The Buckeyes wrapped up spring football with their third straight Saturday scrimmage in Ohio Stadium, and 44,276 fans showed up to watch the finale. Jim Tressel had to alter the traditional OSU Spring Game format because he didn't have enough offensive linemen to outfit both a Scarlet and a Gray team with enough bodies. Instead of the traditional "drafting" of two full teams from the 103-man spring roster, the offense wore the scarlet jerseys, and in the end they outpointed the gray-shirted defense to score a 59-27 decision in a 90-play situational scrimmage.

The "game" was played without kickoffs, punts or halftime, with Tressel resetting the offense at different positions on the field after a set series of plays, a forced punt situation, or a score. Those resets included having the offense start inside their own 10-yard line, or beginning at the opponent's 25, to simulate an overtime situation. In the early going, with the first team defense squaring off with the offensive starters, it looked a lot like the first 14 practices and the last two open scrimmages of spring ball this year in Columbus...with the defense dominating against the green skill-position players on offense.

But as the day progressed, some of those untested offensive Buckeyes started to show why they're here, and before it was over, they had generated enough firepower to put five touchdowns on the board to go with two Drew Basil field goals. For example, each of the four quarterbacks vying to replace Terrelle Pryor for the first five games of 2011 managed to throw a touchdown pass. And four different receivers not named DeVier Posey were on the receiving end of those TD throws...all very encouraging developments to be sure.

There isn't enough space on the Internet to get into the details of Tressel's unique scoring system for these affairs, but it's enough to say that the 59-27 score isn't a fair indicator of the difference between offense and defense on this day. It wasn't close for two reasons...the offense scored TD's ...and they didn't turn the ball over. The defense has fewer ways to score points, and without defensive touchdowns they were at a disadvantage.

The QB's

For those who didn't get to see the nationally televised scrum on Big Ten Network, the pressing question is probably how the four quarterback contenders looked. Statistics don't tell us much in a format like this, but together with some other observations, they help paint the picture:

Joe Bauserman: The senior threw his TD pass on the last play of the scrimmage, a 16-yarder

to walk-on Ryan Ross. He was sacked on each of his first two series of the day, and finished 4 of 11 for 42 yards. Bauserman understandably has the best grasp of the playbook, and always seems to know what he's supposed to do. He did scramble and weave out of trouble and away from the relentless pass rush a couple of times to get a pass off. His best throw of the day was a nice 15-yard sideline completion to Chris Fields. Still he is erratic throwing the ball, and rarely makes anyone say "wow".

Kenny Guiton: The sophomore was 5 of 11 passing, including a beautiful 17-yard fade for a touchdown to Verlon Reed (a receiver with a future here). He was 1 of 4 on his first series, but on his second shot from the Gray 25, he hit Jaamal Berry for 8 yards at the sideline, and then the fade to Reed for a 2-play "red-zone" TD drive. Guiton one short completion on each of his last two series at QB. He didn't get sacked, but took some wicked shots after releasing the ball. Tough kid with some quicks and some mobility, but throws some ugly incompletions. Didn't look like "the man".

Taylor Graham: Graham got a baptism under fire from the OSU defense, getting sacked five times for 30 yards in losses. These were not strictly caused by his relative lack of mobility, but that didn't help. On three consecutive plays at one point, Graham was sacked by, in order, J.T. Moore, Dorian Bell and Jeremy Cash. Like I said, not all his fault. The offense was very vanilla, but Heacock's defense was bringing the whole package...stunts by linemen...corner blitzes...the works. Graham had the throw of the day...a 68-yard strike to a streaking T.Y. Williams *(pictured)*, hitting the lanky redshirt freshman in stride on the deep ball. It doesn't take anything away from Graham's throw or the sweet catch by Williams to point out that this TD pass was completed against a defense made up entirely of the "3's", including mostly walk-ons and early-arriving freshmen-to-be.

Braxton Miller: The kid whose classmates are still on spring break from Huber Heights Wayne H.S. showed everyone that he is going to be fighting for the starting job right up to decision time. Miller was 7 of 12 passing for 73 yards and a touchdown. He added 19 yards rushing on four carries, only one of which was a designed running play. He led the Buckeye offense on their longest sustained possession of the day, a 14-play, 92-yard drive ending in a 5-yard touchdown run by Jordan Hall. Miller *(pictured at top)* was 4 of 5 passing on the drive, including completions of 17 yards to Hall and a 20-yard completion to Posey on a deep crossing pattern. Later, he would zip a 15-yard TD strike to Philly Brown out of the shotgun formation, a throw second only to Graham's as the play of the day. Miller show OSU fans a few attributes they haven't seen in their QB for a while. He is elusive in traffic...he doesn't shy away from contact....when he scrambles, he's not looking for the sideline...after contact, he spins, ducks and fights for extra yardage. Now, all these efforts may result in him getting hurt, so I'm not saying it's all that prudent...but it's exciting to watch.

Rushing and Catching the Ball

The Buckeye receivers were better than they've looked up to this point this spring. The drops were minimal, as most of the incompletions were the fault of the quarterbacks. T.Y. Williams had three catches, as did early-enrollee freshman tight end Jeff Heuerman. Posey, Reed, Berry, Hall and Jake Stoneburner had two grabs apiece. Philly Brown made his one catch count for a score, and Chris Fields caught the only ball thrown his way. Baby steps.

The five-headed tailback corps looked pretty good rushing against a defense that is notoriously stingy against the run. Dan Herron looked to be in mid-season form (which is good, since that's when he'll begin playing). Herron rushed 6 times for 40 yards, a 6.2 yd average. Also posting some decent numbers with some hard-nosed rushing were Jordan Hall (8 for 37 yds and a TD), Rod Smith *(pictured)* (7 for 36 for a 5.1 avg) and Jaamal Berry (2 for 16). Only Carlos Hyde failed to get it rolling, gaining just 11 yards on six carrries.

Iron Men

The OSU offensive linemen deserve extra credit for this afternoon's work. They went 90 plays with only eight guys playing nearly all of the snaps. Starters (left to right) were Mike Adams, Jack Mewhort, Mike Brewster, Corey Linsley and Andrew Norwell. Marcus Hall was the primary substitute, getting lots of time at right tackle and right guard. Early freshman Tommy Brown (right tackle) and transfer Ivan Blackman (right guard) got some playing time as well, while walk-ons Ben St. John and Eric Kramer saw very limited duty.

Norwell spent time at both tackle spots as well as right guard, and Mewhort took snaps at tackle, guard and center. J.B. Shugarts, the presumed starter at right tackle, sat out the scrimmage nursing a minor shoulder injury. The best news of the whole day may have been that no offensive tackles got hurt. May that good fortune continue in the fall.

Defensive Stuff

A few notes about the defense, the first of which is to say that you don't have to worry about them losing this exercise on the scoreboard. About a third of the offensive series in the scrimmage began on the defense's 25-yard line. No way do they give up five touchdowns in a normal game against this offense.

Second...and this almost goes without saying...especially if you saw the game on TV...John Simon is a beast. That is all.

And Jonathan Hankins is Beast Jr. OSU defensive coordinator Jim Heacock had his two starting tackles playing almost every position on the defensive line. He started the first series with Hankins at the strongside defensive end, with Simon and Garrett Goebel at the tackles and Nathan Williams in his traditional Leo end spot.

Later, Simon would take his turn at SSDE, with Hankins inside. Still another lineup had Hankins on the nose in a 3-man line, with Simon and Adam Bellamy at the ends and Williams walking up in the middle like a linebacker looking to shoot a gap. By the way, Hankins left the game a little groggy from a helmet to helmet hit that had him down on the ground in pain. Tressel told reporters after the game that it wasn't thought to be serious...plus he's got three months now to shake it off.

Andrew Sweat led the defense in total tackles with 10 from his spot at Will linebacker. Etienne Sabino was a force against the run, and he looked instinctive and mobile, picking up six tackles ranging sideline to sideline from his MLB position. Third year inside linebacker Jordan Whiting is finally getting a chance to play, and he made the most of his time with seven tackles and a sack. And backup Leo end J.T. Moore, a redshirt freshman, was very active, recording six total stops in the game

One reason the OSU passing game may have had a successful day is that four of the the Buckeyes top five safeties sat it out. Tyler Moeller is expected to start at the Star position in the fall, but the coaches are being very cautious with him this spring as he recovers from surgery on a pectoral muscle. And the two guys expected to start at safety, Christian Bryant and C.J. Barnett are both being held out of most of spring ball as they too come back from injuries. The fifth safety, based on spring performance, has been Jamie Wood, but he was banged up in the scrimmage a week ago, and missed this one as a result. 2010 starter Orhian Johnson was the only guy on the depth chart that was able to go Saturday.

Perhaps the most pleasant surprise of the day on defense was the play of safety Jeremy Cash, one of the six early enrolling freshmen playing spring ball. Cash was credited with six tackles (including a sack) on the day, but it seemed to me like more than that. He was always in the middle of the action, and showed some sound tackling technique. Cash had the misfortune to be on the receiving end a crunching, “welcome to college football” block by fullback Zach Boren on Jordan Hall’s TD run, but he looks like a player.

In fact, all four of the early enrollees on defense showed well on Saturday. Defensive tackle Joel Hale has caught the coaches’ eye all spring, and he took advantage of a strong pass rush by fellow freshman OLB Ryan Shazier to record a sack of Taylor Graham. And safety Ron Tanner had a couple of nice hits as well (3 tackles)...unfortunately one of them was on a receiver about three seconds after the play was over, earning him a 15-yard penalty.

Keep an eye on the BTN TV schedule, as they will probably be replaying this one a time or two.

(photo credits - Jim Davidson - The-OZone.net)