

Buckeyes Go Down To No. 14 Ranked Bruins In Defensive Struggle

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PASADENA, Calif. (AP) - UCLA linebacker Robert Thomas didn't need to say a word - his wide smile told the story for an often-criticized Bruins' defense.

No. 14 UCLA stymied Ohio State throughout Saturday's only matchup of Top 25 teams in beating the 21st-ranked Buckeyes 13-6 before an enthusiastic crowd of 73,723 at the Rose Bowl.

"We've been through a lot," said Thomas, a senior who made six tackles - five for losses. "The offense has done it in the past, and it was time to pay them back. It's nice to make plays and celebrate out there."

The Bruins did an especially good job containing senior quarterback Steve Bellisari, who completed only 5-of-23 passes for 45 yards with two interceptions, netted 15 yards on nine rushing attempts, and refused comment afterward.

"The corners and the safeties did a good job on pass coverage, and the linebackers, we kept our eye on Bellisari," Thomas said.

UCLA (3-0) held Ohio State to eight first downs and 166 total yards. The Bruins had 18 first downs and 323 yards of offense, but four lost fumbles contributed to keeping the game close.

UCLA hadn't allowed fewer than six points since beating Texas 66-3 on Sept. 13, 1997.

"They've been maligned, they've been ridiculed," UCLA coach Bob Toledo said of his defense, which allowed a school-record 368 points last season. "They never gave in to the bad things that happened to us today."

UCLA, which allowed an average of more than 29 points from 1998-00, gave up 17 in each of its first two games - wins at Alabama and Kansas.

Phil Snow, hired last winter, is the

Bruins' fourth defensive coordinator in five years.

"He taught us to be better students of the game," Thomas said. "He taught us to read formations, to be ready. Now, all 11 on the field know exactly what's going on."

Snow said he has a better defense than he realized, and believes it will continue to improve.

"These guys are good, so I didn't have to make up a bunch of new defenses," Snow said. "We can play great defense here, because we have great players."

First-year Ohio State coach Jim Tressel lamented missed opportunities.

"The fumbles seemed like they were never-ending, we had more opportunities than we deserved," he said. "We need to grow up quickly or we will be in big trouble. We are just so young."

The Bruins took a 7-0 lead on a 24-yard scoring pass from Cory Paus to Ryan Smith, capping an 80-yard, 14-play drive after the opening kickoff.

They would be limited to Chris Griffith's two field goals after that.

That left it to the defense to excel. And it was never better than midway through the third period, when with the score 10-6, Ohio State lost a yard on three plays after Tim Cheatwood recovered the third of DeShaun Foster's four fumbles at the Ohio State 9.

Following a false start, Josh Huston was wide left on a 32-yard field goal.

In the first half, Mike Nugent was wide right on a conversion attempt as well as a 28-yard field goal try after a fumble by Bryan Fletcher gave the Buckeyes (1-1) possession at the UCLA 15.

After Huston's miss, UCLA moved 64 yards to get into position for a 33-yard field goal by Griffith that completed the scoring.

Mike Doss recovered a fumble by Foster at the Ohio State 41 in the opening minute of the fourth quarter, but the Buckeyes lost the ball on downs at the UCLA 30.

And Angelo Chattams recovered Ricky

Manning's fumbled punt return with 6:06 left at UCLA 38, but again the Buckeyes lost the ball on downs, this time without picking up a first down.

UCLA fumbled seven times and lost four - two by Foster.

"Sometimes, when people who make things happen like Foster, they don't protect the ball like they should," Cheatwood said. "I was going for the ball all day."

Foster made no excuses, saying: "They were just fumbles. The ball wasn't slick. We won, and that's the important thing. Our defense did a great job."

Foster rushed for 66 yards on 29 carries, while Paus completed 16 of 25 passes for 262 yards without being intercepted.

"This season, we've won a game with 20 points and we've won a game with 13 points," Paus said. "That's a testament to our defense. This is a team game."

Paus and Smith hooked up for UCLA's touchdown on a third-and-9. The reception was the second of Smith's career and his first TD.

The Buckeyes scored their points less than four minutes later when Doss blocked Nate Fikse's punt, and Ricky Bryant recovered just before the ball went out of the end zone.

Griffith missed from 40 yards away early in the second quarter, but kicked a career-long 49-yarder late in the period after Cie Grant batted away a potential 32-yard TD pass from Paus to Brian Poli-Dixon.

Griffith missed again, this time from 38 yards, early in the third quarter after Matt Ware's 17-yard interception return to the Buckeyes' 16.

A moment of silence was observed before the game to honor the victims of last week's terrorist attacks. As it was ending, a fan yelled, "God Bless America, yeah!" That drew a loud response from the crowd.

UCLA passed out 60,000 patriotic placards with the American flag on one side and "United, We Stand," on the other.