Ohio State pulled away from a feisty Troy University team Saturday afternoon, winning the game 28-10, and unleashing the full Terrelle Pryor package in the process. Pryor got his first start as a Buckeye, and threw for an OSU freshman record four TD's. The Buckeyes also got a standout performance from a new starter at linebacker, and the defense pitched a second half shutout to help OSU win going away. Buckeye Dan recaps the win.

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No Pryor Restraint

It took Terrelle Pryor three whole games to become the starting quarterback for the Ohio State Buckeyes. This past week, Coach Tressel had said that his quarterbacks Todd Boeckman and Pryor would split the snaps against Troy about "50-50". But after starting the game with the true freshman under center, and watching him drive the team to a touchdown on their first possession, the coach had a tough time convincing himself that inserting Boeckman was going to help the team win. The senior took just three snaps from center all day, and had one pass attempt, an ugly incompletion. Pryor looked more like the upperclassman, poised and confident, taking about 95% of the snaps in the game.

Maybe Tressel isn't mathematically challenged, but knew all along he was going to go with the kid. Maybe a gut feeling early in the game changed his plans. No matter now. Pryor has a hammerlock on the starting job, and Boeckman's star

continues to fade.

Pryor connected on his first ever touchdown pass on the first drive of the game, hitting tight end Rory Nicol (I kid you not) with a perfect throw to the back-right corner of the end zone from 13 yards out. In the second quarter, with OSU up 7-3, Pryor stepped up in the pocket and found Brian Hartline all alone down the middle for a 39-yard score.

He added two fourth quarter TD passes, first connecting with Brian Robiskie on a long post pattern from 38 yards out to give OSU some breathing room at 21-10, and then icing the game on a 16-yard slant to Hartline to close out the scoring. Pryor also rushed for 66 net yards, a figure distorted by the subtraction of 20 yards in losses from two sacks. Discounting the sacks, he rushed for a six-yard average on 14 carries, including consecutive 18-yard runs near the end of the first half. His passing numbers for the game were 10 of 16 for 139 yards, with the 4 TD's, and one interception, a meaningless Hail Mary into the endzone at the end of the half.

Trusting that pure talent would negate inexperience, Tressel's gamble paid off, at least on this day, as Pryor showed repeatedly that his mobility in the pocket allows him to buy time and make plays, with his legs and with his arm, that would be physically impossible for Boeckman to make. The decision to go with Pryor would certainly have been made more difficult had Boeckman not regressed noticeably since the middle of last season, but the slow unraveling of the player who led the Big Ten in passing efficiency in 2007 has been undeniable.

Also providing a boost for the Buckeye offense was a solid performance from Boom Herron at running back. Herron averaged 4.7 yards on 20 carries for a total of 94 yards, and continued to show the patience and instincts that have made him the first backup to Chris Wells. The effective rushing attack by Herron and Pryor allowed the Buckeyes to limit their passing attempts to 17 for the entire game, making the four touchdowns all the more impressive...(talk about passing efficiency!)

It was really the first extended opportunity for anyone to see Pryor throw the ball downfield as a collegian, and the results were obviously encouraging. Of his 10 completions, only four went to wide receivers, two each for Hartline and Robiskie...both of Hartline's catches went for scores. The others were spread around to backs (Herron, Brandon Saine, Brandon Smith) and tight ends (Nicol), a

welcome development as it relates to Pryor's ability to see the whole field and check down to secondary targets.

Pryor does play with a sense of calm and maturity that belies his youth. Part of it may be the effortlessness with which he runs (and throws). Even in the pocket, the game seems to be going more slowly for him than for the others. Maybe it's the humility and team-first approach evident in the way he handles himself on the field. For the Buckeye fan, though, it's all good...because he's only going to get better.

In what was a bit of a surprise, another true freshman, Mike Brewster started at center for OSU, with the regular center, Jim Cordle, moving to left guard to replace the injured Steve Rehring. Brewster seemed to acquit himself well, and it's a possibility that he might hold onto the job, even when Rehring returns. Part of that "future is now" theme of the day maybe?

Defensive MVP

The Troy Trojans came into Columbus with their no-huddle spread offense, fresh off of a 736-yard offensive outburst in their last game, and were matched up against an OSU defense that had been battered by USC, and has had difficulties with some spread offense teams. One key to stopping the spread is to close quickly and tackle well, limiting the yards-after-catch on the shorter completions.

On this day, the Buckeye defense did just that, holding the Trojans to just over 5 yards per passing attempt, as quarterback Jamie Hampton completed 30 of 43 attempts, but for just 218 yards. No one was more active and physical on the defense than linebacker Jermale Hines, the sophomore from Glenville, who was starting at the Will (weakside) linebacker position, where Ross Homan had been the starter in the first three games. Hines was all over the field, especially in the first half, when it seemed as though he was in on every defensive stop. Hines was officially credited with seven tackles (four solos) along with one pass break-up, but he was around the ball a lot more than that, looking a lot like an impact player on a defense that could use a few more.

Hines had been helping out at the safety position early in the season, as Kurt Coleman was banged up, and Jamario O'Neal was serving a two-game suspension, and he impressed with his play there, but if Saturday's game is any

indication, the young man may have found his position at outside linebacker. It's hard to overstate the emotional impact he had on the game early, and he could have topped off his effort with a flourish had he been able to hang onto an interception in the Troy endzone that went through his hands instead of giving OSU a quick six. But just being in position to make that play showed the kind of anticipation and burst that a defense needs to stop a spread team. Hines, who succeeded Troy Smith as the Glenville quarterback, knows a few things about how those guys think. Homan also played and had some big hits in the game, and he's still a promising young talent, but no one who saw this game was left wondering
why the coaches felt they had to play Jermale Hines.

Also standing out with solid performances for the Buckeye defense were James Laurinaitis and Kurt Coleman. Laurinaitis was credited with 12 tackles (four solos) and a sack, and Coleman came up with his first two career interceptions, both of the spectacular variety. The first was a one-handed strip of a nearly completed pass on a short route over the middle. On the second one, a leaping Coleman snagged the ball at the top of his jump, and then was accidentally undercut by Laurinaitis as he came down, landing on his head but holding on to the ball. The two interceptions are two more than the Buckeye starting safeties got all last season.

Once again the OSU coaches experimented with different personnel on the defensive line, playing much of this game with Lawrence Wilson and Thad Gibson at the defensive end spots, with Cam Heyward and Doug Worthington inside at the tackles. Wilson and Worthington stood out on Saturday, as Wilson harassed the QB all day and Worthington had some success stuffing the Troy running game at the line with good penetration and strong tackling. That said, there was still not enough pressure on the quarterback from the defensive line, especially from up the middle.

Rob Rose and Curtis Terry were spelling Wilson and Gibson at the end spots, and Brett Larimore and Nader Abdallah were first off the bench at the tackles. True freshman Nathan Williams also got into the game at a defensive end spot for some significant minutes.

The lone Troy touchdown came as the result of a brief defensive lapse for the Bucks just before the half. After a long completion got the Trojans out near midfield from deep in their own end, a second completion over the middle resulted

in a 45-yard touchdown, as Trojan receiver Jarrell Jernigan broke several tackles and wound his way into the end zone. The defense would settle down a bit after that, and although the game was close well into the fourth quarter, they were able to stop the Trojans when it counted, and blank Troy for the second half.

Now an OSU football season that has already held its share of surprises has supplied a couple more. The Buckeyes will apparently try to defend their Big Ten title with a true freshman starting at quarterback, on what was to have been a senior-laden team drawing strength and inspiration from its seasoned starting signal-caller. Only an injury to Boeckman, all the experts said, would force Terrelle Pryor into the starting lineup...and even in that event, Joe Bauserman might be called upon before the youngster would be forced to face the pressures of big time college football.

On Saturday, Terrelle Pryor stepped up and spit in pressure's eye. The Big Ten has some challenges that are tougher than Troy University, but Pryor gave a preview in this game of what Buckeye Nation can expect for the next three years.

The best advice might be.....enjoy the ride.

Links:

OSU Official Game Stats