Ohio State scored 31 unanswered points in the second half to blow open a seven-point game and rout the turnover-prone Minnesota Golden Gophers 38-7 on a Homecoming Saturday in Columbus. Terrelle Pryor passed for 239 yards and two touchdowns, and rushed for 104 yards and another score, as the Buckeyes capitalized on a boatload of Gopher mistakes and cruised to a confidence-building victory.

Pryor connected with DeVier Posey on touchdown bombs of 62 and 57 yards, and the Buckeyes turned the rushing attack over to their third-string tailback and a converted fullback after Brandon Saine left the game early with a concussion. Freshman Jordan Hall scored his first career touchdown on an 11-yard run, and finished with 38 yards in relief of Saine. And Jermil Martin, getting his first significant game action as a Buckeye, bolted 39 yards for a 4th quarter score and totaled 75 yards on 7 carries.

Slow Starters

Pryor and the much maligned OSU offense rolled up 509 total yards, including 270 on the ground, to put last week's disappointing loss to Purdue in the rear view mirror. It took a while to start cashing in on their ability to move the ball, though. After a three-and-out on their first possession, Pryor led the Buckeyes on a 19-play, 78-yard drive, converting three times on third downs along the way. OSU would come up empty when Aaron Pettrey pulled a 30-yard field goal attempt left, but the Bucks had found a little rhythm.

That was just one of the three long first half possessions for Ohio State that would fail to generate points. A ten-play drive ended in a punt, and Pryor spoiled a nice 8-play drive at the end of the half by throwing an interception at the goal line. But the Gophers were in a charitable

mood all day long, and they declined to put a defender anywhere near Posey on the second OSU possession of the 2nd quarter, and the sophomore receiver pulled in Pryor's long pass and waltzed in for a 62-yard TD, the only points of the first half.

Pryor had a couple of misfires in the first half, including the half-ending interception, but he still finished the half with 174 yards passing on 21 attempts, and looked more comfortable in the pocket, and even more so when they rolled him out to throw. Working with an ever-increasing lead after intermission, Pryor would have just four pass attempts in the second half, to finish 13 of 25 for 239 yards, with the two TD's and one pick, and he sat out most of the final quarter with his team winning in a walk.

Meanwhile, the Buckeye defense was doing what they do. Minnesota had five first-half possessions, and they punted five times. The Gophers offense took six snaps in OSU territory in the half, and generated five total yards on them. When their star receiver Eric Decker went down with an foot injury in the first half, it was all over but the shouting.

Cashing In on the Gifts

Starting the second half down just 7-0, and obviously still in the game despite being roundly outplayed by the Buckeyes, Minnesota didn't waste any time rolling over and playing dead. They fumbled the second half kickoff at their own 31, and three plays later the Buckeyes had doubled their lead.

Hall rushed twice down to the 15, and on the next play Pryor called his own number on a read-option to the right. He stiff-armed a Gopher defender to the ground inside the ten, and then went airborne from the 4-yard line like LeBron taking off at the foul line for a monster dunk. When he hit the ground, he had six points, and after that emotional lift the Buckeyes wouldn't look back.

The OSU defense would force another turnover after an exchange of punts when OSU freshman defensive tackle John Simon knocked the ball from the grasp of Gopher quarterback Adam Weber with his helmet, and Thad Gibson recovered for OSU at the Minnesota 22. On a day that saw the long drives go for naught and the short ones go for touchdowns, Jordan Hall would convert this possession five plays later on an 11-yard TD run, and it was 21-0.

Another three-and-out followed for Minnesota, and it took just three plays for Pryor and Posey to hook up again for a long score. Pryor rolled left on play action, squared up his feet and shoulders and fired a strike to a wide open Posey for a 57-yard TD. 28-zip Buckeyes.

The Minnesota offense was the gift that keeps on giving, though, and it only took three snaps for them to wrap up another present for Ohio State. This one was Austin Spitler picking off a Weber pass at the OSU 45, and it was time for the Buckeyes' fifth-string running back to take

center-stage. Glenville's Jermil Martin, who came to OSU as a fullback, started the drive with two carries totaling 10 yards, and one play later he blasted through the left side of the line, broke a couple of tackles, and rambled 39 yards for the final Buckeye touchdown on the day.

And then...in keeping with their second half trend...four more Minnesota snaps...another Minnesota turnover. On the fourth Gopher giveaway of the half, Kurt Coleman picked off Weber and sprinted 40 yards to the Minnesota 15. A penalty set OSU back to the 30, but Buckeye kicker Aaron Pettrey obviously feels more comfortable on attempts of 40-plus yards, and he finished the Buckeye scoring with a 44-yard field goal.

Marqueis Gray, the backup quarterback for the Gophers, would lead them to a late touchdown against the second-team defense for Ohio State, averting the shutout and breaking a string of nine scoreless quarters for Minnesota.

Silver Bullets on Target

Defensively, the Buckeyes did what they were supposed to do against a team with very few offensive weapons. The Gophers were true to form as one of the weakest teams in the conference on 3rd down conversions. The Bucks held them to 1 of 10 on 3rd down, forcing seven punts, and sacking Gopher quarterbacks four times for 21 yards in losses.

Thad Gibson had another stellar game at defensive end for the Buckeyes, with six tackles and three sacks, plus a fumble recovery. On the other end of the line, Nathan Williams was wreaking some havoc of his own with four tackles and 1.5 tackles for loss, including a sack, putting consistent pressure on Weber all day.

The Gophers had no running game to speak of, outside what they got from the dynamic Gray at quarterback. Weber's backup rushed for 88 yards on a variety of scrambles, options and draws, but Gopher running backs Kevin Whaley and Duane Bennett managed just 45 yards combined.

Weber completed 10 passes in 23 tries, for 112 yards and the two interceptions. Gray had better numbers with 5 of 6 for 51 yards and the lone Gopher score. Gray had attempted just one pass this season coming into the game.

Concluding Observations

Just as it was ridiculous to write off Terrelle Pryor as the quarterback for this team after the Purdue debacle, so would it be silly to re-anoint him the savior after a solid performance against the woeful Gophers. The sophomore said he felt more comfortable and relaxed this week though, and he played like it Saturday. He ran the ball with authority, and was sacked just once, for a 2-yard loss. His first-half passing yardage (174 yds) was more than his full game average (167 yds) coming into the game.

Pryor had just the third game ever for a Buckeye quarterback of 200-plus yards passing and 100-plus yards rushing. He has one of the other two, with Troy Smith owning the third. This is not a quarterback who is ready for the scrap heap with two-plus seasons yet to play in college.

DeVier Posey had his second consecutive monster game, with 8 catches for 161 yards and two TD's. (He had nine catches last week) Posey probably should have had a third TD, as Pryor put a perfect pass in his hands on a long throw in the 2nd quarter. Posey had it, and then had it poked out of his hands by the defender just as he was crossing the goal line. Still, the sophomore has established some chemistry with Pryor, and he is developing into a star-quality player for OSU.

The Buckeyes had a goal this week of righting the ship and getting the offense untracked, and by any measure, even considering the quality of the opposition, they exceeded that goal. Imagine what kind of odds you might have gotten that the Buckeyes would put up over 500 yards of offense this week. I rest my case.

Links:

OSU Official Game Stats

ESPN Box Score