Many OSU fans were left scratching their heads the night of the Fiesta Bowl loss to Texas, trying to figure out why Terrelle Pryor kept running out of bounds, and seemed unable to make crisp throws. Dan Wismar was very critical of Pryor in his post game column here on the site, questioning his intensity, and wondering aloud if increased playing time for Todd Boeckman led to sulking from TP. In hindsight, it turns out Pryor was hurt. And in his latest, Buckeye Dan reasseses his take on Pryor, and his thoughts on his performance.

There's not a lot to be said about the OSU-Texas game in the Fiesta Bowl that Jesse and yours truly haven't already committed to pixels...but there is one (rather long-winded, as it turns out) thing to say.

Lots of OSU fans were scratching their heads that night over the performance of Buckeye freshman quarterback Terrelle Pryor in the game. For my part, I feel badly now about having questioned the intensity and attitude of Pryor in my post-game article, in light of what we learned from him after the game ended. And in my conversations with friends and others since the game, it's apparent that a lot of people, even staunch Buckeye rooters, never got the word. And it explains a lot.

And the word is that Terrelle Pryor played the entire Fiesta Bowl with a badly sprained right shoulder. He injured it in practice sometime in the days leading up

to the game, and was quoted after the game as saying the injury "was pretty bad", and that he had "rolled it". Watching the game again (yeah...twice) it was obvious that the shoulder was bandaged or taped, causing his jersey to hang unevenly on him.

I suppose it's to Jim Tressel's credit that he didn't make a big issue out of it after the game, knowing that it would be perceived as a "loser's limp" and an excuse for a disappointing loss. And Pryor didn't dwell on it either, for that matter. The quotes above are about all he had to say about it afterwards.

Now, I've already done my abject apology to the kid here on the TCF discussion boards, for speculating that he may have been pouting about sharing time with Boeckman...or that he lacked sufficient understanding of the intensity required to play football in January. My concern resulted from being baffled by what I was seeing from Pryor, since it was 180 degrees from the kind of intensity we had seen throughout the season. Most glaring were the two or three occasions when he stepped out of bounds on scrambles when several yards of open field remained in front of him, even as the Longhorn defenders approached to lay a hit on him.

And I'm still concerned that there exists out in Buckeye Nation, and nationally as well, an undue perception of Pryor, based on the way he looked in this game, and on the fact that his injury was underreported, both regionally and nationally.

Because it is now clear that the injury was something the OSU coaches were well aware of, and that it was significant enough to require changes to the game plan, specifically Boeckman's increased role in the offensive scheme....something we had seen very rarely since Pryor became the starter in the fourth game. I think it's fair to say the coaches would have preferred not to signal to the opponent what the OSU play call was likely to be, based on which quarterback we had in the game. But Pryor's injury necessitated that signal. Because he simply couldn't throw the ball at all.

It also seems apparent in retrospect that Pryor was acting on instructions from his coaches to avoid unnecessary contact on the sidelines. And it should also be noted that he did not avoid the *necessary* contact at all. In the fourth quarter, with his team behind and his star running back sitting on the bench, Pryor was running option plays and QB draws down the middle of the field, racking up crucial yardage, and taking big shots from Texas defenders. In one of the Buckeyes' two

fourth quarter TD drives, Pryor ripped off gains of 15 and 26 yards on designed rushing plays.

But it was his passing performance that should have been the telltale sign early on that something was physically wrong. Now I'll acknowledge that Pryor is not yet a polished passer as a true freshman (although no less an authority than Mack Brown has said he is light years ahead of where Vince Young was at this stage) but in his roughest passing performances of the season, he had not been this ineffective throwing the ball. In fact, the coaches hardly allowed him the chances to throw the ball, bringing in Boeckman in most every obvious passing situation.

The other two points that I have repeatedly made to critics of Pryor's passing prowess in 2008 are a) that Pryor was spoon-fed his introduction to the passing phase of the OSU offense as the season went along, permitted by play-calling to make just 15 pass attempts per game, an average that dropped to just 12 attempts per game in his last three starts....and b) that the level of sophistication in the OSU passing scheme is somewhere south of your average high school offense. It's an attack that could make Colt McCoy look average. I won't even blame average OSU receivers, because Cosby and Shipley for Texas aren't Michael Crabtree either, and McCoy went off for 414 yards.

Even more of a factor than coaching or passing schemes is simple game experience. Two short years ago these same two teams met in Austin, and the freshman Longhorn quarterback was sacked, harassed, picked off, and completely stymied, scoring just seven points in a decisive 24-7 win for the Buckeyes and their two-year starter Troy Smith. And I don't remember anyone writing off Colt McCoy's career on the basis of that game.

In the two weeks days since the Fiesta Bowl, I've heard OSU fans say Pryor is a "coach killer"...or that he'll never make it as a top college quarterback because he's not a good enough passer...or that he'll fail because he can't read defenses...and so on. As often happens, these people either didn't watch much of Pryor's first nine starts, or are simply bearing the imprint of the last guy to sit on them, basing way too much of their opinion on what they saw on January 5th. And to a man they were completely in the dark a week or more later about Pryor's injury.

That didn't seem quite fair to a young man who sucked it up and played hurt, gained 104 yards in positive rushing yardage, caught a touchdown pass, and

came within an eyelash of beating a top five team, and all with a painful injury to his passing arm. Knowing that doesn't make the sting of losing the game go away. But it does help us understand what we saw that night, and why we saw it.