Starting with this column, Jesse Lamovsky is going to take a look back at the week that was in college football, first centering on Ohio State's last game, then moving on to some odds and ends for the rest of the nation. The Buckeyes got a big-time scare from the Naval Academy, nearly blowing a fifteen-point fourth-quarter lead before hanging on to win, 29-27. Jess gives us his thoughts on that game, and also on the rest of the storylines from the opening weekend of college football.

Starting with this column, I'll take a look back at the week that was in college football, first centering on Ohio State's last game, then moving on to some odds and ends for the rest of the nation. The Buckeyes got a big-time scare from the Naval Academy, nearly blowing a fifteen-point fourth-quarter lead before hanging on to win, 29-27. Running their archaic option offense to near-perfection, the Midshipmen confused Ohio State's defense, while the Buckeye offense moved in fits and starts, struggling to run the ball and continually hurting itself with dropped passes and untimely penalties. Nevertheless, Jim Tressel's team produced enough big plays- by Terrelle Pryor on offense and by Thad Gibson, Kurt Coleman and Brian Rolle on defense- to subdue the feisty Middies and stay unbeaten going into next week's showdown with USC.

Let's talk about the game that was.

Line of Contention: First things first- Navy is a good football team. They don't make mistakes. They don't beat themselves with stupid penalties and turnovers. They run a scheme that is almost impossible to prepare for, and they run it with the crispness and confidence of a team that knows exactly what it is doing. The Midshipmen were disciplined and opportunistic on Saturday and they never gave up the ship, even when it looked hopeless for them. And Ricky Dobbs is one tough hombre.

Okay, now that the sportsmanship quota is filled, we can talk about what Ohio State *didn't* do well on Saturday- specifically, the play of the offensive line, which once again failed to control scrimmage against a smaller, lighter opponent that was also missing its best defender in nose guard Nate Frazier. The Buckeyes ran for just four yards per carry and were stonewalled in a number of short-yardage situations, most notably midway through the fourth quarter when Jim Tressel disdained the field goal on the Navy fifteen and watched Dan Herron get stuffed on fourth-and-two.

To tell you the truth, I've about given up on the offensive line looking halfway decent under Jim Tressel. Nine seasons the Vest has been here, and the Buckeyes haven't once had a top-flight line in any of those seasons. Don't tell me about the rushing numbers put up by Messrs Clarett, Pittman and Wells either- a good running back can make a mediocre offensive line look competent, which is what those guys did by bouncing off tacklers, stiff-arming defenders and making plays on their own, with precious little help from the big guys with the big numbers. The Buckeyes just haven't gotten it figured out up front for years now, and don't look for that to change any time soon.

About that fourth-and-two: Running Dan Herron up the middle probably wasn't the best call in that situation- I'd like to see Mr. Pryor outside the pocket there- but it was an attitude call on the part of the Vest. Ohio State had been in second-and-three on that possession before Brandon Saine and Dan Herron had gained one yard on back-to-back carries that were blown up at the line of scrimmage. Tressel, in my humble opinion, was challenging his offense- in particular his offensive line. With a fifteen-point lead, the clock, and field position in his hand, he was putting it on them to get three yards in three plays. And of

course, they couldn't do it.

Watching the play unfold, I was reminded of Tressel's fourth-and-one call on his own twenty-nine late in the first half of the BCS title game against Florida. In that case the Buckeyes had also just been stopped on a third-and-short, and by going for it Tressel seemed to be challenging his team, testing to see if they were man enough to get the yardage. The score, field position and time of the games were very much different, but the intent, the challenge, seemed to be the same. Sadly enough, so was the result.

I'm not pretending to be Joe Bugal or anything: but I have to ask- what is with Ohio State's blocking scheme? Why are they asking their ponderous, 300-plus pound guards to pull so often when the operative thing would be to simply send them straight forward? Am I missing something here? Again, I'm no expert, but it looks to me like there's disconnect between Ohio State's offensive-line personnel and what they're being asked to execute. You want to run finesse zone schemes? Run it with smaller, more mobile linemen- not wide-bodies with their drawers sagging round their butts. At least, that's what I think.

On the Bauserman Series: Didn't pay it no nevermind. Ohio State was in control at 17-7 and Bauserman moved the team decently, getting a field goal out of his possession. The game shouldn't have been that close. I didn't get the quarterback draw, though. First with Todd Boeckman, now with Bauserman, the Vest has a bad habit of calling Terrelle Pryor plays for quarterbacks who aren't Terrelle Pryor.

Play of the Game: Without a doubt, it was Brian Rolle's 99-yard return of Navy's two-point conversion attempt with 2:15 remaining and the Buckeyes clinging to a 29-27 lead. The most impressive aspect of Rolle's big play wasn't the interception itself- Ricky Dobbs threw it right to him- but the way he ran away from Navy fullback Alexander Teich, who had the angle on the undersized linebacker at around the Ohio State ten-yard line but couldn't keep up. Thad Gibson's second-quarter chase down-and-strip of Dobbs, an awesome individual play

which set up a touchdown to make it 17-7 Buckeyes, gets honorable mention.

Strange Call: Young Mr. Dobbs had just gashed Ohio State's defense for a twenty-four yard touchdown scamper off the option to make it 29-27 with 2:23 left. The Midshipmen were running their quaint offense to near-perfection and only needed to run it three more yards to knot the score and further spook the shell-shocked crowd at the Horseshoe. But instead of going for two with the option, Navy threw for it out of a spread formation. Dobbs fired it right between the three and the six on Brian Rolle's jersey, and the rest was history. I can't fathom why in the biggest play of the game, Ken Niumatalolo didn't dance with what brung him.

Heroes

Terrelle Pryor: TP had an efficient afternoon, throwing for 173 yards and a touchdown on 14-of-21 attempts and rushing for thirty-one yards on six carries with another score. He wasn't quite as accurate as one would like- he missed a wide-open Duron Carter on a third-down play in the second half, forced Jake Ballard to make a leaping grab on a pass which, if delivered in the breadbasket, could have resulted in a big play, and airmailed Dane Sanzenbacher on the fourth-quarter interception that set the Academy up for its last score- but he made some nice throws as well, and again displayed the escape-ability that makes him one of college football's most exciting players.

Kurt Coleman: The better half of Ohio State's bookend senior safeties had nine tackles, a forced fumble and an interception on Saturday, and was probably the best defensive player on the field for either team.

Duron Carter: Cris's kid showed soft hands and good balance on his three receptions Saturday, just like the old man. He didn't do anything spectacular, but it was nice to see a true freshman out there making plays in his first-ever collegiate game.

Goats

Anderson Russell: Apparently, no one told young Mr. Russell that the operative thing to do late in a game in which you're winning and the opponent needs touchdowns is *keep everything in front of you.* In a painful reminder of his fatal blown coverage at last year's Fiesta Bowl, the lesser half of Ohio State's bookend senior safeties was toasted for an 85-yard touchdown that cut the Buckeye lead to 29-21 late in the fourth quarter.

Austin Spitler: Making his first career start, the fifth-year senior looked painfully slow against Navy and will no doubt look painfully slower against Joe McKnight and the rest of USC's armada of tailbacks.

Taurian Washington: The junior receiver had two critical drops in the first half of Saturday's game and finished without a reception. Washington has speed, a quality that the Buckeyes don't have in abundance, and he needs to perform a whole lot better to make this offense at least semi-potent.

Next Week's Opponent: USC

My mascot of antiquity can beat up your mascot of antiquity: The Trojans spotted the San Jose State Spartans a 3-0 lead at the end of the first quarter, than ran up the final 56 points unanswered. With the running game rolling up 343 yards, true freshman Matt Barkley pecked away at San Jose for 233 yards and a score on 15-of-19 attempts. Now, to be clear, San Jose State is not nearly as good as Navy. Still, the danger of Joe McKnight and Co. getting whatever they want in the middle of Ohio State's defense and letting their freshman quarterback luxuriate in the comfort of second-and-short is very real. It'll be the age-old story in Columbus next Saturday: whoever runs and stops the run most effectively will probably win.

Ex-Buckeye I'd most wish to see on Ohio State's offense next week: Walt Harris.

Ex-Buckeye I'd most wish to see on defense next week: Dan Wilkinson.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- BYU-Oklahoma: In terms of importance and closeness of outcome, it's got to be BYU's 14-13 victory over third-ranked Oklahoma, the most significant win for the Cougars since Ty Detmer shot down top-ranked Miami in the 1990 season opener. The reverberations from this game will be felt all season-most especially if BYU goes on to run the table against a pretty respectable schedule.

Story of the Week- Greg Paulus's debut at Syracuse: With his skinny basketball player's body, Greg Paulus didn't look like a guy who was a highly sought-after prep quarterback at Syracuse-area Christian Brothers Academy four years ago. But at times he played that way during his first game directing the Orange, completing 19-of-31 for 167 yards and at one point leading a charge of seventeen unanswered points against visiting Minnesota. Still in full-feathered Duke point-guard mode, Paulus cajoled officials, exhorted teammates, and did everything but slap the Carrier Dome turf as the Orange battled from behind to take a 20-14 halftime lead. Unfortunately, enthusiasm wasn't enough: with the score tied in overtime, Paulus threw an ill-advised pass which was intercepted, setting up the Gophers for the game-winning field goal. Nevertheless, the young man performed well, considering he hadn't thrown a football in anger in nearly half-a-decade.

Big Winners

Brigham Young: The Cougars took a monstrous step in the BCS race by

knocking out Sam Bradford and smothering Oklahoma, 14-13. There are three games against ranked teams remaining- Florida State, TCU and Utah- and all of them are in Provo. I know it's early to speculate, but if BYU finishes undefeated, Oklahoma bounces back and finishes in the top ten or fifteen, and the other dominos fall just so, the Cougars are going to have a legitimate shot to appear not just in a BCS game, but in the title game itself.

Michigan: The stock shots of stunned Wolverine fans with their hands gripped to their heads weren't in evidence on Saturday. Freshman Tate Forcier did his best Rick Leach impression, throwing for 179 yards and three scores while running for thirty-seven more as the Maize & Blue dominated Western Michigan, 31-7. The Broncos, with their excellent quarterback Tim Hiller, were supposed to give Michigan problems- but this one was over at halftime. An excellent start of the season for our buddies up North, especially considering the turmoil that gripped their program the past week.

Cincinnati: So much for Rutgers as my preseason Big East title favorite. The defending-champion Bearcats had something to say about that as they tore apart the Knights, 47-15. Tony Pike hit 20-of-25 passes for 286 yards in the first half alone, leading UC to a 31-7 halftime lead. Despite winning the Big East and appearing in a BCS bowl last season, Brian Kelly's team started this season outside the Top 25. They enter the AP rankings this week at number 23 and have a chance to generate serious buzz in two weeks when they head to Corvallis to take on Oregon State.

New SEC Coaches: Lane Kiffin, Gene Chizek and Dan Mullen started their tenures with blowout wins, as Tennessee throttled Western Kentucky 63-7, Auburn thumped Louisiana Tech 37-13 and Mississippi State dominated Jackson State 45-7. This Saturday Chizek and Mullen will go for win number two at the other's expense, as Auburn and Mississippi State meet for the first time since their dismal 3-2 struggle last September.

Big Losers

Oklahoma: There are a lot of games left to play, but the Sooners have already said "later" to their BCS title aspirations with their stunning loss to BYU. With a stated two-to-four-week recovery time for his sprained shoulder, Sam Bradford probably won't be back until the Red River Shootout with Texas on October 17, and in the meantime his team, already without Jermaine Gresham and saddled with a young and inexperienced offensive line, has to go to Miami to take on a seemingly revived Hurricanes team. Home tilts against Tulsa and Baylor might not be cakewalks either.

Oregon: Other than being whipped by a Boise team on which they'd sworn revenge, seeing their new coach upstaged by their old coach on national television, and having arguably their best player suspended for the season for bitch-slapping an opposing player after the final gun, Thursday night went rather swimmingly for the Ducks.

Illinois: The Illini got toasted for 319 yards by a quarterback making his first start (in all fairness, Blaine Gabbert wasn't expected to be chopped liver), got a mediocre performance out of Juice Williams, and got run out of the Building Formerly Known as the TWA Dome by underdog Missouri, 37-9. Ron Zook's troops had better handle business against Illinois State next week, because their following four opponents are Ohio State, Penn State and Michigan State.

The ACC: It was not a good opening Saturday on the Atlantic Coast, which came up short against every level of Division I competition. Virginia Tech's come-from-ahead loss to Alabama in the weekend headliner was accompanied by Maryland's crushing defeat at Cal, Wake Forest's home loss to Baylor and N.C. State's ugly setback to South Carolina, while Virginia and Duke dropped games to FCS opponents William and Mary and Richmond. Clemson's 37-14 rout of Middle Tennessee State was the conference's only win over an FBS team.

This Week: Ohio State hosts USC. Dan Wismar and I will break down the showdown on Buckeye Friday, so tune in.