There aren't a whole lot of people on this planet that know this Ohio State football team better than our own Dan Wismar and Jesse Lamovsky, and there are none whose opinions I respect more. Jesse is not happy about Saturday night's loss in the Shoe to USC, which he blames coach Jim Tressel squarely for. And in his latest Weekend That Was piece, Jesse explains his thoughts on the loss, and also takes a look back everything that transpired in week two of the college football season.

There are no moral victories in football. Keep that in mind, if you must, as you digest Ohio State's 18-15 loss to USC in the Horseshoe on Saturday night.

Ohio State handed USC this game. Just like they handed it to Texas in 2005; just like they handed it to Texas in last year's Fiesta Bowl. They handed it to the Trojans with offensive breakdowns that turned touchdowns into field goals and field goals into punts. They put too much on a defense that groaned under the weight of second chance after second chance handed, silver platter-style, to USC's offense. Ohio State's defense essentially gave up one touchdown in this game. At home, with almost total domination of field position, that really should be enough. It wasn't. And you can lay that almost 100 percent on the offense.

You could go further back than the Texas game in 2005. You could go back to the Bowling Green and San Diego State games in 2003. You could go back to the Penn State and Michigan games in 2002. You could go back to the UCLA game in 2001. Games where the defense played plenty well enough to win, and either barely did, or didn't, in spite of a misfiring, counterproductive offense. Ohio State needed a 100-yard interception return to beat San Diego State in '03. They needed Chris Gamble's interception return to beat Penn State in '02. They needed two turnovers inside their own territory to beat Michigan in '02. Against UCLA in '01 they got a blocked punt for a touchdown and lost. There's little to no margin for

error in these games, even against inferior opposition- and against the likes of USC, the margin just isn't enough.

It isn't a moral victory to stay close with USC. Not at home, at night, with an electric crowd and a true freshman quarterback on the other side of the football, and not when you're Ohio State. That's a game the Buckeyes had to win; it's a game they should have won. And they gave it away.

Jim Tressel had a problem here. Just about every big game Ohio State has lost since 2005, with the possible exception of the loss to LSU in the '08 title game, can be laid squarely at the feet of the offense. Not only does the Vest pick the players and coaches to run the offense, he calls the plays. His quarterback didn't play well at all on Saturday night- we'll get into that directly- but Ohio State's offensive problems- the lackluster line play, the lack of tempo through dead-ball penalties and late-ticking play clocks, the conservatism to the point of inertia- have been chronic since long before Terrelle Pryor arrived on campus. There is one common denominator, and it's Jim Tressel.

I very much doubt you're ever going to get the Vest to hand over play-calling duties to an imported coordinator. He's an offensive coach, and calling plays is his prerogative as such. So we're going to continue to get these types of performances. Against the Navies and the San Diego States, it will be good enough- if barely. Against opponents with equal or superior talent, it usually won't be. Whether it'll be good enough to keep knocking off Michigan and win Big Ten titles remains to be seen. Judging by what transpired in Ann Arbor on Saturday afternoon, it may not be, sooner rather than later. And when that sooner comes, some tough decisions will have to be made.

Not exactly a marquee performance: There's no way to sugarcoat it- Terrelle Pryor did not play well at all on Saturday night. The sophomore completed just 11-of-25 passes for 177 yards, threw a horrible interception that led directly to USC's first touchdown, committed two delay-of-game penalties and an intentional grounding, looked skittish in the pocket, and didn't come close to taking full

advantage of the great field position his defense gave him all night. Ohio State was 4-of-13 on third-downs and got only thirteen points out of three first-and-goal situations, and in part that's on the quarterback. It was an ugly display by a young man who has gotten a LOT of hype.

The first in a series of lost opportunities: At the 14:56 mark of the second period Ohio State had out-gained USC 138 to 0, had controlled the ball for well over ten minutes, and had a 10-7 lead to show for it. The Buckeyes' chances were largely predicated on getting off to a fast start and putting young Matt "Cobra Kai" Barkley in an early hole. But they couldn't take advantage, they left the Trojans in the game, and they paid for it.

The score should have been 14-0 at that point. Terrelle Pryor had gifted USC its first touchdown on a pass that hit Trojan linebacker Chris Galippo squarely between the 5 and 4 on his white road jersey. With the score tied 7-7 and Ohio State with third-and-goal from inside the one late in the first period, the Vest ignored the possibility of a sneak from his six-foot-six quarterback and called the standard slow-motion deep-handoff to Dan Herron, who was stuffed for a short loss. Instead of going for it on fourth down, the Buckeyes kicked the field goal to make it 10-7.

Coach Tressel's decision revealed in stark relief the difference between him and Pete Carroll, who went for it on fourth down four times during the game, including the play that resulted in USC's first touchdown. It shouldn't have come down to fourth-and-goal anyway. There's no reason the Buckeyes shouldn't have called for the quarterback sneak when they were two feet from the goal-line. And if the play call on third down was poor, it was augmented by the play call on fourth down which was, frankly, gutless. You've got USC on the run, you have an opportunity to make them take it all the way in just to tie, if you don't score you still have them backed up in the shadows of their own goalposts- and you kick the field goal? Give me a break. You don't win like that.

An odd way to end the half: With 1:49 remaining in the first half Ohio State took

over on its own 27-yard line; still leading 10-7 thanks to a USC field-goal attempt that doinked off the crossbar and landed in the end zone. The Trojans only had one timeout remaining and it seemed self-evident that the smart thing to do would be to take one shot downfield and if that didn't work, milk the clock down to the nub and take the lead into the dressing room. Here the Vest's innate conservatism would have stood him in good stead. Unfortunately, he picked this inopportune point to go all William O. Douglas on us. Tressel called two pass plays, both incomplete, and punted back to the Trojans with fifty-five seconds remaining. Thanks in large part to USC's biggest offensive play of the night, a twenty-nine yard run by Stafon Johnson, the Trojans rallied to the field goal that tied the game going into halftime. It was a very strange time to not play safety-first football.

The defense couldn't rest: Ohio State's defense certainly wasn't the problem. Led by great performances from Cam Heyward and Brian Rolle, the defense was fast and active, containing Joe McKnight, getting reasonably good pressure on Matt Barkley and keeping Ohio State in control of field position virtually the entire game. Other than a stop on USC's second-to-last possession, you really can't ask for a better performance from that side of the ball. It's a shame their efforts went for naught. Ohio State's defenders deserved a better fate.

Another opportunity lost: With a little over nine minutes remaining, a botched long snap on a USC punt resulted in a safety, giving Ohio State a 12-10 lead. DeVier Posey then put together a nifty 24-yard return of the ensuing free kick, landing the Buckeyes on the USC 43-yard line. They drove to a first-and-goal at the ten, with a chance to go up 19-10 and, given the way the Trojans offense was struggling, all but put the game away right then and there. Instead Terrelle Pryor fumbled an ill-advised option pitch then, after a completion, under-threw an open Dane Sanzenbacher in the end zone. Ohio State was forced to settle for another field goal and a 15-10 lead.

And *another* opportunity lost: Ohio State began its penultimate drive of the game at the USC 45-yard line with 10:28 to play. Moments later they faced a third-and-seven at the Trojans thirty-two. Already within Aaron Pettrey's range, it seemed smart to run the ball and set up the field goal that would make it 18-10

and essentially force USC to score twice just to tie. The Vest called for the pass, Pryor was sacked back at the thirty-six, and out came the punt team.

The decision to punt was reasonable. The field-goal attempt would have been from fifty-three yards, the outer limits of Pettrey's range, and a miss would have set USC up with excellent field position, still down only five points. Better to make them drive the field (which they promptly did.) The decision to pass on third down, however, was questionable. Pryor had limited success throwing on third down all night- he was one-of-seven in those situations- and getting a field goal was of paramount importance at that point in the game. Just as he had at the end of the first half, the Vest passed when he should have run.

And that late Ohio State two-minute drill: The less said the better. That was a *s orry*
excuse for a hurry-up offense.

Tempo, tempo, tempo: One thing I touched on earlier, and which bears repeating, is Ohio State's lack of tempo on offense. The Buckeyes all too often fail to get into a rhythm, because all too often their offensive proceedings are being interrupted, by false starts, illegal procedures, delays-of-game and the like, or slowed by an almost complete running down of the play clock on play after play. It's tough to build momentum when you're constantly shooting yourself in the foot or hurrying just to get the snap off. It isn't just that Ohio State's offense is stodgy and conservative- it's sloppy and prone to unforced errors as well. There is no reason to incur multiple false-start penalties at home, when the crowd isn't a factor. Yet the Buckeyes committed two last night, in addition to the two they committed against Navy. Plain and simple, these are signs of bad coaching on the offensive side of the ball.

More and more, the contemporary Buckeyes remind me of Tony Dungy's Tampa Bay Buccaneers teams of the millennium. Those teams played fantastic defense, were solid on special teams, but were downright horrible on offense. Some of the players on those Bucs teams- most notably Warren Sapp- believed there was a

double-standard of accountability; that the offense was allowed to get away with sloppy, uninspired play while constant perfection was demanded out of the defense. Eventually that state of affairs became untenable; Dungy was let go, and replaced by a coach in Jon Gruden who set the same standards for the offense as for the defense. I'm not necessarily advocating such a drastic step here... but something has got to give. Ohio State can't play every big game with the expectation that the defense and kicking game is going to carry 95 percent of the load. It just doesn't work.

Not a prediction, but: I wouldn't be shocked if Ohio State and USC met again in Pasadena on January 1st. I'm not going to pick a winner in that re-match... let's just say I don't think the Trojans will be limited to 18 points again.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- Michigan-Notre Dame: A couple of revivified programs hooked up in a sensational duel at the Big House in Ann Arbor on Saturday, combining for seventy-two points and more than nine hundred yards of total offense, and the issue wasn't settled until Tate Forcier found Greg Mathews in the end one with eleven seconds remaining. Forcier was sensational, throwing for 240 yards and two touchdowns and running for seventy yards and a touchdown. Jimmy Clausen threw for 336 yards and three touchdowns, with both of his primary receivers- Golden Tate and Malcolm Floyd- topping the one-hundred yard mark. It was the kind of game neither team deserved to lose, but Michigan won it, and with Eastern Michigan and Indiana coming to Ann Arbor in the next two weeks, the Wolverines have a great shot at surpassing their 2008 win total before the end of September.

As for the Irish, I like their chances when USC comes to South Bend on October 17th. I was not particularly impressed with the Trojans, and although Matt Barkley will improve as the season goes on, he'll be hard-pressed to prevail in a shootout with Clausen, Floyd, Tate and Company. Notre Dame will have a legitimate shot to win that game. You heard it here first (unless, of course, you didn't.)

Better score more than fifteen next Saturday, Bucks: After the performance put on by Toledo's Aaron Opelt last Saturday, Ohio State might just want to crank things up offensively when the Buckeyes and Rockets meet next weekend in Cleveland Browns Stadium. Opelt shredded Colorado for 319 passing yards and four touchdowns on just twenty-three attempts and added 109 rushing yards on eight carries with two touchdowns, including a 61-yard burst, as the Rockets routed the Buffaloes, 54-38 Friday night at the Glass Bowl.

Butt-kicking of the week: Oklahoma appeared in the BCS Championship Game last season, while Idaho State limped to a 1-11 record and last-place finish in the Big Sky Conference. So it was no surprise that their match-up in Norman last Saturday turned into somewhat of a one-sided affair, even with Sam Bradford in street clothes. The Sooners out-gained the Bengals 564-44, held them to -22 yards rushing, and steamrolled to a 64-0 victory. Idaho State didn't run a single play in Oklahoma territory the entire game.

Hot Hand: Thus far in 2009, Notre Dame's Jimmy Clausen has completed 66.7 percent of his passes, is averaging 10.85 yards an attempt, and has thrown seven touchdown passes with no interceptions. Best of all, after sustaining 56 sacks in his first two seasons, Clausen has yet to be sacked this season.

Any Which Way You Can: Cincinnati's Marshwan Gilyard found diverse ways to find the end zone in his team's 70-3 rout of Southeast Missouri State. The senior receiver returned a punt 53 yards for a touchdown, tallied another score on a one-yard plunge, and scored twice more on pass receptions.

Winners of the Week

Washington: After fifteen consecutive losses, the Huskies finally got on the winning side of the ledger as they thumped hapless Idaho, 42-23. Jake Locker has been impressive thus far, completing sixty percent of his passes with five touchdowns to one interception and adding another touchdown on the ground. Coach Steve Sarkisian should celebrate too long, though: his former employer USC comes to Seattle next Saturday.

Houston: The Cougars got their first win over a top-five team

since 1984 when they went into Stillwater and stunned fifth-ranked Oklahoma State, 45-35. Houston entered the rankings week at number 21; they haven't finished a season ranked in the AP poll since 1990, when David Klingler was running up the score as the master of the Run n' Shoot.

SMU: Winners of one game in 2007 and ‘08 and losers of twenty-one straight against FBS foes, the Mustangs moved to 2-0 on the '09 season with a 35-33 victory over Conference-USA rival Alabama-Birmingham. It may be premature to start the countdown to the program's first bowl bid since the pre-death penalty year of 1984, but there's reason to be optimistic in University Park.

Minnesota: Playing outdoors at home for the first time since November 21st, 1981, the Gophers opened up TCF Bank Stadium with a flourish, defeating Air Force 20-13 in front of a sellout crowd. Next week Minnesota hosts California, which has outscored Maryland and Eastern Washington 111-20 in two lopsided victories.

BYU: So much for a letdown following the big win over Oklahoma. The Cougars rolled into New Orleans and tore apart hapless Tulane, 54-3, piling up 527 total yards and picking up 35 first downs.

Losers of the Week

Oklahoma State: A week after getting the program's biggest win in years, the Cowboys gave up twenty-one fourth-quarter points and fell at home to Houston, 45-35.

Michigan State: The Spartans blew two fourth-quarter leads, gave up a successful on-side kick, and were beaten at home on a last-second field goal by Central Michigan, 29-27. It was Sparty's first loss to a MAC opponent since September 12th, 1992, when these same Central Michigan Chippewas came into East Lansing and surprised George Perles's team, 24-20.

Colorado: After being beaten by mediocre Colorado State in Boulder, then being humiliated by a MAC school, the Buffs are 0-2- and Dan Hawkins is in major trouble. After what should be an easy game against Wyoming, Colorado has to go on the road to face West Virginia and Texas- not an easy

slate for a coach on the hottest of hot seats.

Ball State: Remember 2008, when the Cardinals rolled to an undefeated regular season? That was only a year ago, but it must seem like an eternity in Muncie, after BSU fell to 0-2 with a home loss to FCS opponent New Hampshire on Saturday.

Connecticut: The Huskies entered the fourth quarter with a 10-0 lead over 19th-ranked North Carolina. They then collapsed, giving up the tying points on consecutive Tarheel possessions, then were hit with a safety on a holding call in the end zone to lose, 12-10. After allowing North Carolina 142 total yards in the first three periods, Connecticut's defense allowed 126 in the fourth quarter to let a golden opportunity at an upset slip away.

Next week: Ohio State takes on Toledo in Cleveland Browns Stadium. Buckeye Dan Wismar and I will talk about that game, and the USC loss, at length on the Buckeye Friday podcast.