Rose Bowl Champions ... got a nice ring to it.

Jim Tressel and Terrelle Pryor each came into the 2010 Rose Bowl with something to prove to a doubting nation. By the time the Buckeyes wrapped up their 26-17 victory over the Oregon Ducks Friday in Pasadena, Pryor had played the best game of his Ohio State career, and helped Tressel notch the "big game" postseason victory that had eluded him since the 2005 season.

In the afterglow of a satisfying win, neither probably cared if his doubters had been won over . Pryor had taken a giant step toward becoming a complete quarterback while still in his sophomore season, and Tressel had authored a huge January win for a program and a conference sorely in need of respect.

That screeching sound you hear out of the west is the monkey flying off the backs of the Ohio State Buckeyes.

After holding a 10-0 lead in the first quarter, and a 16-10 advantage at the half, the underdog Buckeyes would trail just once in the game...and briefly...after Oregon took the second half kickoff and drove for a touchdown to go ahead 17-16. But Ohio State answered with a field goal on their next possession to retake the lead, and the OSU defense held the vaunted Oregon offense to *two first downs* after the 11:03 mark of the third quarter.

A 13-play, 81-yard touchdown drive early in the 4th quarter pushed the OSU lead out to 26-17, and after Oregon placekicker Morgan Flint missed a 41-yard field goal try at the 5:10 mark, the Ducks never got another chance to cut into the lead. Pryor led the offense to three first downs on nine straight running plays to run out the clock and start the rosy celebration.

Domination on D

While Pryor was earning game MVP honors with 338 combined yards (266 passing, 72 rushing), the OSU defense was throttling the high-powered Ducks' offense, holding Oregon to 12 first downs and a 2 of 11 performance on third down conversions. The Ducks' dynamic quarterback Jeremiah Masoli was a non-factor in the rushing game, despite his 1-yard TD run in the third quarter, with nine net yards on six carries, and was minimally effective throwing the ball as well, accounting for just 81 yards on 9 of 20 passing.

In fact, it's fair to say the game might not have been as close as it was if Oregon had not so thoroughly gashed the OSU coverage teams on kickoff and punt returns, repeatedly setting the Ducks up in great field position. Five times Oregon began drives beyond their own 40-yard line, including once at the OSU 30, and once at the OSU 36, following the Buckeyes' 4th quarter TD. That last opportunity went for naught for the Ducks though, as they failed to get a first down, and missed a field goal attempt.

The Ducks were smart enough to go wide on Ohio State rather than try to challenge the middle of the Buckeye defensive front, and they had some success in the first half, and on the first possession of the second. After picking up gains of 10 and 13 yards on their first two offensive plays of the game, Cameron Heyward sacked Masoli for a nine-yard loss, and the OSU defensive line forced a punt on the Ducks' first series. From that point on, it seemed that for every sizable positive gain by the Oregon offense, the OSU defense would answer with a negative-yardage momentum killer to slow the Ducks down.

Oregon did manage 179 yards rushing for the game, well off their per game average of 236 yards, but enough to out-rush Ohio State. But Oregon had come into the game averaging 37.7 points per game, while the Buckeye defense was giving up just 12.2 points per contest. As every two-bit pregame analysis pointed out, something had to give. And it was the Oregon point-scoring machine that gave.

Only three teams scored 20 or more points on OSU this year, none more than Navy's 27. And the Ducks had the same problems dealing with the Silver Bullets that every other opponent had. As it turned out though, much of the credit for holding the Oregon offense in check has to go to an OSU offensive unit that refused to give up the football.

Air Tressel Surprises Ducks

The Buckeyes were expected to field the better defense in this game, but few expected that Pryor and OSU would prove to be the more productive offensive unit as well. But Ohio State opened the game by calling six straight pass plays to establish Pryor as a passing threat, and maintained a balanced attack throughout, resulting in total domination of the time of possession, 41:37 to just 18:23 for Oregon. The OSU offense rolled up 419 total yards to 260 for the Ducks.

The Buckeyes took the opening kickoff, and with Oregon stacking the box against the run, Tressel got his quarterback started early in the passing game. Pryor was 5 of 8 passing in the opening drive, and added a 24-yard scramble for a first down on the first series. DeVier Posey

had two receptions on the drive, but dropped a well-thrown ball in the end zone on 2nd and 10 from the Oregon 13. But on the next play, Pryor found Brandon Saine near the right sideline, and the tailback caught it at the 10, ran over an Oregon defender at the three, and pushed it into the end zone to give OSU the early 7-0 lead.

The lead reached 10-0 as the Buckeyes pretty much owned the first quarter, but a 37-yard reverse run by Kenjon Barner on the Ducks' third possession helped Oregon to a first and goal at the OSU 9 as the quarter ended. The Ducks were held to a 24-yard Morgan Flint field goal, but after a three-and-out for Pryor and OSU, Barner again torched the Bucks, returning Jon Thoma's punt all the way to the OSU 30-yard line, and the Ducks were back in business early in the second.

LaGarrette Blount scored on a 3-yard run at the 9:14 mark of the second quarter *(becoming perhaps the first player to score in a bowl game while on a full-season suspension?)* to tie the game and give the Ducks a little momentum. But Terrelle Pryor was ready to go back to the air...

Pryor then began an 8-minute, 19-play drive at the OSU 20, mixing in runs by Dan Herron and Brandon Saine with his controlled passing game. He completed 7 of 10 attempts on the drive, including five completions in a row at one point. The most memorable was an improvised cross-body throw for 15 yards to Herron on a 3rd and 12 play to keep the drive alive at midfield. Devin Barclay gave the Bucks the lead again at 13-10 with a 30-yard field goal, but the Ducks still had a minute on the clock before the half.

Masoli quickly completed a 23-yard pass out across midfield, and it looked as if OSU's distressing tendency to give up cheap points right before halftime might continue. But OSU's senior captain Doug Worthington got his big mitt on a Masoli pass, deflecting it to Ross Homan, who picked it off and ran it back to the Oregon 46. With just 25 seconds on the clock to start out, Pryor hit Dane Sanzenbacher for 18 yards to the 28, and after two incompletions, Aaron Pettrey came in to nail a 45-yard field goal, and the half ended 16-10.

Pryor had completed 15 first half passes in 24 attempts, putting him well on his way to establishing career highs in completions (23), attempts (37) and passing yards (266) on the day. That's the kind of stuff that can win a guy the MVP award.

Bucks Deliver in Second Half

As noted above, Oregon took the second half kickoff and controlled the first four minutes of the 3rd quarter, driving for the go-ahead score on a keeper by Masoli. (The tough Ducks QB made a believer out of me by taking on Brian Rolle at the one-yard line and driving him into the end zone) After the Buckeyes regained the lead on the fourth OSU field goal of the day, the Ducks would have a couple more chances to come back and win it.

After taking the kickoff out to their own 38 (one of their worst returns of the day) the Ducks'

freshman sensation LaMichael James had runs of 6 and 30 yards, and Barner took the ball to the OSU 18 on an 8-yard run before the Bucks finally had Lady Luck smile on them in a big game.

The aforementioned suspendee Blount failed to corral the second down handoff from Masoli, and fumbled the ball forward before kicking it toward the goal line, and then into and out of the end zone for a touchback. It was a huge break for the Bucks, and a terrible momentum swing against the Ducks...but OSU couldn't stand prosperity.

Pryor returned the favor shortly thereafter by throwing his only interception of the day on one of only a couple truly bad throws he made in the game. Starting at their own 43 though, Oregon couldn't move the ball, and had to punt.

One more huge kickoff return in the fourth quarter would give the Ducks their final opportunity to make it close, but by that time, their deficit was nine, at 26-17, and when Flint pushed the field goal attempt wide right with just over five minutes to play, the Buckeyes and their fans knew this Rose Bowl was all over but the shoutin'.

They Call it Finishing

That's because the fourth quarter had belonged to Ohio State to that point. Leading 19-17 when the quarter began, they started their final TD drive at the 13:03 mark of the quarter. They couldn't have known it then, but the Oregon Ducks' goose was already cooked. Oregon would run just three more offensive plays in the game.

Pryor and the offense ran six minutes off the clock driving for the decisive touchdown, a beautifully thrown (and caught) 17-yard strike to Posey, a replica of the ball Posey had dropped in the first quarter. But the drive wouldn't have lasted long enough for the Pryor-Posey TD had it not been for a highlight-reel play earlier by senior tight end Jake Ballard.

On a dropback on third and 13 from his own 45, Pryor was heavily rushed and was seemingly in the grasp of a defender, a sack imminent as he tried to escape toward the right sideline. Flinging up a desperation heave in the direction of his tight end, Pryor was rewarded for his effort when Ballard jumped up in a crowd of Oregon defenders, extending his 6' 7" frame to it's absolute max, and came down with the ball for a 24-yard gain and a first down.

You've got to tip your hat to Coach Tressel when his game plan works to perfection. The Buckeyes did everything they knew they had to do to win.

Disrupt the Oregon offense with great defensive line play. Check

Get a solid, balanced performance out of Terrelle Pryor. Check

Tackle well and wear down the smaller Ducks with size and athleticism. Check.

Control the football, move the chains and keep the Oregon offense off the field. Check.

Win the turnover battle. Check.

If we're mentioning standouts on defense, Ross Homan has to be at the top of the list. Homan led the team in tackles with eight solo stops and 12 total tackles. Thad Gibson and Cam Heyward kicked the usual amount of opponent butt. Gibson had four tackles and two TFL, while Heyward had four tackles and the only OSU sack.

Congrats to several seniors who stepped up in their final game with strong performances. Notably, Doug Worthington (2 tackles, 1 TFL) at defensive tackle, who made his presence felt all game long, and caused Homan's interception with a deflection. Jake Ballard made the most of his opportunity with one great play. Jim Cordle (and his O-line teammates) had a fairly solid day in pass protection and in run blocking. And both senior safeties, Anderson Russell (six tackles) and Kurt Coleman (four tackles) had good days tackling and breaking up passes downfield. Other seniors contributing to a super overall defensive effort were Lawrence Wilson, Austin Spitler, and Todd Denlinger.

And kudos to all the seniors, who leave Ohio State as the winningest class in school history, with 44 victories in four years. Thanks guys, for all the memories.

Links:

OSU Athletic Communications - Final Stats

ESPN Recap