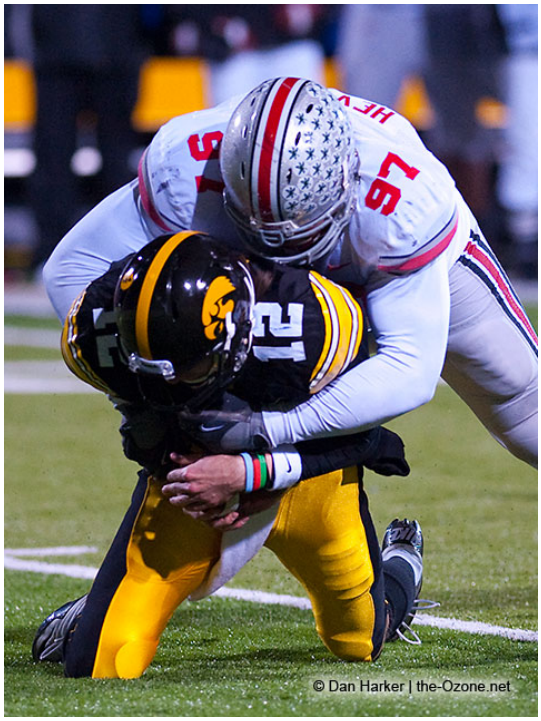

Ohio State scored the last ten points of the game, including the go-ahead touchdown with 1:47 remaining, to beat Iowa 20-17, and stay alive in the Big Ten title chase. Dan Herron pounded it in from the 1-yard line to put the Buckeyes ahead to stay, after Terrelle Pryor had kept the game-winning 76-yard drive going with a 14-yard scramble on a 4th-and-10 play.

The win keeps Ohio State (10-1, 6-1) tied atop the Big Ten with Michigan State and Wisconsin, both also victorious on Saturday, and sends the Buckeyes into Michigan Week with The Game still meaningful in the conference race. Iowa (7-4, 4-3) lost for the fourth time this season on an opponent's touchdown drive in the game's final minutes.

Closing

The Hawkeyes had gone ahead 17-10 early in the 4th quarter when they capitalized on Pryor's second interception of the day. Starting at the OSU 27-yard line, they scored a touchdown in just two plays to break the tie with just under 12 minutes to go. The Buckeyes then mounted an 11-play drive that reached the Iowa 27, but stalled after a sack of Pryor, and OSU kicker Devin Barclay closed the gap to 17-13 with a 48-yard field goal.

The OSU defense, which had been vulnerable most of the game, came to play in the 4th quarter after Iowa took the lead off of Pryor's mistake. They forced a 3-and-out after the Barclay field goal, and gave the ball back to Pryor and the offense with six minutes to play and the Buckeyes down four. Three plays later, OSU had reached midfield, but two incompletions put Pryor in a crucial 3rd-and-10 from the 50.

There was nothing wrong with the OSU play call on 3rd and 10, and Posey's double-move pattern and Pryor's 60-yard heave into the end zone were both perfect...but Posey just flat dropped it...the winning touchdown that wasn't. Now it was 4th-and-10, and crunch time. Pryor was asked afterward if he was mad when Posey dropped what should have been the go-ahead TD...

"Yeah, I was mad," Pryor said. "But, I mean, we had a 4th-and-10 to get to or we were going to lose another game. I hate losing with a passion."

On 4th down, with the game on the line, Pryor dropped to pass and the pocket shifted to the right. He stepped up and broke back to the open space on the left side, and wove his way to 14 yards and the first down. It looked like a designed pass play, but Pryor said he was thinking run all the way...

"I was going to run the whole time," he said. "I found running room, had some good blocking. I just cut it up and went and got the first."

Two plays later, on a 1st down at the Iowa 26, Pryor found Dane Sanzenbacher down the right sideline, and the senior put the finishing touch on a 102-yard receiving day by making the grab and touching his foot down in bounds at the 2-yard line. Herron took it in from there, and it was up to the defense with less than two minutes to play.

Sort of Like Last Year's Overtime

Iowa quarterback Ricky Stanzi would try to engineer another late comeback for the Hawkeyes,

but he was sacked on 3rd-and-10 by Cam Heyward, much like QB James Vandenberg took a big sack by OSU's Doug Worthington on a crucial 3rd down in overtime a year ago. In each case, the desperation 4th-down play by Iowa would fail, and in each case, the Buckeyes would prevail in the game. Stanzi hit Marvin McNutt over the middle on 4th and 21, but he was dragged down a few yards short of the first down, and the Buckeyes ate up the final minute with their ground game.

The loss drops Kirk Ferentz' Iowa record against Ohio State to 1-7, and he is now 1-5 in Big Ten matchups with Jim Tressel's OSU teams. In every one of Iowa's four losses this season, they have given up a touchdown drive in the last few minutes, the last three of those game-winning TD's coming with less than two minutes remaining. Where I come from that's called a trend.

The Enigmatic Pryor

What to say about Terrelle Pryor? First, the numbers. He was 18 of 33 passing, for 195 yards, with one touchdown pass and two interceptions. And he rushed 15 times for 78 yards (5.2 avg) on a variety of options, quarterback draws and scrambles from pass formation. He had at least three balls dropped...one each by Sanzenbacher and Corey Brown, and the big one by Posey, that would have made his stats look better.

So why is Pryor still making Ohio State fans reach for the Pepto-Bismal now almost three full seasons into his OSU career?

I think most of us expected him to gradually acquire the judgment and discipline that normally come with veteran status, but so often Pryor still looks like a freshman out there. Often the mistakes are ones of commission rather than omission...trying to make plays when they're not there to be made...but they are still errors in judgment, and ones that shouldn't be made by a guy who has started 33 college games.

There is a lack of touch on so many of the routine short throws he makes, and he has tendency to try to make throws even when he's nearly down behind the line, often slinging the ball up dangerously and unnecessarily.

Both interceptions Saturday were passes that should never have been thrown. The tipped ball in the end zone that resulted in an Iowa interception just before the half was on a play that saw OSU receiver Taurian Washington come wide open early, but by the time Pryor scrambled into position to make the throw, the moment was gone. The second pick was on a rushed attempt to squeeze the ball into an opening that was too small to try for. That one nearly cost the Buckeyes the ball game.

But Pryor's critics (and they are legion) can be answered with one simple fact: Ohio State is now 29-4 in games started by Terrelle Pryor. And with that, Pryor's defenders rest their case. With the frustrating lack of judgment and consistency, you also get the passionate hatred of losing, and the immense physical talent. Did I mention 29-4? (**)

Stanzi's Fast Start

Ricky Stanzi, pride of Mentor Lake Catholic, played well in his first shot at Ohio State as the Iowa quarterback. He drove the Hawkeyes to a touchdown on the second Iowa possession, surviving a tough hit on a corner blitz by OSU's Devon Torrence to deliver the ball to Marvin McNutt for a 19-yard TD pass. Stanzi was 20 of 31 passing, matching Pryor's 195 passing yards, and connecting on the one TD. Iowa did not turn the ball over.

Stanzi was able to take advantage of the OSU pass rush by patiently hitting the underneath routes to his tight ends and running backs. When he had to though, he was getting the ball to the receivers, especially McNutt, who had seven grabs for 92 yards and a touchdown. The

Bucks held Derrell Johnson-Koulianos to two receptions for 38 yards, while running back Adam Robinson had four catches for 20 yards. Stanzi picked up eight first downs passing the ball, but only three in the second half.

Missing Chances

All season, Ohio State has been turning touchdown opportunities into field goals, and that's what happened on the Buckeyes' first possession of the 2nd quarter. Down 7-0, they drove to the Iowa 1-yard line, but failed to get in on two plays from a yard out. Two completions to Sanzenbacher totaling 42 yards were the key plays in the drive, but Devin Barclay had to come in to get the Buckeyes on the scoreboard with a 3-pointer.

Iowa cooperated in keeping the game close with a missed field goal try in the middle of the 2nd quarter, and the Bucks went on the move again. The next trip down into Iowa territory for the Buckeyes was short-circuited by the Pryor interception in the end zone, although that throw wouldn't have been necessary had Corey Brown not dropped a perfectly thrown long pass from Pryor a few plays earlier that had touchdown written all over it. The missed opportunities were adding up, and the half ended at 7-3 Iowa.

Mo Switching Jerseys

The Buckeyes grabbed the lead for the first time in the game by driving for a score with the second half kickoff to go up 10-7. Pryor rushed four times for 27 yards, and was 5 for 5 passing on the 77-yard drive, finishing it off with a 5-yard TD strike to backup tight end Reid Fragel.

Stanzi answered with four straight completions on the ensuing Iowa possession, and the Hawkeyes were aided by a personal foul penalty on Jermale Hines for a hit on an Iowa receiver. The Hawkeyes stalled out on the OSU 13-yard line, but a field goal tied it up 10-10 going into the final quarter.

That's the quarter that saw Bad Pryor early and Good Pryor late. Buckeye fans know by now that we rarely see either one without the other in any given game. Paraphrasing Bob Knight, who was speaking of an entirely different subject, "if it's inevitable, you might as well relax and enjoy it". Not bad advice for Pryor-watchers.

Miscellany

Ohio State became the first team in Big Ten history to win 10 games or more in six consecutive seasons. It's slightly easier to accomplish that in the era of every team playing a 12-game regular season, and everybody and his brother going to a bowl game, but it's impressive nonetheless.

The Buckeyes had mixed results from their strategy of playing mostly man-to-man with their corners on the Iowa wideouts and blitzing liberally. Chekwa and Torrence got turned around a few times, and got called for a couple of legitimate pass interference calls, as well as a couple of questionable ones. But late in the game, the coverage was pretty good, and Stanzi was harassed into several throwaways and a coverage sack. He was held to 195 passing yards, and completed only one pass for more than 20 yards, a 23-yard connection with Johnson-Koulianos, so on balance you have to say the press strategy worked pretty well.

Michigan is up next, in the final matchup of the greatest rivalry in sports before the two schools are separated by the Big Ten's divisional setup next year. If OSU gets by the Wolverines for the seventh consecutive time, it's hard to imagine the 11-1 Buckeyes not getting an at-large BCS berth. Keep an eye on the front page for what Jesse and David have to say on that in the days ahead. There's a lot of football yet to be played.

(**) *(To be fair, it's really 29-5. The official stats don't show the Texas bowl game loss as a "start" for Pryor, since he lined up at WR on the first offensive play, with Boeckman at QB)*

Links:

OSU Athletic Communications - Official Box and Game Stats

ESPN Box

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