

Byars Will Be A 'Big' Catch For Colleges

By Zan Strobel

There are lots of things about Keith Byars that are big: his body (6-2, 225), his football statistics (1,590 yards rushing in eight games with 12.4 average), his narrowed-down list of possible colleges (11, Ohio State included) and his mouth.

The week before Byars' soon-to-be alma mater, Dayton Roth High School, played neighbor-



Keith Byars

hood rival Trotwood-Madison in the first round of the Ohio prep football playoffs, the senior running back-linebacker let his mouth get out of control. Rightfully proud of Roth's 10-0 regular-season mark and City League championship, he carried his boasting beyond the bounds of good sense.

Talk about bulletin board material! This was prime stuff. "We're gonna take the Rams right off their helmets and throw them in the river. . . They're gonna look like they went through a meat grinder. . . They'll be looking for a place to hide."

Get the idea? The Trotwood defense certainly did and held the big running back to 72 yards in 24 carries. Not to mention that it made Byars look rather foolish.

"I just defended Roth," Byars said, after he had a week to think about it. "No matter what I said, they would have come after me anyway."

But shooting off his mouth and playing one sub-par game cannot really detract from all the positive things that Byars — called 'Boomer' by coaches and players of Roth and its opponents — has accomplished in his high school career.

First off, he grew a physique that hasn't been seen around Dayton since the days of Irv Eatman (a 1979 Meadowdale grad, now a defensive tackle for UCLA who almost single-handedly destroyed Ohio State last year). Tremendously strong, although he doesn't lift weights, his upper body muscles stand out as if he pumps iron three times a day and twice on Sunday. His legs are solid muscle and can push him

through an ordinary defensive line as if it were made of tissue.

While he gets headlines in football, Byars is a four-sport man. He was the sixth man for the Falcons' Class AAA state champion basketball team last season, averaging about nine points a game. He should start this year.

He batted .457 for the baseball team as an outfielder last spring, but that wasn't enough to fill his time. He also ran the 440-yard relay and the open 100 for the track team. He missed the sectional-district-state meets however because of dental problems that forced him to watch from the stands. (Roth won the Class AAA state track championship, also).

"I'd work out for the track team first," Byars said. "Then go over to baseball practice."

His baseball skill drew enough attention to get him an invitation to try out with the Cincinnati Reds.

Last year in football he shared the backfield with another 1,000-plus yard gainer, and he still finished with close to 1,200 yards himself.

In 1981 he not only ran for 1,590 yards and 13 TDs, he also caught 12 passes and played linebacker most of the time. On defense, Byars is a real terror as his size, speed and aggressiveness make a perfect combination. In college, he could easily be a success at linebacker, or even tight end, if the situation called for it.

Byars will definitely go big time college. His grades (2.6 on a 4.0 scale) are above average, so that won't hold him back. Recruiters have been sending him letters and brochures since last season. And now that his senior football season is over, the real hunt has begun.

"I've been getting a bunch of phone calls," he noted, saying that Ohio State was right in the thick of things.

"Since I grew up in Ohio, I've been hearing about Ohio State for a long time. When I was little, it was my favorite team. But as I was growing up, I saw a lot of other teams play on TV and stuff, so now I have a whole lot of favorites," Byars said diplomatically.

No use alienating a school until you're positive you don't want to go there, right Keith?

Baseball is important enough to him that he wants to be guaranteed that he'll be allowed to try out for the baseball team his sophomore year.

"I can see not playing baseball my freshman year, because spring football is real important for freshmen," he noted. "But after that, I'd like to play baseball, too."

In addition to Ohio State, his most recent list includes

Clemson, LSU, Tennessee, USC, UCLA, Arizona State, Notre Dame, Iowa State, Michigan and Pittsburgh.

"I'm just starting to think real hard about where I want to visit, now that the season's over," he said. "I'm not too sure I'll sign

the first day, but then again, maybe I'll commit early and get it all over with. I've pretty much got time to make up my mind."

Which ever school lands Byars is getting a solid-packed package of talent — even if he does have a big mouth.



Photos Courtesy Dayton Journal Herald

Byars In Action

BUCKEYE Sports BULLETIN

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Byars' 274 Yards Nets Fourth Key Buck Award

Griffin's Record Falls From Books

By Rich Exner

Keith Byars had his name put up there along side Archie Griffin's last year when he rushed for 1,199 yards, becoming only the second sophomore — Griffin was the first — to rush for more than 1,000 yards at Ohio State.

Byars' best game was a 174-yard performance against Wisconsin, well off Griffin's single game rushing mark of 246. But Byars didn't think Griffin's record was out of reach.

"Over the summer, I had a copy of a program that showed all the records," The 6-2, 233-pound speedster said. "I never set a game in which I wanted to break it, but it's a goal — if you are a running back — that you always want. If one person could do it, I was sure another one could do it."

Bramble, as his teammates call him because of what they think is a combination of Jim Brown and Earl Campbell, got that record against Illinois. He also surpassed the 1,000-yard rushing mark, checking in with 1,074 after six games.

Byars' totals of 274 yards on 39 carries earned him his fourth Key Oldsmobile Subaru/Rent-A-Wreck *Key Buck of the Week* award.

Byars was still well behind the Big Ten single-game rushing record of 350 yards set by Michigan State's Eric Allen in 1971.

"I didn't break the record," Byars said of eclipsing Griffin's single game mark. "I just happened to be the person running the football. I think the whole team broke the record," he proclaimed.

"I didn't know I was even that close until I looked up at the scoreboard and it said 274. I was just amazed that I had done it."

It was not a tainted record, either, in which a back is kept in the game only to get a record. The record came on a 23-yard run that got the Buckeyes' final, game-winning drive going.

His last three yards won the game for the Buckeyes.

The final run came with less than a minute left on the clock and the game knotted at 38. On third down, a time out was called and the offense looked to its leader.

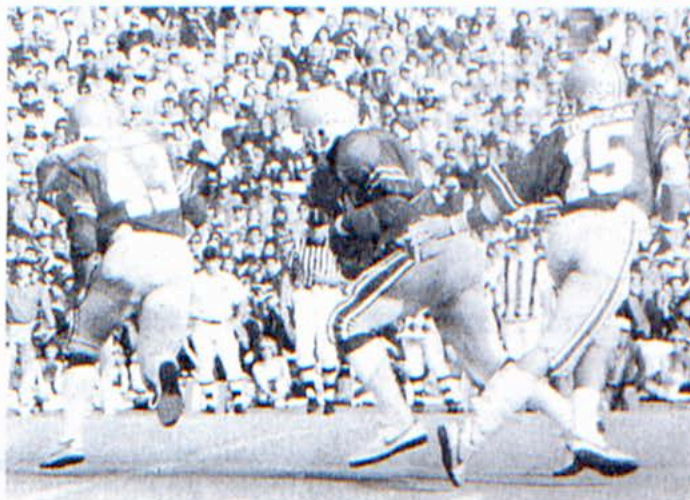
According to Byars, "Mark Krewowicz said, 'Keith, can you get three yards? Can you get three yards?' I said, 'Mark, I can get the three yards.'"

The play — 49 pitch — was called, and Byars swept around left end before cutting into the end zone behind a fine block from fullback George Cooper.

"I said, 'Hey, I've got to go get it. Stop me.'"

The touchdown was Byars' fifth of the day, tying the Big Ten scoring record of 30 points. He shares that record with Pete Johnson of Ohio State (1975), Mike Northington of Purdue (1973), Ron Johnson of Michigan (1968) and Red Grange of Illinois (1924).

The record update shows Bramble leading the country in rushing (179.3 yards per game), all-purpose running (243.5) and scoring (16.0). If Byars can stay anywhere close to his current pace, he will smash Griffin's Big Ten rushing record of 1,695 yards



Barry Walker Leads Keith Byars On His Way

and Pete Johnson's Big Ten scoring record of 156 points. He would finish the season with 2,148 yards and 192 points at his current rate.

Erasing a Griffin record seems like a dream come true for a kid who grew up in Dayton as a Griffin fan.

"Everybody was an Archie Griffin fan in my neighborhood," Byars said.

The summer before Byars' senior year at Dayton Roth High School, Griffin threw a recruiting pitch Keith's way.

"I went down to the Cincinnati Bengals training camp and had the opportunity to talk to him. He told me all about his experiences here at Ohio State. They were all good. He said all the good high school running backs in Ohio should go to Ohio State. He said, 'Be part of the tradition.'"

The longest run Byars turned in on the day was the longest from scrimmage of his career and put Ohio State up by eight, 35-27, midway through the third quarter. On this 67-yard scamper, Byars took the handoff on a draw going right, headed to the sideline, cut back down the middle of the field, lost his left shoe, and out-ran the Illini defensive backs into the end zone.

"I felt the shoe slip, and it just popped off," Byars explained. "I wasn't about to slow down to go

back and get it. I tried to get to the end zone as quick as possible and hope no one would step on my size 14."

As usual, both coaches were in awe of another great Byars performance.

Illinois coach Mike White: "It settled down to the last few minutes to what we did and what we didn't do. But Byars did it all. He is so sudden, so versatile and has everything a good running back needs."

Asked if Byars is the best running back in the country, Ohio State's Earle Bruce said, "If there's another one, I don't know where he is. I know who I'd take. I see him give great effort every, every practice."

And when the game was on the line, Byars came through. Although carrying the ball 39 times — five short of Harold "Champ" Henson's Ohio State record — Byars appeared as fresh as could be on the last drive. Forty-nine of Ohio State's 80 yards on last drive were Byars yards.

Following the game, Byars was asked if he was tired. "Yah, right now," he said. "During the fourth quarter I wasn't tired at all. I felt myself getting stronger. I felt the momentum shifting our way. I knew I had to stay in there and help the team."

The Big Ten Record Chase

Archie Griffin, 1974			Keith Byars, 1984		
Game	Att-Yds	Totals	Totals	Att-Yds	Game
Minn., 34-19	26-133	26-133	34-182	34-182	Ore. St., 22-14
Ore. St., 51-10	16-134	42-267	60-327	26-145	Wash. St., 44-0
SMU, 28-9	24-156	66-423	83-447	23-120	Iowa, 45-26
Wash. St., 42-7	21-196	87-619	111-611	28-164	Minn., 35-22
Wisc., 52-7	18-112	105-731	141-802	30-191	Pur., 23-28
Ind., 49-9	22-146	127-877	180-1076	39-274	Ill., 45-38
North., 55-7	18-173	145-1050			Michigan St.
Ill., 49-7	20-144	165-1194			Wisconsin
Mich. St., 13-16	23-140	188-1234			Indiana
Iowa, 35-10	23-175	211-1509			Northwestern
Mich., 12-10	25-111	236-1620			Michigan
USC, 17-18	20-75	256-1695			

Griffin's 1974 rushing total is a Big Ten record. Griffin, as Byars is in 1984, was a junior during his record-setting season.

Make Up 24-Point Deficit

Buckeyes Rally With Help Of Byars

By Rich Exner

The crowd in Ohio Stadium was stunned. Favored Ohio State trailed Illinois, 24-0, just 16 minutes into the game.

Illinois drove 80 yards for its first score and 57 yards before kicking a field goal to take a 10-0 lead. Buckeye quarterback Mike Tomczak promptly threw an interception, setting up a second Illinois touchdown and a 17-0 score. Then, Keith Byars fumbled the ball away on Ohio State's very next play, setting up the Illini's third TD.

"I didn't see any eyes of defeat in the Buckeyes when we were down 24-0. I was looking for them," Ohio State coach Earle Bruce said.

Tailback Byars, who had just 20 of his record-setting 274 yards in the first quarter, didn't have "eyes of defeat," but he certainly was surprised.

"We were down, 24-0, and we couldn't help but to second guess ourselves," Byars said. "That's the first time I've ever been down 24 points and comeback to win."

The Buckeyes took the ball on their next possession and, using both the pass and the run, moved the ball for the first time of the afternoon. Ohio State went 79

yards before having the drive stopped without scoring at the 13.

The Buckeye defense held and the offense went back to work, this time starting at its own nine-yard line after Illinois punter Chad Little dropped one out of bounds.

Tomczak connected on all four of his pass attempts — 17 yards to Doug Smith on a tipped pass, 15 to Mike Lanese on a deep curl, 36 to Carter down the right sideline after Tomczak pumped left, and 17 more to Carter.

The last pass gave the Buckeyes a first down at the 16 and set the stage for Byars, who spun off one tackler and burst into the end zone. An ensuing scuffle ended in the ejection of All-Big Ten defensive back Craig Swoope.

"As soon as we scored, that's all we needed to break the ice," Byars said.

After a 15-yard penalty was marched off against Illinois for the Swoope incident, the Buckeyes tried an onside kick and Ohio State's Joe Jenkins came out from under a pile of players with the football.

"The big turning point was the 15-yard penalty and the onside kick that we recovered," Bruce said.

Two plays later, Tomczak faked a handoff to Byars, faked a reverse pitch to Lanese and pumped deep to Carter, who leaped high among three defenders to grab the pass and fall into the end zone for the touchdown. Rich Spangler's extra point made it 24-14.

Sonny Gordon made the next big play.

Illini quarterback Jack Trudeau threw to Randy Grant, who was doing an out pattern. Grant didn't turn around in time to see the ball, and Gordon watched it into his hands for his third interception of the year.

Tomczak completed five of seven passes, and Byars ran one time for 11 yards as the Buckeyes moved to the four-yard line. From there, Byars took a pitch going left and dove over the last defender for the TD, which brought OSU back to 24-21 with only 16 seconds left in the half.

The early game boos turned to thunderous roars in Ohio Stadium as Tomczak led the team off the field waving a towel high in the air.

"It's just funny how momentum changes so quickly. It was exemplified today," Tomczak said following the game.

Things kept going Ohio State's way in the second half. Ray Wilson fumbled the kickoff and William White recovered for the Buckeyes at the 26.

From there, Byars ran four times, diving over from the one, and Ohio State led, 28-24, climaxing a rally that saw the Buckeyes score 28 unanswered points. From there on out, it was a

**Scott Leach (8), Pepper Johnson (98) Apply Hit**

battle of two nearly unstoppable offenses.

Trudeau's short passing game put Chris White, son of coach Mike White and the Big Ten's leading kicker, in range for a 46-yarder. But Ohio State still led, 28-27, with 10:35 on the clock in the third quarter.

Once again, the Buckeyes looked to Byars and, once again, the big tailback came through, breaking to the right side on a draw play and cutting back up the middle for a 67-yard touchdown. Halfway through the run — Byars' longest ever — he lost his left shoe but, with the help of blocks from Cris Carter and Jamie Holland, was still able to out-run the Illini secondary.

With that run and the extra point that followed, Ohio State went up, 35-27.

The two teams traded punts before Illinois, behind some more short passing by Trudeau and good running from Thomas Rooks, reached the end zone again. Trudeau rolled right on a two-point conversion try and, with the receivers covered, tucked the ball up and ran in to tie the game at 35.

Rich Spangler split the uprights with a 47 yarder, equaling his career long set against Brigham Young and Purdue.

After Illinois elected not to go for the touchdown on fourth and inches, White was called upon to kick a 16-yarder to tie the score at 38-all. Coach White called on his son after Fred Ridder stopped Rooks cold on third down.

Just 3:18 remained in the game and, after the kickoff was downed in the end zone, Ohio State stood 80 yards away from its destination.

"We said, 'Hey, this is the season right here,'" Byars said. "Last

year, we went all the way down and got stopped. They came back and won the football game on us."

Tomczak looked to Carter on first down but the pass was knocked away by David Edwards, the man who returned an interception for a touchdown against Ohio State last year.

Then, the Buckeyes went to their franchise, the ground game led by Keith Byars, who ran 23 yards on the next play to break Archie Griffin's Ohio State single-game rushing record.

John Wooldridge ran for eight, Byars for three, Wooldridge for five, Byars for eight, Byars for seven and Wooldridge for 18 to the eight-yard line. After picking up five and being stopped for no gain, Byars took a pitch going left and cut into the end zone off a good block from fullback George Cooper for the winning TD with 32 seconds left in the game.

The defense held and Ohio State emerged a 45-38 winner in a game that saw 1,073 yards in total offense.

"It was a great college football game," coach White said after the game. "It was our best performance of the year. We did not win because we could not stop them."

Big Ten Standings

Ohio State	3-1	5-1
Purdue	3-1	4-2
Iowa	3-1	4-2
Michigan	3-1	4-2
Illinois	3-2	4-3
Michigan State	2-2	3-3
Minnesota	2-2	3-3
Wisconsin	1-3	3-3
Northwestern	1-4	1-6
Indiana	0-4	0-6

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Tomczak Gets To Pick Up Byars' Shoe

By Craig James

Mike Tomczak remembers the play well.

The handoff went to tailback Keith Byars. Byars went through right tackle, found an opening and then cut to the left on his way to a 67-yard touchdown run that put Ohio State up 35-27 over Illinois in the third quarter.

Along the way, one of Byars' shoes came flying off, but it didn't slow him down any. Tomczak got the honor of carrying the shoe back to the Buckeye bench.

"After he shifted into high, he kind of blew a tire," the quarterback remarked. "I had to pick up the treads and bring them over to the sideline. I was like the pit crew, more or less."

Tomczak's own performance in Saturday's victory kind of got lost in the shuffle as Byars basked in the spotlight with his 274-yard rushing game against the Illini. But while the game's outcome was

based on Ohio State's running versus Illinois' passing attack, the senior signal-caller also had some impressive statistics to show off when the day was done.

He completed 16 of 26 passes for 236 yards and a touchdown, a marked improvement over the off-day he had a week before at Purdue.

"Any time we get a victory, I feel happy with my performance," he said. "I'm not a greedy person. I'm just going to go out there and do whatever it takes."

Tomczak's play in the early going, however, reflected the type of shaky play that the entire team exhibited. The OSU offense couldn't get anything going and the Illini was piling up a 24-0 lead. Tomczak was blitzed on his first pass attempt, forcing him to throw too long for split end Cris Carter.

On his second attempt, another pass intended for Carter was picked off by Illinois cornerback Mike Heaven, the same fellow who tackled Tomczak in Champaign a year before, causing a concussion.

Illinois scored following the interception, and did so again after recovering a Byars fumble during the Buckeyes' next possession.

"(Heaven) made a great play," commented Tomczak about the steal. "It's the game of football. You can't reflect on that. The

play's over. And when Keith fumbled the ball, you can't do anything about that. I said, 'Keith, hang in there, buddy. We're going to go. We're going to explode sooner or later.' Keith kept his head on."

Evidently, considering the way OSU rallied to eventually win the game.

"I knew myself that we weren't out of the game," the quarterback said, "because you never say die here at Ohio State. We were behind 24-0, but we just stuck together. We're family and we proved it today."

Ohio State was a family that knew how to play football very well, and when the Buckeyes had trouble with their ground game at first, they resorted to the airways.

OSU's first score, coming in the second quarter, was set up primarily by Tomczak and his receivers. The senior connected on three straight passes at one point to split end Doug Smith, flanker Mike Lanese and Carter for gains of 17, 15 and 36 yards respectively. After OSU was assessed a holding penalty, Tomczak got another throw off to Carter for a 17-yard pickup to the Illinois 16. Byars reached the end zone on the next play.

On the second play during Ohio State's next possession, set up after the Bucks recovered an onside

kick, Tomczak faked a reverse and passed down the middle for 30 yards and into the waiting hands of a leaping Carter for the touchdown.

The quarterback used three receivers again to account for 48 of the 62 yards that OSU covered in its third scoring drive of the second frame, which began when rover Sonny Gordon stole an Illini pass.

In all, Tomczak threw for 209 yards in the second quarter, completing 13 of 20 aerials.

"There were some passes last week (at Purdue) that were crucial that hurt us," he said. "This week, we had one interception on the first pass of the game. They surprised us, but sooner or later, we come back."

"Just like Keith did in running, I knew my passing would come sooner or later."

The Illinois game reminded him of another during his senior year at Thornton Fractional High School. Rich Central took a 21-0 lead in the first half, but Tomczak came out throwing for over 300 yards in the last two frames and Thornton ended up winning 28-21.

"I was having the worst day of my life the first half," he said of that game. "We came back and I had the greatest day in my life the second half."

That is, until last Saturday.

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Twice, Ohio State players have led the country in scoring. Harold Henson scored 120 points in 10 games in 1972 and Pete Johnson scored 150 points in 11 games in 1975, both to lead the country.

Pre-Game Explosions Ignited Buck Fire

Young men, competing in the world of athletics, usually need very little urging to perform at their best. The smallest jab of any sort can serve only to fan the fires that are already smoldering. The Buckeyes of Ohio State, about to face Iowa, the number one ranked team in the country, found two reasons to stew shortly after dawn's early light on Nov. 2.

Which of the two explosions came first for the Bucks is immaterial. Was it the chicken or the egg? Who cares? The reasons, those which fueled the fires, were there.

First, or maybe it was second, was the morning paper in Columbus. *Citizen-Journal* columnist Bert Graeff took somewhat of a potshot at the Buckeye secondary. Personally, I don't feel the article about — or against, as they would have you believe — the Men of Brutality was that derogatory.

Graeff insinuated that the Buckeye defenders would be lucky to keep Long under 1,000 passing yards in the game.

The second reason, or maybe this one was first, was an apparent tirade by Buckeye captain Keith Byars. That's the quiet, reserved, low-keyed Keith Byars, son of a minister.

We can — and probably will — jump around from one to the other among players who addressed the issues following the game. But one thing is sure, the match was struck.

"We got some bad pub in the papers today, talking about our defensive backs and talking about how Long will pass for 1,000 yards today," said linebacker Eric Kumerow. "I think we took that a little personal. We decided to go out and really kick some butts."

Wharton's View

By Jim Wharton
BSB Editor

The Hawkeyes felt the sting — right on the seat of their gold and black britches.

"We read the article in the paper this morning," said defensive back Greg Rogan, who had one pass interception and came up with a near-miss on another. "It said we'd be lucky to keep Chuck Long under 1,000 yards and that we'd look in the mirror and see that we might just as well throw in the towel. That just kind of psyched us up to go out there and play even harder."

And play hard they did. Iowa, with Long, the nation's leading passer as the game opened, was in for a long (get it?) day. The talented Hawkeye quarterback, who had passed for six touchdowns the previous Saturday, was harassed into a sub-par performance, with Buckeyes swarming all over him.

Before Long and the Hawkeyes surrendered their number one ranking, Byars would have his say.

It was a players-only meeting around breakfast time in the hotel where the Buckeyes stow away on Friday night. Byars wanted to make a point. Knowing he would watch from the bench because his foot, reinjured a week earlier against Minnesota, had not responded, Byars grabbed center stage for a little heart-to-heart talk with his mates.

Now here's a guy who gets all the 'pub,' grabs all the headlines, all the glory. Respected by his mates? You bet. It must have been a little like the E.F. Hutton commercial.

You know, when Keith Byars speaks, everybody listens.

"It was really something else," said OSU fullback George Cooper, who took up some of the slack created by Byars' absence by rushing for 104 yards in 17 carries. "Keith never loses his composure. I guess because he knew he wasn't playing, he didn't want to lose this game. He didn't want us to lose."

So, tell us, George, what happened?

"He kind of got upset," said Cooper of Byars. "He kicked a few things around. That kind of showed us this game meant something. That fired us up a lot. Keith never gets upset and he got upset; a glass here, a table there. A tray."

One report said Byars even tried the table cloth trick. You know, the one where you try to pull the tablecloth out from underneath the knives, forks, spoons, cups and saucers, etc.

"I've never seen Keith like that," said linebacker Pepper Johnson, who shared high-tackle honors in the game with fellow linebacker Chris Spielman — each with 19 tackles. "I know he can always get his point across when he's talking to me. But he wanted to get this point across to everybody."

Byars' antics, which hopefully were controlled enough that the hotel does not send the university a bill for damages, undoubtedly served their purpose.

"I hadn't seen Keith so emotional since I've been here," said wide receiver Mike Lanese. "I can't speak for the other guys, but it sure got me fired up. He came out saying things like Chuck Long and Ronnie Harmon are two great players and Iowa's a very good football team — but we're Ohio State. They're coming into our

hometown, into our stadium — where we've won 19 straight — and no one should beat us at home."

The speech — with miniscule property damage like a broken glass — inspired his teammates.

"I've known him for four years and I've never seen him so excited," said Buckeye quarterback Jim Karsatos. "It was a great speech by a great man."

Evidently.

"Everybody was fired up," said center Bob Maggs. "When we had our meeting this morning, everybody could feel it. Some people are awed by number one. We saw the films. We knew we could beat them if we played our game."

Or, as Rogan looked at it, "We just decided that if we lost here, we wouldn't be going to the Rose Bowl and we probably wouldn't end up as Big Ten champions again."

"The captains and some of the other people just had a little pep talk and got us to come closer together as a unit."

As all of this unfolded in the interview room following the game, it was a shame that Byars had not been present to give his version of the pep talk. But, as it goes each week, reporters request those players who made significant contributions in the game. Byars, not having played, had not.

The things that go on that we usually don't hear about are amazing. It's also a wonder that all of this washed out. Those types of things are usually kept within the family.

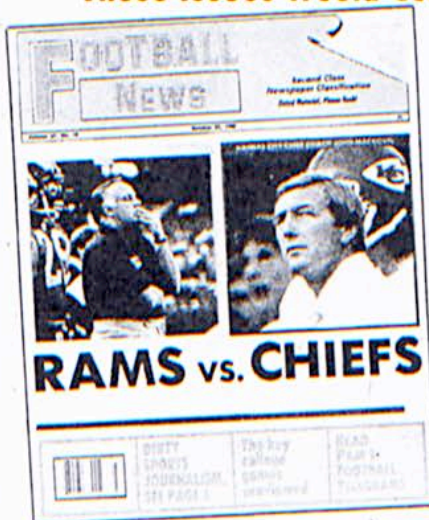
But it also made for some interesting conversation. Let's hope, after the way the flames roared against the Hawkeyes, that somebody doesn't stomp out that fire. That was a real barn-burner.

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MICHIGAN MEMORIES — KEITH BYARS

Big UM Thrills Came Early In Byars' Career

By MIKE WACHSMAN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Despite the fact Keith Byars made a huge name for himself at Ohio State, his favorite OSU-Michigan memory is of a game in which he never carried the football.

The school's third all-time rusher with 3,200 yards, Byars had his share of fine games against the Maize and Blue, including the one in 1984 when he scored all three touchdowns in OSU's 21-6 victory. That win sent OSU to the Rose Bowl, a game it has not played in since.

But his favorite remembrance of "The Game" was his very first one, in 1982, when he was mainly a blocking back.

"We won that game 24-14 to go to the Holiday Bowl after losing three in the middle of the season," said Byars, now a member of the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles. "I was happy we won because Timmy Spencer was the tailback and it was his senior year. It was good to see the seniors go out on a high note. He was the featured back that game and did a great job."

"It was my first taste of the series and it was a great one. But each game was a special one because that's just the nature of the series."

Byars said even if he had bad games against Michigan, the sheer excitement and atmosphere was intense.

"The reason I went to Ohio State was to play in the Michigan game," he said. "There's so much history surrounding it. Playing them and getting the gold pants and all those things really make the game what it is."

"When you grow up as a kid in Ohio, that game is always a big one for you as a fan. It's even more exciting to play in."

For Ohio State fans, the series has not been as exciting as in past years, due mainly to four straight Buckeye losses.

Despite the losing skein, the former OSU great still believes the game transcends college football and is one of the all-time great rivalries in sports.

(Former OSU head) Coach (Earle) Bruce used to say that everything you do against Michigan counts twice," Byars said. "If you gain 10 yards, it's really 20, just because the game is so intense. It's a battle of wills on every play, and you have to see who's going to be the first to crack."

"I haven't liked what I've seen the last few years, but these things happen sometimes. They can't worry about what's happened the past few years; they just have to go out and play their best game."

Byars had numerous good games against Michigan, but his best was the aforementioned 1984 contest in which he scored three touchdowns, including two in the fourth quarter when OSU was clinging perilously to a 7-6 lead. In



Keith Byars

the game, he ran for 101 yards on 27 tough carries.

The year before, in a heartbreaking 24-21 loss to the Wolverines, Byars rambled for 115 yards and scored two touchdowns, giving him 19 for the year.

The Dayton native has become one of the most versatile backs in the National Football League, doing pretty much of everything for the Eagles. He still runs the ball on occasion and is listed as a running back, but he is known more for his ability to catch and run with the

pigskin. He has also thrown five touchdown passes in his career.

Byars led the Eagles in receiving last year with 62 catches, but led all NFL running backs in receiving in 1990 with 81 catches. He has carved a fine niche for himself with the Eagles and has been called one of the best all-around backs in the NFL by numerous experts.

Despite the demands of his professional career, Byars still has time to check on the Buckeyes now and then. And he will definitely be tuned in to the OSU-Michigan game Nov. 21.

"When they're on national TV, I try to watch them as much as I can," he said. "I stay in touch with a few people there, (head trainer) Billy Hill and (former assistant) Coach (Bill) Myles. He'll always be 'Coach' to me, until I come back there in maybe the year 2000 and coach myself."

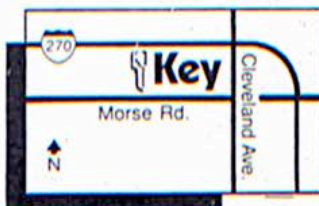
"The Michigan game is a special one, but just being a Buckeye is special, too. I'm still best friends with Pepper Johnson; I talk a lot with Cris Carter, William Roberts, Kirk Lowdermilk and Todd Bell. Once you join the Buckeye fraternity, you're always going to be a part of it."

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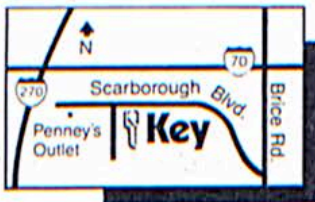


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