Ohio State lost their Big Ten opener Saturday to Michigan State by a score of 10-7, scoring their only points on a touchdown with 10 seconds to play in the game. After one of the most inept and embarrassing offensive performances by a Buckeyes team in recent memory, several realities about this team are becoming ever clearer.

If there had been any doubt before the game that Ohio State's nearly decade-long reign as the class of the Big Ten is over, there is doubt no more. And if there had been any doubt that Ohio State will have a new coach next year, there should be none any longer.

The Ohio State defense played relatively well, with the exception of two big plays by Spartan receiver B.J. Cunningham beating OSU's No. 1 cornerback. But the offense never looked like they had a clue about how to make headway against the Spartans...and it wasn't just the inexperience of quarterback Braxton Miller making them look hapless.

Blitz Every Play

Michigan State coach Mark Dantonio said after the game that the Spartan game plan was to blitz on every single play, and to assign a man to contain the quarterback Miller. If the Ohio State offense had a game plan, it was apparent to no one watching. Miller told reporters after the game that "We did pretty much what the game plan was".

Ouch. What they did with Miller at the helm was complete 5 of 10 passes for 56 yards, 33 of those coming on one completion to Chris Fields. The freshman, whose running skills were supposed to be his advantage over the other QB contenders, was running for his life from Spartan defenders who consistently overwhelmed the OSU offensive line. He managed just five positive yards rushing, and was sacked four times, finishing at -27 net rushing yards for the game.

To give the reader some idea of OSU's offensive desperation as the game wore on, consider that the coaches replaced Miller with Joe Bauserman in the 4th quarter. 'Nuff said?

Bauserman completed 7 of 14 passes for 87 yards with the Spartans defending a two-score lead, including the last-second 33-yard TD pass to freshman Evan Spencer, but he also suffered five sacks in the quarter, and generally demonstrated the passing prowess that caused the coaches to start a freshman in the first place.

Game Plan?

To be fair, OSU players and coaches said their plan was to run the ball...and when they proved unable to do that effectively, things broke down from there. In this case, "broke down" meant that the positive rushing yards....mainly Jordan Hall's 51 yards and Carlos Hyde's 34 yards....were more than negated by -75 yards on sacks and negative rushes, and 82 more yards in penalties. That...and their near complete inability to execute a forward pass.

Until Bauserman worked the Bucks down to the MSU 33-yard line with less than half a minute to play, the OSU offense had taken exactly *one snap inside the MSU 40-yard line the entire game!* And on that 2nd quarter snap from the Spartan 34, Miller threw a pass that was picked off at the MSU 6-yard line.

The only thing more painful for an Ohio State fan than watching this game on TV was watching it in person....in a light, wind-driven drizzle...having paid 70 bucks for the privilege. Trust me and 105,305 others on this one.

Early Turning Point

The best chance for Ohio State to run a play in the red zone (a chance that never came) went by the boards on the first MSU offensive series, when the Spartan punter somehow managed to track down a snap that went through his hands and over his head down inside the MSU 15, and get off a miraculous side-winding kick with several Buckeyes bearing down on him. Jordan

Hall, (who exercised questionable judgment fielding punts all day) let it bounce and roll all the way to the OSU 21, and a golden opportunity was lost.

Spartan quarterback Kirk Cousins played like a 5th-year senior should, keeping plays alive and hitting open receivers down the field when his team needed a big play. He was 20 of 32 for 250 yards, with one TD and two interceptions. But even at that, the OSU defense harrassed and hurried him several times, and his game could be boiled down to perhaps three plays.

Midway through the first quarter, he rolled away from the rush, and found Cunningham in the end zone with a 33-yard strike. OSU cornerback Travis Howard was in coverage and seemed to have a look at the ball, but failed to leave his feet to make a play on it, and it was 7-0 early. Howard was burned again later on a 52-yard Cousins strike to Cunningham to the OSU 17, but the defense rose up to stop the drive with an end zone pick by safety C.J. Barnett off a tipped ball intended by Cousins for tight end Dion Sims.

Breaking Down

The OSU defense can hardly be blamed for the second and last Spartan score. One of Ben Buchanan's *10 punts*, this one a 4th quarter effort from his own end zone, was run back to the OSU 39, and after the Spartans failed to get a first down, Dan Conroy kicked a 50-yard field goal.

The 10-point lead in the 4th quarter might as well have been 50 on this day, and it turned out to be enough, so the Buckeyes are still looking for their first conference victory. They are 3-2, 0-1, and have a date in Lincoln next week with a very ticked off group of Cornhuskers playing their first ever Big Ten home game. The two teams on the schedule after that (Illinois, Wisconsin) are a combined 10-0. This has the potential to get very ugly.

More than one OSU beat writer speculated afterward about the possibility that Luke Fickell could lose this locker room, and see their much-touted unity break apart after all they've been through. The problems have not been exclusively on one side of the ball for this team, but at least in this game, that's sure the way it looked. One defensive starter was quoted after the game as saying, "Defense fought all game. We can't do anything else...Offense is on scholarship too. Make a couple plays." Uh oh.

It's the Scheme, Stupid

All the disclaimers about the OSU staff having "forgotten more than I'll ever know" are applicable here, and I tend to leave the X's and O's analysis to better qualified folks, but it was disheartening to see Luke Fickell and Jim Bollman so utterly in over their heads on Saturday....mostly Bollman. He is, after all, in charge of offensive strategy and execution, game-planning, play-calling, and oh, by the way, coaching the offensive line. In other words, all the areas of football that were crying out for coaching competence against the Spartans.

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