The third weekend of October proved to be one filled with on-field upheaval. Two leading BCS contenders saw their hopes melt away under the heat of upside-minded opponents; one of those contenders fell on the play of the season thus far. Races in the Big East, Big Ten and Big 12 cracked wide-open. Unbeaten teams and individual records fell alike.

Amid the turmoil there was stability. LSU and Alabama won big to set up a confrontation for the ages, while fellow unbeatens Oklahoma State, Boise State, Stanford, Clemson, Kansas State and Houston held serve in style. All of this sets the stage for two weekends of season-defining games: Stanford-USC, Oklahoma-Kansas State, Michigan State-Nebraska this weekend, and the titanic showdown between LSU and Alabama next weekend.

The 2011 season is about to really take shape.

Game of the Week- Michigan State/Wisconsin: No one who watched this instant classic will ever forget it- especially the way it ended, with the 44-yard Hail Mary from Kirk Cousins to Keith Nichol shattering Wisconsin's BCS title dreams and giving the Spartans an improbable 37-31 victory. Long before the final dramatic play this Saturday night thriller was an emotional rollercoaster: the Badgers dominating early in gaining a 14-0 lead; the Spartans scoring 23 unanswered points in the second period thanks in large part to a safety and two blocked kicks; Wisconsin fighting back to tie the score at 31-31 with a pair of fourth quarter touchdowns, the second with 1:26 left; the desperate final minute-and-a-half and, finally, the last play, which was initially ruled down at the Wisconsin one-yard line before being reviewed and (correctly) ruled a touchdown. What a night.

For Wisconsin it's as nightmarish an end to its undefeated run as can be imagined. Haunting questions will linger. What if Russell Wilson hadn't thrown an interception with his team up two touchdowns and driving in the first quarter? What if the Badgers didn't have a field goal blocked and a punt blocked for a touchdown in the second quarter? What if Bret Beilema hadn't called a timeout with thirty seconds remaining, giving Michigan State enough time to launch its Hail Mary Heard 'Round the World? What if safety Jared Abbrederis had timed his leap better instead of jumping too early and allowing the Cousins heave to bounce off B.J. Cunningham and go straight to Keith Nichol?

What makes the loss especially galling is that the Badgers, in their first true test of the season, had all but weathered the storm. Down 31-17 early in the fourth quarter they mounted the type of comeback that makes champions, scoring two touchdowns to tie the score and, seemingly, set up overtime. Russell Wilson made big plays with his arm and legs, his receivers worked hard to get free and make big catches and the defense rose up and made the stops it absolutely had to make. Wisconsin did everything it had to do to come back and steal the game- something every team must to at some point if it wants to go undefeated and win a national championship. But all that effort, all that grit, went for naught- thanks to a one-in-a-million play.

Later, Sooners: Wisconsin's loss was shocking only in the way it happened, not that it happened in itself. Michigan State is a very good team, one that handed the Badgers their only-regular season loss in East Lansing last season. This was bound to be a tough game, maybe the toughest of the season for Wisconsin going in.

Far more shocking was Oklahoma's 41-38 home loss to Texas Tech Saturday night. Playing a team that had lost two in a row and hadn't won in Norman since 1996, the Sooners- owners of the nation's longest home winning streak going in, at 39 games- were mesmerized by Tech's quick, short passing attack and fell behind 31-7 in the third quarter before mounting a rally that was too little, too late. Oklahoma couldn't stop the Red Raiders in the first half, couldn't get a defensive stop after pulling to within seven early in the fourth quarter and couldn't keep from, in all likelihood, falling out of the race for the BCS title.

(Honestly, though- how many of you wanted to see Oklahoma back in the BCS Championship Game against another SEC opponent? Anyone? Anyone? Bueller?)

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