Ohio State and Iowa needed overtime to decide the Big Ten title in Columbus Saturday, but the Buckeyes overcame an inspired performance by the Hawkeyes and their backup quarterback to pull out a dramatic 27-24 victory and send Jim Tressel to the Rose Bowl for the first time as OSU coach. The win also guarantees Ohio State at least a share of the conference title, a trophy they can claim outright with a win over Michigan next week.

The Hawkeyes followed their season's script with another improbable late comeback, erasing a 24-10 OSU lead in the 4th quarter. But the Buckeye defense rose to the challenge in the extra session, registering their only sack of the game when it counted, holding Iowa scoreless in their overtime possession. Then OSU's backup kicker Devin Barclay started the rosy celebration with a game-winning 39-yard field goal, punching the Buckeyes' ticket to Pasadena.

Tresselball Triumphs

For the second straight week, Ohio State played turnover-free football, and the ground game clicked again, as the Bucks rushed for 229 yards as a team, with three rushing touchdowns. Brandon Saine broke a 3-3 tie in the second quarter with a 22-yard TD run, and then flashed his sprinter's speed in the 4th quarter with a 49-yard dash on the first play after a Ross Homan interception.

That score came less than two minutes after Dan Herron had broken a 10-10 tie with an 11-yard scamper around right end out of the wildcat set. Saine rushed for 105 yards and Herron finished with 97.

Pryor's Precision

Terrelle Pryor again played under control, executing the short passing game to near perfection, completing 14 of 17 attempts for 93 yards. Once again the coaches chose not to call his number on rushing plays very often, and his 29 yards rushing was a season low for him. A look at the

3rd down conversions probably tells the story of Pryor's ongoing maturation process as well as anything. For the game OSU was 8 for 17 on 3rd downs, and with one big exception, Pryor was getting it done with his arm instead of his legs.

The OSU offense took a while to get it rolling, picking up just one first down on their first two possessions. But with the Bucks down 3-0 and the first quarter winding down, Pryor calmly led the offense on a 17-play drive, converting three times on 3rd down with completions to three different receivers, before a Barclay field goal tied the game.

After Iowa came smoking out of halftime and tied the game 10-10 in the 3rd quarter, Pryor again led the Buckeyes on a long scoring drive, converting two crucial 3rd down plays along the way. First he found Duron Carter at the right sideline for a 12-yard pickup and a first down at the Iowa 30, and then on 3rd and 10 from the 30, he broke free on a quarterback draw for a 19-yard gain to the 11. Herron ran it in on the next play and the Buckeyes had regained the lead at 17-10.

Ross Homan made the second of three OSU interceptions on the next Iowa series, setting up Saine's 49-yard TD burst off the left side on the first play. It was 24-10 Ohio State, and the stage was set for Iowa to do what they do.

No Wonder These Guys Were 9-1

Did I mention that this was one hell of a football game? Did I mention Iowa looked like the better team for much of it? When the Hawkeyes struggled to move it on the ground in the early going, they aggressively threw the ball down the field. They protected their young QB in the pocket all afternoon. The vaunted OSU defensive line looked like they got caught reading their press clippings before this one. For the first 60 minutes at least, they got handled by the Iowa offensive line more often than not.

As the game went along it began to look like it could play out as a storybook first start for Iowa quarterback James Vandenberg, who completed his first seven throws and went 20 of 33 for 223 yards and two TD's on the day. Instead, Vandenberg wound up as the sidebar story, because a 26-year old former pro soccer player stole the headlines for the Buckeyes in overtime. That detail though, shouldn't detract from the game Vandenberg played before his inexperience caught up to the Hawkeyes in overtime.

The baby-faced redshirt freshman made two picture perfect throws for touchdowns, both times tying the game for Iowa. The first was a quick slant from 9 yards out to Marvin McNutt that he threaded between two OSU defenders to tie it at 10-10 shortly after halftime. The second was a 10-yard bullet, also to McNutt, that tied the game at 24 with less than three minutes to go. Vandenberg would have had another TD had it not been for the stone hands of Trey Stross, who had at least three big drops in the game.

Vandenberg put a lot of zip on the ball, and showed poise and confidence beyond his years. The stat sheet will show three interceptions, but of those, one was a tipped ball off his receiver's hands, and another was his final throw of the day, a desperation shot into the end zone in

overtime on 4th and a quarter-mile. The position appears to be in capable hands for Iowa going forward.

Tresselball Tested in the 4th Quarter

Up two touchdowns with ten minutes left in the game, and Buckeye Nation about to start the victory party, the Buckeyes would find out quickly that there's no quit in the Hawkeyes. After Saine's second TD, Iowa receiver Derrell Johnson-Koulianos took the kickoff, broke a tackle and bounced it outside, and took it the last 50 yards with a Hawkeye escort for a 99-yard touchdown, and Iowa was instantly revitalized.

For a time it looked as if the fates were conspiring against the Buckeyes as they tried to put this game away in the 4th quarter...a stunning kickoff return for a score after the Buckeyes had taken a 14-point lead....later, a missed field goal that would have made it a two-score game...an interception for an OSU touchdown called back on an offsides penalty...another sure pick tipped up and miraculously grabbed by Iowa's Tony Moeaki for a key first down...

Iowa kept making plays that aren't supposed to happen in Tresselball. 99-yard kickoff returns confound Tresselball, calling the whole approach into question. Tressel of course answers the question with his 92-21 record in Columbus...and those six Big Ten championships and one national championship.

Speaking of which.....before January 1st rolls around, I'm sure someone *(Jesse?)* will explain how the heck Jim Tressel has won six Big Ten championships in his first nine years in Columbus and yet has never taken the Buckeyes to the Rose Bowl. It seems unimaginable. Thanks, BCS.

Senior Day in Overtime

The Buckeye defense had to be stinging a little bit after giving up the tying touchdown with 2:42 remaining in regulation, and winning the overtime coin toss gave them the chance they needed to get back at young Vandenberg and the Hawkeyes. After Vandenberg rolled out and threw the ball away under pressure on first down at the 25-yard line, two senior captains for the Buckeyes would take turns making memorable plays on the next two downs.

On 2nd and 10, the left side of the OSU defense (Larimore, Worthington, Rolle) blew up the Iowa running play, and Austin Spitler broke through and dragged Adam Robinson down for a six-yard loss.

Then on 3rd and 16, senior defensive tackle Doug Worthington looped around the end and sacked Vandenberg for a 10-yard loss, knocking the Hawkeyes out of field goal range and finally exposing the lack of experience in the young Iowa quarterback.

Yet another 5th-year senior, safety Anderson Russell, would haul in his second interception of the day on Vandenberg's 4th down throw in the end zone, and the pressure immediately started to build for OSU kicker Devin Barclay as the Buckeyes took possession of the ball.

Unlikely Hero

Barclay, who walked on at Ohio State last year after his professional soccer career with the Columbus Crew was cut short by injuries, had made one field goal from 30 yards out and missed one from 47 yards before lining up for his history-making attempt. Tressel showed faith in the 26-year old junior by calling three straight no-risk running plays before calling on Barclay to send everyone home.

By now you know that his 39-yarder was straight and true...and as a result, the Ohio State Buckeyes are headed west for the holidays.

Special mention of some sort is due OSU linebackers Ross Homan and Austin Spitler. Homan led the team with eight total tackles and had one tackle for loss, plus the big 4th quarter interception. Spitler had six tackles, including two for loss. Both of these guys made some huge hits in this game, several of the "that's-gonna-leave-a-mark" variety. On a rare off day for the Buckeye defensive front, these two stepped into the breach big-time.

Congratulations to Coach Tressel for winning the Big Ten for the fifth consecutive year! It is indeed a great time to be a Buckeye fan.

OSU - Official Game Stats

ESPN Recap