Saturday's 38-0 evisceration of the Toledo Rockets at Cleveland Browns Stadium doesn't quite remove the bad taste of USC from the mouth of the Buckeye Fan, but it'll do for a start. Showing no signs of demoralization from their last-second loss to the Trojans, Ohio State played aggressively on both sides of the football in recording its first shutout over an FBS opponent since the 2006 season. In his latest, Jesse looks back at the Toledo win, and all the other happenings from the past weekend of college football.

Saturday's 38-0 evisceration of the Toledo Rockets at Cleveland Browns Stadium doesn't quite remove the bad taste of USC from the mouth of the Buckeye Fan, but it'll do for a start. Showing no signs of demoralization from their last-second loss to the Trojans, Ohio State played aggressively on both sides of the football in recording its first shutout over an FBS opponent since the 2006 season. In a game like this, it isn't necessarily about winning; winning is a given. It's about *how* you win, and for the most part the Buckeyes won it the right way, getting a solid performance from Terrelle Pryor and an outstanding performance from a defense that more and more looks like the best we've seen around these parts since the hallowed season of 2002.*

Welcome back, Silver Bullets: Its official, folks (or m- the 2009 Ohio State Buckeyes defense is *nasty*. Jim Heacock's defenders play fast, play with a chip, and tend to arrive at the football in a bad mood and with bad intent. They made life extremely difficult for Toledo quarterback Aaron Opelt, who was intercepted once, sacked twice, and blasted countless other times; I hope for his sake the young man watched NFL football on Sunday from a safety of a whirlpool. As is becoming usual, Cameron Heyward applied much of the pressure, backed up by aggressive performances from Nathan Williams, Brian Rolle, Ross Homan and Kurt Coleman. This defense is

legit, and anyone who doesn't think Ohio State has the speed to match up with the nation's elite would do well to watch these guys fly around the football for sixty minutes.

*- I know, I know- what about 2005? Right now the Buckeyes are generating a pass rush with their front more than they did four years ago, and there's nothing better for a defense than the ability to rush the passer with three and four only. It opens up everything else.

Speaking of Jim Heacock: All of a sudden he doesn't look like such a bad coach, now does he? A defensive coordinator is only as good as his front four, and after a lengthy run of relative mediocrity, Ohio State has an excellent one. Really, Heacock's MO isn't much different from that of Mark Dantonio- rely on the defensive line to apply most of the pressure while the back seven drops into coverage. The short gains are conceded and made as painful as possible; the occasional blitz is dialed up, but for the most part it's up to the big guys in the trenches to get to the quarterback and shut off the running lanes. When the front four isn't doing either proficiently, the scheme doesn't look so sound (see the Florida and LSU title games.) When it is, you get the kind of performance we saw last Saturday and in the USC game.

Give him a whole strip of Buckeye leaves for that one: Playmaking hasn't been a problem for Kurt Coleman this season, and on Saturday the senior safety made the biggest play of the game, the one that preserved the shutout. Early in the fourth quarter, with Ohio State in command 31-0, Toledo's Opelt hit Eric Page with an aerial inside the five-yard line. Page probably could have scored had he just gone forward after the catch, but he stutter-stepped, Coleman tore the football from his grasp right at the goal line, and Ross Homan jumped on it in the end zone to give it back to the Buckeyes. It looked like Page caught Coleman in his rearview and tried to avoid the contact.

Kind of a bounce-back: Statistically, and of course scoreboard-wise, Terrelle Pryor's performance on Saturday more than filled the bill. Pryor was 17-of-28

passing for 262 yards and three touchdowns, including a 76-yard bomb to Dane Sanzenbacher to open the scoring less than two minutes in. He added 110 yards on twelve carries with a touchdown and most importantly was 7-of-10 passing on third downs, a major step forward from his awful 1-of-7 performance against USC. 372 total yards is nothing to scoff at, even against the defensively challenged likes of Toledo... but there were still recurrences some of the same issues that have plagued the youngster since he arrived in Columbus. Two of Pryor's passes were intercepted, including a first-quarter pick that was basically thrown up for grabs inside the Toledo ten-yard line. His accuracy was a bit spotty in places as well.

One big hand per hour: The fine Ohio State blog Eleven Warriors has bestowed the nickname "LeBron in Cleats" upon Terrelle Pryor, and like LeBron with his heat-check three-pointers, Terrelle is always going for the big play, the knockout punch, sometimes in lieu of the smaller but safer play. On his first interception, thrown at the end of a long rollout to the left, Pryor had Jake Ballard open underneath but chose to throw deep to a double-covered Ray Small. Sometimes the big play simply isn't there; hopefully at some point LeBron in Cleats learns that instinctively.

Take the odd-numbered Interstate, not the even-numbered: Terrelle's other counterproductive idiosyncrasy involves his running- specifically, his tendency to run laterally instead of forward, again in search of the big play. Oftentimes he'll have certain yardage north and south but will eschew it in favor of going east or west in search of cutback lanes that might or might not be there. Here is where Terrelle can take a lesson from God's Quarterback down in Gainesville, who understands he's built like a brick shithouse and runs accordingly- right up the gut. Terrelle Pryor is 6'6", 245 pounds (or 235, or 240- like LeBron, his exact weight is a matter of Paul Bunyan-like conjecture) and his size and momentum are good for a few yards just going forward. When you're that big, you don't need to cut back against the grain like a scat-back. Just plow straight ahead. The yards are going to be there every time.

Where be your jibes now: I'm not going to call anyone out, least of all my brothers-in-arms here at the Cleveland Fan, but there has been some criticism of Dane Sanzenbacher on our message boards; some rather noisy whispering that

perhaps he's a little too slow, a little too *white*, if you will, to play a proper field-stretching role in Ohio State's offense. Well, stretching the field certainly wasn't Dane's problem on Saturday: he caught five passes for 128 yards on the day with two touchdowns, including the season-long 76-yarder to open the scoring. He didn't look slow when running away from the Toledo secondary, that's for sure. Every good offense needs a guy like Dane: tough, good hands, good routes, unafraid to go across the middle and make the catch in traffic. He reminds me of another Caucasian receiver with soft hands and sneaky speed: Brian Brennan. I like Dane a lot- respect his courage and appreciate his talent. If he's a liability, I'd love to see what an asset looks like.

The U.S. Army Presents- Teammates: True freshman Jordan Hall got his first bit of duty late in Saturday's game, and Terrelle Pryor's teammate at Jeanette High School made the most of it. Looking like Pepe Pearson both in his number 29 and slashing style, Hall hit the holes with speed, made slicing moves at the second level, and delivered with 44 yards on seven impressive carries. Without a bell cow at tailback Tressel seems to be feeling around for someone who can tote the damn thing forward on a semi-regular basis and in the process is building a small stable of "micro-backs" *a la* Hank Stram with the late ‘60s Chiefs. He is also giving them Chris Well's plays, of course, which makes a great deal of sense. You get the feeling the Vest is much more comfortable with a tailback whose number he can call up to forty times if he has to.

More of this formation- please: Also making its first appearance of the season in the Buckeye offense was the read-option, which was employed with some success in 2008 but had been mothballed this season up until last Saturday. Ohio State got some solid gains out of the formation, and hopefully the Vest will continue to dial it up as the Buckeyes move into the Big Ten portion of the schedule.

Good football? In Cleveland? The quasi-road game at Cleveland Browns Stadium was, as expected, a rousing success. More than 71,000 fans, the vast majority decked out in scarlet, packed the Lakefront to watch the game, the first

played by the Buckeyes in Cleveland since 1991. Of course, getting a home game moved from Columbus to Cleveland is completely out of the question, and should be. But I'd love to see Ohio State play more neutral-site or "road" games here, perhaps against a BCS-level opponent like, say, Pitt.

Around the Nation

Game of the Week- Washington-USC: The Huskies got arguably their biggest win for the program since the 2001 Rose Bowl when they outlasted USC, 16-13, on a last-second field goal by Erik Folk. Facing a Trojan defense that admittedly was banged-up, Jake Locker was nails in leading a 63-yard drive to the winning kick. The junior converted a 3rd-and-15 with a 21-yard strike to Jermaine Kearse, picked up a 3rd-and-2 with a scramble, and hit Kearse again with a 19-yard rollout pass to put Washington in field-goal range. From the see-sawing scoreboard to Locker's final-minute heroics to the crowd of purple-clad celebrants that stormed the Husky Stadium field after the final gun it was, quite simply, one whale of a college football game.

Sam Who? Oklahoma's Landry Jones looked decidedly Bradford-like on Saturday, as he tied a record for freshman quarterbacks with six touchdown passes to go with 336 yards passing in his team's 45-0 demolition of Tulsa. It'll get tougher in two weeks when the Sooners and their diaper-dandy field general head down to Dade County to take on a speedy Miami team, although there is a chance Bradford could be back for that game.

It isn't a win over USC, but it's a start: Prior to Saturday's meeting with Michigan State, Notre Dame had dropped six consecutive home games to the Spartans and hadn't beaten them in South Bend since 1993. That onerous dry spell is now over, after Jimmy Clausen threw for 300 yards and led his team to a come-from-behind 33-30 victory. Unfortunately, the milestone victory came with a heavy price tag: stud receiver Michael Floyd broke his collarbone early in the proceedings and is expected to miss the remainder of the regular season.

Where are the dominators? Once upon a time, not too long ago, giants strode the college football landscape, causing tremors wherever they went. Iconic teams like the 1995 Nebraska Cornhuskers, 2001 Miami Hurricanes and 2004 USC Trojans owned the sport, abusing opponents both lofty and lowly. Of the twelve National Champions from 1994-2005, ten boasted perfect records.

Those days are gone. In the last three seasons, no major-college team has gone through the regular season and postseason with an undefeated record. The last three BCS Championships have been won by teams with at least one loss on their schedule; in 2007, LSU won the title with *two* losses. There are no super-teams in this day and age, and the contenders to that distinction all seem to have insuperable flaws: USC annually melts down against an inferior Pac-10 opponent, Oklahoma is road kill in bowl games, and Ohio State can't buy a win against an elite foe. Florida has the best chance of becoming the game's preeminent power, but the Gators have yet to pull off an undefeated season and didn't exactly look overwhelming in their 23-13 victory over Tennessee on Saturday. There are a lot of very good teams in the country, but there don't seem to be any great ones.

So what are we left with? Another BCS mess, most likely. It'd be nice to see a clear-cut 1-vs-2 battle like we had with Ohio State-Miami and Texas-USC. Without a tournament, it's the purest form of National Championship Game, and more often than not those match-ups turn into classic struggles. But barring some surprises- like, say, Florida *and* California running the table- we're not going to get it.

Winners of the Week

Miami: It might be a little early to declare that the Hurricanes are back, but they're certainly doing a good job weathering the storm of their early-season schedule. Not only is Randy Shannon's team 2-0 in the wake of a 33-17 domination of Georgia Tech , they're 2-0 in the ACC. The Hurricanes can get to 3-0 with a win next week in Blacksburg, than Oklahoma invades Dolphins Stadium. The Sooners whipped Miami 51-13 in Norman two years ago, and the re-match is a major litmus test for the Hurricane program in general and Randy Shannon in particular.

Washington: A Huskies team revived by the presence of new head coach Steve Sarkisian and the healthy return of Jake Locker moved to 2-1 on the season with a stunning 16-13 victory over USC. U-Dub made all of the big plays down the stretch offensively and defensively in knocking off the Trojans for the first time since the 2001 season. It's a little too early to be smelling roses in rainy Seattle, but it's clear that, while they may not be all the way back, the Huskies are definitely moving in the right direction.

Everyone in the Pac-10 except USC: For the first time since very early in the decade, the Pacific Coast seems to be up for grabs after USC's loss to Washington last Saturday. Except for the Trojans- and Washington State- everyone in the conference looks considerably improved from last season, which should make for a very interesting autumn out West.

Boise State: Not so much by virtue of their 51-34 conquest of Fresno- that outcome was expected- but by the catastrophe that befell BYU on Saturday. With one of their toughest road tests out of the way, all the Broncos need to do to probably secure a BCS spot is just keep winning. They might want to improve their run defense, however, after being gashed for three 60 plus-yard touchdown runs by Fresno's Ryan Mathews last Friday night.

Auburn: The lackluster offense that buried first Tony Franklin then Tommy Tuberville is but a distant memory on the Plains. Gus Malzahn's new attack lit up the scoreboard for the third consecutive week in a 41-30 win over West Virginia that pushed the surprising Tigers to 3-0. Auburn has now tallied 127 points in its first three games, after needing seven games to breach that total in 2008.

Losers of the Week

USC: I kind of expected the Trojans to be vulnerable after last week, but I didn't know they were *this* vulnerable. USC failed to reach the twenty-point mark in consecutive games for the first time since 2000

and looked completely inept offensively against Washington, committing three turnovers, going 0-for-10 on third-down conversations and failing to score a touchdown for the final fifty-seven minutes and change. Four road games remain on the schedule- at California, at Notre Dame, at Oregon and at Arizona State- and none of them look remotely like cakewalks. If the Trojans don't get their offense straightened out, they might be looking at a quick jaunt down I-5 for the Holiday Bowl in late December.

Brigham Young: The BCS (and National Championship) hopes of the Cougars collapsed in the face of a 54-point Florida State onslaught. The 512 total yards for the Seminoles was more than BYU allowed in its opening two wins over Oklahoma and Tulane combined. The Cougars can't dwell on the disaster, though; not with a hot Colorado State team coming to Provo for the MWC opener next Saturday.

Nebraska: The Huskers had Virginia Tech all but beaten with a 15-10 lead and the Hokies buried on their own 12-yard line with less than two minutes to play and no timeouts. But in the span of two plays- an 81-yard completion from Tyrod Taylor to Danny Coale and a scrambling touchdown pass from Taylor to Dyrell Roberts- Bo Pelini saw his first marquee victory with the Big Red go up in smoke, 16-15 . Nebraska out-gained Virginia Tech 343-278 but could only muster five field goals in the loss.

Southern Methodist: After building a 27-13 lead over Washington State the Mustangs imploded in the final ten minutes of the fourth quarter and in overtime and lost 30-27, costing themselves their first 3-0 start since 1983.

Virginia: The Cavaliers dropped to 0-3 on the season by blowing a 17-point third-quarter lead and falling to Southern Mississippi, 37-34. Eventually Al Groh's act is going to get tired- the ex-New York Jets coach is a middling 56-47 and hasn't even sniffed an ACC title since getting the Virginia job in 2001, despite recruiting a lot of talent to Charlottesville.

Next Week: The Buckeyes kick off the Big Ten season in Columbus at 3:30 on Saturday afternoon against the Illinois Fighting Illini. Dan Wismar and I will look forward to that game and backward at the win over Toledo on our Buckeye Friday podcast.