In what had been called a "statement game" for Coach Mark Dantonio and Michigan State, it was Jim Tressel's Buckeyes who did all the talking Saturday, as they raced out to a 28-0 halftime lead behind Terrelle Pryor and Chris Wells, and forced five turnovers on defense in a 45-7 rout of the Spartans in East Lansing. Ohio State (7-1, 4-0) remained tied for the Big Ten lead with Penn State, setting up a showdown next Saturday at the Shoe against the unbeaten Nittany Lions. Buckeye Dan recaps the rout for us.

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Dantonio dropped to 0-4 as a head coach in games against Tressel's Buckeyes, losing for the second straight year as the Spartans coach after two losses as the head man at Cincinnati. Michigan State (6-2, 3-1) came into the contest on a roll of six consecutive wins, and were hoping to vault past the Buckeyes in the conference standings, and into the upper tier of Big Ten programs. Instead, Ohio State humbled the guys in green for their seventh consecutive win over MSU, and that Spartan move into the conference elite is temporarily on hold.

The Return of the "O"

Coach Tressel made his first statement before the game even began, when OSU won the coin toss, and the OSU coach elected to take the ball rather than defer to the second half. The intent may have been to send a message of his confidence in Pryor and the offense, who were the objects of concern and criticism in Buckeye Nation after a lackluster showing last week in the win over Purdue.

Pryor responded with a 32-yard dash around left end on the game's second play, and although that drive stalled, the Bucks were back inside Spartan territory after

an exchange of punts, and set up at the 47-yard line to start their second possession. Three plays later, at the MSU 18-yard line, Pryor took off left on a read-option, stiff-armed MSU cornerback Ross Weaver to the ground at the line of scrimmage, and cruised into the end zone unmolested for the game's first score.

The Buckeyes would score touchdowns on three consecutive possessions in the quarter to take a commanding 21-0 lead, taking the crowd completely out of the game. The Michigan State offense would cross midfield just once in the quarter, to the OSU 49, before fumbling the ball away.

The anticipated running back duel between OSU's Chris Wells and Michigan State's Javon Ringer wasn't much of a contest. Wells piled up over 100 yards by halftime, and scored two first half touchdowns, finishing with 140 yards on a season-high 31 carries. Meanwhile, the Buckeye defense was holding Ringer to season-low totals in carries and rushing yards. Ringer, who had been averaging 35 carries and 158 rushing yards per game, was held to 67 yards on 16 carries, plus 19 more yards on six pass receptions.

Pryor, the other half of the Buckeyes' dynamic rushing duo, added 72 yards rushing on 12 carries. He attempted only 11 passes, completing 7 for 116 yards and one TD. Nearly half of the passing yardage total came on one play, a 56-yard bomb to Brian Hartline to the 1-yard line that set up the Buckeyes' third score of the first quarter. In that decisive first period, Pryor was 5 for 5 passing for 86 yards, and rushed for 62 yards on four carries.

Big Plays on "D"

A large share of the credit for this big road win has to go to the Buckeye defense, as the unit put together perhaps their best performance of the season, forcing three fumbles, grabbing two interceptions, and scoring two touchdowns. Two of the fumbles, one in each half, were key turning points in the ball game.

With the Buckeyes up 7-0 in the first quarter, Michigan State was trying to answer with a drive, and had already picked up one first down, when freshman Keyshawn Martin took a lateral pass around left end into OSU territory, and ran past OSU safety Kurt Coleman who had slipped down on the play. But Coleman reached out and poked the ball out of Martin's grasp, and it bounced up to Donald Washington, who raced 44 yards back down the sideline to the Michigan State 17. Five plays

later, Pryor rolled out right, eluded a defender, and found Brian Robiskie in the back of the end zone for a 14-0 OSU lead.

The second game-changer occurred in the second half and thwarted any Michigan State hopes for a comeback. The Spartans had taken the second half kickoff and marched downfield for a touchdown behind backup quarterback Kirk Cousins, making the score 28-7. The Bucks had to punt the ball back to MSU, and the Spartans were on another effective drive deep in OSU territory, looking to make it a 28-14 game, with plenty of time left to get back in it.

But on a 3rd and 11 play at the OSU 23, Malcolm Jenkins blitzed off the left corner and blindsided Cousins for the sack, jarring the ball loose in the process. The ball bounced up nicely right onto Cousin's backside, where defensive end Thaddeus Gibson grabbed it and raced 69 yards untouched for the score and a 35-7 OSU lead. It was the second play of the fourth quarter, and that's when many of the Spartan Stadium crowd of 77,360 headed for the exits.

Kurt Coleman had a diving interception at the sideline late in the first half on the first play of a Spartan possession to assure the Bucks of a first half shutout. The last two Buckeye turnovers came in the game's final seconds, as the Spartans were trying to mount a scoring drive. Jermale Hines picked up a fumble by the Spartans' Blair White after a completion from Cousins, and returned it 48 yards down the sideline for the TD with just 15 seconds left in the game. Backup linebacker Brian Rolle then picked off another Cousins pass near midfield on the game's final play.

In the contest of two teams who rush the ball to make their offenses go, the Buckeyes ran for 216 yards on the ground to just 52 for Michigan State. The OSU linebackers had another excellent game against the run, with James Laurinaitis leading the way in the middle, and Ross Homan and Marcus Freeman turning in solid performances with several crunching hits each.

Notable Contributors

Malcolm Jenkins continues to play lights out at cornerback for OSU. If there is a better cornerback in the country, I haven't seen him. Against the Spartans, Jenkins had 9 tackles, including 7 solos, 1.5 tackles for loss, a sack, and a forced

fumble.

James Laurinaitis led the team with 11 tackles and 1.5 sacks. On this day he played the part of Javon Ringer's Siamese twin.

Tight end/fullback Brandon Smith led Buckeye receivers with three receptions for 37 yards, including a 21-yard play on a well executed screen that set up the fourth OSU touchdown in the first half.

Even though OSU receiver Ray Small fumbled on a punt return with the Buckeyes up 14-0 in the first quarter, he did total 56 yards on five returns, including a 22-yarder. Austin Spitler made a nice hustle play on the Small fumble to get the ball away from two Spartans at the OSU 3-yard line, keeping the Bucks from a potentially disastrous turnover.

Brian Hartline made an extraordinary play on his 56-yard catch, first adjusting to catch the underthrown ball, and then managing to stay upright as two Spartan defenders collided with him, then spinning and racing to the goal line, diving and stretching out in the attempt to score. They marked him at the one-yard line. Great effort.

Ross Homan hurt some people in this game with some bone-jarring hits. He had nine tackles, including six solos, and two tackles for loss.

Thad Gibson, Dexter Larimore and Rob Rose didn't have a lot of tackles, but they provided good pressure from their defensive line spots, making life in the backfield pretty stressful for the Spartan QB's Hoyer and Cousins.

Donald Washington (44 yards), Jermale Hines (48 yards), and Thad Gibson (69 yards) had a combined 161 yards on returns of recovered fumbles. That's got to be an OSU game record, don't you think? We'll find out soon, I'm sure.

For the Spartans, backup QB Kirk Cousins was pretty impressive, completing his first 10 throws while leading two effective third quarter drives, and generating the only Michigan State points of the game. He finished 18 of 25 for 161 yards, with one TD and one interception.

MSU linebacker Greg Jones is an Ohio (Cincinnati Moeller) kid who got away. He played well, and led the Spartans with 13 total tackles and a sack on the day.

Links:

OSU Athletic Dept. Game Stats

ESPN.com Recap and Highlights