the case in Arizona last January.

But did the Buckeyes learn from what happened last year and move on? It is one thing to talk the talk, a completely different thing to walk the walk.

Maybe that's why a lot of fans are having a little tougher time accepting the loss to LSU and trying to put it into some kind of perspective. The Tigers were arguably the better team on the field Jan. 7 but only marginally so. Speed really wasn't a factor – execution was. The gap in roster talent wasn't such that the eventual champions should have been able to score 31 unanswered points.

For the second year in a row, there is plenty of blame to go around. No need to start naming names because it was pretty much a team loss. There were mental mistakes, physical errors, missed assignments, blown coverages and adjustment failures. Some of that can be attributed to an excellent team such as LSU creating those kinds of situations. But you can't give the Tigers all the credit. They had some help – a lot of it.

It's going to be nine long months until the Buckeyes tee it up again, and from the very instant you read the words on this page until the ball is in the air against Youngstown State, the question marks about Tressel and his program are going to hover over Ohio Stadium like the Goodyear blimp.

I have always believed that Tressel "gets it." He understands the nature of Ohio State

football, the vital role it plays in so many people's lives. I also continue to believe in Tressel as a coach, motivator and teacher. These last two national championship appearances notwithstanding, his overall record through the years speaks for itself.

But Tressel's long honeymoon with Ohio State fans may be coming to an end.

The coach is fond of repeating the Biblical phrase, "To whom much is given, much is expected." He is right, of course, but those words may begin to hang around his neck like an albatross.

Ohio State football fans give their undying devotion to their team and if their team is going to get to the national championship game, they expect the Buckeyes to win it.

Wells For Heisman

There is no doubt that Florida quarterback Tim Tebow will be the odds-on favorite to win his second Heisman Trophy next season. But if the Buckeyes can find a suitable replacement for Barton, I think Beanie Wells is going to give the Gators QB a run for his money.

Wells is probably the best running back in America that no one outside the Big Ten seems to know. Hopefully, that situation was remedied by his 146-yard performance against LSU in the national championship game, a performance that was equal parts Jim Brown, Walter Payton and Barry Sanders.

Players are lucky if they experience one marquee moment on such a national stage, and Wells had at least two.

The first, of course, was his 65-yard touchdown run in the first quarter. It combined every facet of what an excellent running back should bring to the table – finding and then hitting a hole with authority, the ability to change directions in a split-second and enough speed to leave pursuing would-be tacklers in the dust.

That touchdown run had them all. Wells was like Brown when he exploded through a hole over right guard then made like Sanders with a quick shift of his hips and a dash to the end zone.

The second highlight moment came on a 29-yard run early in the second quarter. Wells showcased his power again on that carry before employing a Payton-like stiff-arm to fend off LSU cornerback Chevis Jackson. If you're old-school like me, you love a good, old-fashioned stiff-arm and Wells swatting Jackson away was one of the best I've seen in a long time. Riding back to the media hotel after the game, one veteran sportswriter claimed it was one of the top three he'd ever seen in 40 years of covering professional and college football.

By gaining 146 yards against the Tigers, Wells achieved his ninth game this season of 100 yards or more and pushed his 2007 total to 1,609 yards, the fourth-highest single-season total in Ohio State history. Considering the rich history of running backs for the Buckeyes, a total that trails only Eddie George, Keith Byars and Archie Griffin speaks for itself.

Punctuating just how good his '07 season was is the fact that Wells played through injuries the entire year. He had a well-publicized ankle injury that plagued him from spring ball before he injured his wrist late in the regular season. Somehow, though, he seemed to get stronger as the campaign wore on – another attribute that separates the great backs from the merely good ones.

It is scary to think about the numbers he could put up if he is 100 percent healthy.

Heisman-type numbers, I would think.

COVER STORY: TOUGH TWO TAKE

Blocked Field Goal Helped LSU Take Control

Continued From Page 1

OSU receiver Ray Small saw the blocked field goal as the most significant play of the game.

"My thought was, 'Wow, momentum changed pretty quick,'" Small said.

Ohio State trailed 24-10 at the half but managed to reach the intermission without being knocked out, as they had been a year before by Florida when the Gators took a 34-14 lead into the locker room.

Though LSU began the second half with the ball, the defense appeared to come up with the stop it needed to give Boeckman and company a chance to get the Buckeyes back within one score.

That went out the door, however, when the Buckeyes were flagged for personal fouls on consecutive plays.

First reserve linebacker Austin Spitzer drew a flag for roughing Tiger punter Patrick Fisher on a fourth-and-23 at the LSU 40. One play later, freshman defensive end Cameron Heyward cost his team 15 more yards on another personal foul and the Tigers suddenly were in business with a first down at the Buckeye 29.

Two plays later, Doucet made his score and the Buckeyes were sprawled on the mat.

"They definitely helped them," Buckeye cornerback Malcolm Jenkins said of the personal fouls. "Nobody gives somebody 30 free yards. That helps their drive and puts us in a bad situation."

"When it came to penalties, a couple of times we had just gotten a big stop and

were just about to get off the field, then we get another (penalty) so they're in scoring position. We gave them a lot of free yards and put them in position to score."

Johnson said his team simply suffered from a lack of execution.

"I felt the guys played with all their hearts, but when you have 15-yard penalties it really builds back the momentum the other way, and they were able to capitalize on it," he said. "Coach (Jim) Tressel preaches to us day in and day out that you can't have mental breakdowns or turnovers, and that's what we had."

The miscues in an area in which Tressel emphasizes excellence – special teams – proved just as damaging as lost fumbles or interceptions.

"The blocked field goal, that's a turnover," Johnson said. "It was fourth-and-forever and we get a roughing the punter call. That kind of stuff hurts. It hurts the defense. You can't really expect them to bounce back after something like that. Then we got an unsportsmanlike conduct. Those things, I don't want to say they made or broke the game, but they definitely had an effect on it."

Spitzer said he had no idea how he missed blocking Fisher's kick.

"I went right through the line untouched and I took my eye off of it, I guess," he said. "I figured it would hit me in the chest at least. I was there. I figured I'd make the play. Nobody touched me. I just took my eye off it and missed."

"Special teams always play a key role. We look at it every game line and special teams always play a role. Unfortunately

tonight it didn't fall our way."

Defensive coordinator Jim Heacock was unhappy with the way his troops performed, and his displeasure was more from a mental standpoint than it was physical. The stop unit that finished the regular season allowing a national-best 10.7 points per game was burned for more than three times that number.

"We just didn't execute," Heacock said. "They're a good football team, they really are. You can't give them the stuff we gave them and expect to beat them."

The Tigers especially hurt Ohio State on third down, where they converted 11 of 18 tries and 11 of their first 14.

That 61.1-percent success rate was aided greatly by the fact that nine of the successes came on third-and-4 or less.

LSU got into those spots because the Buckeyes got themselves out of position too often and did not tackle well when they were where they were supposed to be. That was an especially damaging mistake to make against an offense with as much variety as LSU's, one that is just as comfortable in an I-formation as it is the spread.

"They did a lot of things, and you better be disciplined because if you're not disciplined they'll get you," Heacock said. "There were a couple times when we uncharacteristically had guys running around trying to go make plays instead of executing their responsibility and doing what they need to do and what they've done all year. We got a little bit out of character and things started not going so good."

Heacock saw no problems in the pre-game work.

"One thing about this group is they prepared maybe as hard as any group I've ever been around," he said. "They worked hard, they were focused, they were in watching film, doing the whole deal and when things aren't going good I don't think it's a time to turn on them. We tried to make them realize the importance of execution. You've got to have 11 guys executing. We had some breakdowns and they were costly breakdowns."

The 14-point loss to another SEC team is likely to give more ammunition to those who feel the Big Ten plays an inferior brand of football these days, but that is not a notion the Buckeyes buy into themselves.

Spitzer said they are not the only ones.

"I think the SEC knows," he said. "We're (in the title game) for a reason. Everybody has speed. I think it showed tonight. Last year everybody talked about the speed difference. It wasn't the speed difference, it was the physicality of the game. We got outphysicalled. We knew coming into the game LSU was a great team, very physical, and we'd have to be physical to play with them."

The Tigers can argue they won the line of scrimmage but by a slim margin.

LSU finished with a slight rushing edge of 152-145 but did so with the aid of 41 yards Ohio State lost on five quarterback sacks, four of which came in the second half after Tiger pass rushers were able to pin their ears back knowing the Buckeyes would need to go to the air more often to

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COVER STORY: TOUGH TWO TAKE



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG PLAY – Malcolm Jenkins (2) intercepted a Matt Flynn pass in the second half, but overall it was a rough night for the OSU defense.

cut into their deficit.

However, the Tigers' total was tempered by a 15-yard loss on a mishandled snap during the first series and three kneel-downs on the final possession of the game that totaled 8 yards.

Flynn lost 15 yards on his one sack and, like Boeckman, was hit at or near the time of the release of many of his passes on the evening.

Flynn was named the game's most outstanding offensive player after completing 19 of 27 passes for 174 yards and four touchdowns.

Boeckman's 134.9 passer rating might have been closer to Flynn's outstanding 195.6 had the Buckeye receivers not dropped a few passes along the way.

"I thought at first we started getting it going a little bit," Boeckman said. "We were hanging with them, but momentum shifted a little bit. You can't have those personal fouls, those turnovers. That just killed us."

Small, Jenkins and Johnson all felt the teams matched up fairly evenly from a physical standpoint.

"I just think they executed a little better than us," Small said. "We had a couple penalties and that was our downfall."

"They weren't dominating us," Jenkins said. "Every time you give up free yardage, it hurts you."

Johnson was happy with his team's preparation and effort level.

"I think we finally put to rest the myth that they were faster and things like that," the fullback said. "That wasn't really the case. We gave them great field position when they were scoring. Our offense did a great job. We were moving the chains."

"Penalties and turnovers," he said with a sigh. "That's the parts that you've got to take out of the game."

"All that talk about SEC and Big Ten, (that) the Big Ten is inferior can be put to bed because you saw the Michigan-Florida game," Johnson said, referring to the Wolverines' 41-35 win over the Gators Jan. 1 in the Capital One Bowl. "It's any given night. That's the most important thing, who's ready on that day."

Noting that his team did not have an issue with personal fouls during the regular season, Heacock said he had no explanation for the explosion of them in New Orleans.

"They're not bad kids," he said. "They're not going to go out and cheap-shot somebody."

Like every Buckeye queried on the subject, Johnson said he would not have believed it if he had been told the morning of the game that that many major penalty flags would be thrown against his team.

"But that's a part of football," he said. "We knew coming into this game we shouldn't hurt ourselves, and we did anyway."

On the issue of talent, Bollman offered a somewhat dissenting opinion. Of course, his offense had to contend with a Tigers defense that finished the season ranked third in the country in yards allowed, a greater challenge than that posed by the LSU offense.

Speaking of his unit, Bollman felt good that the plethora of missed blocking assignments that played a huge role in the 2007 blowout had not repeated themselves in 2008. He made it clear he felt much better walking out of the Superdome locker room than he had when leaving University of Phoenix Stadium.

"I'm not sure that I should or shouldn't without seeing the film, but I feel like walking out of here we ... I feel like we played – the guys were focused," the coach said. "They played hard. They gave great effort the whole game. There wasn't a lot of mental errors. We got beat physically on some plays. It wasn't at all like last year's game."

"There were some plays in the pass-

ing game that we needed to make, but we didn't. We had chances to catch a couple balls that we didn't, had a couple misfires."

So did this loss to an SEC team look like the last one?

"No, no, no, no," he said emphatically.

Bollman concluded by saying the season was still pretty good for what many had dubbed a rebuilding year in August.

But that is probably not how the rest of the nation will see the latest setback. No matter how many of the faces were new this season in the Buckeye starting lineup, the bottom line on websites, newspapers and television screens across the country was that Ohio State again took a highly rated defense onto a big stage and got blown up, giving up 38 points this time after surrendering 41 a year ago.

Asked about that, Heacock said, "I don't think people are going to stop talking, if that's what you mean. We're all hurt. We work real hard for this. Our kids have been living 364 days for this. Our kids were picked third in the Big Ten conference and I think they worked their butts off and put themselves in position to be here. I think is a pretty good accomplishment, and I give them a lot of credit for that."

"I don't know who gave us a lot of credit heading into the year, so I think there were some good things that went on and we came out to this game and we didn't play well. They played better than we did. They made fewer mistakes than we did. They executed better than we did, and we didn't do a good job tackling. But they average 39 points a game – they're a good offense, and they're a better offense when you make mistakes."

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

Similar Script In Another Buckeye BCS Loss

By MARK REA

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Managing Editor

Ohio State suffered a terrible case of déjà vu Jan. 7 in the BCS National Championship Game.

Just like last year, the Buckeyes jumped out to an early lead. Just like last year, that lead evaporated quickly. And just like last year, the team wound up on the business end of a rough outcome, courtesy of another Southeastern Conference team.

Louisiana State was the culprit this time, spotting OSU an early 10-point lead before partying like it was Mardi Gras. Before 79,651 fans, the largest crowd ever to watch a game inside the refurbished Louisiana Superdome, the Tigers reeled off 31 consecutive points on their way to a 38-24 victory.

As a result, LSU head coach Les Miles capped a month of personal upheaval with his first national championship while his Tigers became the first two-loss team to capture the Bowl Championship Series title. The team also became the first-ever two-time national champion under the BCS format.

"I have to give credit to some divine intervention and some grace that allows us to be in this position," said Miles, who had been linked to the head coaching job at alma mater Michigan before the Wolverines finally hired Rich Rodriguez away from West Virginia. "We have a great group of young men ... who understand how to really commit to a team, really fight like hell and not let any obstacle stand in their way.

"There will always be a wonderful place in my heart for Michigan. It's just that simple. It will never change. But there will also be an extremely warm spot in my heart for LSU because of this very special season, this very special team."

While the Tigers were celebrating all of their firsts, Ohio State became only the second team to lose back-to-back title games since Oklahoma in 2004 and '05. Ironically, the Sooners' loss in 2004 came in the Superdome, a 21-14 defeat courtesy of LSU.

In a game that was billed as the hulking titans of the Big Ten against the speed demons from the SEC, the game boiled down



SONNY BROCKWAY

BEANIE BLOWS BY – Just as they did a year prior, the Buckeyes jumped out to an early lead with a touchdown. This time, it was a 65-yard run by Chris "Beanie" Wells that put OSU in front.

to a few key plays – LSU made the most of its opportunities and Ohio State did not.

"Hats off to LSU," Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel said. "They did a great job preparing for this game. We said all along they're a very tough football team, a very mature football team. That's why they're the SEC champions, and they're very deserving national champions.

"It was a clean, hard, tough football game. Our kids played hard to the bitter

end, and we just didn't do things that you need to do to win a ballgame of this nature. But we're awfully proud of our 2007 Ohio State Buckeyes and very aware that LSU is a deserving champion."

The Buckeyes actually outgained the Tigers by a 353-323 margin, led by a 146-yard effort from tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells. That left him with 1,609 yards for the season, the most ever for an OSU sophomore.

Unfortunately, Wells was rendered ineffective in the second half by the fact the Buckeyes had squandered their early lead into a 24-10 halftime deficit. Ohio State was forced to throw the ball more often than it had planned, and Wells was limited to just 27 yards on 10 carries after the break.

With OSU forced to throw the ball, the Tigers began to tee off on quarterback Todd Boeckman. He started well by completing four of his first seven passes for 92 yards by the middle of the second quarter. But Boeckman was battered down the stretch under a relentless LSU rush.

The 6-5, 238-pound junior managed to complete 15 of 26 passes in the game for 208 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions. But he was also sacked five times and fumbled three times.

While Boeckman was struggling, his LSU counterpart was enjoying one of his finest games. Senior quarterback Matt Flynn was named the game's most valuable offensive player after completing 19 of 27 pass attempts for 174 yards and a career-high four touchdowns.

"This team has grown a lot this year," Flynn said after the game. "We've come together strong and we've had a lot of close games – a lot of tough game that went to the wire. But we're stubborn. We don't know when to say quit and we don't know when to give up.

"But I'll be honest – I'm glad this is over. Obviously, I'm glad we came out on top. It just feels incredible."

Incredible, however, was a relative term. "To go to the national championship game twice and lose?" asked an incredulous Wells as he shook his head. "I mean, it's incredible."

On defense, LSU sophomore defensive tackle Ricky Jean-Francois overshadowed his more decorated senior counterpart Glenn Dorsey. Jean-Francois totaled six tackles, including 1½ for loss, assisted on a sack and blocked a field goal, and he was named the game's outstanding defensive player.

Dorsey finished with five tackles and a sack while senior linebacker Ali Highsmith led the Tigers with eight total stops and 1½ sacks. He also recovered one of Boeckman's fumbles.

For Ohio State, junior middle linebacker James Laurinaitis recorded a career-high 18 tackles, including 12 solos. Fellow linebacker Marcus Freeman registered 14 stops, and safety Kurt Coleman added a career-high 10 stops. Defensive end Vernon Gholston logged OSU's lone sack of the game while cornerback Malcolm Jenkins grabbed an interception.

Wells Strikes Early

It took Ohio State only four plays to open the game's scoring. Boeckman was forced to throw early on first down before Wells got 5 yards to give the Buckeyes a third-and-5 at their own 28.

The team converted that situation when Boeckman completed a 7-yard pass to Brian Robiskie for a first down at the LSU 35. On the next play, Wells took a handoff and squirted through a hole at left guard. He motored ahead and then cut toward the sideline, running away from most of the LSU defense. Senior strong safety Craig Steltz gave pursuit and made a dive for Wells at about the 20, but the tailback never broke stride.

The 65-yard touchdown romp, which was followed by kicker Ryan Pretorius' PAT, was the longest touchdown run in BCS title

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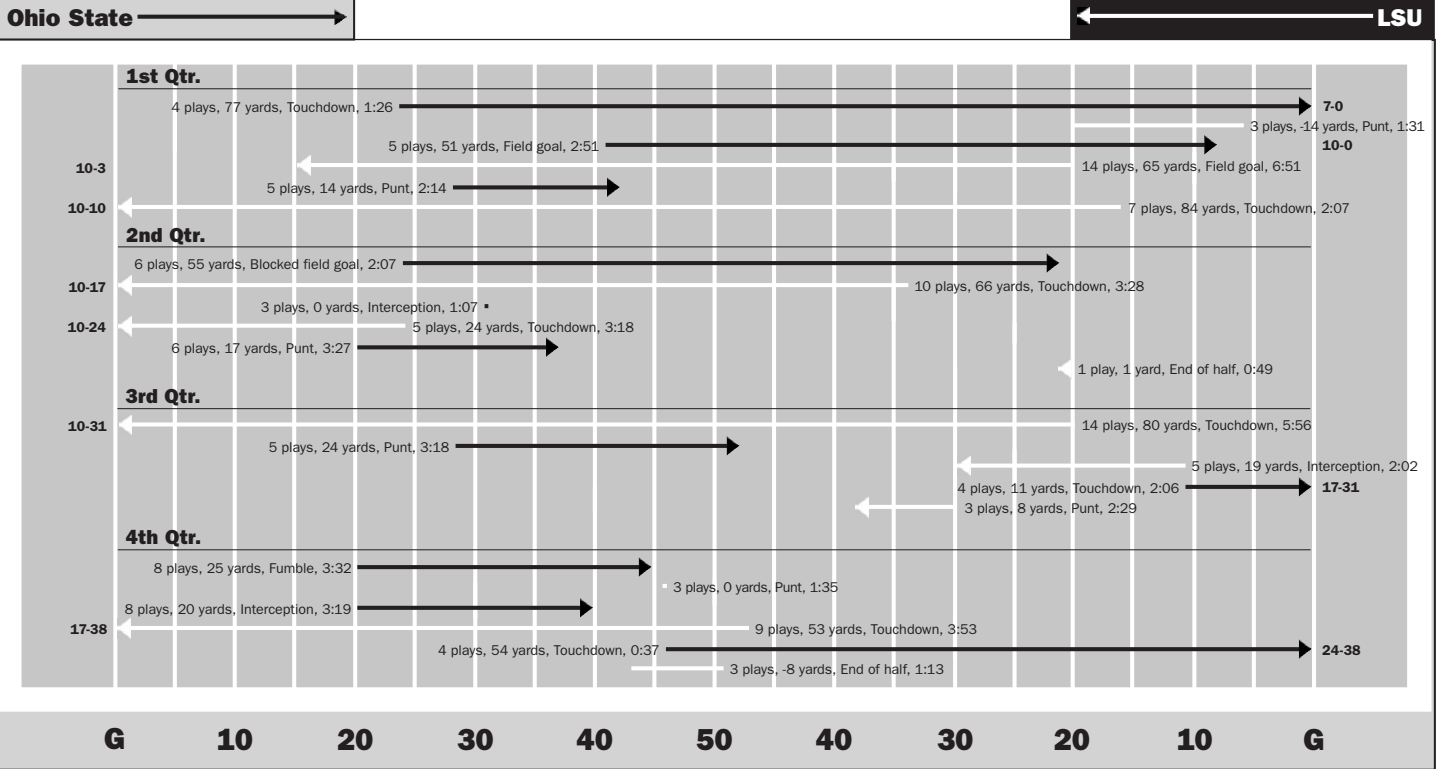
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OSU-LSU Drive Chart



game history. More importantly, it gave the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead less than a minute and a half into the contest.

OSU continued its excellent early play by forcing LSU to go three-and-out on its first offensive series. In fact, the Tigers went backward with minus-14 yards to show for their first three plays from scrimmage.

When the Buckeyes got the ball back, they immediately got back into the red zone when Boeckman dropped in a pass to Brandon Saine along the sideline that the freshman tailback turned into a 44-yard gain. Unfortunately, the drive stalled at the LSU 8 and Ohio State was forced to settle for a 25-yard field goal from Pretorius.

Still, the three-pointer made the score 10-0 at the 9:12 mark of the first quarter and the Buckeyes appeared to be in control.

But LSU got itself untracked on offense and marched 14 plays in 65 yards to get its first score of the game, a 32-yard field goal from kicker Colt David. But that was only the beginning. Thanks to costly mental errors and physical mistakes committed by Ohio State, the Tigers totaled three touchdowns in rapid succession to turn their early deficit into a 14-point halftime lead.

Two personal-foul penalties on the Ohio State defense gave LSU an extra 30 yards on its next possession. That allowed the Tigers to get close enough for a 13-yard pass from Flynn to tight end Richard Dickson for a touchdown with 13:00 showing on the clock. David added the extra point to tie the game at 10.

Dickson would prove to be a consistent thorn in the Buckeyes' side all game long. He got loose in the OSU secondary on several occasions, finishing the game with four receptions for 44 yards and a career-best two touchdowns.

A personal-foul penalty on the OSU offense crippled the Buckeyes' next drive and they had to settle for a 38-yard field-goal attempt by Pretorius. Instead of Ohio State

retaking the lead, however, the kick was blocked by Jean-Francois and the Tigers took the ball the other way on a 10-play, 66-yard drive that culminated in another Flynn touchdown pass, this time for 10 yards to receiver Brandon LaFell.

"Coach (Miles) told me to back up off the ball a little bit because their line wasn't trying to put their hands out or anything - they were using their shoulders," Jean-Francois explained about the blocked kick. "So I backed up and just came off quick as possible, trying to time the ball.

"When I got back there and I saw my hand, I was like, 'Please, let me block this ball.' But when I finally blocked it, I was shocked."

It was the fourth blocked field goal of the year in 23 attempts for Pretorius and the 10-point swing changed a potential 13-10 lead for the Buckeyes into a 17-10 deficit with 7:25 remaining until the half.

The Tigers went looking for more points just three plays later when Boeckman was intercepted in the deep flat by LSU cornerback Chevis Jackson. Jackson returned the pick 34 yards to the OSU 24, and just five plays later, running back Jacob Hester squeezed his way over the goal line from the 1 with 4:16 remaining in the first half.

David's extra point allowed LSU to enjoy a 24-10 halftime lead despite being out-gained 234-198 in the first half. The Tigers had an advantage, however, in several other key categories - they were 8 of 10 in third-down conversions while the Buckeyes were 2 of 7; they had 15 first downs to only seven for Ohio State; the only turnover of the first half went LSU's way; and OSU had four penalties for 48 yards while the Tigers went unflagged.

Game Slips Away

Another critical mistake cost Ohio State on LSU's opening possession of the third period.

The Bottom Line . . .

It was over when ... the Buckeyes tried to make something happen by going after LSU punter Patrick Fisher early in the third quarter. A big play on special teams at that juncture could have turned the tide for Ohio State. But when linebacker Austin Spittler was penalized for roughing Fisher, an infraction that carried with it an automatic first down, LSU scored a touchdown four plays later and the Buckeyes never recovered.

Game ball goes to ... LSU quarterback Matt Flynn. Maligned by many, including his own fans who believed sophomore backup Ryan Perrilloux was better suited to run the offense, Flynn capped his senior season - and only one as a starter - with a superlative performance. Not only did he complete 19 of 27 passes for 174 yards and a career-high four touchdowns, he showed plenty of poise early when the Tigers needed it most and gave them excellent game management down the stretch.

Stat of the game ... 11 for 18. Ohio State's defense entered the game ranked No. 7 in the nation in third-down efficiency, limiting 12 previous opponents to only 31 percent efficiency on 139 third-down plays. LSU converted 11 of its 18 third downs (61.1 percent), including 10 of its first 12. Defenses that can't get the opposing team off the field on third down typically have trouble winning games.

- Mark Rea

The Buckeyes appeared to have stopped the Tigers after Flynn was called for intentional grounding on second down and threw incomplete on third down. That pushed LSU all the way out of Ohio State territory and back to its own 40-yard line with a fourth-and-23.

Continued On Page 12

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

LSU's Defense Thwarted Comeback Attempts

Continued From Page 11

But Tressel evidently saw a chance to make something happen at that point and called for his team to go after LSU punter Patrick Fisher. Ohio State linebacker Austin Spitler put on an excellent rush and got to Fisher just as the ball was reaching the punter's foot. Unfortunately, Spitler did everything but get a hand on the football. He ran into Fisher, picking up a roughing penalty and giving the Tigers an automatic first down at the OSU 45.

On the next play, the Buckeyes were flagged again for a 15-yard personal foul, pushing the ball to the Ohio State 29. In all, OSU was hit with five personal-foul penalties in the contest and wound up with seven penalties for 83 yards.

Three plays later, Flynn threw a 4-yard touchdown pass to receiver Early Doucet and it was 31-10 LSU at the 9:04 mark of the third quarter.

Ohio State had its chances to get back in the game. Junior cornerback Malcolm Jenkins intercepted Flynn late in the third quarter, setting up a 5-yard TD pass from Boeckman to Robiskie with 1:38 to go in the period. After Pretorius' conversion kick, it was 31-17 and the Buckeyes had some hope.

But every time OSU looked to get back in the game, a drive fizzled when the LSU defense came up with a big play.

Early in the fourth quarter, Tressel rolled the dice by going for a fourth-and-7 at the Tigers' 34-yard line. But when Boeckman was flushed from the pocket and rolled to his right, he was snowed under by Highsmith and fumbled the ball away.

Then when the Buckeyes got the ball back at the 9:02 mark of the final period, they moved only 20 yards in eight plays before Boeckman was intercepted again, this time by LSU free safety Curtis Taylor.

The dagger came at the 1:50 mark when Flynn pitched a 5-yard floater to a wide-open Dickson in the end zone. David tacked on the PAT to make it 38-17.

A 15-yard touchdown pass from Boeckman to Brian Hartline with 1:13 remaining closed the gap back to two scores at 38-24. But when the Buckeyes tried an onside kick and LSU running back Charles Scott recovered, OSU was powerless to stop the clock more than once. Flynn knelt down on the game's final play and raised the football in the air.

Several minutes later, the LSU quarterback kissed the crystal football trophy as he hoisted it in the air, symbolic of the Tigers' national championship.

Game Notes

- With the loss, Ohio State dropped to 4-2 all-time in Bowl Championship Series games and 18-21 overall in bowl contests. The Buckeyes are now 1-2 in the BCS National Championship Game, defeating Miami (Fla.) for the 2002 title and losing to Florida last year and LSU this year.

- Miles now has a 7-8-1 lifetime record against Ohio State. He was previously 0-2 as a player at Michigan, 6-5-1 as an assistant coach for the Wolverines, and 0-1 as the head coach at Oklahoma State, losing a 33-7 decision in the 2004 Alamo Bowl.

- Tressel's record in NCAA championship games dipped to 5-4. He was 4-2 in Division I-AA title contests while at Youngstown State and is now 1-2 on the I-A level with the Buckeyes.

- LSU upped its record to 2-6-1 all-time against teams ranked No. 1 in The Associated Press poll. Their most recent contest against a top-ranked team before taking on OSU also resulted in a victory - 27-21 over Florida in Baton Rouge in 1997.

- The Tigers completed their season hav-



SONNY BROCKWAY

ROUGH NIGHT - Ohio State linemen Kirk Barton (74) and Alex Boone (75) struggled against LSU's agile defensive line. OSU quarterback Todd Boeckman (17) also had difficulties, completing 15 of 26 passes for 208 yards, two touchdowns and two interceptions.

ing scored 21 or more points in every contest. Never before had the Tigers gone the entire length of a season scoring at least 21 points in every game. The only other LSU team to score at least 20 points in each game over a single season was the 1969 squad that finished 9-1.

- Laurinaitis did not set a personal record with his 18 tackles against the Tigers. (He had registered 19 against Wisconsin earlier this season in the Buckeyes' 38-17 win over the Badgers.) But his total did set a BCS game record, besting the previous single-game mark of 17 set by Rufus Alexander of Oklahoma in last year's Fiesta Bowl loss to Boise State.

- The 65-yard touchdown run by Wells beat the previous national championship game record by a single yard. It had been held by Justin Vincent of LSU, who ran for 64 yards on the first play of the game against Oklahoma in the 2004 Sugar Bowl.

- Rushing for 146 yards gave Wells the second-highest total in BCS title game history. Only Texas quarterback Vince Young did

better, running for an even 200 yards against Southern California in the 2006 Rose Bowl.

- Fisher crushed the single-game BCS punting record by averaging 56.7 yards on three attempts. The previous mark was held by Kyle Tucker of Kansas, who averaged 50.0 yards against Virginia Tech in this year's Orange Bowl.

- OSU punter A.J. Trapasso also had three punts in the contest and averaged 50.0 yards. His 63-yarder in the second quarter was the longest in BCS history. It broke the record of 62 set by Tucker and then equaled just one quarter earlier by Fisher.

- Former Buckeyes in attendance at the game included Will Allen, Drew Carter, Chris Gamble, Antonio Holmes, Anthony Schlegel, Ted Ginn Jr., David Patterson, Troy Smith, Bobby Carpenter, Donte Whitner, Will Smith and Craig Krenzler. Also in the Superdome as members of various broadcasting teams were Joe Germaine, Eddie George, Maurice Hall, Jim Lachey and Kirk Herbstreit.

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

Impressive Start Leads To Lackluster Finish

Where did it all go wrong?

For the second straight season, Ohio State had an early lead in the BCS National Championship Game. This time, the Buckeyes had demonstrated more than the ability to run a kickoff back for a touchdown: They had managed to mount two successful scoring drives as well as force the LSU offense into a three-and-out.

For the first 5:48, it all appeared to be going OSU's way. But then suddenly everything changed, and by the time the Buckeyes scored again they had surrendered 31 consecutive points, committed six penalties for 78 yards, turned the ball over once and faced what would prove to be an insurmountable three-touchdown deficit. By the time the dust settled, LSU had captured a 38-24 victory.

In short, they got away from doing what had been successful as personal fouls and a patient yet deadly LSU offense prevented the nation's top-ranked defense from ever truly getting comfortable on the field.

It all adds up to OSU's second loss in as many years in the biggest game on the college football landscape.

How About That SEC ... Power?

Leading up to the title game, it was nearly impossible to hear about the matchup between OSU and LSU without hearing some pundit talking about the great speed discrepancy between the two teams. LSU, a member of the Southeastern Conference, was advertised as being clearly superior in the speed department.

But it became evident as the game went on that the Buckeyes did not suffer from a lack of speed. Ironically, it was an inability to be physical enough in the trenches on both sides of the ball that helped to bury OSU this time around.

When the Tigers had the ball, the Buckeyes found themselves largely unable to get pressure on LSU quarterback Matt Flynn. However, the final statistics do not completely tell the final story.

INSIDE THE GAME
with
Adam Jardy



SONNY BROCKWAY

NOT ENOUGH – Vernon Gholston (50) stopped LSU quarterback Matt Flynn in his tracks here, but the Buckeyes were unable to slow the Tigers offense down in a 38-24 loss. James Laurinaitis (33) led OSU with 18 tackles on defense in what may be his last game as a Buckeye.

On paper, the Buckeyes outgained LSU by a 353-326 margin in total offense, averaging 6.3 yards per play compared to 4.3 for the Tigers. OSU had three plays go for a combined 130 yards – take them out, and the Buckeyes' average drops to 4.2 yards

per play.

It all began at the point of attack. The Tigers had six tackles for loss and five sacks against the OSU offensive line.

"We were ready to come out there, come off the ball at full speed, be aggressive," said LSU sophomore defensive tackle Ricky Jean-Francois, who was named the game's top defensive player. "The coaches told us just to slow down for a minute. Coach (Les) Miles and (defensive coordinator Bo) Pelini just told us to slow down for a minute, just look at what we were doing, what was the mistake from the last play. And we just corrected from there."

That much was evident as OSU quarterback Todd Boeckman was consistently harassed from the first play of the game. One season ago, the Buckeyes had problems stopping a Florida defensive line that also racked up five sacks in the title game.

Last year, the pressure came around the ends. This year, it came right up the gut.

"They just got us a couple of times," OSU sophomore center Jim Cordle said. "Then they started blitzing more when it's a passing situation. You've got to avoid long down and distance, and when you've got a guy like Glenn Dorsey and their D-line, you've got to play as good as you can. That didn't

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

happen.”

As Cordle said, it helped LSU’s line when the Buckeyes found themselves needing to move the ball through the air in the second half in a vain effort to catch up. Not only did Boeckman suffer the five sacks, he was hurried countless other times and stripped of the ball three times.

In spite of that, OSU offensive line coach Jim Bollman said he initially felt better about the team’s performance along the offensive line than he did one season ago.

“Obviously at times it wasn’t quite good enough, but at times I thought it was OK,” he said of the team’s protection. “I think those guys were pretty good. You weren’t going to run the ball all night on them. I think that we missed some opportunities in the passing game a few times, and we had some opportunities in the second half to get back in the game and weren’t good enough on those occasions to pull it off. That’s my first reaction.

“There weren’t that many real breakdowns, I didn’t think. There were a couple of times I saw a guy get beat here, a guy get beat there, but that’s going to happen when you play a game like this against people like that. I’m not walking out of here feeling like anything was a disaster of any means. We just weren’t quite good enough to make a couple of plays that we needed to get done. In a game like this against these guys, you’ve got to make some plays.”

Boeckman rushed for 34 yards, but his five sacks cost the team 41, leaving him with a net of minus-7. None was more damaging than a sack that ended an OSU drive in LSU territory midway through the fourth quarter.

Trailing 31-17, Boeckman was sacked on third-and-4 from the LSU 31-yard line, setting up fourth-and-7. With all three wide receivers going deep, Boeckman rolled to his right to find his intended target in sophomore wideout Brian Hartline covered. With two LSU defenders bearing down on him, he attempted to heave a desperation pass but was nailed by senior linebacker Ali Highsmith, who knocked the ball loose.

The Buckeyes gave up 16 yards on the sack and 14 on the return, but a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty on the Tigers helped to negate some of that.

“Give a lot of credit to LSU,” Boeckman said. “They did a lot of good things out there.

We didn’t make the plays when we needed. You have to give Dorsey and the guys up front a lot of credit because they did some good things out there.”

On the other side of the ball, LSU’s presence was felt much more often.

As a whole, the Buckeyes did nothing unexpected on defense. They began the game in their base, 4-3 defense and seldom deviated from it. However, the team’s defensive tackles were frequently beaten at the point of attack, leading to more frequent substitutions. Sophomore Doug Worthington and junior Nader Abdallah earned the starting nods, but they were rotated liberally with redshirt freshman Dexter Larimore and sophomore Todd Denlinger.

Regardless of who was in the game for the Buckeyes, though, they could get little pressure.

“We obviously weren’t getting the job done so we wanted fresh guys in there, and that’s why we rotated a little bit more,” Larimore said. “I think this kind of game is won in the trenches, and if we would’ve got a little more pressure maybe it could have changed the outcome of the game. We just didn’t get it done.”

Early during the game, the Buckeyes dialed up blitzes that were effective in getting to Flynn. As the game went on, though, the quarterback said he was able to pick up on what the OSU defense was trying to do.

As a result, the pressure the Buckeyes wanted to get on Flynn was largely rendered ineffective.

“We want to be aggressive all the time,” said OSU defensive coordinator Jim Heacock. “We wanted to be aggressive last year. You’ve got to beat blocks and make plays. We played a little more man and that hurt us a bit. We felt like we had to get after them and play a pressure defense.”

OSU blitzed players from every position, but it seemed the Tigers were prepared.

Facing a second-and-11 play from the OSU 46-yard line during the second quarter, Flynn hit wideout Demetrius Byrd on a slant across the middle for 20 yards. Byrd was wide open because OSU sophomore safety Kurt Coleman – who was originally lined up over Byrd – was blitzing. Flynn saw that, reacted and almost immediately hit Byrd for the big gainer.

“The funny thing is, you expect a team to

have so many days off, they’re going to show something new.” OSU junior linebacker Marcus Freeman said. “We knew everything they were going to do and we just didn’t execute well and they made the plays.”

For the game, the Buckeyes had just three tackles for loss and one sack that was actually an intentional grounding penalty on the Tigers but recorded as a sack.

Senior linebacker Larry Grant said he was surprised with the lack of execution as a whole from the OSU defense. From his point of view, the team might have been too excited to play in the game.

“We were very surprised because we had a great week of practice,” Grant said. “We had a great 51 days of practice and preparation. We were locked in and so intense. We were so ready to play this game. The intensity got the best of us when the game started.

“For a game like this, you’ve got to be amped. But as the game carried on, our intensity level was so high and being in this atmosphere, it just carried on. Maybe we were doing a little bit too much extra things that got us carried away.”

Larimore, who had one tackle, was more blunt with his assessment.

“The thing is, there’s no real reason why they beat us except that they just beat us (physically),” he said. “You can’t point the finger at anybody: They just flat-out beat our butts. Shoot. That’s what hurts the most. They beat us in the run game, they beat us in the pass game, they did everything right and we did everything wrong. That’s what hurts the most for me.”

The OSU Offensive Wrinkle

During the 51-day layoff between the Michigan and LSU games, the Buckeyes were busy finding a wrinkle to add to their offense

to use against the Tigers. With the move of sophomore quarterback Robby Schoenhoff to tight end and the ascension of dual-threat quarterback Antonio Henton to second-team status, it widely was speculated in the days leading up to the game that Henton could be the new asset to the OSU offense.

Henton, as it turned out, did not play a single snap against the Tigers. Instead, the secret weapon OSU unveiled on the first play of the game was freshman tailback Brandon Saine, who had seen limited playing time as the season had progressed.

On the game’s first play, the 6-1, 220-pound Saine lined up in the backfield in the fullback position as the Buckeyes opened with two wideouts, one tight end and one tailback. Boeckman took the snap, faked the handoff to the tailback and tried to find Saine in the flat for a pass.

It fell incomplete, but it would mark just the beginning of Saine’s night and signal an increased role for the native of Piqua, Ohio. Before the game was over, he would line up at fullback, tight end and tailback as the Buckeyes tried to find ways to utilize his speed and elusiveness in space.

“He’s a really gifted receiver,” Bollman said. “He’s a multitasking guy in there for you and I’m sure in the future he can be more of a running back kind of guy, but he gives you an added factor as a wide receiver in there. That was largely his role tonight. I’m sure that will change in the future.”

His abilities as a wide receiver were ably demonstrated on the first play of OSU’s second drive. After lining up on the wing along the left side of the line, Saine got free from the LSU defense and hauled in a pass from

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

Wells' Big Game Not Enough For Ohio State

Continued From Page 15

Boeckman, tiptoeing down the sideline for a 44-yard pickup.

He would finish the afternoon with three catches for 69 yards, the second-most yardage total among OSU targets.

"I feel like I can move pretty well in open space, catch the ball and run the ball well," Saine said. "I just like getting the ball. Sometimes it might be out catching a pass, but I like running the ball too."

Saine said his role has grown in practice during the latter part of the season. Senior fullback Dionte Johnson said he has been quick to pick up the nuances of playing a multitude of positions.

"He's coming into his own as an athlete," the senior captain said. "You've just got to find a way to get him the ball. I think that he was able to make some big plays for us. He did everything. He's one of those guys who is tough enough to make the blocks and fast enough to run the routes. He's definitely a gifted athlete."

The LSU Offensive Wrinkle

Schoenhof's move to tight end during the preparations for the bowl game was made in part because of a desire to better help the Buckeyes prepare for LSU's two primary tight ends – sophomore Richard Dickson and senior Keith Zinger.

The move appeared to not help the Buckeyes much, as they frequently lost track of the LSU tight ends and paid dearly for doing so.

The first Tiger touchdown of the game

knotted the game at 10 and came on a 13-yard pass from Flynn to Dickson. With three wide receivers bunched to the right, Dickson lined up on the left side of the offensive line against OSU's base defense. Junior defensive end Vernon Gholston blitzed from the left end but did not make contact with Dickson, who found himself wide open and hauled in the easy scoring pass from Flynn.

It was not an isolated incident. Dickson finished as LSU's second-leading receiver with four catches for 44 yards and two touchdowns, while Zinger added another grab for 18 yards.

"We were in man coverage and did not have great eye control," Heacock said. "I think everybody was trying to make a play and got a little flustered. This offense is so multiple and so good that you've got to have 11 guys doing their job, and that's probably what we didn't do a good job of doing."

Bookending the scoring, Dickson hauled in the final touchdown of the game for the Tigers in a similar fashion as the team's first touchdown. After pretending to stay in tight and block, he suddenly streaked into the end zone and found himself wide open again, this time for a 5-yard touchdown pass that made it 38-17 with 1:50 remaining.

Dickson's two touchdowns tied him with four other players for the second-most receiving touchdowns in title game history.

OSU head coach Jim Tressel cited two reasons that LSU's tight ends could get so wide open on multiple occasions.

"I'm sure one of two things happened.

One, it was a misdirection pass, I think, in both cases, and our guys love to pursue to the ball. And the tight end leaked back away from it. I can't tell you that I know if it was a man defense or a zone defense where a backside zone defender was just pursuing what he thought was a run play.

"But in either case, those were well-conceived and well-executed. And those were good football plays and we didn't stop it."

The Ground Game

Despite OSU's struggles in the protection game, the Buckeyes were able to pave the way for sophomore tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells to have a big day on the ground.

Wells wasted little time making a big impact. After Boeckman's pass for Saine fell incomplete, Wells took a pitch around the left end for 5 yards, helping set up third-and-5. OSU would pick it up on a 7-yard completion from Boeckman to junior wide-out Brian Robiskie, setting the stage for the game's first big play.

On first-and-10 from the OSU 35-yard line, Wells took the handoff from Boeckman and plunged off the left guard. Sensing some open field, he cut back to his right just as junior right guard Ben Person provided a sealing block.

Untouched, Wells accelerated up the right side of the field and took the ball to the house. The 65-yard scamper gave the Buckeyes an early 7-0 lead and accounted for the longest run from scrimmage in BCS title game history.

"The offensive line did a tremendous job

blocking," Wells said. "I give them all the credit in the world. They make the holes. I just run through them."

In the first 15 minutes, Wells carried the ball six times for 89 yards and one touchdown – an average of 14.8 yards per carry.

Later in the half, Wells took a handoff and ran around the left end where LSU senior defensive back Chevis Jackson tried in vain to bring Wells down with an arm tackle. Instead, he received a stiff arm as Wells blew past him, picking up 29 yards.

At the half, Wells had 10 carries for 119 yards but the Buckeyes trailed 24-10. As a result, his role diminished greatly in the second half when OSU tried to mount a comeback.

In addition, Boeckman said he felt the Tigers adjusted defensively to stop Wells, who finished with 20 carries for 146 yards – the second-highest total in BCS championship game history.

"We just felt we could run the ball on them, do a few tosses and sweeps, and they took that away from us," the quarterback said. "They adjusted well and did a lot of good things."

Miles said that was just part of being able to win the game in the trenches.

"I think certainly they won their share of battles," the victorious coach said. "But as the game wore on, our defensive line stopped their run. Our offensive line allowed us to pass the football and run the football. So maybe the big guys had more influence on this game than maybe other spots."

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OHIO STATE VS. LSU

BSB Quotebook: LSU 38, Ohio State 24

LSU head coach Les Miles' assessment of the game: "We certainly respected that opponent, knew we'd have to play well to win and feel very fortunate to have played as well as we have."

Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel's assessment of the game: "Hats off to LSU. They did a great job preparing for this game. We said all along they're a very tough football team, a very mature football team. That's why they're the SEC champions. They're very deserving national champions."

Ohio State captain Kirk Barton on his team's effort: "I'm just proud that our guys kept fighting because last year I think we kind of went in the tank a little bit and they really took it to us. This year we were fighting. I'm proud of my guys."

Fellow offensive captain Dionte Johnson on the loss compared to last year's title-game defeat to Florida: "It's a little more painful. One, it's my senior year, it's my last go-around, it's my last chance to strap up as a Buckeye, but two, we're so close. Last year it seemed like they ran away with it. This year it was just us. We were committing the penalties, the personal fouls, the turnovers."

OSU safety Kurt Coleman on the difference between last year's title loss to Florida and this loss: "It's a different feeling. I felt like we never gave up. We went to the end, and it's a good point because we can look at next season and we're going to look good. It's taking the good with the bad."

Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Bollman on the difference between the two games: "It's weird to say, but I didn't feel the same way when I was walking off the field last year knowing all the errors that we made."

OSU tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells on losing the game: "It hurt tremendously. I mean, the pain, you really can't compare it to anything. To go to the national championship twice and lose, I mean, it's incredible."

Buckeye linebacker James Laurinaitis on the loss: "Anytime you lose a game, no matter the margin, you're going to be upset about it. I'm obviously disappointed."

Ohio State cornerback Malcolm Jenkins on the game: "This game is about momentum. We started off with the momentum but then we gave it away. We tried to get ourselves back in the game, but we kept giving it away with penalties and turnovers. We kind of shot ourselves in the foot."

OSU defensive tackle Doug Worthington on LSU's offense: "They made the plays when it counted. That's the main point that I'm sad about. We didn't execute when it was time to, and it's just a bitter taste in your mouth."

OSU left guard Alex Boone on OSU's early 10-0 lead: "We're thinking this game is going to be a lot easier than it was. I think that was our mistake. We scored early and we kind of thought, 'These guys are nothing.'"

OSU defensive end Vernon Gholston on Ohio State's fast start: "We came out playing like we were capable of playing, and then I guess we kind of



SONNY BROCKWAY

ALMOST HAD IT – It looked for a split second that Brian Robiskie had a touchdown reception in the second quarter, but he was unable to hold on with LSU cornerback Chevis Jackson (21) defending.

toned it down. It just shows that if you have a game like this, you have to keep it going full speed for 60 minutes."

Buckeye wideout Brian Hartline on the personal fouls suffered by OSU: "That's a lot of swing yards they got in their favor. They were disciplined, we weren't and that's part of the game."

Ohio State quarterback Todd Boeckman on a dropped second-quarter touchdown pass by Brian Robiskie: "I thought he had it. He was manned up, and whenever Brian's manned up I'm going to try to get him the ball. The LSU defender knocked it out and made a good play on it. I just said, 'Heck of a job, keep your head up, and the next time you'll get it.'"

OSU center Jimmy Cordle on OSU's offense, which finished with more yards than LSU's: "We were moving the ball, we just couldn't finish those drives. It would have been a whole 'nother game if we could have done that."

Cordle on LSU All-America defensive tackle Glenn Dorsey: "He's got an unbelievable nose for the ball. He just knows where the ball is. And he was healthy, he really was. He ran to the ball. He was doing all kinds of different things."

OSU linebacker Marcus Freeman on LSU's offense: "We knew how good of a team they were, and we knew 10 points wouldn't be enough. They came back and showed how good of a team they are."

Tressel on attempting to block an LSU punt during the third quarter, the result of which was a roughing the punter call on linebacker Austin Spitzer: "I guess the first thing as a coach, you think to yourself maybe we should have been in punt safe, maybe we shouldn't have been rushing. That's your first self-evaluation."

Miles after unleashing an exuberant yell during the postgame press conference: "Just kind of had to do that."

Tressel's assessment of LSU's 21-point second quarter: "That was a quarter where we certainly won't make a highlight reel of it. We didn't do the things that we would sure like to think we could do."

Ohio State freshman tailback Brandon Saine, who caught a 44-yard pass on OSU's second drive: "It meant a lot for them to go to me that early in such a big game."

Miles on winning the national title at 12-2: "It's the first time that a two-loss team has played for a national title and won, certainly. And I have to give great credit to some divine intervention and some grace that allows us to be in this position."

Hartline on the SEC vs. Big Ten argument: "Oh, I do think they're a better conference. It's difficult because, are they good? Yeah, they're good. I think the Big Ten is good as well. They just play a different kind of football."

Cordle on the end of the season: "It was a fun season. We were a young team. We stepped up but we couldn't get it done in the end. Just the way that guys stepped up this year, we'll be back next year."

ESPN.com's Mark Schlabach on the game: "(The Tigers) more than proved they were worthy of playing for the BCS championship. More people might be asking if the Buckeyes truly deserved to be here."

CNN.com's Stewart Mandel on the OSU mental errors: "An Ohio State team whose coach, Jim Tressel, preaches structure and discipline aided the Tigers' cause with an unfathomable series of brain farts."

One of the chants from the Tiger faithful with LSU comfortably ahead: "S-E-C."

Laurinaitis' response to the chant: "That hurts, just because the media really builds it up as we are slow and all of that stuff. I don't think that it is a speed thing. I think that the team that wins in this type of game is the team that is more physical and the team that executes the best. They executed tonight and they did it longer than we did."

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH

Physical Play – Not Speed – Told Game's Story

Let me say right off the bat that LSU's victory over Ohio State in the BCS National Championship Game had nothing to do with speed. I know that's hard to believe after having heard so much for the last year about the speed of the SEC and the lack of speed at Ohio State and throughout the Big Ten.

In fact, I was quite surprised by the physical nature of the Tigers' play, a physical style of play that had a far greater impact on the outcome of the game than any speed the Bayou Bengals might have possessed. LSU's performance was quite Big Ten-esque in the muscle department.

None other than victorious LSU coach Les Miles would seem to agree.

"As the game wore on, our defensive line stopped their run. Our offensive line allowed us to pass the football and run the football. So maybe the big guys had more influence on this game than maybe other spots."

So much for that speedy SEC dominating the plodding Big Ten.

Let me warn all of you that I have become obsessed with the mantra of the SEC being far superior to the Big Ten and Ohio State in particular. I'm just so tired of hearing it. Maybe it's true, maybe it isn't, but I think so much of this talk is based on Ohio State's performance against Florida in the championship game last year. And this notion that Ohio State didn't belong in the championship game, I believe, is fueled in part by a national dislike for the Buckeyes.

For those who, after LSU's 38-24 championship victory, continued to question Ohio State's presence in the Superdome, might I point out that the championship game was shaping up as a West Virginia-Missouri matchup until final-week upsets vaulted the Buckeyes and Tigers into the championship game.

Would we still be discussing the merits of the Big Ten and SEC if the Mountaineers and Missouri's version of the Tigers had made it to the big dance? Would the credentials of those teams and those of the Big 12 and Big East be under scrutiny? Or would fans and pundits accept that those teams did what they had to do within the BCS structure to earn their way into the game, just as the Buckeyes and – maybe – LSU did.

To my knowledge, there is no clause in the BCS guidelines that says that because ESPN and various talk radio shows have declared the SEC the class of the country, their champion should get an automatic berth in the title game.

I'm not going to try to justify Ohio State's performance in its loss to LSU.

But I would contend that the penalties and kicking game miscues – that I don't believe are caused by a talent gap – had a lot to do with the seemingly lopsided nature of the game. Take those Ohio State gaffes away and maybe the Buckeyes don't win the game, but I don't think we would be having this discussion about the wide gulf between Ohio State and LSU, Florida and any other SEC team that happens to enter the discussion.

Keep in mind, also, that once the Tigers built up their large lead against Ohio State, it made it a lot easier to play defense. Everyone in the Superdome knew that the Buckeyes were going to have to pass to catch up so the Bayou Bengals could be more aggressive in attacking quarterback

THE VIEW FROM 15TH AND HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Todd Boeckman. The score also fairly well negated the Buckeyes' biggest weapon of the evening, running back Chris Wells.

So if you accept my contention that LSU was not as dominant over the Buckeyes as the score might indicate and consider that in the other two bowl games pitting the SEC and the Big Ten, Wisconsin was competitive with Tennessee and Michigan beat Florida, the gap between the two conferences might not be as great as some would like us to believe. As an aside, I should say that I am so bothered by this debate that I actually found myself rooting for slow, plodding Michigan over fleet Florida in the Capital One Bowl, and I'm not a big one for the Wolverines.

For the belittling pundits to point to OSU's now 0-9 record against SEC teams in bowl games as proof of Ohio State's failure to match up against that conference is much like saying that the Buckeyes can't compete with Michigan. I say this because five of the OSU bowl losses against teams from that conference were racked up in the John Cooper years, when the Buckeyes struggled in virtually all bowl games, just as they struggled against their rival Wolverines at that time. This logic would also mean that the Buckeye program does not stack up against those of Syracuse or Air Force, teams that also defeated OSU in the postseason during the Cooper era.

Ohio State turned things around against Michigan under Jim Tressel and, if given another chance, will hopefully get the SEC monkey off its back, as well.

So where does that leave the Ohio State program right now?

I think everyone – fans, players and coaches alike – is disappointed after the loss. Once you make it to the big one, you want to come away a victor. And after the bad taste from last year's title game, I think fans, players and coaches wanted this championship game really badly.

I just worry that the understandable disappointment makes people forget all the Ohio State football program has accomplished these past few years. Conference championships, wins over Michigan – these are things that any Ohio State team aspires to and few Buckeye teams are able to achieve with this type of regularity. While a national championship is always the goal, these successes that help earn the right to play for the championship are things to be savored.

People forget how difficult it is just to make it to the title game. I hear talk of how next year's Buckeye team could be even better than this year's club. That hardly guarantees a third straight visit to the BCS championship game. As this year so vividly proved for so many teams, it's a long road to those top two spots in the BCS rankings.

On the flip side, I disagree with those who minimize the loss to LSU because the Buckeyes were supposed to be rebuilding this year and were said to be a year away from being championship material. If you are good enough to get there, you are good enough to win.

Ohio State fans have every reason to be

disappointed after a second straight loss in the BCS National Championship Game. They also have every reason to be proud of their Buckeyes.

As I have said in this space before, I believe that years from now this will be looked back upon as one of the golden ages of Ohio State football.

I just hope that when people look back upon this era, they look back upon a win over an SEC team somewhere in the mix.

Hard-Nosed Roots

The physical nature of LSU's play shouldn't be such a surprise when you consider that the team's coaching staff has strong Ohio, Big Ten and Midwest roots.

Miles' Michigan connection is well-documented. And defensive coordinator Bo Pellini, now free to assume his duties as head coach at Nebraska, is a former Ohio State football player. Defensive backs coach Doug Mallory played his collegiate football at Michigan, and his father, Bill Mallory, was an assistant to Woody Hayes on OSU's 1968 national championship team and was a longtime head coach at Indiana.

LSU offensive line coach Greg Studrawa is a Fostoria, Ohio, native who played his college ball at Bowling Green, where he also coached. He served as a graduate assistant for Ohio State under John Cooper in 1997.

Holiday Promos Continue

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BCS Quick Kicks

I continue to worry about Boeckman's tendency to underthrow his deep ball. I don't know if it is a question of arm strength, mechanics, footwork or what. But I know it is a recipe for disaster.

One thing I don't question about Boeckman is his toughness. He took a beating in the game with LSU and kept coming back to try to lead his club to victory.

• Speaking of arm strength, I continue to be amazed by Wells' ability to use the old-fashioned stiff-arm. There's nothing fancy about a stiff-arm. I'm sure it was used in the days of Chic Harley. But it can really be effective, as Wells has demonstrated repeatedly, including on a 29-yard run in the second quarter of the championship game.

• You can add sloppy tackling to the list of miscues by the Buckeyes in the title tilt. Some of that can be attributed to the play of the Tigers, but most of that has to fall on Ohio State. While people talk about Austin Spitzer's failure to block that LSU punt and the Tigers' subsequent new life after his roughing the kicker penalty, they don't seem to mention that poor Buckeye tackling helped the Tigers gobble up the final 45 yards for the decisive touchdown.

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