The scoreboard will show that Ohio State lost the Fiesta Bowl on Quan Cosby's touchdown with 16 seconds to play. But football games are won or lost over the entire sixty minutes, and Jesse Lamovsky says the Buckeyes lost this one in the first half, a half they controlled in terms of yardage, field position, and time-of-possession, but finished with only a skinny 6-3 lead to show for it. Jesse talks about the missed opportunities that did in the Buckeyes.

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Let's take a look back at the plays that cost the Buckeyes in that fatal first half, when they had a chance to put Texas squarely behind the eight-ball- and couldn't do it.

Dead-Ball Penalties: Ohio State committed two dead-ball penalties in the first half last night, both of which may have cost them points. The first came on the Buckeyes' initial drive. Terrelle Pryor had just scrambled for 17 yards on 2nd-and-19 to put Ohio State in a 3rd

-and-two situation from midfield (the freshman displayed poor field awareness when he stepped out of bounds short of the marker despite having room to run in front of him, a mistake he would make a couple of more times over the course of the game.) On the next play, the Buckeyes were whistled for an illegal substitution, pushing them back five yards. Instead of possibly running for the first down, they had to throw for it, and when Todd Boeckman's long pass to Brian Robiskie fell incomplete, Ohio State was forced to punt.

The second penalty was more costly. Midway through the second quarter, with the score tied 3-3 Ohio State was in another 3rd-and-two, this time from the Texas seven-yard line. This time the Buckeyes were hit with a false start, again putting them out of range to run for the first down. Boeckman's ensuing pass was broken up, and Ohio State settled for a field goal to make it 6-3. The penalty was reminiscent of last year against LSU, when a false start on 1st-and-goal took the steam out of a drive that might have put the Buckeyes up 14-0.

You can't have unforced errors like these against a quality opponent and expect them to not come back and bite you. The fact that the false start came out of a timeout makes it even more egregious. There's no excuse for committing a false start in a neutral-site game, especially after a timeout. Everyone ought to know the snap count, and it isn't as if crowd noise should have been a factor. It was simply a mental mistake, the kind that has badly damaged Ohio State in its last three BCS losses.

The Second Field-Goal Attempt: Late in the first quarter, leading 3-0, Ohio State put together a drive that carried to the Texas 33-yard line, where the Buckeyes were faced with 4th-and-two. Instead of going for the first down, Jim Tressell settled for a 51-yard field goal attempt by Aaron Pettrey, who had nailed a 50-yarder a few moments earlier. This time the snap was botched, and Pettrey's kick was way off. I couldn't understand this decision at the time, and still don't. You only need two yards for the first down. Even if you don't make it, you're still giving your defense nearly seventy yards to work with. You've already asked your kicker to make one fifty-yard attempt, and it's a lot to ask to expect him to make two.

Besides, does a field goal really do Ohio State *that* much good in that situation? Is 6-0 *that* much better than 3-0, especially against a team as explosive as Texas? Not from the standpoint of this Tuesday-morning coach. Like Charlene Shiherlis says, it's risk versus reward, baby. Going for it on fourth down in that situation was worth the risk. Was the reward of a 6-0 lead worth a difficult field-goal attempt, when all the Buckeyes needed for a first down were a couple of yards? Not to me it wasn't. Go for it there. Roll Terrelle Pryor out of the pocket and see what happens. Best case, Ohio State gets the necessary yardage and is in a

position to go up ten points. Worst case, they don't, and Texas's offense still has to drive the length of the field.

Bottom line, there was less of a downside to going for it, than there was upside to kicking. Against Purdue or Northwestern, maybe kicking is the right call. Against Texas in the Fiesta Bowl, this coaching staff should have let its hair down a little bit and gone for the throat. We all know what Pete Carroll would have done in that situation.

What we saw on Monday night, yet again, were the limitations of Tressell-Ball. Playing it close to the Vest (pun intended) and relying on the defense and the kicking game is a nice strategy, if you've got 2002's defense and 2002's kicking game. If you don't, it's a tough way to win a game, especially against an opponent like Texas. I understand Ohio State's offense being limited by having a true freshman quarterback who can't yet make all of the throws. But when you've got a chance to make a momentum-changing play, you have to take it.

I hate to second-guess Jim Tressell, a man who has

forgotten more about football than I'll probably ever learn. But what did the Buckeyes have to lose in that situation by going for the first down?

Missed Opportunity: Ohio State's defense was magnificent throughout the first half, and with 2:25 left, they made a huge play when Thaddeus Gibson sacked Colt McCoy on a fourth-down attempt, giving the Buckeyes the ball at their own 48-yard line, with plenty of time to expand on their 6-3 lead. A great team capitalizes on opportunities like these. Ohio State did not. After picking up one first down, the Buckeyes missed on three pass attempts* and had to punt the ball back to the Longhorns with 56 seconds left in the half. Texas proceeded to drive 76 yards without using a timeout (assisted by a blatant blow to Colt McCoy's helmet by Thad Gibson) before McCoy was intercepted by Anderson Russell at the Ohio State one-yard line at the end of the half. Thanks to the penalties, missed opportunities, and stodgy play-calling, Ohio State had to settle for a 6-3 halftime lead, despite dominating the first thirty minutes.

**- ESPN.com lists the intended receiver on the*

third-down attempt as Dan Potokar. I'm hoping that wasn't an error on the part of the Worldwide Leader. Dan has had to wage a rough battle. Diagnosed with testicular cancer nearly a year ago, he had to fight like hell for survival, as the disease had progressed into his lungs and his brain. Being a survivor of testicular cancer myself, I followed Dan's story pretty closely, and if he was on the field last night, that's a wonderful thing, better than any bowl victory. Physically as well as psychologically, cancer is the ultimate opponent. My hat is off to a young man with uncommon courage and toughness, and I wish him good health and better fortune down the line.

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I don't want to be too tough on the Buckeyes for what happened on Monday night. As a fan, all I can truly ask is for a team to give a good effort, and Ohio State did that. The much-maligned senior class performed with honor and character. The team showed tremendous intestinal fortitude in fighting back from what looked like an insurmountable 17-6 deficit. The Buckeyes left it on the field, gave us an entertaining game, and for that I'm

grateful. And Texas deserves a great deal of credit for making big plays when they absolutely had to be made.

But the chance for a redeeming victory was right there for the Buckeyes, and they couldn't take advantage. And it didn't have to be that way.