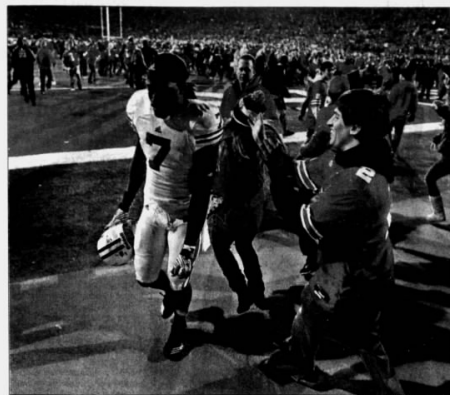


WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

SPORTS

★ SUNDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2011 • D5

UW FOOTBALL NOTES



Badgers safety Aaron Henry leaves the field amid Buckeyes fans who poured from the stands in celebration on Saturday night.

Another costly miscue

For the second straight game, the Badgers allow a punt to be blocked — leading to a touchdown.

By TOM MUEHLER
tmuehl@madison.com
608-252-6169

COLUMBUS, Ohio — One area where Ohio State's success in recruiting pays big dividends every year is on special teams.

Like many teams, the Buckeyes use special teams as a proving ground for young players. But their young players just happen to be better athletes than just about everybody else's.

Ohio State worked its special teams magic again Saturday night with a blocked punt that led to a touchdown during their 31-20 victory over the University of Wisconsin at Ohio Stadium.

Early in the third quarter, Buckeyes freshman linebacker Ryan Shazier blocked a Brad Nortman punt and Ohio State freshman line-backer Curtis Grant recovered at the UW 1-yard line. Three plays later, Jordan Hall scored on a 22-yard run to give Ohio State a 17-7 lead.

It was the second straight week UW had a punt blocked, and once again backup lineman Robert Burge was the culprit. Burge, one of three players lined up in a shield in front of Nortman, didn't even attempt to block Shazier as he came around the edge.

Burge wasn't available for comment after the game. "Obviously, it's frustrating," Nortman said. "As a punt unit, we want to be able to have a positive influence on the game. The punts that I get off and am able to punt, I want it to be a positive influence on the game, but it's just frustrating when something like that happens."

UW redeemed itself later in the quarter when reserve defensive back Andrew Lukasek recovered a muff by Hall on a punt return. That led to a Monte Ball touchdown that cut Ohio State's lead to 17-14.

But UW had another special teams breakdown late in the game.

After the Badgers had rallied to take a 20-20 lead with 1 minute, 18 seconds remaining, Hall returned the ensuing kickoff 42 yards to the Ohio State 48. Four plays later, Braxton Miller found Devin Smith for a 40-yard touchdown pass to give the Buckeyes the lead with 20 seconds to go.

Bielsma doesn't back down

One week after UW coach Bret Bielsma was heavily criticized for the use of his timeouts in a last-second loss to Michigan State, he was at it again against Ohio State.

The Buckeyes were backed up to their own 8-yard line, following an illegal block below the waist on a punt return with 56 seconds left in the first half.

After a run by Dan Herron gained 3 yards up the middle, Bielsma didn't hesitate in calling the Badgers' first timeout with 49 seconds left.

A week earlier, Michigan State had the ball deep in its own territory in the final minute of the game. Bielsma burned three timeouts in the final 42 seconds in an attempt to get the ball back.

That didn't work. The Spartans scored the winning touchdown on a 44-yard Hall Mar pass on the final play.

This time, the timeout strategy worked as planned.

Another run by Herron on second and 2 picked up 2 yards and Bielsma called a second timeout with 45 seconds left.

An open-field tackle by linebacker Kevin Claitor on Miller resulted in a 1-yard gain on third and 5.

Bielsma called his final timeout of the half and the Badgers got the ball at their own 47, with 32 seconds remaining.

However, the offense was unable to take advantage of the field position. Quarterback Russell Wilson was sacked for a 7-yard loss on third and 5 from the Ohio State 44.

It was Miller time for OSU.

The Buckeyes attempted only four passes in their most recent game — against Illinois two weeks ago — completing only one.

In three earlier games this season, Ohio State completed seven or fewer passes — four against Miami (Fla.), seven against Colorado and six against Nebraska.

Miller attempted 12 passes against the Badgers, completing seven for 89 yards and the score.

Fertile recruiting ground

The Badgers have had success recruiting in Ohio, formerly in the Cleveland area under former receivers coach Henry Mason and most recently in the Cincinnati area under tight ends coach Joe Rudolph.

UW has 15 players on its roster from Ohio — but it's mostly young talent. The only starter in the group is sophomore middle linebacker Chris Borland.

The only other players in the two-deep roster are three sophomores, wide receiver Jeff Buckworth, tight end Brian Wesnock and defensive end Pat Muldoon.

Ten of the Ohio players are freshmen or redshirt freshmen, including some highly regarded players such as offensive linemen Ray Ball and tight end Austin Trayler, who are from Columbus.

Bielsma talks about recruiting Wisconsin players, even outside the state. The Ohio players seem to fit the mold of hard-working players with a passion for football.

"I think a good brand of football comes from Ohio," Borland said. "Maybe not the athletes you see across the board in Florida, Texas and California. You get guys who understand the game and do it the right way. I've played against a couple guys who have played for Ohio State. They're no exception."

Extra points

Ohio State wore special uniforms to honor its 1958 Intercollegiate Football team, a "1958" inscription on the inner neckline, socks and sleeves served as "a silent reminder of the indisputable determination of that year's lineup," according to Ohio State's media notes.

Wilson has thrown at least one touchdown pass in 32 straight games, four short of the NCAA record — Wilson now has 19 passing touchdown passes this season, tied for the second-most in program history. The record is 25, set by John Stocco in 2005.

— Jim Pizzo contributed to this report.

Oates

Continued from Page D1

knocked off the top-ranked Buckeyes last year in Madison, it spoiled their perfect season and ended the series at 5-5 since 1990. The rivalry isn't Michigan-Ohio State yet, but it has been so closely contested that Ohio State scored only four more points (201-202) than UW in those games.

If anything, UW's victory last season escalated the rivalry to a new level. It was Ohio State's only loss on the field — it has since vacated its 12 victories due to NCAA violations — and it robbed the Buckeyes the wrong way. At the same time, UW saw the victory as validation of its status as a true Big Ten power.

But if it was UW that ruined Ohio State's season a year ago, the struggling, short-handed Buckeyes repaid the bill Saturday night at Ohio Stadium, in a thriller that is certain to heat up the rivalry even more. 12th-ranked UW dropped a 31-20 decision to Ohio State, leaving the Badgers to pick up the pieces to a season that was rife with national championship talk only eight days earlier.

"Whatever they're going through, they still have great players, great coaches," UW tackle Josh Oglesby said. "Ohio State is Ohio State. It is definitely a rivalry. It hurts to lose this one get away from us."

Ohio State was the second of back-to-back road night games for the Badgers against traditional Big Ten powers. And much like the deflating 37-3 loss at Michigan State a week earlier, the Badgers had no one but themselves to blame for the loss to the Buckeyes, who were a rare seven-point underdog at home.

Many wondered if the Badgers would suffer from a Hall Mar hangover after losing to the Spartans on the game's final play. But being ready to play at the start didn't seem to be an issue. Being ready to play a mistake-free game was an issue, however.

Amazingly, the game came down to dueling Hall Mar's receivers that, inexplicably, were left all alone — Russell Wilson's bomb to Jared Abbrederis that gave UW the lead with 1 minute, 18 seconds left and Braxton Miller's bomb to Devin Smith with 20 seconds left that gave Ohio State the victory.

Even more amazing, Ohio State's students rained the field afterward. More than anything, that tells you how far this rivalry has escalated.

"It's definitely tough losing to Ohio State," said Aaron Henry said. "It's definitely tough losing, period, whether it's a rivalry game or it's a team that we don't consider it to be a rivalry. But, I mean, it's Ohio State. They're a traditional program and have a lot going for themselves. The one last week was really tough and the one this week is just as tough. It's unfortunate because in order for us to be considered a great ballclub, you've got to win on the road."

Although they promised to play better than they

OATES GRADES THE BADGERS

OFFENSE

C- The Badgers tried to run inside in the first half and outside in the second but had little success anywhere. UW's receivers had a tough time getting open. Once again, Russell Wilson had a late comeback.

DEFENSE

C- Looking for a 67-yard burst by Dan Herron, UW stopped Ohio State's running backs. However, it had trouble containing the scrambles and draws of quarterback Braxton Miller. The late coverage breakdown was inexcusable.

SPECIAL TEAMS

D- Ohio State's premier special teams was this one. The Buckeyes blocked a Brad Nortman punt and recovered at the 1. A bigger sin was allowing Jordan Hall to return the kickoff to the 48 inside the final 2 minutes.

OVERALL

D+ That's twice in two weeks the Badgers lost on the road to an inferior opponent on a late desperation heave into the end zone. However, in both cases, they did themselves in with mistakes long before the final throw.

did at Michigan State, the Badgers made many of the same mistakes — intentional grounding, missed tackles that led to long runs, a blocked punt, a fatal mistake in pass coverage — they made a week earlier. They didn't quit after falling behind in the second half, but their rally fell short once again, victimized by a few huge mistakes that ruined an otherwise hard-nosed performance.

To have a couple of plays here and there that break for long yards, that kills the defense," line-backer Mike Taylor said. "It kills any chances of winning football games. You can be playing good football all game, but that's all the other team needs is four or five big plays. That's what happened tonight."

Ohio State's strong run defense hurt UW and an inability to cover deep receivers hurt it at the end, but it was special teams, an area that has plagued UW throughout coach Bret Bielsma's tenure, that did in the Badgers this time.

The blocked punt — UW's second in two weeks — handed the Buckeyes a 17-7 lead. And after it took a late lead, UW allowed Ohio State to return the kickoff to the 48, setting up Smith's winning catch that was eerily similar to Michigan State's right down to the booth replay that confirmed it.

"They're a great team," Oglesby said. "You can't go on the road and expect to beat a great team having the mistakes that we had."

Despite the loss, the Badgers remain in the thick of the Leaders Division race. However, they are not the disciplined, mistake-free team that captured its first six opponents.

Now they're just a team on the short end of a budding rivalry.

CONTACT Tom Oates at toates@madison.com or 608-252-6172.

TODAY'S DEAL

MONDAY

\$20 Gift Card for \$10

2 - \$10 Gift Cards

JIM'S MEAT MARKET

1428 Northport Drive
Madison

TUESDAY

\$10 Gift Card for \$5

Collo's Gallery

1805 Northport Drive
Madison

WEDNESDAY

Two 14 Day Manicures with SHELLAC UV POLISH System

Nails

1234 Engle Road
Madison

THURSDAY

\$20 Gift Card for \$10

2 - \$10 Gift Cards

JIM'S MEAT MARKET

1428 Northport Drive
Madison

FRIDAY

1 Month of Tae-Kwon-Do Classes

\$115 value for \$25

Rings Martial Arts

1528 South Douglas Road
Madison

TO SHOP UP FOR TODAY'S DEAL, LOG ON TO go.madison.com/todaysdeal

MADISON.COM

Badgers Bowl Bound

Watch for Details

Call to get on our preferred list

Middleton Travel

(608) 831-4664

www.mttravel.com