Ohio State dug a 21-0 first half hole for themselves in Madison Saturday night, and the Wisconsin Badgers made it hold up for a 31-18 win, as the Buckeyes' stay atop the national polls lasted one short week. David Gilreath ran the opening kickoff back 97 yards for a touchdown, and the Badgers proceeded to run the ball down the Buckeyes' throats on their first two possessions to take command of the game early in the second quarter.

The Buckeyes made a game of it with a third quarter comeback to draw within three at 21-18, but the Badgers answered with another touchdown drive in the final quarter to effectively put the game away. The Buckeyes weren't able to overcome squandering their two good scoring opportunities in the first half, coming away with just three points total on two trips into the red zone.

All of the boxing metaphors are appropriate for the way Ohio State looked in the first half, arguably their ugliest half of football since one or the other of their two BCS title game losses under Tressel. They got punched in the mouth early....they were staggered by the body blows delivered by the Badgers...and they were on the ropes from the first 15 seconds of the game.

OSU captain Brian Rolle described precisely what the problem was, as Wisconsin did to the Buckeye defense what many thought couldn't be done. "...the run game...they just overwhelmed us with it," Rolle told reporters afterward, "It's hard to take in...we just got beat. It's not like we got beat off trick plays...they just beat us...just lined up toe to toe, ran right at us, and beat us."

That's about right.

Tolzien on Target

Wisconsin quarterback Scott Tolzien didn't throw much, but when he did, he was effective, completing 13 of 16 attempts for 152 yards with one interception. He came up with several big throws to convert on third downs, none more timely than a 20-yard hookup with Nick Toon to keep the Badgers' 4th quarter touchdown drive alive, and prevent OSU from regaining possession with a chance to retake the lead. He was on target all night on the long stretch screens in the flats to beat the OSU rush, and his offensive line did a great job keeping the Buckeye front four out of his face.

His Buckeye counterpart Terrelle Pryor was effective running the ball, finishing with 56 (net) yards on 18 carries, but right from the start he was not sharp with his throws, and by the time the first two OSU possessions failed to generate any points, the Buckeyes found themselves down three touchdowns with 80,000 noisy Wisconsin partisans just getting warmed up.

Dan Herron toughed out 91 yards on 19 carries for the Buckeyes, and scored two rushing touchdowns, but the ground game in this one belonged to Wisconsin's John Clay and James White. Clay rushed for 104 yards on 21 carries and two TD's, getting 88 of those yards in the first half when the game was pretty much decided. White had 44 first half yards, and finished with 75 for the game.

In the end, Wisconsin came closer to their 240 yards per game rushing average than the OSU defenders did to the 78 yards per game they had been giving up this year. The Badgers ran for 184 yards, for a 4.3 yard average, making it look way too easy in running out to the early lead. The Buckeyes tightened things up against the run in the second half, but that's when Tolzien began to throw the ball against them.

Missed Opportunities

Almost as common as special teams breakdowns this season for the Buckeyes has been the troubling tendency to settle for field goals when touchdowns are within reach. The storyline of this game might have been much different had Ohio State not missed out on two good chances to climb back into the game in the second quarter.

With a 21-0 deficit staring them in the face, Pryor drove the Buckeyes from their own 32 to a

1st-and-goal at the Wisconsin 3-yard line, but some questionable red zone play-calling by OSU resulted in a field goal instead of six points. Twice Pryor tried to run wide, and the Badgers were sitting on the quarterback keeper both times. Another run by Herron went nowhere, and the momentum of a good drive was lost.

The next Badger possession ended on an interception by OSU's Andrew Sweat, who brought the ball back to the Wisconsin 23-yard line. But the Buckeyes couldn't muster a first down, and after Pryor took a sack, Devin Barclay barely missed wide left on a 45-yard field goal attempt, and another golden scoring chance went for naught.

Climbing Out of a Hole

The Buckeyes took the second half kickoff and tightened the game up at 21-10 with a 77-yard touchdown drive capped off by a 13-yard run by Dan Heron off a direct snap. They forced a Wisconsin punt, and used up the rest of the quarter on their second straight touchdown drive, this one ending with a 1-yard run by Herron with 11:38 to go in the game. A two-point conversion got OSU within three at 28-18, but the OSU comeback was just about over at that point.

The Badgers and their boisterous fans weren't about to let this one get away, and they pushed it straight down the field on a 10-play, 77-yard drive, highlighted by the 20-yard completion to Toon, and James White finished the Buckeyes off with a 12-yard TD off the left side to push the lead back to ten at 28-18.

The Buckeyes late surge was notable for several Terrelle Pryor to Dane Sanzenbacher connections, including a couple of the spectacular variety. Sanzenbacher had catches of 9, 11, 20, 24, and 26 yards in the second half, and paid dues with big hits and/or painful landings on several of them. He finished with six catches for 94 yards.

Not Enough

So once again the Buckeyes national championship aspirations are dashed with a mid-season loss to a conference foe, and the goals are now reset with the bar a bit lower. They now trail both Michigan State and Iowa in the Big Ten race, and they don't have a chance to deal with the Spartans themselves, as they are not on the schedule.

Unfortunately, the OSU losing scenario was all too familiar on this night...bad special teams play...questionable play-calling at key moments...a generally flat performance by the entire team

for large portions of a big game. A tip of the cap is due the Wisconsin Badgers, who prepared better, executed better during the game, and rode the emotion of the crowd and the moment to a signature win for their program.

For a humbled Ohio State team, the dream is again deferred.

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