It was a different kind of BCS bowl game loss for Ohio State, but a loss just the same. Now Buckeye fans are left to debate which variety is more brutal ... the embarrassing blowouts of the previous two years, or the heartbreak of watching a huge win slip away in the final, gut-wrenching minute. In his latest, Buckeye Dan Wismar checks in to give us his account and his thoughts on The One That Got Away.

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In the end, Monday night's Fiesta Bowl turned on record-setting performances by Texas quarterback Colt McCoy and his top receiver Quan Cosby, and it was that duo that connected on the winning touchdown in the final seconds to give the Longhorns a 24-21 victory. Ohio State may have regained a measure of respect nationally by proving they belong on the same field with the best in college football, but that's no consolation for a Buckeye team that envisioned a more satisfying outcome...and thought they had it in their grasp.

Setting the Tone

The Bucks served notice early that things would be different this January by rushing for 138 first half yards behind Chris Wells and Terrelle Pryor, while the

defense was shutting down the powerful Texas offense with an aggressive, blitzing scheme. Ohio State dominated the time of possession in the opening half, and snuffed out the last Texas drive with an interception at the goal line just before the break, to take a 6-3 lead into halftime.

But McCoy (41 of 59, 414 yds, 2 TD) got rolling in the third quarter, and the Longhorns used a hurry up offense to score two quick touchdowns against a visibly gassed Buckeye defense, taking a 17-6 lead, and prompting flashbacks for OSU fans. But with Beanie Wells sitting out the fourth quarter, Jim Tressel somehow summoned the best from both of his quarterbacks to get OSU back in the game.

Ohio State caught its second wind behind senior Todd Boeckman's passing and Terrelle Pryor's running to score the first 15 points of the fourth quarter and take a late 21-17 lead. The two combined to breathe life back into the Buckeyes when Boeckman found Pryor in the end zone on a fade route with 7:26 to go in the game to bring OSU within two at 17-15.

The defense then rose to the occasion to stop Texas without a first down, and Tressel alternated QB's effectively on the final OSU drive. But Boom Herron's go-ahead TD from 15-yards out came two minutes too early, and McCoy was able to drive Texas for the winning score with just sixteen ticks left on the clock.

3rd Quarter Blues

After a frustrating first half for the Longhorns offensively, Mack Brown decided to wear down the OSU defenders starting the second, and he succeeded spectacularly. McCoy went to a no-huddle offense, and the Longhorns started running the football. After taking the second half kickoff, a 15-play drive ended with a 14-yard TD run by McCoy, and Texas had their first lead of the game. McCoy had just four pass completions on the drive, none for over nine yards.

The OSU offense cooperated with a 3-and-out on their first possession, and put the already fatigued Buckeye defense right back out on the field. A big sack of McCoy by OSU end Nathan Williams on the next possession forced a Texas punt, but again the OSU offense couldn't muster a first down, and the Longhorns offense went back on the no-huddle attack. By this time, the OSU defenders looked completely spent, often failing to even get lined up in time for the next Texas snap. McCoy quickly found Jordan Shipley and Cosby downfield for

completions of 15, 7, and 20 yards, and then four consecutive running plays gained 28 more. By the time McCoy found Cosby in the end zone from 7 yards out to make it 17-6, the OSU defense appeared ready to hoist the white flag.

Turnaround

The Buckeyes had run just eight offensive plays in the quarter, which ended on an 8-yard sack of Pryor, and it looked like a third consecutive 3-and-out was in the cards as the OSU offense faced a 3rd and 13 on the first play of the final period. As he had done in six first half passing situations, Tressel turned to his senior quarterback Boeckman, who shrugged off a hit from Texas tackle Roy Miller on the dropback, and fired a 48 yard strike to Brian Robiskie, who made a diving catch at the Texas 28-yard line. A 44-yard Aaron Pettrey field goal stopped the bleeding for the Bucks, who pulled to within eight at 17-9, and gave the defense a chance to catch their breath.

After Texas punted it back to the Buckeyes, it was Pryor's time to shine. He completed a 16-yard pass to Robiskie, and then put together two big runs of 15 and 26 yards to get OSU down to the Texas 26-yard line. With a big assist from a pass interference call on a 3rd and 12, and then another penalty after the play, the Bucks had a 1st and goal at the Texas five, and Boeckman's TD pass to Pryor followed on the next play.

The newly inspired Buckeye defense held Texas without a first down, and OSU took over at their own 27. Boom Herron got the final drive started with a gain of seven on first down, but Pryor was sacked and fumbled on the next play, but Herron saved the possession by falling on the ball. And on the 2nd and 17 play, it was Boeckman again to the rescue, hitting Jake Ballard *(yes, the tight end!)* for 16 yards, and then one play later, hooking up with Robiskie for a 22-yard gain to the Texas 23. Herron covered the last 23 yards on the next two plays to put the Buckeyes once again into the lead with 2:05 remaining, and all looked rosy for the Scarlet and Gray...for the moment.

From where I was sitting, if the Buckeyes had held on to win the game, Todd Boeckman would have been my MVP. He was just 5 of 11 passing, but all five completions were arguably momentum changers for Ohio State. I had mistakenly downplayed pre-game speculation that he might have a significant role in the game plan, but it's fair to say the game would not have been as close as it turned out to be had he not been involved. And in the game's aftermath, I'm speculating

that his role may have contributed to what I view as one of the game's lingering questions.

Pryor's Pout?

Right from the outset, Terrelle Pryor's approach to the game had observers wondering what was up with the young OSU QB. When on the first OSU possession, he scrambled around right end on a 2nd and 19, and then inexplicably chose to step out of bounds two yards short of the first down marker, with several yards of open field in front of him, he began to raise questions about the level of intensity he had brought into the game. Another similar avoidance of sideline contact raised even more doubts about his understanding of January football.

On several other plays, he seemed oddly distracted, almost disinterested...and lacking the kind of fist-pumping, teammate-encouraging fire that Buckeye fans have come to see and appreciate all season long. He took an unnecessary sack early in the game that probably prevented a field goal attempt. At times his indecision was almost like the dude in the Tostidos aisle at the grocery, wondering if he should go with the Scoops.

Whatever the issue is or was, I hope it's a one-off for him. I can only speculate that he may have been put out by not having started the game at QB, (for one play) and was perhaps showing some pouting petulance about being removed in certain passing situations. And if that was the case, the best way to prove his point to the coaches would have been to throw the ball effectively when he did get the opportunities. And that he clearly did not do.

Indeed the effectiveness of the quarterbacks in the game was the deciding factor in determining the winner. McCoy put on a record-breaking performance in the face of a ferocious (and probably unprecedented in the Tressel era) pass rush by the OSU defense. And if Pryor has been working on the finer points of the passing game in the six weeks since the Michigan game, it was not in evidence on this night. *(Memo to self: he is still a freshman after all....Vince Young had yet to play in a game at the same point in his college career)*

The What Ifs

As always in a closely fought contest, the losing side laments the many and varied ways their team could have or should have won the game, and this one is no exception. The extra foot that Longhorn wide receiver James Kirkendoll gained on the 4th and 3 reception on the final drive was the difference between a win for OSU and new life for Texas. As was a potential interception on the play before that.

And the second-guessers will have a field day speculating that once the Buckeyes got into field goal range on the final drive, they should have worked the clock, forcing Texas to use their last two timeouts, and taking as much time as possible off of the clock, before kicking an easy go-ahead field goal with under a minute to play. This neglects the fact that it would have allowed Texas to win the game on a field goal instead of needing a TD to pull it out.

They will also make a goat of safety Anderson Russell, who missed the tackle on Cosby at the 20-yard line on the winning touchdown, forgetting that even if he makes that tackle, the Longhorns would still have had about 20 seconds, two timeouts and Colt McCoy at their disposal.

On the upside, the BCS got the well-played, entertaining game that they needed on a night when this was the only game in town. And if the Buckeyes moved a step up from laughingstock to loser...well, that's something.

Author's Note: This is where the official apology to Terrelle Pryor goes. Turns out he had a shoulder injury from practice in the days before the game, which explains his avoiding contact wherever possible, and the trouble he had throwing the ball. My bad.