Ohio State lost the coin toss to Marshall for the opener of the 2010 season, but one play later the Thundering Herd's fortunes took a permanent turn for the worse, and the Buckeyes cruised to a dominating 45-7 win at Ohio Stadium Thursday night. OSU's Dorian Bell jarred the ball loose from Marshall return man Andre Booker on the opening kickoff, and four plays later it was 7-0 Ohio State. It would not get any closer.

Terrelle Pryor threw for 247 yards and three touchdowns in an efficient 17 of 25 passing performance and the Buckeyes piled up 280 yards on the ground, including a 103-yard, two touchdown game from Brandon Saine. OSU receiver Dane Sanzenbacher had 113 yards in receptions highlighted by a 65-yard touchdown catch as Pryor spread the ball around to eight different receivers. Devier Posey added four receptions, including touchdown catches of 6 and 11 yards.

Defense Pitches a Shutout

The Buckeye defense did pretty much what they were expected to do...holding Marshall to 44 rushing yards, roughing up the smaller Herd players physically, scoring a defensive touchdown, and not allowing the Marshall offense to score a point. The only dent the Herd put on the scoreboard was a 61-yard touchdown on a return of blocked field goal attempt by the Buckeyes' Drew Basil.

That momentary lift for the Herd cut the Buckeyes' early 14-0 lead in half with just over two minutes remaining in the first quarter, and temporarily quieted the 105,040 in attendance. But the swing in momentum for the guys in green wouldn't last, because two plays and less than a minute later, Pryor hooked up with Sanzenbacher for the 65-yard TD that made it 21-7, and the Buckeyes never looked back.

The blocked kick wasn't the only special teams mistake committed by the Buckeyes in that first quarter. With the game barely five minutes old and OSU holding a 14-0 lead, Marshall's Booker found a lane on the kickoff return and sprinted to the OSU 29 before they could knock him out of bounds. The Buckeye defense stiffened though, forcing three quick incompletions, and the Herd kicker Tyler Warner cooperated by missing a 40-yard field goal attempt.

Time of Possession is Overrated

Quick strikes and big plays were the story for the OSU offense in the early going, as the first three OSU touchdowns came on possessions of 1:09 (four plays), 1:14 (three plays), and 0:57 (two plays). Saine accounted for most of his 103 yards on two of his eight carries, a 40-yarder on the second possession that set up his own 4-yard score, and then a 45-yard dash off the right side that saw him sprint untouched to the end zone with 3:25 remaining in the half to put the Bucks up 28-7.

It looked like Ohio State would take that comfortable 28-7 lead into the half after Saine's score, but the Buckeye defense was about to get into the scoring column. On third down from their own 17, Herd quarterback Brian Anderson threw over the middle, but Buckeye linebacker Brian Rolle anticipated the throw and picked it off at the Marshall 30-yard line. After making the interception, as Rolle put it later, "I just turned around and I was like, wow, all I see is red". The guys in red easily escorted Rolle into the end zone, and at 35-7, the rout was on.

Ball Control in Second Half

With zero doubt remaining about the eventual outcome, the Buckeyes came out in the second half and put together a couple of longer sustained drives sandwiched around the longest Marshall possession of the evening. Dan Herron took the field at tailback for the first OSU drive, and chalked up runs of 11 and 15 yards in the possession, as Pryor drove the Buckeyes to four first downs, and then capped it off with an 11-yard strike to Posey for the final OSU touchdown of the day, and a 42-7 lead.

The Herd would then put together a 12-play, 71-yard drive almost exclusively through the air, with Anderson completing seven throws and maintaining possession despite a sack by Tyler Moeller and an ensuing fumble. Marshall would get inside the OSU 10, but again, the Buckeyes hard hitting, this time by Chimdi Chekwa, caused a fumble, and Ross Homan fell on it at the OSU 6-yard line to corral the Herd.

Rotating in the Young Backs

Sophomore tailback Jordan Hall had a very impressive opener for Ohio State, returning both punts and kickoffs effectively, and he got his chance to work from scrimmage late in the third quarter, and rushed for 32 yards on 5 carries, adding a pass reception for 13 more.

In the fourth quarter, it was redshirt freshman Jaamal Berry making his Buckeye debut with a flourish as he showed the quickness and elusiveness OSU fans have been hearing about, rushing for 80 yards on just seven carries, with a long of 30 yards. Berry darted through holes and made tacklers miss once he got to the second level, giving the Buckeye offense a capability their other backs just don't provide for them. Yes, the garbage time setting in a game long decided is reason enough to temper the enthusiasm for Berry's showing somewhat, but what better situation could he have had to break the ice and get his first game action?

Moeller Back With a Vengeance

There's no better OSU "feel good" story for this game, or for the entire 2010 season for that matter, than the return of Tyler Moeller to Buckeye football after he missed the entire 2009 season due to a serious head injury. Moeller gave his teammates more than just an emotional lift with his performance against Marshall. He led the OSU defense with six total tackles, including 2 TFL, a sack and a forced fumble. Moeller demonstrated his knack for getting to the quarterback, applying pressure on several occasions, and also fared pretty well in coverage. Moeller was elated after the game to have this first competitive action, and the nerves that came with it, out of the way.

Stoney End

The long-promised arrivals of Berry and Moeller played out just about like they were supposed to, and one other trend that we have been predicting after watching the Buckeyes prepare this offseason is the increased use of backs and tight ends in the passing game. Here too, the team followed the prepared script pretty well.

Pryor hit tight end Jake Stoneburner on the first offensive play for the Buckeyes, and for the game, Stoneburner had three catches for 41 yards. Tailbacks Herron and Hall, and fullback Adam Homan had one reception apiece. Not earthshaking, but that's about a month's worth of receptions by the backs and tight ends in the average OSU season under Jim Tressel. Baby steps.

Youth is Served

The blowout nature of the win allowed a number of young players to see some game action for OSU. Corey "Philly" Brown worked at receiver and also returned one punt. Defensive back Christian Bryant, defensive tackle Jonathan Hankins and offensive tackle Andrew Norwell all saw considerable field time. All four are true freshmen.

Redshirt freshmen Dorian Bell, Jamie Wood and Dominic Clarke also got their first action as Buckeyes, with Bell's forced fumble on the opening kickoff the highlight reel play from that threesome. And senior receiver Grant Schwartz got his first career reception as a Buckeye, and finished with three catches for 20 yards.

The Down Side

Even easy wins have their drawbacks, problems and weaknesses, and the Buckeye opener is no exception. The two glaring special teams plays noted above: the long kickoff return and the blocked field goal for a TD, weren't the only special teams issues. The blocking scheme for the punt team looked like it needs work too, and they had an extra point go through even though it was partially blocked.

The cornerback play for this team has been a concern in the past, and this game did nothing to allay those concerns. The tackling in the secondary wasn't where it needs to be, and the pass interference calls are becoming distressingly common. The defense gave up just 155 net yards passing, and six passing first downs, numbers that aren't bad if all you're looking at is numbers. The worry here is that Jacory Harris and his elite receiving corps are coming to town a week from now, and they don't look anything like the Marshall passing attack. Not even close.

Those issues aside though, this was a satisfying win for a Buckeye team that set out to make a statement on national TV in this game, and arguably did just that. They outgained Marshall in total yards, 529 to 199, and outrushed the Herd 280 yards to 44. They won the turnover battle 3-0, and scored a touchdown on one of them. The defense dominated the opponent with their second best defensive lineman sitting on the bench. Their developing quarterback showed that The Project is coming along nicely. Lots to build on from this one, and lots of young talent starting to come to the fore.

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