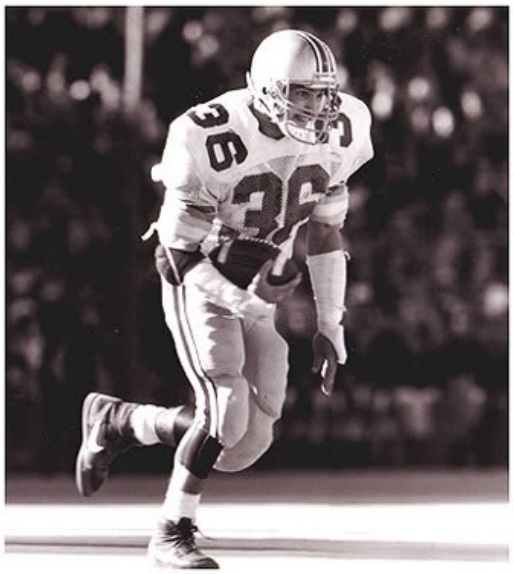
The contestants in Monday's BCS Championship Game share a brief but memorable past. Two decades ago, back in the days of the old locked-in bowl system when marquee intra-conference games were a relative staple of the early-season college football schedule, Ohio State and Louisiana State butted helmets in a pair of classic contests, both of which came down nearly to the final snap. Resident historian Jesse Lamovsky takes us back in time ...



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September 26, 1987

The first meeting of the OSU-LSU home-and-home, in Baton Rouge, was the most hyped non-conference game of the 1987 season, with both teams rolling into the showdown unbeaten and ranked in the Top 10. The fourth-ranked Tigers, defending SEC Champions, were 3-0 in Mike Archer’s first season at the helm, including a season-opening 17-3 domination of powerful Texas A&M at College Station. Their high-powered offense featured quarterback Tommy Hodson, long-necked tailback Harvey Williams, and receiver Wendell Davis. Earle Bruce’s seventh-ranked Buckeyes were 2-0, having defeated West Virginia and Oregon in

their first two games. With Cris Carter ruled ineligible prior to the season due to contact with an agent, most of OSU's big-name players were on defense; William White, Eric Kumerow, and especially, the great Chris Spielman.

(By the way, can you imagine a non-conference schedule of WVU, Oregon, and LSU in 2007? Good Lord; that OOC slate might even force Mark May to shut his trap for two freaking seconds.)

Little love was lost between the contestants. Ohio State held up the nationally-televised showdown while Earle Bruce refused to take the field first; after a short delay, the two titans came to blows in front of a baying mob of 79,263 Tiger partisans. LSU wasted little time jumping out in front, capping its first possession with a 24-yard touchdown strike from Hodson to Rogie Magee with less than five minutes gone in the first quarter. Ohio State made it 7-3 late in the period on a Matt Frantz 27-yard field goal. David Browndyke answered for LSU with a 20-yard chip shot, and at halftime, the score was 10-3 in favor of the Bayou Bengals.

Ohio State's veteran defense tightened up in the second half, and as they stymied LSU, the Buckeye offense nickel-and-dimed its way into the lead. Frantz's second field goal, a 38-yarder, made it 10-6 late in the third quarter, and, after an interception by Buckeye linebacker Mike McCray, Brecksville's Tom Tupa connected with tight end Jay Koch for an eight-yard score, putting Ohio State out in front for the first time, 13-10, with eleven minutes remaining. Five minutes later, Browndyke drilled a 40-yard field goal to tie the score at 13-all.

LSU controlled the final moments, but couldn't put it away, thanks to the heroics of Greg Rogan. Twice in the final two minutes, the senior cornerback killed potential game-winning drives with interceptions, the second setting up last-second Ohio

State field goal attempt. Frantz's 47-yarder was partially blocked by LSU defensive tackle Karl Dunbar and in those pre-overtime days, that was it. The grudge match had ended in a brutal, unsatisfactory 13-13 draw. LSU dominated statistically, out-gaining Ohio State 348-246 and piling up 21 first downs to the Buckeyes' 12, but four turnovers prevented the Tigers from turning their box-score edge into a victory.

The tie was just a hiccup for LSU. The Bengals went 10-1-1 for their highest win total in over a quarter-century, and although their lone loss to Alabama denied them a second consecutive SEC title, they still finished the year ranked fifth in the polls after a 30-13 Gator-Bowl thumping of then-independent South Carolina.

Things weren't so sanguine the rest of the way in Columbus. Handicapped on offense by the loss of the spectacular Carter, the Buckeyes limped through a dismal Big Ten campaign that included a one-sided home loss to Indiana, in what Earle Bruce called "the darkest day of Ohio State football" since he was a freshman in 1949. It got worse; at least for Earle- with OSU reeling at 5-4-1 going into the Michigan game, he was fired. Playing on emotion, the Buckeyes defeated the Wolverines in Ann Arbor, but turned down a Sun Bowl bid. It was the first bowl season without Ohio State since 1971.

September 24, 1988

The re-match in Columbus came under far different circumstances than the meeting in Baton Rouge a year earlier. LSU was again undefeated and ranked in the Top Ten, at number-seven, with victories by a combined score of 61-9 over Texas A&M and Tennessee. Ohio State, led by first-year head coach John Cooper, was not so heralded. The young Buckeyes were unranked, expected by most observers to finish in the bottom half of the Big Ten standings, and were

coming off a 42-10 thrashing at the hands of Pitt. To make matters worse, starting tailback Vince Workman had just been ruled ineligible due to contact with an agent- the same sin that had taken Cris Carter from the fold the year before. The game shaped up as a runaway for LSU, an eight-point favorite. What materialized was one of the most thrilling non-conference games in Ohio State football history.

As expected, LSU drew first blood in front of 90,584 at the 'Shoe. Following a fumbled punt by freshman receiver Bobby Olive, the Tigers went out in front 3-0 on a 37-yard field goal by the ubiquitous David Browndyke. Early in the second quarter, OSU took a 7-3 lead on a one-yard jaunt by Carlos Snow, and made it 14-3 moments later when Vinnie Clark blocked a punt and Mike McCray, who had haunted LSU a year earlier, took it 23 yards for a score. The Tigers struck back; first Tommy Hodson hit flanker Tony Moss for a 30-yard touchdown strike, then, after OSU's 19-year old sophomore quarterback Greg Frey threw an interception, Browndyke kicked another field goal, making it 14-13 Bucks at halftime.

After Ohio State extended the lead to 17-13 on its first possession of the second half, the favored Tigers finally began to dominate as expected. Eddie Fuller finished a 78-yard drive with a scoring plunge to put LSU in front 20-17, and Browndyke trumped a Buckeye field goal with two more of his own, making it 26-20 Tigers in the fourth quarter. The Bengals seemingly put the game away when tailback Alvin Lee snagged a tipped Hodson pass and turned it into a 56-yard touchdown, giving the Bayou Bengals a 33-20 lead with 4:29 to play.

That set the stage for one of the finest comebacks ever seen at the Horseshoe. First, Greg Frey led a 59-yard touchdown drive, hitting Bobby Olive and Jeff Graham with critical third-down completions on the way to a two-yard Carlos Snow plunge that cut the lead to 33-27 with less than two minutes left. One first down for LSU would have put the game away, but the Tigers couldn't get it. Two runs resulted in a loss of two yards, and a questionable pass call resulted in a clock-stopping incompletion. Remembering the earlier blocked punt, Coach Archer called for the intentional safety, and LSU punter Rene Bourgeois ran the

snap out of the end zone, making it 33-29 with a minute-and-a-half left.

Here, Bobby Olive, who grew up in Atlanta, the heart of SEC country, took a couple of giant steps toward legendary status in the state of Ohio. First, he took the free kick back 29 yards, setting up the Buckeyes at the LSU 39 with 1:24 remaining. Three plays later, Ohio State stood at the 20-yard line with no timeouts, needing a touchdown to win. Offensive coordinator Jim Colletto called the play: Confirm 63 Y Post. Frey lofted the ball into the end zone and Olive made a leaping catch, putting Ohio State in front 36-33 with 38 seconds to play and setting off a wild celebration at the Horseshoe. The Buckeyes had scored 16 points in just over a minute to win.

Louisiana State recovered nicely from the heartbreak in Columbus- at least for the time being. The Tigers went 8-4, including the famed earthquake victory over Auburn, and split the SEC title before losing to Syracuse in the Hall of Fame Bowl. The program then swooned to six consecutive losing seasons under Archer and Curley Hallman, and didn't return to perennial power status until the Nick Saban era a decade-and-a-half later.

For Ohio State, the dramatic win proved the highlight of a singularly dismal season. The Buckeyes went 4-6-1 in 1988, their first losing record since 1966 and their last to date. Ohio State has played against SEC teams eight times since the home-and-home with LSU, and has lost all eight. It is one of the ironies of OSU football: the program's last win over its nemesis conference, pulled off by the program's worst team since World War II.

Here’s hoping on Monday night at the Superdome, a somewhat more talented Ohio State team can conjure up the ghosts of Greg Frey, Carlos Snow, and Bobby Olive.