Contrary to what I cheerfully (and ignorantly) announced in last week's column , the Ohio State Buckeyes did *not* play a football game on Saturday, against Penn State or anyone else. It was a mistake on my part, one Pete Fiutak certainly wouldn't make; one I wouldn't have made if only I'd checked the damned schedule at some point.

But enough with the self-flagellation. There were a lot of football games that were played on Saturday, some crucial- and with them a bit more clarity in the race for the BCS Championship Game. TCU certainly put its case on record; Alabama, meanwhile, saw its chances of a crystal-football repeat go down the drain in Baton Rouge.

These stories and a little bit more, on a truncated version of TWTW.

Game of the Week- Michigan/Illinois: Looking at the 67-65 final score you'd think it was Glen Rice and Rumeal Robinson versus the Flying Illini at Crisler Arena, not the descendants of Bo Schembechler on a November afternoon in the Big House. But the Michigan Wolverines are doing things differently on the gridiron these days. Mainly they've decided they can give up copious amounts of points and yardage yet still win football games. Saturday against Illinois, they were right. The teams combined for 1,237 total yards, with Michigan running up 676 while surviving five turnovers and the usual Denard Robinson injury .

Despite an obscene statistical performance, Michigan's defense made the key stops in a game where stops on the whole were few and far between. Leading 7-3 midway through the first period the Wolverines committed turnovers in their own territory on three consecutive plays. Michigan's defense did a decent job minimizing the damage, holding Illinois to a field goal, recovering a fumble in the red zone and keeping the score at 14-7 Illini. The defense also nailed down the win by blowing up the Illinois two-point conversion attempt that would have sent the game into a fourth overtime. Michigan's defense isn't the best in the country but on Saturday it was the best in the stadium and good enough for a sixth win and a probable bowl trip.

That doesn't mean Rich Rodriguez is off the hot seat. Beating Illinois would be forgotten if his team swoons in its last three. The Wolverines still need to win at Purdue and at least make it look good against Wisconsin and Ohio State. An actual win over either of those last two- especially Ohio State- would be huge for the beleaguered coach. But the odds are long. Having the best defense on the field in a 67-65 game isn't exactly a blueprint to victory over Badger or Buck.

Damn It Was a Good Day: Even if mama cooked the breakfast *with* hog , Saturday still would have been a good day for TCU- and not just because the Horned Frogs made a mockery of the much-anticipated battle of unbeatens against Utah. It was 7-0 TCU less than five minutes into the game, 20-0 at the end of the first period and 47-7 at the massacre's conclusion . The Frogs forced four turnovers and outgained their hosts 558-199. Provided they win out- and having given up 23 points in six Mountain West games that shouldn't be an issue- they're a shoo-in to finish in front of Boise in the BCS standings.

There was more good news for Gary Patterson's team, out of Baton Rouge. Alabama, the top one-loss BCS team, fell to Les Miles and his spoilsport LSU Tigers, giving the Mad Hatter victories over Nick Saban the Urban Meyer, the high priests of God's Conference. With two losses the Tide are out of the championship chase, wiping out one of TCU's pursuers for a slot in the title game. Oklahoma's defeat at Texas A&M made it two.

With Oregon showing no signs of slowing down, the Frogs- and the Broncos of Boise, for that matter- need as many one-loss BCS teams as possible to lose, just to be sure. Alabama would have almost certainly leapfrogged both teams had the Tide won out; Nebraska and LSU still may, although they're relative long shots. TCU needed to beat Utah and did, in the most decisive fashion imaginable. The Frogs also need help, and they got a measure of it on

Saturday. We're one week closer to seeing a non-BCS team play for the BCS Championship.

Poke Power: Oklahoma's defeat did more than give Mike Sherman the biggest win of his rocky tenure in College Station. It opened the championship door to a school that hasn't stepped through such a thing in a long time. The Oklahoma State Cowboys haven't won an outright league football title since 1948, when they were a member of the Missouri Valley Conference. But with Saturday's shakeup, the road to the Big 12 South title now runs squarely through Stillwater.

The Cowboys handled their business in style, blasting the Cinderella Baylor Bears for 725 total yards in a 55-28 rout. Newly returned Justin Blackmon led the way with 13 catches for 173 yards and a touchdown as well as a 69-yard touchdown run. Oklahoma's loss leaves Oklahoma State in sole possession of first place in the Big 12 South with a 4-1 record. Even with a loss in one of the next two games, the Pokes will have an opportunity to win the division when they host the Bedlam Game against the Sooners on November 27th.

Great players like Thurman Thomas and Barry Sanders passed through Stillwater without feeling the glow of a championship. There was always someone ahead in line. But with Texas down, Oklahoma stumbling, Bedlam at home, the stars are aligning for this Cowboys team. No one is ahead in line. Oklahoma State, for one of the rare times in the history of that program, controls its destiny in November.

Cheers: For New Mexico which won its first game of the season on Saturday. After falling behind 21-7 in the second quarter to visiting Wyoming the Lobos roared back, beating the Cowboys 34-31 on a 38-yard James Aho field goal with no time remaining. New Mexico's win left Akron as the only FBS team without a victory. The Zips fell to Ball State in double overtime on Saturday, 37-30. Not all is lost for the A.K. Rowdy, however- they still have the O.G. Miami and feeble Buffalo remaining, and both games are at Infocision Stadium.

And Tears: For Nick Bell, the Mississippi State defensive end who passed away of cancer last week at the age of twenty. A little more than a month ago Bell started for the Bulldogs in their win over Georgia. Now he's gone. It's almost incomprehensible.

Next Week: 3:30 on Saturday the Buckeyes are back in action against Penn State at the Horseshoe. This time I'm sure of it.