

Clarett Makes History on Buckeye Opener

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Even though it was an unprecedented game for an Ohio State freshman tailback, Maurice Clarett acted as if it were no big deal.

"I just wanted to do my job and everything just fell its own way," Clarett said after becoming the first true freshman to ever start at tailback in an Ohio State season opener.

Clarett more than did his job. He rushed for 175 yards and three touchdowns as the No. 13 Buckeyes beat Texas Tech 45-21 on Saturday in the Pigskin Classic.

Clarett scored on runs of 59, 45 and 2 yards - and set up two other short touchdown runs by Lydell Ross as the Buckeyes rolled up 318 yards on the ground.

Early in the third quarter, after he ran untouched through the right side for the 45-yard score, the crowd of 100,037 at Ohio Stadium chanted, "Mau-rice! Mau-rice!"

"I'm just kind of soaking it in," Clarett said. "It's only one game. If I'm successful all season, I guess then I can call myself a success."

Clarett's teammates were impressed.

"He's the real deal," quarterback Craig Krenzel said. "Sometimes you get recruits that are highly touted and they don't pan out. His performance today proved he's ready to play."

Tech quarterback Kliff Kingsbury, touted as a Heisman Trophy contender but befuddled most of the day by the Ohio State defense, completed 26 of 44 passes for 341 yards and three touchdowns with one interception. Two of his touchdown passes and more than 140 of the passing yards came in the fourth quarter after the Red Raiders fell behind 38-7.

"We knew they were good up front but when you get behind 21-7 you get out of your game plan and you're scrambling for things to do," Kingsbury

said. "We never recovered."

Kingsbury had a shot at getting the Red Raiders back in the game after they fell behind 21-7 midway through the second quarter. But he bumped into halfback Foy Munlin on a fourth-and-goal handoff at the 1 late in the half, with Ohio State's front line smothering the play.

"They just blew it up," Kingsbury said.

On Tech's first series of the third quarter - after Clarett burst through on a slant play for another score - Kingsbury underthrew a wide-open Nehemiah Glover on a short pass and Ohio State's Dustin Fox picked it off at the goal line.

"That's a 14-point turnaround," said Carlos Francis, who provided Tech's first touchdown on a 37-yard pass from Kingsbury. "It hurts bad. It hurts in PlayStation and it hurts in real life."

Ohio State defensive end Will Smith was a key component in disrupting the Red Raiders' spread offense. In one second-quarter series, he sniffed out Kingsbury's shovel pass to Taurean Henderson for a 3-yard loss, almost picked off Kingsbury's pass over the middle and then rushed Kingsbury and forced him to throw a pass away.

Tech ran for just 31 yards on 20 attempts.

Smith only had four tackles but all four were for negative yardage including two sacks. The Buckeyes totaled seven sacks and nine tackles for a loss.

"We didn't have any tricks up our sleeves and Ohio State didn't have any up their's, either," coach Mike Leach said. "It was pretty much base stuff and they just executed better than we did."

Clarett was Ohio's Mr. Football last year at Warren's Harding High School and also was USA Today's national offensive player of the year. He graduated from high school in December and enrolled at Ohio State for the winter quarter so he could go through spring drills with the team.

He carried four times for 10 yards and caught an 8-yard pass for a first down as the Buckeyes took a 7-0 lead on their first possession on Ross' 2-yard run.

Clarett broke two hand tackles at the line and fought off Tech's Joselo Hanson the final 10 yards on a 59-yard run that made it 14-0.

Ohio State also scored on a Ross 1-yard dive, backup quarterback Scott McMullen's 1-yard keeper and Mike Nugent's 45-yard field goal.

Kingsbury's late touchdown passes covered 36 and 34 yards to Wes Welker.

Ahead 21-7 at the half, the Buckeyes pulled away by scoring on each of their three third-quarter possessions. Clarett, who gained 100 yards on 12 carries in the first half, had seven carries for 71 yards in the period.

He also ended up as the Buckeyes' leading receiver with four catches for 30 yards.

"There's no question that Maurice has great ability," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said. He added, "I think we have three guys who can bang it in there."

Krenzel was almost flawless, completing 11 of 14 passes for 118 yards and running for 34 yards - three more than Tech's leading rusher.

Much had been made about how good Tech's passing game was - and how many question marks the Buckeyes had up front and in their offensive backfield.

"I felt the physical factors would be in our favor and that if we got a chance to outwit them we would," Tressel said. "And we did."