

D6 • Sunday, October 14, 2001 •

BADGERS 20, BUCKEYES 17

Wisconsin State Journal

Davis awakens with big game

Senior Nick Davis has six receptions in his best performance for UW in two seasons.

By Tom Mulhern
Wisconsin State Journal

COLUMBUS, Ohio — It was a different Nick Davis on the field for the University of Wisconsin football team on Saturday and it didn't take long for everybody to notice.

"Right out of the chute, one of the assistants coaches said, 'Nick Davis is really into the game. Get him the ball as many times as you can,'" UW coach Barry Alvarez said.

And just like that, the link that enveloped the senior wide receiver and kick returner for more than a year seemed to vanish.

In his best overall game since his sophomore season, Davis caught six passes for 90 yards, including a key 42-yard touchdown in UW's 20-17 victory over Ohio State. He also returned two punts for 35 yards.

"I could tell he was into this game during the week," UW offensive coordinator Brian White said. "He was on a mission. I think he just really relaxed and just said, 'They're just going to go out and play.'"

Davis agreed that he was on a mission. "And the mission was just to go out there and play my fanny off," he said.

I started last Sunday, the day after UW's demoralizing 63-32 loss to Indiana. "I wasn't worried about the little things this week," Davis said. "It was just a matter of me going out and forgetting about everything else and concentrating on one thing."

The one thing was playing football, and nothing else mattered: not all the problems he endured last season, when he was suspended four games for two unrelated incidents, and not his failure to be a bigger part of the offense this season.

Davis was just what the offense needed, including a 5-yard completion on third-and-3 on the second possession.

"Sometimes it just takes a



Nick Davis dashes past Ohio State's Dustin Fox on his way to a 42-yard touchdown reception in the third quarter Saturday afternoon.

ing a different week," said Davis, who also had an 18-yard kickoff return.

It's hard to say why Davis was not able to do this earlier. Perhaps it was the finality of entering the second half of his senior season taking hold of him. "It's kind of like now or never," he said. "That's the mentality you have to take game in and game out from this point on."

It helped that quarterback Brooks Bollinger went to Davis early, including a 5-yard completion on third-and-3 on the second possession.

"Sometimes it just takes a

NOTES

By Eric Anderson
and Tom Oates
Wisconsin State Journal

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Just as it did in the University of Wisconsin's comeback win at Ohio Stadium in 1999, momentum in Saturday's 20-17 UW victory turned on a special teams play: the decision by Ohio State junior punter Andy Groom to run with the ball on a botched punt attempt deep in Buckeyes territory late in the first half.

Ohio State was facing a fourth-and-20 from its 22-yard line when Mike Jacobs' snap was slightly off-line. UW had three players — David Braun, Chris Catalano and Jim Leonhard — coming in from the punter's right side as he tried to block the punt, but there was no consensus as to whether they would have had a good shot at blocking it if Groom had kicked it.

"I think we did," said Braun, who watched Catalano tackle Groom after a 1-yard gain. "I was pretty shocked that he actually decided to run."

Everyone agreed it shifted the momentum in UW's direction. Trailing 17-0, the Badgers took over at the Ohio State 23 with 53 seconds left in the half. Anthony Davis promptly ripped off a touchdown run, which began UW's string of 20 straight points.

"He let it be punted it, it was going to be blocked," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said of Groom. "His momentum was going around the corner. He wanted to try to take the corner. We have to make decisions as we go."

Watson breaks leg

UW's euphoria was tempered by the broken leg suffered by reserve junior wide receiver Stephon Watson.

An Ohio State spokesman said Watson broke the tibia and possibly the fibula in his right leg and would spend the night at the Ohio State Medical Center.

"I could see he broke his leg," coach Barry Alvarez said. "That's a bad fracture."

As the Badgers celebrated after the game, their thoughts were on Watson.

"I wasn't dancing on the 'O,'" Watson said. "I was praying on the 'O.'" Tight end Mark Anelli said, "I got down on my knees and I was thanking God for this opportunity and praying for Stephon Watson."

Anelli was kneeling, he was holding the hand of Ohio State linebacker Fred Page Jr., who suffered a broken leg against UW two years ago.

Saturday was Page's first start since that game.

Davis back on track

Anthony Davis admits it. "I love grass," the UW freshman tallback said.

When you are battling the punt from turf to grass, Davis is, any cushion helps. Davis, who missed last week's loss to Indiana because of the toe, said it felt better Saturday but wasn't 100 percent.

It didn't matter. Davis, the leading rusher in Big Ten entering the game, ground out 103 hard yards on 26 carries against one of the conference's better defenses. His 23-yard touchdown run late in the first half cut Ohio State's lead to 17-7.

Turnabout is good play

The Badgers defense gets untracked in the second half to stifle Ohio State.

By Eric Anderson
Wisconsin State Journal

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Cancel the missing persons report: After being essentially absent for 90 minutes of action, the University of Wisconsin football team's defense finally made its return late Saturday afternoon.

After being raked for 631 total yards by Indiana last week and yielding 189 yards in the first half against Ohio State, the Badgers' defense clamped down in the second half, keying UW's 20-17 upset of the 21st-ranked Buckeyes in a Big Ten Conference game at Ohio Stadium.

The statistical turnaround was startling.

In that six-quarter stretch against the Hoosiers and Ohio State, the Badgers allowed a whopping 820 yards, with 574 of those yards coming on the ground. In the final 30 minutes Saturday, the Buckeyes managed just 64 total yards, including a net of minus-4 yards rushing on 18 carries.

Surprisingly, there weren't many major changes made by UW coaches at halftime — because there wasn't much they could do.

"More than adjustments, we weren't getting off blocks and we missed a lot of tackles," Badgers coach Barry Alvarez said of the first half. "I rubbed a lot of oil on my back and I don't know how you make adjustments to tackle better."

The case, the same players who looked lost for six quarters quickly found themselves.

UW shut down Ohio State running backs Jonathan Wells and Lydell Ross, most notably by defending the Buckeyes' "take-over" play that worked



UW's Mike Echols (36) and Wendell Bryant take down Ohio State's Lydell Ross for a loss Saturday. The Buckeyes had minus-4 yards rushing and 64 total yards in the second half of the Badgers' 20-17 victory.

well early on. Wells rushed for 52 yards on 18 carries in the first half and had 14 yards on six attempts in the second half. Ross carried eight times for 56 yards before the half and only 3 yards on six carries thereafter.

The lack of a running game forced the Buckeyes to go to the air with much-maligned senior quarterback Steve Bellari, who continued to struggle. He was 6-for-12 passing for 58 yards in the second half and was sacked three times for 17 yards.

"We just had to play our type of football, play our brand. Hit 'em in the mouth, get off blocks and make plays," Badgers defensive tackle Wendell Bryant said.

Bryant and his mates up front made plenty of plays. In addition to starters Bryant, Delante McGee, Chuck Smith and Ben Herbert, younger players such as Nick Cochart and Erasmus James, Jonathan Welsh and Antai Hawthorne made contributions as UW rotated its defense.

line men and turned the tables by wearing down the Buckeyes' mammoth offensive line, which averages 309 pounds.

"I think being able to rotate guys and having fresh bodies out there, especially when their offensive line was wearing down... is a great thing," Bryant said. "They can step in and they can play. And I think they did today. I think they served notice that they are here."

Party

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shocking, probably," UW coach Barry Alvarez said of Comeback II.

Granted, Bollinger was making his first start as a redshirt freshman in Comeback I, and UW was coming off back-to-back losses to Cincinnati and Michigan. But Bollinger was surrounded by a veteran team that had won the Rose Bowl the previous year.

"I think people realized then we had a pretty good team (in 1999)," Alvarez said. "That whole offensive line is playing in the NFL, and you've got the Heisman Trophy winner (tailback Ron Dwyer) lined up back there."

There was no such confidence about this year's team, which was in serious crisis mode after the humbling 63-32 loss to Indiana.

"I think people were looking to see how we would respond," Alvarez said. "I think everybody was shocked when they saw that score up there last week and wanted to know what you're all about."

The Badgers (4-3 overall, 2-1 in the Big Ten Conference) showed what they are about, and likely salvaged their fast-sinking bowl hopes, with a dominating second-half performance before 103,520 fans at Ohio Stadium.

"You've got to give credit to the group of guys in that (UW) locker room and then the coaches," Bollinger said. "After what we went through last week and stuff going bad right away early in the game, I think the character of the guys and also this program showed through."

It also helped to get another big assist from the forgiving hosts. Two years ago, it was a fumble by Michael Wiley to start the second half. The Badgers scored two plays later to pull within 17-12, changing the game's momentum.

This time, it was a decision by Ohio State junior punter Andy Groom to try and run after a slightly wide snap on fourth-and-20 near the end of the first half. It appeared Groom could have gotten off a punt, but he was snuffed after a 1-yard gain.

Thank you, whoever you were, I'm going to send you

some doughnuts," Anelli said of Groom. "That was huge for us."

When freshman tailback Anthony Davis — back in form with 103 yards after missing the Indiana game with an injury — did a great job keeping his balance on a 23-yard touchdown run around right end on the next play, the Badgers trailed 17-7 and had new life.

"That was just like getting three points two years ago here," Alvarez said of a field goal on the final play of the half that made it 17-6. "It gave us momentum and now you can see light at the end of the tunnel."

Bollinger, who had his second straight 200-yard passing game (12-22 for 282 yards), made sure UW held the momentum, beating a middle blitz with a 42-yard touchdown pass to Nick Davis on a slant on the opening second-half drive to make it 17-14.

But the second half, more than anything else, belonged to the much-maligned UW defense. The Buckeyes scored on their first three possessions, building the 17-0 lead behind their physical running game.

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