

## Buckeyes Remain Perfect

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**EVANSTON, Ill. (AP)** - Ohio State freshman Maurice Clarett ran for two touchdowns, and personally outrushed Northwestern with his fourth straight 100-yard game.

The only number he's going to remember, though, is three - his three fumbles.

Clarett and the rest of the fifth-ranked Buckeyes were hardly at their best, but the freshman made up for his miscues with two scores and the defense held when it mattered most to stave off scrappy Northwestern 27-16 Saturday night.

"Horrible, horrible," Clarett said. "This win doesn't feel good, but it's a win."

Clarett finished with 140 yards, and is now one shy of Robert Smith's school freshman record for 100-yard games. His 715 yards rushing are 411 short of Smith's freshman record.

Craig Krenzler completed 11 of 22 passes for 170 yards and ran for 62 yards as Ohio State improved to 6-0 (2-0 Big Ten) for the first time since 1998.

It was the Buckeyes' 23rd straight victory over Northwestern (2-4, 0-2 Big Ten), a streak dating to 1971.

"The key is to keep improving and I hope we look at some things and say we're better at this or we're getting better at that," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said. "I hope we improve, I hope we focus on that instead of, 'OK, great, we won another one.'"

Especially since this one was closer than anyone but Northwestern expected. The Wildcats had plenty of chances to win, but they missed two field goals and had to settle for field goals on two other possessions inside the Ohio State 10.

They also had a touchdown wiped out by a questionable call in the second quarter and ended up with three points. And driving late, Brett Basanez's pass was intercepted at the Ohio State 25.

"There were critical plays and the credit goes to Ohio State. They made them and we didn't," Northwestern coach Randy Walker said. "You can't get some of those plays back on the goal line."

Jason Wright did his best to give the Buckeyes a game, rushing for 95 yards and a score and adding 67 yards on returns.

"I'm really frustrated about being close," Wright said. "Almost does not count."

The Buckeyes had played only one other road game this year, at Cincinnati, and that was dicey, too. After trailing for most of the day, they needed an interception in the end zone with 26 seconds left to seal their 23-19 victory.

This one wasn't supposed to be nearly as tough. Northwestern's defense entered allowing a whopping 522 yards a game, including 309 rushing. Those are the kind of numbers made for Clarett and Ohio State's ground game.

But Northwestern didn't make this easy.

"We prepared all week to play this offense. They didn't surprise us with anything," said linebacker John Pickens, who forced Clarett's second fumble.

"In the second half, we kind of let it slip out of our hands."

Clarett fumbled on two of the first three possessions, setting up Northwestern's first score, a field goal. The Buckeyes didn't score until the second quarter, on a 3-yard run by Lydell Ross. They added another touchdown on Clarett's 2-yard run with 2:43 left in the half, giving them a 14-9 lead.

Northwestern had a chance to seize the momentum - and possibly the game - when Wright ripped off a 31-yard run and followed it with a 29-yard reception, putting Northwestern at the Ohio State 4. But the Wildcats couldn't get into the end zone, and David Wasielewski's 18-yard field-goal attempt was wide right just before halftime.

"It was a huge difference in the game," linebacker Cie Grant said. "A lot of people were saying maybe they'll come

out with three, and we're saying, 'They're getting nothing.'"

Ohio State finally looked like its old smashmouth self in the second half, with Clarett gaining 35 yards during an 11-play, 79-yard drive. He finished it off with a 20-yard run up the middle, diving over the goal line for the touchdown that gave Ohio State a 24-9 lead.

"I just saw the pylon and I knew we had to get points on the board," he said. "So I ran for the pylon."

Northwestern lost 3 yards on the first two plays of its next series, and the game appeared to be just about over. But Basanez hit Jon Schweighardt up the middle for a 36-yard gain.

The Wildcats got a break with a pass-interference call on 3rd-and-8 at the Ohio State 45, getting a first down and 15 yards. Four plays later, Wright rumbled into the end zone, dragging Ohio State safety Michael Doss with him.

But Ohio State answered right back with a field goal, and Northwestern never threatened again.

"That's something we can come away with, that we continue to be great in the red zone," Buckeyes linebacker Matt Wilhelm said. "That's a totally different ballgame if they score a couple of times."