With Purdue coming to Columbus this Saturday, let's take the time to give a tip of the cap to a truly worthy adversary of the Buckeyes- Boilermakers coach Joe Tiller, in his last season as head coach of the Old Gold & Black. The Boilermakers had been a pushover for the Buckeyes for nearly three decades preceding Tiller's arrival in West Lafayette. But since his arrival, the Buckeyes and Boilers have played some classics. Jesse takes a look back at some of them for us in his latest column.

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When Tiller arrived in West Lafayette in 1997, after a successful stint at Wyoming, Purdue had mustered up one winning season (a 5-4-2 masterpiece in 1994, under former Ohio State offensive coordinator Jim Colletto) in twelve years, and hadn't played in a bowl game since 1984. Under his guidance, the Boilermakers have enjoyed nine winning seasons, played in ten bowl games, and in 2000 won their first Big Ten title in 33 years, going all the way to the Rose Bowl for the first time since the 1967 season. An Ohio native marinated in the wide-open ways of the Big Sky and the WAC, Tiller turned the stodgy Big Ten on its ear with his spread-oriented, "basketball-on-grass" offense, and breathed new life into the long-dormant tradition of outstanding quarterback play at Purdue.

He also turned what had been a regular milk run for Ohio State into a near-annual knock-down, drag-out fight. For a stretch of several years in the early part of this decade, perhaps no Big Ten game was tougher for the Buckeyes, or produced more memorable plays and moments, than the Purdue game.

The Boilermakers had been a pushover for the Buckeyes for nearly three decades preceding Tiller's arrival in West Lafayette. Ohio State had won 18 of the previous 21 meetings between the schools, including six straight victories by an average score of 38-10. That all changed when Joe Tiller took the helm. From 1999 through 2004, Ohio State and Purdue played five games that were decided either in the last two-and-a-half minutes or in overtime. The average margin of victory in these games was 4.2 points. Purdue won two of those games; the Buckeyes won three.

Here are the recaps of those five thrilling games:

October 9, 1999 @ Columbus: Ohio State 25, Purdue 22- In Coach Tiller's first meeting with Ohio State, his Boilermakers out-gained the Buckeyes 380-369 and got 153 rushing yards from freshman tailback Montrell Lowe, but fell short when Brent Johnson blocked Travis Dorsch's attempt at a game-tying 29-yard field goal with 53 seconds remaining. In a harbinger of things to come in this rivalry, the lead changed hands five times, with the Buckeyes getting the winning score on a five-yard touchdown run by Jonathan Wells with 5:13 remaining in the game.

October 28, 2000 @ West Lafayette: Purdue 31, Ohio State 27- One of the greatest Big Ten games of the decade produced one of the signature plays in the last four decades of Purdue football- and a bitter memory for the Buckeyes and their fans. With first place in the conference on the line, Ohio State dominated the first three quarters, repeatedly intercepting Drew Brees and taking a 20-10 lead going into the final stanza. A pair of Brees touchdown passes to John Standeford and Vinny Sutherland gave the Boilermakers a 24-20 lead, but with a chance to salt the game away, Brees threw his fourth interception, a wounded duck that Mike Doss returned to the Purdue two-yard line. Three plays later, Jerry Westbrooks barged into the end zone to put Ohio State back in front, 27-24, with 2:16 remaining.

The Buckeyes' advantage stood up for exactly 21 seconds. Two plays after the ensuing kickoff, Brees found Seth Morales streaking wide-open down the middle

of the field for a 64-yard touchdown to give Purdue the lead back- this time for good. Doss, who blew the coverage, exchanged a hero's laurels for a goat's horns, while Brees, who had nearly thrown the game away moments earlier, became the man of the hour. The Purdue quarterback completed 39-of-65 passes for 455 yards and three touchdowns, all of them in the fourth quarter. The Boilermakers would go on to the Rose Bowl, while Ohio State's season, and John Cooper's coaching career, went up in smoke.

November 9, 2002 @ West Lafayette: Ohio State 10, Purdue 6- Two years after having their hearts broken by a long touchdown pass at Purdue, the Buckeyes got sweet revenge, and took a giant step toward the National Championship in the process. In a bitter defensive war waged under gray flannel skies, the Boilermakers shut down Ohio State's rushing game and took a 6-3 lead on Berin Lacevic's 32-yard field goal with 7:50 left. The slim margin looked relatively safe- after all, the Buckeyes had done virtually nothing on offense all day, were without Maurice Clarett, knocked out of the game with a shoulder stinger, and had to go into a 15-mile per hour wind. Adding insult to injury, Purdue's go-ahead score had been set up by a 58-yard pass from Brandon Kirsch to Ray Williams, a play eerily reminiscent of the Brees-to-Morales connection that had doomed the Buckeyes two years earlier.

With the clock running and under two minutes two play, Ohio State, still trailing 6-3, found itself with fourth-and-one at the Purdue 37-yard line. It was too long for a field goal, and too late for a punt, so the only choice was to go for it. Coach Tressel's play-call was a short crossing route to Ben Hartsock, but Hartsock was well-covered, and with Purdue blitzing, Michael Jenkins found himself in one-on-one coverage with cornerback Antwaun Rogers. Jenkins ran a takeoff route and Craig Krenzel deftly avoided the blitz and tossed up a pass that arced through the wind and settled into Jenkins's hands as he crossed the goal line with 1:36 remaining. Holy Buckeye!

November 15, 2003 @ Columbus: Ohio State 16, Purdue 13 (OT)- The combination of a defensive touchdown and a shaky Purdue kicking game helped the Buckeyes escape with a narrow victory and keep their slim National Championship hopes alive. Ohio State took a 13-6 lead early in the fourth quarter

when Mike Kudla recovered Kyle Orton's fumble in the end zone, but the Boilermakers tied the score on an Orton-to-Jerod Void scoring toss with 4:36 to play and sent the game into overtime when Bobby Iwuchukwu batted down Mike Nugent's attempt at a game-winning field goal. The Buckeyes opened the scoring in overtime with Nugent's 36-yard field goal, and Purdue kicker Ben Jones, who had missed a 28-yard try in the third quarter, was wide left from 36 yards out to give Ohio State the win.

November 13, 2004 @ West Lafayette: Purdue 24, Ohio State 17- After starting the season with five consecutive wins and a top-five ranking, the Boilermakers lost four in a row by a combined ten points to fall out of the Big Ten race. But they salvaged a measure of their season by nipping the Buckeyes, scoring the go-ahead touchdown on Kyle Orton's 14-yard pass to Dustin Keller with 2:17 to play and hanging on from there. Ohio State had only itself to blame for the loss- the Buckeyes committed four turnovers, three in the fourth quarter and two in the Purdue red zone, as their comeback from a 17-3 halftime deficit fell short. The loss was Troy Smith's first as a starter. He would lose only twice more in 28 career starts at Ohio State.

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Win or lose, fans of both schools, and fans of college football in general and Big Ten football in particular, are richer for having experienced the thrills and chills of the Ohio State-Purdue donnybrooks of the last decade. Have a long and happy retirement, Coach Tiller. And thanks for the memories. It's been a blast.