The Buckeyes went to L.A. looking to get the monkey off their backs, and instead it looks like he's still there...and he's gained about 35 pounds. The top-ranked USC Trojans stomped an over-matched and mistake-prone Ohio State team Saturday night at the Coliseum, 35-3, proving to a national audience that the 2008 version of the Buckeyes is not among college football's elite. Buckeye Dan recaps last night's beating.

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The Buckeyes' performance may have demonstrated that USC has the advantage in talent over the guys in scarlet and gray...but it's not 32 points worth. It's hard to come away from watching this performance by Jim Tressel without concluding that his team was out-prepared, out-executed, and thoroughly out-coached by Pete Carroll and his staff.

Tressel's charges committed key penalties, turned the ball over, failed to convert the few scoring opportunities they had, and generally played like they didn't belong on the same field with USC. The Buckeyes somehow managed to drain most of the drama out of this one early, and for the third straight time in a huge national match-up, sent the college football audience digging in the couch for the remote control by the middle of the third quarter. Overall it was an embarrassment for a program that is establishing something of a trend in that direction.

The Trojans, on the other hand, proved formidable on both sides of the ball. In fact, it wouldn't be a stretch to call them one of the more talented teams in college football in the last several years. Mark Sanchez threw four touchdown passes, all to wide open receivers, and the Trojan running backs seemed to be either a step ahead of, or able to step around the OSU defenders all night long.

On defense, USC smothered the Buckeye offense after OSU put together a couple of positive drives in the first half, and there wasn't so much as one scoring threat for Ohio State after halftime. The offensive performance for the Buckeyes in the second half was beyond pitiful, as the Trojans held them to a total of 35 yards after halftime. Both OSU quarterbacks, Todd Boeckman and Terrelle Pryor were under constant pressure from the relentless USC rush, with Boeckman getting sacked four times and Pryor once.

Early Hope

It didn't look all that bad early, as the Buckeyes held USC to a three-and-out on their first possession, and drove down the field from their 19 on a 17-play drive that showcased some nice runs from Boom Herron and an effective short passing game from both Boeckman and Pryor, who were both taking snaps on the drive. But instead of finishing with a TD from their first-and-goal from the 5-yard line, a loss on a Boeckman run and a false start penalty set the Buckeyes back, and Ryan Pretorius gave OSU their only lead of the game with a 29-yard field goal. They had used up most of the first quarter clock, and had broken on top.

The Trojans took the kickoff though, and it only took them seven plays to get into the end zone, as Sanchez found his running back well behind Buckeye linebacker Marcus Freeman, and hit him for a 35-yard touchdown down the left sideline. A quick three-and-out gave the ball right back to USC, and again it only took seven plays for them to score. A nifty 24-yard run by Joe McKnight was the big play in the drive, setting up a short TD pass to the tight end over Buckeye safety Anderson Russell.

Even down 14-3 though, the Buckeyes looked like they might keep it close in the second quarter. Driving from their own 24, Boeckman had completions to receivers Robiskie, Small and Sanzenbacher, and Pryor had a 13-yard run, to put OSU in business at the USC 19. But that's when the PAC 10 referees took over,

setting the Bucks back with a pair of questionable holding calls, both negating big plays for Ohio State, the second one a touchdown pass to Brian Robiskie. Pushed back to the 30, Pretorius missed badly on a 46-yd field goal attempt, and the Buckeyes never really mounted another offensive threat.

A few words about the officiating, and then I'll leave it alone, because it clearly didn't make the difference in the game, although trimming the USC lead to 14-10 late in the first half *might* have given the Bucks some life. The first two USC touchdown drives had been marked by several blatant non-calls on what was obvious offensive holding committed by the Trojans, much of it by USC linemen with fistfulls of Ohio State DE's Lawrence Wilson and Cam Heyward. Laurinaitis also had his jersey grabbed and stretched out from behind while pursuing a USC runner. No calls. That is what made the two cheesy calls on the Buckeyes in that second quarter drive even harder to take.

The officials also had an interesting interpretation of roughing the passer, twice flagging OSU for pushing Sanchez down after the release, while allowing Boeckman to be pretty much brutalized after throwing the ball all evening, including at one point looking the other way when a USC defender slammed into him after he was already lying on the ground after the tackle. Life on the road.

But the struggling Buckeyes had yet another shot to get a score before the half, after 11-yard runs by Herron and Pryor put the ball at the OSU 42 with three minutes to go in the half. On the first down play, Boeckman rolled left and tried to get it to Hartline out of the slot, but was picked off by Rey Maualuga, who barrelled down the sideline for a 48-yard TD. For all intents and purposes, the game was over right there.

Confusion and Cruise Control

The Trojans put the game out of reach with two third quarter touchdowns, as Ohio State appeared to fold the tent. OSU had three offensive possessions in the quarter, and a single first down. A.J. Trapasso punted miserably when it really counted, and put the Buckeye defense in terrible field position. The Trojan rushing attack started to click, and Sanchez found the endzone twice on scoring passes. The first was a nice 3rd and 10 pass through the loose Buckeye zone coverage for a 24-yard TD, and the second was on a blatant illegal pick play that somehow

escaped the attention of the seven guys in striped shirts, and resulted in a wide open Damian Williams in the end zone.

Garbage time ensued for the better part of the fourth quarter, as the Trojans substituted, and the Buckeyes tried to decide who their quarterback is. Pryor had been responsible for most of the positive plays from the quarterback position, getting to the outside a few times for good rushing yardage, finishing with 40 yards on 11 carries. He was 7 of 9 passing, for 52 yards. Boeckman's line was 14 of 21 passing, for 84 yards, and two interceptions, both of which might be described as inexcusable.

The Buckeyes did seem to have USC a bit off balance with their alternating quarterback system on the first quarter field goal drive, but by the end of the game, the two-headed QB monster was clearly not serving the Buckeye offense's best interests, as the confusion shifted to the OSU side of the ball. There's no way to sugarcoat how bad Boeckman looked at times in this game, but the people who think that more of Terrelle Pryor is the answer were probably left a little disappointed too.

Pryor is an amazingly talented freshman, but he is still a freshman. He doesn't even look downfield on most plays, and with the new "option" look on the 2008 Tressel offense, the Bucks have seemingly abandoned their vertical passing game from last season. Now we see Boeckman running quarterback draws and option plays that appear to be in the play book for Pryor, and at least on this night, the coaching staff showed no serious interest in throwing the ball down the field...you know...to try to get back in the game?

In the days to come, there will be plenty of finger-pointing and amateur analysis of what went wrong for the Buckeyes Saturday night in L.A. The easiest and perhaps the most plausible explanation is that they ran into one of college football's great juggernauts in recent memory in these USC Trojans.

But that's the stage the Buckeyes say they want to play on, and once again they've come up with an embarrassing performance on that stage. It's long past time for Jim Tressel to take a long hard look at his coordinators and the rest of his coaching staff, and begin asking the hard questions about why they have been so obviously out-schemed and ill-prepared when competing with the best in college football. A glance in the mirror wouldn't hurt either.

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