Ohio State (8-2, 5-1) vaulted back into a tie for first place in the Big Ten standings by drilling Northwestern 45-10 on Saturday, while Penn State lost their spot alone on top with a last-second loss to Iowa. OSU quarterback Terrelle Pryor threw for three touchdowns, repeatedly torching the Wildcats with clutch 3rd-down conversions, and Chris Wells ran for 140 yards and two more scores, including a 55-yard sprint in the second quarter that put the Buckeyes ahead to stay.

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OSU quarterback Terrelle Pryor threw for three touchdowns, repeatedly torching the Wildcats with clutch 3rd-down conversions, and Chris Wells ran for 140 yards and two more scores, including a 55-yard sprint in the second quarter that put the Buckeyes ahead to stay. Wells averaged 5 yards on 28 carries to provide the OSU power game, but it was Pryor supplying the flash and dash, with a combination of big plays in the passing game, and his standard improvisational scrambling from the pocket that leaves defenders grasping at air, and jaws dropping everywhere else.

Yes, the development of Terrelle Pryor as a starting college quarterback is coming along just fine, thank you. As he has for most of the season, Pryor played error-free football, and he showed a nice touch on the intermediate and longer throws that hasn't always been there in previous games. There weren't too many short throws in the game plan, as Pryor averaged a remarkable 22 yards per

completion, connecting on 9 of 14 attempts. Brian Robiskie was on the receiving end of touchdown passes of 15 and 34 yards from Pryor, leading the OSU receivers with three catches overall.

3rd Down Demon

The Buckeye freshman served notice early that he would be tormenting the Wildcats on 3rd down plays when he converted two of them on the first OSU possession. He hit Robiskie for a 9-yard first down on the first series, and then three plays later, went long over the top to Brian Hartline on a 3rd and 16, for a 44-yard gain down to the Wildcat 2-yard line. Wells took it in on one play, and the Bucks led 7-0.

Northwestern would come right back on their first possession to tie the game on a 13-play drive featuring 10 carries by Wildcat quarterback Mike Kafka, including the last seven in a row and the TD from one yard out. After an exchange of punts, Pryor would again keep a Buckeye drive alive on 3rd down, this time with a perfectly thrown 22-yard strike to tight end Rory Nicol to start the second quarter. That set up Beanie's long TD run, and the Buckeyes never looked back.

Signature Drives

The OSU defense stiffened after that first Wildcat score, holding Northwestern's offense to one first down in the second quarter, while the Buckeye offense took control of the game. After a field goal resulting from a fumble recovery pushed the OSU lead to 17-7, the Buckeye defense forced another punt, and a penalty on the return had Pryor and the Buckeye offense starting deep in their own end, at the OSU 10-yard line. By the time the ensuing 90-yard Ohio State drive was over, the Wildcats were pretty sure they were going to finish second on this day, and Buckeye fans were pretty sure their young quarterback is a bonafide star.

Not *someday*. Not *soon*. Now.

The drive itself wasn't a thing of beauty, but Pryor single-handedly took the fight out of Northwestern by bailing the Buckeyes out of bad circumstances on three straight 3rd down plays. A 14-yard completion to Dane Sanzenbacher on a 3rd and 8 from the 12-yard line got them going on the first series, and three plays later, Pryor scrambled up the middle for 15 yards on a 3rd and 13 from the 23. Buckeye offensive tackle Alex Boone then turned a routine 3rd and 1 into a difficult 3rd and 16 with a truly stupid (yet replay worthy) headbutt penalty, but Pryor refused to let the drive die. Once again he scrambled from the pocket, circled left to the outside, and darted 21 yards to midfield, getting a late-hit flag on the sideline to add 15 more yards to the play.

Two Boom Herron runs took the ball to the Northwestern 15-yard line, and on first down, Pryor dropped back and threw a laser to Robiskie in the back right corner of the end zone to give the Buckeyes a 24-7 lead at the half, and establish himself as the dominant player in the game. He would drive that point home on the last OSU possession of the third quarter with two more highlight reel plays that left Buckeye partisans giddy with anticipation of the next two seasons.

On 3rd and 8 from the OSU 32, Pryor rolled out right, evading two rushers, and while on the dead run, launched the ball 45 yards on a line to a streaking Hartline down the right sideline, eliciting an appreciative "Wow!" from the TV commentator. Wow indeed. He then finished off the drive with a flourish, breaking two tackles and shrugging off a third defender on a rollout to the right, before finally turning the corner and zipping a 6-yard TD pass to a diving Rory Nicol. That play sent the TV guys into "you've got to be kidding me" territory, and got Wildcat fans fumbling for their car keys.

Whatever "it" Is

There have been other OSU games earlier in the season in which Pryor was arguably the most talented athlete on the field. The difference now is that he is arguably the best football player on the field. And however you define that intangible "it" that the great players have, it is becoming more and more apparent that Terrelle Pryor has "it" in some quantity. The coaching he is getting is starting to meld with the dazzling athletic ability that was obvious from the start, and at the same time, we are coming to see the competitiveness and the genuine humility that round out the package.

If you think all the above gushing about Pryor's performance is over the top, then I don't think you saw this football game. There were, however, a few other players on the field with The One.

Defense Stays Consistent

It took a while for the OSU defense to get a grip on the Northwestern rushing attack, but after the touchdown on the first NU drive, it was clear that QB Mike Kafka was the Wildcats' only weapon. Kafka was impressive, but he didn't have nearly enough help. He rushed for 126 yards on 29 carries, but finished with 83 net rushing yards after sacks and negative yardage plays were tallied. The only other Wildcat to carry the ball was Stephen Simmons, who eked out 39 yards on 14 attempts.

Kafka went 18 for 27 passing, for 177 yards, with one interception, and was sacked four times. Only 35 yards of his passing total came in the first half, and the Wildcat offense managed only a field goal in the second half despite the better passing yardage numbers.

Defensive tackle Nader Abdallah had perhaps his best career game as a Buckeye with eight tackles, including one for a loss. He also knocked down two passes and plugged up the middle of the defense all game long.

James Laurinaitis keyed on Kafka, and rang up 11 total tackles to lead the OSU defense. Anderson Russell was next with nine total stops from his free safety spot. Jermale Hines and Kurt Coleman also played well in the secondary, with five solos each.

Freshman defensive end Nathan Williams had another strong game for the Buckeyes, showing good speed off the edge, and a non-stop motor in pursuit along the line. He had two sacks of Kafka on consecutive plays early in the fourth quarter to snuff out the last Wildcat scoring threat, finishing with seven total tackles.

On the other side of the ball, Brian Hartline had only two catches, but they were both big plays, totaling 90 yards, and setting up two touchdowns. Tight end Rory Nicol showed well, with two nice catches, including the TD.

Dan 'Boom' Herron chipped in with 38 rushing yards on six carries in relief of Chris Wells, including the last Buckeye TD, with seven seconds left in the game.

The Buckeyes travel to Illinois next week before the home date with Michigan on Nov. 22.

Notes:

With Penn State now probably out of contention for the BCS title game, they grab the inside track for the Rose Bowl from the Buckeyes, having beaten OSU to get the tie-breaker.

The Bucks beat Northwestern for the 28th time in their last 29 meetings. The

combined score for the last four meetings, all OSU wins, is 205-34.

Jim Tressel won his 50th Big Ten game, and is now 81-18 (.818) in his first 99 games as the OSU Head Coach.

Links:

OSU Athletic Dept. Game Stats

ESPN.com Recap