A couple of weeks ago, after the loss in Miami, I resigned myself to watching Ohio State play December postseason football. After last Saturday's 10-7 loss to Michigan State in the Horseshoe, the scariest offensive horror show this program has seen in a number of years, I'm honestly wondering if this team is capable of even that modest feat.

Saturday's defeat was both a nightmare and a harbinger of bad tidings. Ohio State's offense collapsed completely in the face of Michigan State's rugged defense; the Buckeyes were hovering around the one hundred total-yard mark in the fourth quarter and needed a last-second touchdown heave to avoid their first home shutout in nearly three decades. Ohio State couldn't run, couldn't pass, couldn't protect and couldn't avoid the program's first loss to the Spartans since 1999. And there seems to be no sign of improvement on the horizon.

With a brutal upcoming schedule, it could get a lot worse before it gets better. A winning season and a bowl bid are a long way from certain at this point- a very long way. What is certain is the dire future of Ohio State's coaching staff, which again looked dazed, confused and incapable of adjustments. The brutal performance by the Buckeyes on Saturday won't be the last in what is rapidly degenerating into the sorriest season in a long, long time.

First, the Offense: And it was just as bad, if not worse, than the numbers indicate. Ohio State managed 178 total yards on the day, 85 of those in the last five minutes. The Buckeyes went 4-of-16 on third downs, ran for just 35 yards, went three-and-out six times and until their lone touchdown with ten seconds to play never got beyond the Michigan State 33-yard line. Ohio

State quarterbacks were sacked nine times, which for all I know is a record worst for the program.

Play-calling and execution alike were lacking. With Michigan State bringing blitzes on practically every down, Ohio State called not one screen pass. Every pass play seemed to consist of downfield routes that took eons to develop, and by the time they did- if they did- time was running out for Buckeye quarterbacks. Ohio State's offensive line was whistled for three false starts- at home, which is inexcusable. It was a bad game for the quarterbacks, which is to be expected, but the line play was atrocious as well- not for the first time in the last decade.

Series after series started and ended with the Buckeyes beyond the eight-ball. The average gain on first down was less than three yards. Sacks and penalties forced Ohio State into one long-yardage situation after another, a situation the offense was anything but equipped for. On back-to-back possessions in the second half the Buckeyes wound up with 4th-and-22. Even with the Spartans dominating, it was still only a 7-0 game early in the fourth quarter. But the Ohio State offense was utterly incapable of making that one play that would have changed the momentum of the football game.

Have to Say, Though: So was the defense. Christian Bryant criticized the offense afterward (uh, oh) but he had a potential pick-six bounce off his hands in the third quarter- not for the first time this season. The defense is holding up fairly well in terms of points allowed, but the game-changing plays, the plays that score points, are nowhere to be found at a time they are needed most.

Oh, And Another Thing: Why in the hell would you continually run play-action in third and double-digit yardage situations?

Enough is Enough: I understand the quarterback mess is out of his hands, but the play-calling, the performance of the offensive line, the rhythm and tempo of the attack- none of it is up to Big Ten standards. These defects have been around for a long time, covered up by great individual performers. With those performers nowhere to be found, the long-standing dysfunctions of the offense have been exposed for the world to see.

There's no real scheme in Ohio State's offense. If there is high-level talent it works fairly well

despite its built-in inefficiencies; incoherent line play and little in the way of adjustments (I'm usually annoyed by "adjustments" talk, but when you get sacked nine times and never throw a screen pass, I'd have to call that a lack adjustments) or changes of tempo. If there isn't high-level talent, or if it's raw, Katie Bar the Door.

They really need to bring in a staff that can plot and execute a coherent offensive game plan; one with rhythm, one that operates at a higher level than merely getting by from play to play. I have a feeling they will- or at least, they'll try.

Play of the Game: It came at the end of Michigan State's opening possession of the afternoon. After the Spartans were stopped on three plays punter Mike Sadler muffed the long snap, the ball rolling away behind him. It looked as if Ohio State's offense was about to set up shop deep in Spartan territory with a chance to get an early score, so important in what promised to be a low-scoring affair… until Sadler retrieved the ball and got the punt off right before he was wiped out by John Simon. When Jordan Hall- who had a forgettable game both on offense and on special teams- failed to make a fair catch, the ball rolled all the way to the Buckeye 21-yard line before being downed. And just like that, Ohio State's first and only chance to take the initiative was gone.

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