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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Sept. 11, 2021

Day, Buckeyes Stick To Their Guns; Use Explosive Second Half To Win Opener

By MARK REA

BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

One thing Ryan Day has proved during his relatively short tenure as Ohio State head coach is a fierce, almost stubborn tenacity when it comes to his offensive attack.

That mentality was on full display once again Sept. 2 when Day's Buckeyes were faced with a young quarterback struggling in his first collegiate start against an inspired Minnesota team, a 14-point underdog with nothing to lose and everything to prove.

The upstart Gophers dispensed with an early 10-point deficit to take a 14-10 lead at halftime, using a solid running attack spearheaded by senior Mohamed Ibrahim, the reigning Big Ten Running Back of the Year.

Meanwhile, redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud, starting his first game under center for the Buckeyes, began the game steady enough but quickly hit a rough patch. After completing five of his first seven attempts, Stroud suddenly went cold. As a steady rain began to fall at Huntington Bank Stadium in Minneapolis, the youngster overthrew several targets and so badly missed receiver Chris Olave on a crossing route over the middle that the pass was intercepted, leading to Minnesota's second touchdown.

Still, Day refused to play it safe. The third-year head coach's ace in the hole was a strong running game of his own, one that produced fireworks on Ohio State's fifth offensive play of the night when starting tailback Miyan Williams turned a simple counter play into a 71-yard touchdown romp.

But while the conservative play might have been to protect Stroud and rely more on Williams and fellow running backs Master Teague and TreVeyon Henderson, Day chose instead to keep his foot planted squarely on the gas pedal. Despite the rain picking up in intensity and the fact that he entered the game with zero passes thrown in his college career, Stroud settled in for a solid second-half performance that included touchdown passes of 38, 56, 70 and 61 yards, and the fourth-ranked Buckeyes wound up running away with a 45-31 victory.

"C.J. and I had a conversation early on," Day told reporters after the game. "He and I decided that we were going to keep swinging, no matter what happened. We were not going to play it close to the vest because that's not the way we do it here. And he responded."

Stroud finished the night 13



SONNY BROCKWAY

BIG SECOND HALF - Redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud (7) shook off a slow start Sept. 2 at Minnesota to throw for four second-half touchdowns and the Buckeyes scored a 45-31 victory to open the 2021 season. After throwing for only 58 yards in the first, Stroud threw for scores of 38, 56, 70 and 61 yards after halftime.

of 22 for 294 yards, four touchdowns and one interception. Most of that production came in the second half when Stroud completed 5 of 8 passes for 236 yards and all four scores. His passing efficiency went from 75.66 in the first half to an off-the-charts 475.30 after the break.

"It took a little while, I think, for us to get the rhythm on offense with C.J., but that was his first game," Day said. "That was his first pass on the first play of the game. There's a lot going on there, and when you go into situations like that, you know that it may be a little bit murky early on, and that's what happened."

One man's murky could just as easily have been another's disaster waiting to happen.

Stroud got off to an efficient start, completing passes on the Buckeyes' first two offensive plays from scrimmage. But on the

third play, he overthrew junior receiver Garrett Wilson, who had come open down the field. It was a harbinger of things to come as Stroud began to struggle with his accuracy, especially when asked to throw on the run.

Later, the redshirt freshman admitted he had suffered some opening-night jitters.

"In the first half, my mind wasn't right," Stroud said. "I was kind of all over the place a little bit. I talked to my teammates, prayed a lot, and tried to block that out. I don't feel like I did terribly, but I definitely didn't do as much as I could."

Despite Stroud's uneven performance, the Buckeyes raced out to a 10-0 lead in the first half, an advantage that could have been even larger.

Williams tallied the first points of the game on his long

Continued On Page 10

OPINION

QB Bar Set Extremely High For Stroud

Late in the second quarter of what would eventually become a 45-31 season-opening victory for Ohio State at Minnesota, a friend texted me regarding the performance of redshirt freshman quarterback C.J. Stroud.

At the time, Stroud was suffering through a cold streak during which he had attempted six passes and completed only two of them for just 7 yards. The tail end of that streak was a poorly thrown ball over the middle – the kind Stroud normally could complete in his sleep – that resulted in his first career interception.

Minnesota cashed in on that turnover, scoring eight plays later to take a 14-10 lead in a game the Gophers entered as 14-point underdogs. While television cameras scanned the Ohio State sidelines and focused in on Stroud, who wore a decidedly deer-in-the-headlights look on his face, my friend texted this message: "Good God, we've been spoiled these last few years."

It's a pretty safe bet that similar texts were flying through the ether from one Buckeye fan to another, wondering what in the name of Chic Harley was Ryan Day thinking when he named Stroud the starting quarterback. Where is Kyle McCord? Whatever happened to Jack Miller? Where's the new million-dollar kid Quinn Ewers?

Stroud, of course, shook off his self-described first-game jitters and proceeded to throw for 236 yards and four touchdowns in the second half to help lead the Buckeyes to victory, but the point made about just how spoiled Ohio State fans have become with regard to their quarterbacks is a salient one.

Day, perhaps as aware of what is happening outside his program as any coach in the college ranks, addressed the burdensome expectations for any young man who aspires to be the starting quarterback for the team Fox Sports play-by-play man Gus Johnson has taken to calling "the world-famous Ohio State Buckeyes."

"I told (C.J.) early on, there are no expectations going in," Day told reporters after the game. "You might throw four interceptions, you might throw four touchdowns. I don't know what's going to happen. I know everyone thinks you just walk out there, and you're going to throw for 300 yards and a bunch of touchdowns, but it doesn't just work that way."

Day should probably look in the mirror to see who's at least partially to blame for that mentality. After all, he was the quarterbacks coach when Dwayne Haskins spoiled OSU fans during his record-shattering 2018 season. In fact, Day was the acting head coach when Haskins threw for 313 yards and five touchdowns in his first collegiate start, a 77-31 rout of Oregon State in the season opener three years ago.

Haskins broke so many OSU passing records during that 2018 season that it was hard to keep track of all of them. But he did throw for 300 or more yards in nine of 14 games that year, and his 313 total in the season opener established a new program high for a quarterback in the first start of his career.

Want to know who's second on that list? It's Stroud. His 294 yards against Minnesota marked only the eighth time an Ohio State QB has thrown for at least 200 yards in his first start. The others are Cardale Jones (257 vs. Wisconsin in the 2014 Big Ten Championship Game), Steve Bellisari (243 vs. Ohio in 1999), Justin Fields (234 vs. Florida Atlantic in 2019), J.T. Barrett (226 vs. Navy in 2014), Todd Boeckman (225 vs. Youngstown State in 2007) and Justin Zwick (213 vs. Cincinnati in 2004).

Stroud's four touchdown passes also tied Fields for second most in an OSU quarterback's first start. Haskins had five in that 2018 opener. Unlike some of the TD tosses by Haskins and Fields in their debut games, however, Stroud's scoring passes were almost as much a product of the talent and speed of his supporting cast as the strong, accurate arm hanging from the young quarterback's right shoulder.

Only his second scoring pass, the 56-yarder to Garrett Wilson in the third quarter, could be considered anything resembling a deep ball. Stroud took advantage of a clean pocket and stepped into the throw to deliver a strike to Wilson, who made the catch in midstride. Stroud was standing on his own 38 when he delivered the ball, and Wilson cradled it about the Minnesota 15, meaning the pass traveled an on-target 47 yards in the air.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Stroud's first touchdown came early in the third quarter when he found Chris Olave for a 38-yard score. The QB felt some pressure in the pocket and threw off his back foot but still managed to find a wide-open Olave on a deep crossing route near the left sideline. Olave snagged the pass and then added 20 yards after the catch for the touchdown.

Freshman running back TreVeyon Henderson kicked off his college career with a bang – and padded Stroud's stats in the process – early in the fourth quarter. Minnesota veteran defensive end Boye Mafe got suckered into rushing Stroud rather than covering Henderson swinging out of the backfield, and the result was a 70-yard touchdown run, something for the guys over at ESPN to put on their highlight reel. Stroud's toss over the hard-charging Mafe's head traveled only about 5 yards in the air before Henderson and his world-class speed blew through the Gophers like they were cardboard cutouts left over from last season.

The final scoring play involved a play fake and some misdirection from Stroud as he moved to his right to find Olave open again on another sideline route. This pass – probably the most accurate one Stroud threw while on the move during the entire game – traveled about 29 yards in the air before Olave gathered it in and danced down the sideline to complete a 61-yard scoring play.

Stroud's four touchdown passes, worth a total of 225 yards, involved some 149 yards after the catch. Then again, experts around college football don't claim for nothing that Ohio State's receiving corps is the best in the nation. And they barely scratched the surface of what they are capable of. While Wilson and Olave combined for nine catches, 197 yards and three scores, Jaxon Smith-Njigba was targeted only twice – and caught both balls for a total of 12 yards – while the likes of Julian Fleming as well as such highly rated true freshman as Marvin Harrison Jr., Emeke Egbuka and Jayden Ballard stand ready, waiting in the wings to see if they can make as big an initial splash as Henderson.

Minnesota provided a difficult test for Stroud in nearly every way possible – everything from different looks to a hostile, nighttime sellout crowd. And even though he will make his Ohio Stadium debut against Oregon, there is little doubt the Ducks will do everything in their power to rattle Stroud as best they can. But while he undoubtedly has the talent to exceed at this level, it seems the 19-year-old has the mental fortitude to match – not to mention a stable of receivers who would make any quarterback's job just that much easier.

Defense Better? Maybe

Full disclosure. I was extremely pessimistic about the defense – most notably the back seven – coming into the season, and I am only slightly less so after the Minnesota game.

Haskell Garrett's 32-yard touchdown return of a fumble created by a Zach Harrison strip sack

papered over a performance by the OSU defensive line that could be generously described as average. Yes, Minnesota's veteran offensive line holds a lot, and it is pretty clever at concealing it. But the Buckeyes are going to face similar situations all season, and they will have to figure out how to overcome that.

The Gophers rushed for 203 yards, most of that from the hard-nosed Mohamed Ibrahim, who obviously won Big Ten Running Back of the Year honors last season on considerable merit. There were times when the OSU line stuffed Ibrahim, such as the multitude of times Minnesota switched to the Wildcat formation. P.J. Fleck is regarded as one of the college game's best coaches, but the Wildcat? Seriously? That is a formation that should go the way of the single-wing. When is the last time a running back took a direct snap and did anything but run with the ball?

While the Buckeyes successfully defended Ibrahim when he took a direct snap – only 8 yards to show for six attempts – they were decidedly less effective when the Minnesota running back had room to operate. That was especially true when several OSU defenders were out of position on a fourth-and-1 play – coming out of a timeout, no less – that led to a Ibrahim ripping off a run worth 56 yards.

Redshirt freshman cornerback Lejond Cavazos had a particularly tough series during that stretch of the game. Not only did he watch as Ibrahim motored by him at the point of attack on the 56-yard run, two plays later Cavazos let Minnesota receiver Dylan Wright get the better of him in the end zone for a 13-yard touchdown.

It wasn't that Cavazos had particularly bad coverage on the play, but like many other Ohio State defensive backs of recent vintage, the redshirt freshman never got his head turned around to locate the ball, making the catch just that much easier for Wright.

Fellow redshirt freshman Ryan Watts and true freshman Denzel Burke also had rough initiations to college football. Burke committed a third-down pass-interference penalty in the end zone, a play that led directly to Minnesota's second touchdown. And Watts was beaten so badly downfield on a third-quarter play that he had no choice but to mug Gophers receiver Daniel Jackson to prevent an easy touchdown.

And don't get me started on Dallas Gant going to the head of Minnesota QB Tanner Morgan early in the third quarter, a roughing-the-passer penalty that wiped out Josh Proctor's interception return of about 60 yards. That was a potential 14-point swing after the Gophers scored a touchdown two plays later. On any level of football these days, whether you're in the pee-wee leagues or a senior linebacker at Ohio State, you should realize any hit in the vicinity of the opposing quarterback's head is going to draw a flag. In a word, that was unacceptable.

I know the Buckeyes played a lot of young and inexperienced players, and like all young and inexperienced players, they did some good things and they did some bad things. There was some sloppy tackling, but there were also some textbook stops, especially from Burke and Watts. There was too much grabbing downfield, and those are all going to be PIs at some point in the season if Ohio State DBs don't become a little more aware as to the location of the football.

The linebacker play still has a ways to go and that was on full display with a rotation that seemed to border on chaos. Still, it was a little better than in the past (how could it not be?) and I hope that is a sign of good things to come. Cody Simon had an important sack near the end of the first half, stopping Minnesota as it seemed poised to add to its 14-10 lead at the time.

All in all, I wasn't impressed with the Ohio State defensive effort, but I wasn't overly disappointed with it, either. Check back with me in a week to see if I feel the same way.

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No. 1	Sept. 11	No. 13	Dec. 18
No. 2	Sept. 18	No. 14	Jan. 15
No. 3	Sept. 25	No. 15	Jan. 29
No. 4	Oct. 2	No. 16	Feb. 12
No. 5	Oct. 9	No. 17	March 5
No. 6	Oct. 23	No. 18	March 19
No. 7	Oct. 30	No. 19	April 2
No. 8	Nov. 6	No. 20	April 16
No. 9	Nov. 13	No. 21	May
No. 10	Nov. 20	No. 22	June
No. 11	Nov. 27	No. 23	July
No. 12	Dec. 4	No. 24	August

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COVER STORY

OSU 'Keeps Swinging' For Second-Half Surge

Continued From Page 1

touchdown run, and then OSU moved to the Minnesota 18-yard line early in the second quarter based in part upon a trio of Stroud completions that totaled 29 yards. But when the Buckeyes got into the red zone, Stroud's accuracy again deserted him. He misfired on first and second downs, and his third-down, bubble-screen pass to sophomore Jaxon Smith-Njigba netted a gain of only 1 yard, resulting in a 35-yard field goal from North Carolina graduate transfer kicker Noah Ruggles.

Holding the Buckeyes to a field goal at that point recharged the Gophers, who took the ensuing possession 80 yards in six plays for their first touchdown of the night. The big play of the drive was a 56-yard run by Ibrahim on a fourth-and-1 gamble from his own 29-yard line.

Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck didn't necessarily agree with postgame assessments that the fourth-down call was a gamble.

"We didn't come here to lay up," said Fleck, who began his coaching career in 2006 as a graduate assistant on Jim Tressel's staff at Ohio State. "We're going to be aggressive. We knew we were going to have to play pretty perfect to win that football game. And we were going to have to make sure they didn't play perfect."

Stroud's play was far from perfect on his team's next possession. He completed a first-down pass to Wilson worth 6 yards, but two plays later, he hurried a pass to Olave along the right sideline and overthrew his target. Then on the next play, with Olave moving to his left on a simple crossing pattern, Stroud threw a high-and-outside fastball behind his intended receiver. The best Olave could do was get one hand on the ball, but that just tipped the throw to Minnesota defender Terrell Smith, who returned the interception to the OSU 37.

Eight plays later – thanks in part to a pass-interference call in the end zone against Ohio State freshman cornerback Denzel Burke – Ibrahim plunged over the goal line from the 1 to give his team a 14-10 lead with 3:32 remaining until halftime.

Ohio State's final possession of the open-

ing half fizzled when a holding penalty put the Buckeyes behind the chains, and when Stroud couldn't find an open receiver on third-and-9, the QB was forced to scramble out of bounds.

The ugly first half not only had OSU behind on the scoreboard, but trailing in terms of first downs (10-8), offensive plays (35-26) and time of possession (18:19 to 11:41). And while Stroud had completed 8 of 14 attempts, the completions had averaged only 7.3 yards, and there were no touchdowns against the one interception.

Still, there was no sense of panic for the Buckeyes.

"Right when I came in the locker room, everybody was encouraging me, telling me that I can do it, that they all believe in me," Stroud said. "You know, it's all about what we're going to do when we get punched in the mouth. Mistakes happen. You can't stick on it. You have to keep going. The past is the past. You can't do anything about it. If you sit there and sulk, it's going to get worse."

"We knew that with the structure of their defense, we were going to be able to take some shots, and I think that's a very strong suit of my game. I think I can put a ball down the field really well."

That turned out to be the understatement of the night.

Productive Second Half

Day said he decided long before adversity hit that he knew he had the right guy at quarterback. Asked at halftime if he would contemplate making a change in the second half, Day dismissed the question with a simple shake of his head.

"I told (C.J.) early on, there are no expectations going in," the OSU head coach said after the game. "You might throw four interceptions, you might throw four touchdowns. I don't know what's going to happen. I know everyone thinks you just walk out there, and you're going to throw for 300 yards and a bunch of touchdowns, but it just doesn't work that way. There are a lot of things for a young quarterback who has never played

to process.

"I wish last year that we had those seven games that we didn't play and that he had played 150 to 200 snaps and thrown the ball. But he didn't have any of that. Not once. Not one pass. Just a couple of plays here and there. This is a very unique situation for somebody who has really zero experience to go into a conference game on the road like this against a good team. This is a team who was top-10 in the country before the last year or so. But we just decided we'd keep swinging, and I'm very, very impressed with the way he did just that."

Fortunately for Day, Stroud and the Buckeyes, it didn't take that many swings. As mentioned, the quarterback completed just five passes in the second half, but four went for touchdowns, each in excess of 38 yards.

Olave got the onslaught started by gathering in a pass on a deep crossing pattern and turning it into a 38-yard touchdown. Then, in the third quarter, Wilson beat Minnesota veteran DB Calvin Swenson on a 56-yard scoring play.

It was more of the same in the fourth quarter, although the Buckeyes struck in different ways.

First, Stroud floated a short toss over several hard-charging Gophers and Henderson did the rest, turning the screen pass into a 70-yard touchdown that appeared to happen in the blink of an eye. Then Olave finished the scoring when he caught Stroud's final completion of the night, picked up downfield blocks from tight end Jeremy Ruckert and Wilson, and glided into the end zone for a 61-yard score.

"That's one of the best offenses I've ever coached against," Fleck said. "They make you cover the entire field. They're all first-round draft picks."

It was a good thing the Buckeyes were firing on all cylinders in the second half, too, because the Gophers simply would not go away. Part of that was due to Ibrahim, who by the end of the third quarter had already carried 30 times for 163 yards and two touchdowns.

But on that 30th carry, the Minnesota star appeared to twist his ankle and was forced to hobble off the field. He later posted on his Twitter page that he had suffered a rupture of his right Achilles tendon, meaning his 2021 season was over almost as soon as it had begun.

Almost every time Stroud and his teammates would land a haymaker, the Gophers responded with a touchdown of their own. And it really wasn't until Olave's final touchdown at the 4:39 mark of the fourth quarter that the Buckeyes could finally take a breath.

"That's a really good team that's going to win a lot of games," Day said. "P.J. and his staff do a really good job."

Defensive Game-Changer

Along with the second-half offensive fireworks, Ohio State enjoyed a defensive game-changer at the 2:18 mark of the third quarter.

The Buckeyes were protecting a 24-21 lead when junior defensive end Zach Harrison bull-rushed Minnesota QB Tanner Morgan and swatted the ball out of Morgan's grasp. The fumble then bounced into the hands of nose guard Haskell Garrett, who rumbled 32 yards for a touchdown that gave Ohio State some breathing room.

"It just shows that big dudes can run," Garrett said with a big smile. "We've got nimble feet nowadays. Back in the day, we just used to be big and plug up space, but I think there's an evolution of linemen that are athletic."

That evolution might be a discussion for another day. The importance of the play was not.

"That was probably the difference in the game," Day said. "Anytime you get a defensive score, whether it's a blocked punt or something like that, it flips the scoreboard and is a huge game-changer."

Minnesota linebacker Mariano Sorin-Marin agreed.

"There was a very small margin for error against that team," he said. "Any slip-up, they



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COVER STORY

take advantage of."

Considering the Buckeyes were down a couple of starters due to lingering injuries and the fact that new starters were all over the starting lineup, the defensive effort was perhaps not as bad as the final statistics might indicate.

The Gophers piled up 408 total yards, but a sizable chunk of that was provided by Ibrahim. After his exit, Minnesota managed only 26 rushing yards on 10 attempts.

Morgan was effectively neutralized as well. The fourth-year starter who was the second-team All-Big Ten quarterback in 2019 when he threw for 3,253 yards and 30 TDs, completed 14 of 25 attempts for 205 yards and a touchdown. He was also sacked twice, including the game-changing strip sack by Harrison.

As Good As Advertised

Two carries for 15 yards isn't exactly the stuff legendary debuts are made on for most running backs. Then again, most running backs don't throw in a 70-yard touchdown run off a simple screen pass for their first career reception, either.

When the Buckeyes signed Henderson out of Hopewell, Va., there were many who believed the five-star prospect would be the team's starting running back from day one. And although that distinction went to Williams, the running back rotation provided brief opportunities for Henderson to showcase the talent that made him the nation's No.1-rated high school running back.

Day gave a series each to Williams and Teague to start the game before Henderson entered early in the second quarter. The freshman celebrated his first career carry with a 10-yard gain, although the possession ended two plays later when Stroud was intercepted.

Henderson returned the second-half kickoff 19 yards and then didn't see the field again until early in the fourth quarter when he ran up the middle for 5 yards on first down. But two plays later, on a third-and-5 play at the OSU 30, Stroud faked back and threw a short toss over the heads of a couple



TreVeyon Henderson

of Minnesota rushers. Henderson cradled the ball in his arms just behind the line of scrimmage and took off as if shot out of a cannon. He quickly split two defenders, made one clean cut and then turned off the afterburners, leaving the rest of the Gophers in the dust of a 70-yard touchdown romp.

"That was a great play," Stroud said after the game. "He made a great cutback. He's going to be a hell of a player."

The reception was the longest by an Ohio State player since Parris Campbell caught a 78-yard touchdown from Dwayne Haskins against Michigan in 2018, and it was the longest catch by an OSU running back since Carlos Snow caught a short pass from Tom Tupa and turned it into a 70-yard touchdown during the 1987 Michigan game.

No Stranger To Thursday

Playing on a Thursday might seem unusual for the Ohio State football team, but there was a time when the Buckeyes made a regular habit of Thursday games.

Beginning with a Thanksgiving Day contest during its 1890 inaugural season, OSU played 23 Thursday games over the subsequent 23 seasons. The first six of those Thanksgiving affairs were rivalry games against Kenyon College to close the season. The Buckeyes split those six games with the Lords.

After a 35-20 win loss to Michigan State on Thanksgiving Day in 1912, it was five years before Ohio State played again on Thursday when the team finished the 1917 season with a 28-0 victory against Camp Sherman.

It would be another 80 years before the Buckeyes played again on Thursday, this time hosting Wyoming and sending the Cowboys home 24-10 losers in the 1997 season opener. Another gap of 13 years passed before Ohio

State hosted another Thursday night affair. It kicked off the 2010 season with a 45-7 win against Marshall.

Two more Thursday night season openers (this time on the road) would follow – a 49-21 win at Indiana in 2017 and this year's 45-31 victory at Minnesota.

All-time, Ohio State is now 18-9-1 on Thursday.

The Buckeyes have played on every day of the week, including two Sunday night contests in the old Kickoff Classic series. OSU rolled to a 38-6 win against Boston College in 1995 at the Florida Citrus Bowl in Orlando but then lost a 23-12 decision to Miami (Fla.) in 1999 at the old Meadowlands in East Rutherford, N.J. That represents the last time the Buckeyes lost a season-opening contest.

Ohio State has played at least three times on every other day of the week except Tuesday. The program's only Tuesday game in history resulted in a 6-0 loss to Columbus Barracks on Oct. 26, 1897.

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OHIO STATE VS. MINNESOTA

Young Buckeye Defense Bends, Doesn't Break

Ohio State's defense has to be getting pretty tired of entering games down multiple starters. After seeing much of its lineup decimated during the back half of the 2020 season, the Buckeyes were again shorthanded to open the 2021 campaign, though the pandemic had seemingly very little to do with it in the case of the latter.

Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs was without starting cornerbacks Sevn Banks and Cameron Brown as well as starting defensive tackle Jeron Cage to open his second season at the helm of the Ohio State defense. Banks was available only in an emergency situation as he deals with hamstring tightness, while Brown and Cage were ruled out

GAME NOTEBOOK Patrick Mayhorn

entirely before the game.

In their places, Ohio State tried just about every potential combination, mixing and matching personnel at nearly every position on the field in the first half before locking in on a more compact contributor list after entering the locker room trailing by a 14-10 deficit.

Freshman Denzel Burke and redshirt

freshman Ryan Watts earned the start at the top two cornerback spots, joined in the backfield by slot specialist Lathan Ransom, bullet Ronnie Hickman and safety Josh Proctor, the only OSU defensive back with a previous start to his name.

"(We were all in the same boat) because this was my first start, so there's a little anxiousness, a little nervousness, but we're nervous because we care so much," Ransom said after the game. "I think they handled themselves well, especially with it being their first start, especially Denzel. A true freshman out there, and he really did his thing. Ryan Watts had the big play, that huge tackle on that third down (fourth-quarter tackle on

Cam Wiley). I think they both played really well and handled themselves really well."

Even in positions without large swaths of the depth chart unavailable, Ohio State's defense was without a defined pecking order throughout the game.

Linebackers coach Al Washington drew the unenviable task of replacing four starters this offseason and doesn't seem to be committed beyond senior captain Teradja Mitchell, doling out primary playing time to Tommy Eichenberg, Dallas Gant and Cody Simon but getting former running back Steele Chambers into the rotation late in the game.

Mitchell and Gant were the most productive of the bunch, but no one looked truly cemented in his spot. Minnesota running back Mohamed Ibrahim burst into the secondary a few too many times for comfort for the Buckeyes, thanks in large part to some shaky run fits from those green linebackers. The new cornerbacks and safeties certainly did their part in taking the talented Gophers RB down, but 163 yards and two scores on 30 carries is quite a bit more than Ohio State wanted to see from its rush defense to open the season.

The result of a constantly shifting and overwhelmingly young Buckeye defense was as one might expect – disjointed with signs of both the immense talent that defines Ohio State's roster on paper and the inconsistent, untidy play that defined the unit last season.

"(Minnesota) ran the ball really well and controlled the game a little bit, so we'll look at it," OSU head coach Ryan Day said after the game. "But a lot of guys played a lot of football, so we have an opportunity now (to use that). We've recruited a lot of young players. We lost those four linebackers, and because of that you can see that we matched the personnel a little bit differently this game."

"Now we're going to have to go back and assess and really get a feel for those guys because when you're going in scrimmages and practice, you get a good feel for things but you don't really know until you get into a game. I think it's going to sort itself out a little bit, but we do like playing depth, and guys who deserve to play are going to."

What was new for the Silver Bullets, however, beyond the nameplates and numbers, was a base formation that looked dynamic and able to adjust to its opponent's personnel. Coombs spent the offseason talking up the freedom that such versatile players as Hickman, Ransom and Craig Young afford him in his personnel and formation decisions, and Ohio State flexed that early and often against Minnesota.

When faced with a short-yardage situation on third down during Minnesota's second drive, Ohio State acknowledged and responded to a heavy Wildcat look, matching two tight ends, a fullback and a halfback taking the snap with three linebackers and a bullet in the box. It was rewarded in turn, stuffing Ibrahim for no gain and forcing a punt to cut short a promising drive. On the play just before, a second-and-9, OSU turned to its passing personnel, fielding just two linebackers and flexing that bullet out of the box.

The ever-shifting defense didn't always pay off, putting players in unfamiliar and uncomfortable positions in a few instances – including on Ibrahim's 56-yard, fourth-down

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Game Analysis

What Worked Well

Ohio State's rushing attack suffered through no early growing pains to open the season Sept. 2 with Miyan Williams picking up right where Trey Sermon left off as a perfect fit into Ohio State's zone-heavy run game.

Despite new starters at center, right guard and right tackle in Luke Wypler, Paris Johnson Jr. and Dawand Jones, respectively, and new starting positions at left tackle and guard for Nicholas Petit-Frere and Thayer Munford, Ohio State was able to grind out yards against Minnesota early and often, carrying 26 times for 201 yards and a score, good for 7.7 yards per carry.

That was certainly helped by a 71-yard touchdown run from Williams to open the scoring, but the Buckeyes still averaged 5.2 yards per carry after that, with Williams earning 6.8 yards per carry on his eight other carries. Holding the ball for just 21:19 hurt Ohio State's total yardage numbers, but the ground game was aces from the start with Williams taking the lead.

The C.J. Stroud-led passing attack was a bit slower to hit its stride, taking a half for the redshirt freshman to get a feel for the speed of the college game. But Stroud was electric in the final 30 minutes, connecting with Chris Olave twice as well as TreVeyon Henderson and Garrett Wilson for big touchdown passes, good for 225 of his 294 passing yards. The receiver duo of Olave and Garrett looked just as untouchable as ever, teaming up for nine of Stroud's 13 completions and totaling 197 receiving yards.

What Didn't Work

Stroud didn't look completely comfortable in the first half despite solid blocking, sailing a few passes to open receivers and missing on several reads, including on one pass behind Olave that ended up in Minnesota defensive back Terrell Smith's hands. His struggles didn't last, but Ohio State's offense slowed to a crawl when it was unable to stretch the defense vertically. That was especially true when Minnesota loaded the box to defend the run.

The Buckeye defense was a far bigger concern, though. It flexed its formational versatility early in the game but found difficulty in execution. The new-look linebackers were often out of place in defending

running plays, filling gaps too aggressively only to be washed away by down-blocking linemen or tight ends.

Without bigger bodies to fill those lanes, such secondary players as Ronnie Hickman and Ryan Watts were forced into difficult one-on-one situations with halfback Mohamed Ibrahim. Those players were able to prevent huge plays for the most part, but it was undisciplined play in the box that led directly to Ibrahim's 56-yard scamper in the second quarter on fourth-and-1.

Ohio State adjusted in the second half by moving its linebackers farther in and adding more size in the box, which worked decently in blunting the rushing attack but created open passing lanes in the intermediate game for quarterback Tanner Morgan, who had open slants to throw to for the entire second half.

A defensive touchdown and the explosiveness of the offense was enough to overcome the defensive issues, but the Silver Bullets again looked more like blanks in week one after an offseason of talk of a bounce-back season.

Play Of The Game

Henderson's 70-yard burst through the Minnesota defense on a swing pass in the fourth quarter to put the game out of reach might have been more impressive (and quite a bit faster), but the play of the game for the Buckeyes was Zach Harrison's sack and strip of Morgan and Haskell Garrett's scoop and 32-yard dash to the end zone.

The play itself is not without its charm, as Garrett again flashed his ability as a playmaker, scoring his second career touchdown, but it also couldn't have come at a better time for the Buckeyes. Leading 24-21 after a 56-yard touchdown pass to Wilson on the drive prior, Ohio State's defense had found itself unable to consistently get off the field without help from some Minnesota penalties.

As the Gophers began another series, they looked to catch the Buckeyes sleeping downfield with play action and actually had a receiver running wide open, but Harrison arrived just in time and turned what could have been a big Minnesota gain into a two-score lead for the Buckeyes from which they wouldn't look back.

— Patrick Mayhorn

scamper in the second quarter that led directly to Minnesota's first touchdown of the game. The Buckeyes again loaded the box, but Young and backup safety Bryson Shaw found themselves closer to the line of scrimmage than expected and took angles too tight to impede Ibrahim's momentum before he was well down the field.

That's to be expected with new defensive looks, whether a team is breaking in so many young players or not. But the more garden-variety struggles – missed tackles, sloppy run fits, a constant opening beyond the linebackers in the middle of the field – looked to be a direct result of an unsettled starting lineup. Day said that the Buckeyes are close to finding a depth chart they're comfortable with, but with Oregon on the way to Columbus for week two, time is of the essence for every defensive decision-maker.

"It's close (to being settled)," Day said. "We have a lot of depth, so we're playing a lot of depth right now. Maybe it sorts out a little bit differently as we watch the film and guys solidify some spots, but until then, it's really close at a lot of positions. We'll have to look at it and see if maybe we need to have a little more continuity in certain positions, but if it was that close, guys deserve to play and we're going to play depth."

"I think that's going to serve us well, certainly down the road," Day added. "When you start with maybe a nonconference game and you can get some guys in the game in the second half, it's a little different. We started in the conference. We knew that coming in. The whole goal here was to go 1-0, and now the next goal is to go 2-0. Then we come up for air and figure out what's next because it's a one-game season here. We didn't care what the score was, and it's going to be the same thing next week."

Williams, Henderson Excel Behind Big Front

The Ohio State defense wasn't alone in leaning heavily on its young contributors in the 45-31 victory Minnesota. Quarterback C.J. Stroud is front-page news (look no further than the cover of this issue of BSB), but the redshirt freshman tasked with pacing Day's offense was far from the only underclassman to lead the offense, even if it wasn't quite able to match the sheer volume of youth that the defense rolled out.

Stroud's battery mate, redshirt freshman Luke Wypler, earned the start at center in Harry Miller's place to open his second season in Columbus and held his own in Day's eyes, serving as a capable member of a line that didn't surrender a sack and led the way for 201 rushing yards on just 26 carries.

"I thought (Luke) did an excellent job, stepping in to start in a big way," Day said. "He's another young guy that has very, very little experience. He handled the weather, handled the calls, handled the environment, the fans. We'll see how he grades out, but I thought he handled everything really, really well."

However, he was upstaged in his first career start by classmate Miyan Williams and true freshman TreVeyon Henderson in the backfield, with the former earning the start and the latter notching the most eye-popping play of the game.

The play in question saw the Virginia Beach, Va., native flare out into the flat on a swing route, snare a Stroud lob and slice through the Minnesota secondary like a hot

knife through butter, emerging from a crowd of defenders with enough speed to immediately justify his lofty recruiting ranking.

"That was a great call by Coach for me," Stroud said. "On third downs, they had some funky looks. They run around all over. My read wasn't simple, but it wasn't too hard. I just had to get the ball over the defensive end, and Tre made a great play."

Henderson finished the game with just two carries for 15 yards, one kickoff return for 19 yards and the 70-yard touchdown reception in what could be the last time that he earns just four touches in a game during his Buckeye career.

Williams took the lion's share of carries for Ohio State, toting the ball nine times for 125 yards and a score, but like Henderson, he made his presence known with just a few touches, nearly breaking loose on his first carry of the game but stumbling after 8 yards. But he followed that with OSU's longest run since 2019, breaking free for 71 yards to put the Buckeyes on the board.

Perhaps more impressive, even, is that Williams' game-opening scamper came on a mistake from the redshirt freshman halfback. The third-and-2 play called for a standard inside zone split, with tight end Jeremy Ruckert slicing against the flow of the line to block the backside defensive end. Meanwhile, Williams was supposed to follow his blockers to the left on the zone staple.

"To be honest, it was actually the wrong play," Williams said. "It was the wrong play, but it was just crazy. I was supposed to go the

other way. I was supposed to go to the left, but I ended up just going to the opposite side and there wasn't anybody over there."

It looked as though Minnesota's linebackers and safeties knew the play better than Williams did, collapsing into the originally designated gap. Williams opted instead to move to his right, following Ruckert to the edge and then into nothing but open space, with three receivers to the back side of the play pulling all of Minnesota's defensive backfield away.

Despite his early success, Ohio State seemed apprehensive about committing fully to Williams as its primary ball-carrier, especially in the first half. The Buckeyes turned to veteran Master Teague on the second drive of the game and didn't go back to Williams consistently until the second half. Day chalked it up partially to Ohio State's lack of possession time – the Buckeyes were nearly doubled up in time of possession, 39:00 to 21:00 – and the desire to lean into its depth, but the offense didn't kick fully into gear until it settled into a routine with Williams as the primary rusher.

As it did, punishing the Gophers defense on the ground and forcing it to constrict, the passing game finally opened up for Stroud, and the young signal-caller was able to hit on five passing plays of at least 15 yards, four of which came in the second half (each resulting in six points). With Minnesota unable to account for receivers Garrett Wilson and Chris Olave down the field as it dedicated more defenders to the box, Ohio State's of-

fense looked as it was designed to and did to the Gophers exactly what head coach P.J. Fleck feared it would – leading to a conservative approach that worked wonders in the first half but faltered as fatigue set in.

"It's way more complicated because you're looking at how we can get beaten," Fleck said. "We're sitting here saying, 'OK, if we get beaten this way, how can we counter that?' If we would have brought a lot of pressure, that would expose us in a lot of areas and made (the scores) even quicker at times. We knew we had to come in with a certain game plan of how we were going to do things, and we knew we had to keep things in front of us. We did that in the first half besides (Williams') big play. We didn't do that in the second half. You can see how fast that happened."

The Minnesota head coach pointed out that two of Ohio State's big plays came against blitzes.

"They're really good," Fleck said. "We saw them up front. They spread you all over the place, and it's not like they're lining up in 12 personnel (one back and two tight ends) and just running it down your throat. They're doing it from a spread, making you cover the entire field, hash to hash, sideline to sideline. I would like to be able to limit those explosive plays in the future, period. But if you sit in Cover-2 all day, they're going to run for 9,000 yards."

"They're a really good football team," he added. "Really well-coached, really good players, and everybody got to see that tonight."

OHIO STATE VS. MINNESOTA

Stroud Makes Strides In Win Over Gophers

By CRAIG MERZ

Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The untested quarterback became tested as redshirt freshman C.J. Stroud overcame early jitters in his first career start to lead No. 4 Ohio State to a 45-31 win against Minnesota at Huntington Bank Stadium in Minneapolis on Sept. 2 in the season opener for both teams.

Stroud, who entered the game never having thrown a pass in college, threw for 294 yards and four second-half touchdowns while the defense made a key play in the comeback win. He finished 13 of 22 with one interception after going 8 of 14 for 58 yards in the first half.

The Buckeyes led 10-0 early but trailed 14-10 at the half and 21-17 early in the third quarter before scoring 14 straight points – a 56-yard TD pass from Stroud to Garrett Wilson and a fumble recovery and 32-yard touchdown rumble by Haskell Garrett.

“That was probably the difference in the game,” Ohio State coach Ryan Day said of the defensive score. “That and some of the explosive plays on offense.”

Miyan Williams led the OSU rushers with 125 yards on nine carries, including a 71-yard TD run to open the scoring.

It got tougher from there, but the Buckeyes showed resiliency on a 67-degree rainy night before a sellout crowd of 50,805.

Gray Start For Buckeyes

Minnesota started the opening drive from its own 25 and made three first downs before the drive stalled at the OSU 41, prompting a

33-yard punt and fair catch by Wilson.

It took only five plays and 1:42 to reach pay dirt on the electrifying long touchdown run by Williams for the 7-0 lead at the 7:22 mark after North Carolina transfer Noah Ruggles added the PAT.

Stroud's initial first down came on a second-and-8 completion of 11 yards to Jaxon Smith-Njigba to the OSU 21. After an incomplete toss to Wilson, Williams had an 8-yard gain before bouncing out to his right and racing down the sideline on the next play.

Ruggles made it 10-0 at the 12:50 mark of the second quarter with a 35-yard field goal on the Buckeyes' second possession that began at the OSU 9.

Master Teague replaced Williams and reeled off a 10-yard gain early in the drive to move the chains to the 36. A pass-interference penalty on a deep throw to Chris Olave – who finished the game with four catches, a game-high 117 yards and two TDs – put the ball at the Minnesota 46. Later, a 15-yard dump-off to tight end Jeremy Ruckert resulted in a first down at the 18, but two incompletions and a 1-yard pass to Smith-Njigba set up the field goal.

Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck took a big gamble early on the following possession, and it paid off. On fourth-and-1 from their own 29, the Gophers came out of an OSU timeout and Mohamed Ibrahim, the 2020 Big Ten Running Back of the Year, broke through the left side of the line and sped 56 yards to the OSU 15.

After Trey Potts ran for 2 yards, QB Tanner Morgan found Dylan Wright for a 13-yard TD



SONNY BROCKWAY

DEFENSIVE HIGHLIGHT – Junior defensive end Zach Harrison (9) reaches out to knock the ball away from Minnesota QB Tanner Morgan during a crucial third-down play. Harrison's strip sack led to a 32-yard fumble return for a touchdown by teammate Haskell Garrett and gave the Buckeyes a 31-21 lead at the time.

to cap the 80-yard, six-play series to bring Minnesota within three at 10-7 with 9:11 remaining until halftime.

Stroud's indoctrination continued when the Buckeyes got the ball back, and he overthrew Olave at midfield. The Ohio State receiver was able only to get a hand on the ball, tipping it to Terrell Smith, who made the interception and returned to the OSU 37.

Potts rushed for 8, Ibrahim gained 6 more on the ground, and tight end Brevyn Spann-Ford was wide open for 16 to the 7. The Buckeyes stiffened, but on third-and-goal from the 5, freshman cornerback Denzel Burke was flagged for pass interference and Minnesota gained a fresh set of downs at the 2. Three plays later, Ibrahim scored from the 1 to give Minnesota a 14-10 lead with 3:32 left before the half.

The Gophers got one more crack at scoring in the first half after an Ohio State punt, but with 42 seconds left and facing a third-and-6 from the OSU 41, Morgan was sacked by Cody Simon for an 11-yard loss on the final play.

Ibrahim, in the first half, had 114 yards on 19 carries, and the Gophers held the ball for 18:19 while limiting OSU to four drives totaling only 26 plays.

Ibrahim finished the game with 163 yards on 30 carries with two scores but exited the game after a short gain in the third quarter. He later posted on Twitter that he had suffered a full tear of his right Achilles tendon and would be sidelined for the remainder of the 2021 season.

Big Plays, Big Win

The Buckeyes got the ball to start the second half, and Stroud quickly led them 81 yards, using seven plays and just 2:13 to regain the lead at 17-14.

Freshman TreVeyon Henderson returned the second half kickoff to the 19. From there, Stroud picked up 5, Williams went for 6, Olave had a catch for 11, and after an incomplete pass, Williams rambled for 15 to the Minnesota 44. He followed with a rush for 6 before Stroud found Olave cutting across the middle at the 20 and the OSU receiver turned on the burners and headed to the left pylon for 38-yard score.

The Buckeyes threatened another quick score when Josh Proctor seemingly ended the Gophers' first drive of the second half with an interception that he returned 60 yards to the Minnesota 20. But a roughing-the-passer penalty on Dallas Gant nullified the play and returned the ball to Minnesota at the OSU 27. Potts picked up 8, and Ibrahim followed with a 19-yard touchdown to put the Gophers back in the lead at 21-17 with 10:03 remaining in the third period.

But then it was Minnesota's turn for misdeeds. On their next possession, the Gophers committed two penalties which led to a punt of only 38 yards and a 1-yard return by Wilson to the OSU 44.

Stroud wasted no time and launched a 56-yard TD strike to Wilson on the first play of the possession to push the Buckeyes back ahead at 24-21 with 5:12 to go in the third quarter.

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caught the pass at the 20.

That's when the much-maligned OSU defense created the play of the game when defensive end Zach Harrison had a strip sack of Morgan.

"Sacks are good, but strip sacks change the game," Harrison said. "We take that to heart. Swipe at the ball, swipe at the ball."

The loose ball bounced off a Gophers lineman and right into Garrett's hands, and the OSU nose tackle thundered 32 yards for a touchdown at the 2:18 mark of the third quarter to make it 31-21.

"It was the right place, right time," Garrett said later.

Minnesota pulled to within seven at 31-24 at 10:39 of the fourth quarter on a 46-yard field goal by Matthew Trickett. Among the 12 plays in the drive were completions of 12 yards to Potts and Wright and 15 to Daniel Jackson.

With the crowd buzzing, Henderson shocked and silenced them with a 70-yard TD off a simple screen pass on a third-and-5 from the OSU 30. The freshman gathered in the floating toss from Stroud about 4 yards behind the line of scrimmage and then turned on the jets to push Ohio State's lead back to two touchdowns at 38-24 with 9:43 remaining.

Minnesota would not quit, and Morgan engineered a nine-play, 75-yard drive culminating in a rush up the middle of 2 yards by Bryce Williams to make it 38-31 with 5:31 to play. Morgan hit Jackson for 21 yards and later for 22 to the Buckeye 2 to set up the score.

But back came the Buckeyes in just two plays to extend the lead to back to 14. Williams rushed for 14. Then Stroud threw to Olave at the Minnesota 41, and the receiver turned the play into a 61-yard TD that gave OSU a 45-31

lead with 4:39 to go.

Minnesota later was driving again, but Lathan Ransom forced a fumble after a catch by Mike Brown-Stephens, and Tommy Eichenberg recovered it at the OSU 41 with 3:59 left.

The play was reviewed to determine if Ransom targeted the receiver and if the fumble was caused by contact with the ground, but the ruling absolved Ransom and granted the turnover to the Buckeyes.

From there, backup running back Marcus Crowley carried six times for 19 yards to finish the game at the Minnesota 35.

Numbers

Wilson led OSU with five catches that totaled 80 yards. He was also targeted by Stroud 11 times, six more than Olave. ... Teague rushed for 29 yards on six carries. ... OSU's Ronnie Hickman had a game-high 11 tackles (five solo), and teammate Teradja Mitchell had 10 (four solo), including a tackle for a loss of 3 yards. ... Morgan was 14 of 25 for 205 yards and a TD.

Ohio State had 495 total yards (294 passing, 201 rushing) and 17 first downs. Minnesota gained 408 yards (205/203) with 24 first downs and held the ball for 38:41.

The Buckeyes have beaten Minnesota 12 straight times, marking the Gophers' longest active losing streak against any opponent. ... Minnesota is 4-23 at home vs. the Buckeyes and has lost 14 straight in Minneapolis to them since a 35-31 win in 1981. ... Ohio State has now won 22 consecutive season openers. ... The Buckeyes haven't lost a season opener since a 23-12 defeat against Miami (Fla.) in the 1999 Kickoff Classic.

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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 45, Minnesota 31

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on the 18-minute difference in time of possession against Minnesota: "It's hard to win the time of possession when you play Minnesota. They do a great job. (Minnesota head coach P.J. Fleck) does a really good job, and they play complementary football. There was a point there in the second quarter where we just couldn't seem to get the ball back, couldn't get off the field on defense."

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud on bouncing back after throwing a first-half interception: "It's a great learning experience for me. I just talked to (offensive coordinator Kevin) Wilson and Coach Day, and they're happy with how I played and how I handled my adversity. I feel like I kept my head up, I stayed positive, and my teammates, they just kept egging me on."

Ohio State defensive lineman Zach Harrison on his strip sack at the end of the third quarter: "It's just practicing hard, working the technique and practicing. Whatever happens in practice happens in games, and during practice I had a few plays like that – the quarterbacks aren't live – but that shows in the game. That's something that (defensive line coach Larry Johnson) preaches, and all the defensive ends are capable of making that play."

Ohio State safety Lathan Ransom on Sevyn Banks' absence and his sideline guidance during the game: "It's definitely tough, but he was giving advice to me, Ryan Watts and Denzel (Burke) throughout the whole game, helping us see, giving us tips of what he's seeing and stuff like that."

Stroud on receivers Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson: "I have great teammates, but I think I'm a great player, too. I mean, maybe the first half didn't show that, but I did my best in the second half. I thought I did really well. They



SONNY BROCKWAY

CELEBRATE GOOD TIMES – Ohio State center Luke Wypler (53) hoists teammate Chris Olave (2) after one of Olave's two touchdown catches against Minnesota. Olave totaled four catches for 117 yards and scores of 38 and 61 yards during his team's 45-31 victory at Minnesota.

put me in a situation to get them the ball, and I mean that's a big opportunity for me, that's a big task but I feel like I did that. Coach Day told me that no matter how I'm playing, good or bad, he has trust in me, he believes in me. Having a head coach like that, it's a blessing from God. He's a great man."

Fleck on what it meant to have fans attendance for the game: "I want to start by thanking everybody, our student body, our

fans, our administration in working so hard to sell that game out. I want to thank our community. This city has been through an awful lot, the state has been through an awful lot in the last year and a half, two years. That's the power of football. Results aside, for one minute, that's the power of football. That's what the world should look like. Our locker room is what the world should look like. That atmosphere was special. I just want to say thank you to our fans, student body, band, to everybody involved with this. It's just really good to have football back. We have to be better, though. We didn't play well enough to beat the No. 4 team in the country tonight, but we have a lot to learn from and we will."

Fleck on Ohio State's talent and his game plan to beat the Buckeyes: "We used everybody, and then there was the running game, but Ohio State is just really good. They're really good. But I think we have a good football team, too, and I hope everybody saw that tonight. We'd like a few plays back, but you can't take plays back. We played pretty much perfect in the first half. In the second half, the sack fumble really hurt us, but there's only so many times you can run the football. We have to play-action pass sometimes. Dylan Wright runs an amazing route. He's open, and it was just an extra second. We didn't have it. They're really good."

Ohio State running back Miyan Williams on his 71-yard touchdown in the first quarter: "It felt like a dream at first. And I was like, just gotta keep going. But it felt amazing."

Day's takeaway from the hard-fought victory: "We learned a lot from this experience. To say I'm surprised with the way it played out, I'm not. We played a lot of young guys on the road, conference game, first time playing with fans in a long time. The way we rallied and played, especially in that second half, we have a lot to build on here. I'm very excited coming out of that locker room."

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The Numbers Game

Ohio State 45, Minnesota 31

Sept. 2, 2021 – Huntington Bank Stadium, Minneapolis, Minn.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	7	3	21	14	45
MINNESOTA	0	14	7	10	31

First Quarter

OSU – Williams, 71-yard rush (Ruggles kick), 7:22; 5 plays, 92 yards, 1:42 TOP.

Second Quarter

OSU – Ruggles 35-yard field goal, 12:50; 14 plays, 74 yards, 6:47 TOP.

MIN – Wright, 13-yard pass from Morgan (Trickett kick), 9:11; 6 plays, 80 yards, 3:34 TOP.

MIN – Ibrahim, 1-yard run (Trickett kick), 3:32; 8 plays, 37 yards, 4:31 TOP.

Third Quarter

OSU – Olave, 38-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 6:45; 3 plays, 75 yards, 1:02 TOP.

MIN – Ibrahim, 19-yard run (Trickett kick), 10:03; 5 plays, 75 yards, 2:40 TOP.

OSU – Wilson, 56-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 5:12; 1 plays, 56 yards, 0:08 TOP.

OSU – Garrett, 32-yard fumble return (Ruggles kick), 2:18.

Fourth Quarter

MIN – Trickett 46-yard field goal, 10:39; 12 plays, 47 yards, 6:39 TOP.

OSU – Henderson, 70-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 9:43; 3 plays, 75 yards, 0:56 TOP.

MIN – Williams, 2-yard run (Trickett kick), 5:31; 9 plays, 75 yards, 4:12 TOP.

OSU – Olave, 61-yard pass from Stroud (Ruggles kick), 4:39; 2 plays, 75 yards, 0:52 TOP.

Att. – 50,805

Weather – 67 degrees, rain, wind 12 mph SE

Team Statistics

	OSU	MIN
First Downs	17	24
Rushing	8	9
Passing	8	12
Penalty	1	3
Rushes-Yards	26-201	50-203
Passing Yards	294	205
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	13-22-1	14-25-0
Offensive Plays	48	75
Total Net Yards	495	408
Third Down Efficiency	4-8	7-14
Punts-Avg.	2-43.0	3-38.7
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	2-2
Penalties	5-48	5-50
Time of Possession	21:00	39:00

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – OSU: Williams, 9-125; Teague 6-29; Crowley 6-19; Henderson 2-15; Stroud 3-13. **MIN:** Ibrahim 30-163; Potts 10-34; Wiley 3-4; Williams 1-2; Morgan 6-0.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – OSU: Stroud 13-22-1-294-4. **MIN:** Morgan 14-25-0-205-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – OSU: Wilson 5-80; Wilson 4-117; Smith-Njigba 2-12; Henderson 1-70; Ruckert 1-15. **MIN:** Wright 5-57; Jackson 3-58; Spann-Ford 3-44; Brown-Stephens 2-34; Potts 1-12.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Mirco 2-43.0. **MIN:** Crawford 3-38.7.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.) – OSU: Wilson 1-1; TEAM 1-0. **MIN:** Potts 1-9; TEAM 1-0.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.) OSU: Henderson 1-19. **MIN:** Potts 1-17.

MISSED FIELD GOALS – OSU: None. **MIN:** None.

FORCED FUMBLES – OSU: Harrison, Ransom. **MIN:** None.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – OSU: Garrett 1-32; Eichenberg 1-0. **MIN:** None.

INTERCEPTIONS – OSU: None. **MIN:** Smith 1-3.

SACKS – OSU: Simon 1.0-11; Harrison 1.0-7. **MIN:** None.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – OSU: Simon 1.0-11; Harrison 1.0-11; Mitchell 1.0-3; Jackson 1.0-1; Stroud 1.0-0. **MIN:** Durr 1.0-2.

TACKLES (Solo-Assist.-Tot.) – OSU: Hickman 5-6-11; Mitchell 4-6-10; Gant 4-4-8; Simon 3-4-7; Proctor 2-5-7; Eichenberg 1-4-5; Jackson 3-2-5; Burke 3-1-4; Vincent 3-0-3; Harrison 3-0-3; Smith 1-2-3; Ransom 2-1-3; Watts 3-0-3; Shaw 2-1-3; Chambers 0-2-2; Garrett 1-1-2; Cavazos 1-0-1; Stroud 1-0-1; Johnson 1-0-1; Pope 0-1-1. **MIN:** Sori-Marin 3-3-6; Howden 4-0-4; Durr 2-1-3; Numbin 3-0-3; Mafe 3-0-3; Swenson 2-0-2; Smith 2-0-2; Rush 2-0-2; Oliver 2-0-2; Harrison 2-0-2; Gibbins 1-1-2; Howard 0-1-1; Anderson 1-0-1; Pinckney 1-0-1; Dixon 1-0-1; Dew-Treadway 1-0-1; Willis 0-1-1; Weeks 0-1-1; Lindenberg 0-1-1; Carter 0-1-1.

Players In The Game

OSU – Olave, Wilson, Stroud, Smith-Njigba, Williams, Wypler, Munford, Johnson Jr., Petit-Frere, Jones, Ruckert, Mitchell, Vincent, Harrison, Smith, Ransom, Hickman, Watts, Burke, Eichenberg, Proctor, Jackson, McCall, Cavazos, Fleming, Williamson, Banks, Babb, Jean-Baptiste, Ballard, Hancock, Scott Jr., Young, Stover, Shaw, Harrison Jr., Gant, Chambers, Hooker, Crowley, Dunn, Johnson, Mirco, Simon, Henderson, Johnson, Teague, Pope, Tuimolau, Kacherski, Jones, Hamilton, Fryar, Wglusz, Booker, Garrett, Ruggles, O'Shaughnessy, **MIN** – Morgan, Jackson, Ibrahim, Kieft, Dunlap Jr., Schmitz, Olson, Ruschmeyer, Schlueter, Andried, Faalele, Smith, Pinckney, Otomewo, Durr, Harris, Howden, Nubin, Mafe, Gibbins, Sori-Marin, Carter, Walley, Swenson, Wiley, Howard, Anderson, Potts, Rush, Dixon, Glaze, Gordon IV, Oliver, Boyd, Wright, Dew-Treadway, Willis, Williams, Brown-Stephens, LeCaptain, McDonald, Weeks, Cheney, Lindenberg, Martin, Boe, Purcell, Kallerup, Spann-Ford, Trickett, Crawford, Kesich.

Season Statistics

2020-21 Game-By-Game

Date	Opponent	Result/Time	Crowd
Sept. 2	(4) at Minnesota	W, 45-31	50,805
Sept. 11	OREGON (11)	Noon	
Sept. 18	TULSA	3:30	
Sept. 25	AKRON	TBA	
Oct. 2	at Rutgers	TBA	
Oct. 9	MARYLAND	Noon	
Oct. 23	at Indiana	TBA	
Oct. 30	PENN STATE (19)	TBA	
Nov. 6	at Nebraska	TBA	
Nov. 13	PURDUE	TBA	
Nov. 20	MICHIGAN STATE	TBA	
Nov. 27	at Michigan	Noon	
Dec. 4	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.	

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

Team Statistics

	OSU	Opp
First Downs	17	24
Rushing	8	9
Passing	8	12
Penalty	1	3
Average Per Game/Rush	201.0	203.0
Average Per Game/Pass	294.0	205.0
Total Offense	495	408
Total Plays	48	75
Average Per Game	495.0	408.0
Average Per Play	10.3	5.4
Penalties-Yards	5-48	5-50
Fumbles-Lost	0-0	2-2
Third Down Efficiency	4-8	7-14
Percentage	50%	50%
Fourth Down Efficiency	0-0	1-1
Percentage	0%	100%
Sacks-Yards	2-18	0-0
Time Of Possession Avg.	21:00	39:00

Score

By Quarters	1	2	3	4	OT	Tot.	Avg.
Ohio State	7	3	21	14	0	45	45.0
Opponents	0	14	7	10	0	31	31.0

Individual Statistics

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Miyon Williams	9	125	13.9	1	71
Master Teague	6	29	4.8	0	10
Marcus Crowley	6	19	3.2	0	7
TreVeyon Henderson	2	15	7.5	0	10
C.J. Stroud	3	13	4.3	0	6
OSU Totals	26	201	7.7	1	71
OPP Totals	50	203	4.1	3	56

Passing	Comp.	Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT	Effic.
C.J. Stroud	13	22	59.1	294	4-1	222.3
OSU Totals	13	22	59.1	294	4-1	222.3
OPP Totals	14	25	56.0	205	1-0	205.0

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD	Long
Chris Olave	4	117	29.3	2	61
Garrett Wilson	5	80	16.0	1	56
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	2	12	6.0	0	11
TreVeyon Henderson	1	70	70.0	1	70
Jeremy Ruckert	1	15	15.0	0	15
OSU Totals	13	294	22.6	4	70
OPP Totals	14	205	14.6	1	22

Scoring	TD	EPK	EPR	EPRC	FG	PTS
Chris Olave	2	–	–	–	–	12
Noah Ruggles	–	6-6	–	–	1-1	9
Garrett Wilson	1	–	–	–	–	6
Haskell Garrett	1	–	–	–	–	6
Miyon Williams	1	–	–	–	–	6
TreVeyon Henderson	1	–	–	–	–	6
OSU Totals	6	6-6	–	–	1-1	45
OPP Totals	4	4-4	–	–	1-1	31

FG Distance	0-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Noah Ruggles	0-0	1-1	0-0	0-0	1-1
OSU Totals	0-0	1-1	0-0	0-0	1-1
OPP Totals	0-0	0-0	1-1	0-0	1-1

Punting	No.	Yds.	Avg.	Bk	Long
Jesse Mirco	2	86	43.0	0	49
OSU Totals	2	86	43.0	0	49
OPP Totals	3	116	38.7	0	45

Interceptions	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
OSU Totals	0	0	0	0	0
OPP Totals	1	3	3.0	0	3

Punt Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
Garrett Wilson	1	1	1.0	0	1
TEAM	1	0	0	0	0
OSU Totals	2	1	0.5	0	1
OPP Totals	2	9	4.5	0	9

Kickoff Returns	No.	Yds.	Avg.	TD	Long
TreVeyon Henderson	1	19	19.0	0	19
OSU Totals	1	19	19.0	0	19
OPP Totals	1	17	17.0	0	17

Def. Leaders	Solo	Ass.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Ronnie Hickman	5	6	11	–	–
Teradja Mitchell	4	6	10	1.0-3	–
Dallas Gant	4	4	8	–	–
Cody Simon	3	4	7	1.0-11	1.0-11
Joshua Proctor	2	5	7	–	–
Tommy Eichenberg	1	4	5	–	–
Antwan Jackson	3	2	5	1.0-1	–
Denzel Burke	3	1	4	–	–
Taron Vincent	3	0	3	–	–
Zach Harrison	3	0	3	1.0-7	1.0-7
Tyreke Smith	1	2	3	–	–
Lathan Ransom	2	1	3	–	–
Ryan Watts	3	0	3	–	–
Bryson Shaw	2	1	3	–	–
Steele Chambers	0	2	2	–	–
Haskell Garrett	1	1	2	–	–
Lejond Cavazos	1	0	1	–	–
C.J. Stroud	1	0	1	1.0-0	–
Jakailin Johnson	1	0	1	–	–
K'Vaughan Pope	0	1	1	–	–
OSU Totals	43	40	83	5.0-22	2.0-18
OPP Totals	30	10	40	1.0-2	–
Fumbles Forced: 2 – Harrison, Ransom.					
Fumbles Recovered: 2 – Garrett, Eichenberg.					



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