The Buckeyes and Nittany Lions slugged it out for three and a half quarters last night in an evenly played defensive struggle, but Penn State converted the game's first turnover into a 4th quarter touchdown, and added a late field goal to remain unbeaten and take command of the Big Ten race with a 13-6 victory over Ohio State. Penn State (9-0, 5-0) is now clearly in the hunt for a spot in the BCS title game, while the Buckeyes (7-2, 4-1) saw their hopes for a third consecutive conference championship dealt a serious blow. Buckeye Dan recaps the painful loss for The Buckeye Nation.

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Terrelle Pryor learned the hard way why Coach Tressel has been trying to focus him on protecting the football as Priority One, when PSU safety Mark Rubin poked the ball out of the quarterback's grasp on a 3rd-and-one at midfield, with Ohio State driving and clinging to a 6-3 lead, with ten minutes to go in the game. The recovery by linebacker Navorro Bowman set the Lions up at the OSU 38-yard line, and they drove it in for the eventual game-winning TD with their backup quarterback under center.

Then in the final minute, with the Buckeyes making one last attempt at a game-tying touchdown, Penn State cornerback Lydell Sargeant picked off a Pryor pass in the end zone to seal the victory for Joe Paterno, and extend the Penn State unbeaten season for another week.

Penn State has been a strong second half team all season, and they outplayed

the Buckeyes down the stretch to notch a win in Columbus for the first time since the Carter administration. The Nittany Lions forced the fumble just as they were seeing their undefeated season slipping away from them, and then drove for the winning touchdown without having to complete a pass. Starting PSU quarterback Darryl Clark was on the sidelines, having taken a shot to the head a few minutes earlier, and freshman Pat Devlin came in to direct the go-ahead drive, running it in himself from a yard out.

Defense Dominates

Both defenses were able to control the rushing attack of the opponent for the most part, with Penn State perhaps getting the better of it, as they held Chris Wells to a 2.5 yard average, and a total of 55 rushing yards on 22 carries. Pryor was held almost entirely in check by the swarming Lion defenders, managing just 6 net rushing yards on nine carries.

The Penn State defense had made no secret of their strategy to force Pryor and the Buckeye offense to beat them throwing the ball, and they repeatedly stacked eight or nine defenders in the box and choked off the determined OSU effort to run the football. And the freshman did have a decent day throwing the ball for the Buckeyes in his sixth career start, posting season highs in attempts (28), completions (16) and passing yardage (226 yards) in a losing cause.

The OSU defense was pretty stingy as well, holding the vaunted Penn State offense to three points well into the 4th quarter. QB Clark was unable to get any kind of passing attack going against the Buckeyes, and he was 12 for 20 on the day, for just 121 yards. 49 of those yards came on one play in the second quarter on a completion to Graham Zug to set up the only Penn State points of the half, a 31-yard field goal by Kevin Kelly.

In a game that was a statistical dead heat after three quarters, the Nittany Lions led in one key stat by the time it was all over, out-rushing Ohio State with 160 yards, to just 61 for the Bucks. The two Penn State tailbacks, Evan Royster (77 yards) and Stephfon Green (23 yards) combined for a 100-yard game, and Clark chipped in with 42 rushing yards from the quarterback position, including a couple of key first down pickups on designed quarterback runs.

Making the Most of It

Most importantly, the Lions were able to convert their best scoring opportunity into a touchdown, while Ohio State was coming up just short on several of their chances, including driving to the PSU 39 on their first possession of the game, and again to the Lion 38 in the 2nd quarter, and being forced to punt both times.

Their deepest penetration of the first half came in the final minute, when the Bucks reached the Penn State 24 yard line after a 33-yard completion from Pryor to Robiskie put them at the 26. A 41-yard field goal by Aaron Pettrey tied the score 3-3 as the half expired.

The Buckeyes' problems finishing drives with touchdowns continued on their first second half possession, when Pryor's 17-yard completion to Robiskie gave the Bucks a first down at the Penn State 26-yard line. But Tressel couldn't get off of page one in the playbook after that, calling three consecutive handoffs to Chris Wells, which failed to generate a first down, and Ohio State settled for three once again.

That lead looked for a while like it might hold up, since the Buckeye defense was putting good pressure on Clark and limiting Royster to moderate gains in the running game. Kevin Kelly missed a 45-yard field goal attempt early in the 4th quarter, and Ohio State got the ball back with a 6-3 lead and 14 minutes to kill. They had driven to midfield and seemed poised to take control of the game with one more score.

That's when disaster struck, and the play that will be remembered as the only one in this game that really mattered gave Penn State the opportunity and the momentum they needed to break their long losing streak in Columbus. The freshman quarterback from Jeannette, PA was disconsolate after his two 4th quarter turnovers swung the outcome to his home state school. Losing an important ball game is a tough way to learn a lesson.

Pryor will undoubtedly have better days and happier outcomes as his career in Columbus plays out. It was his first lost fumble as a Buckeye, and will stand as an object lesson for a young player still learning how to win at the collegiate level. But Terrelle Pryor didn't lose this game...Penn State won it...by rushing the ball when it mattered most, and by forcing the action with aggressive defense throughout the game.

Besides, Jim Tressel would never say "I told you so"

Links:

OSU Athletic Dept. Game Stats and Summary

OSU Athletic Dept. Game Story

BuckeyeSports.com Game Story

ESPN.com Recap