

No. 4 Ohio State Claims 34-3 Victory vs. No. 19 Minnesota

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - Ohio State's defense appreciates being tested.

"We knew that Minnesota was in the top 10 in the nation as far as running the ball and we didn't want those guys to control the clock," two-time All-American strong safety Michael Doss said after the sixth-ranked Buckeyes defeated No. 23 Minnesota 34-3 Saturday.

"We decided to take that as a challenge."

There were plenty of offensive stars for the Buckeyes. Lydell Ross ran for two touchdowns. Chris Vance, who learned before the game that his brother was shot to death Friday night, caught a 30-yard touchdown pass from Craig Krenzel. Mike Nugent kicked two field goals to set a school record with 20 this season and extend his overall mark to 21 in a row.

But it was the defense that controlled the game, holding Minnesota to just 112 yards while running its streak without allowing a touchdown to 10 quarters. The Golden Gophers (7-2, 3-2 Big Ten) came in averaging 271 yards rushing but finished with just 53 on 36 attempts.

"I knew that we'd have a tough go running against these guys," Minnesota coach Glen Mason said. "That's because they're awful good, and they were putting more guys up there on the block."

Darrion Scott had two sacks and David Thompson had two tackles for losses.

Ohio State improved to 10-0 (5-0 Big Ten) for the first time since 1996 and the 10th time in school history. The Buckeyes, who still trail Iowa (9-1, 6-0) in the conference, have games remaining at Purdue, at Illinois and home against Michigan. Iowa still has to play Northwestern at home and at Minnesota.

"I've never been 10-0 in anything," free

safety Donnie Nickey said. "Knowing that we can get to where we set out to go is exciting."

One of the biggest cheers from a crowd of 104,897 came when the score of Notre Dame's 14-7 loss to Boston College was flashed on the scoreboard early in the fourth quarter.

Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said he never mentioned the Fighting Irish's loss to his team, choosing instead to look at what the Buckeyes have ahead.

"We talked about the fact that our guys played an excellent game today, and that we don't get to play at home for another 20 days," Tressel said. "We're going to be on the road for two weeks. We've got to do everything right; we've got to get better at a lot of things if we're going to meet our goals."

Although the Buckeyes' offense foundered with freshman tailback Maurice Clarett out with an injured left shoulder, the defense controlled the game without forcing a turnover.

Ohio State outscored the Gophers 17-0 in the third quarter. During that period, Minnesota ran 13 plays that netted minus-6 yards, without a first down.

Ross ran for 89 yards on 20 carries, scoring on runs of 5 and 9 yards. Maurice Hall added 93 yards on 14 carries.

In the first half the Buckeyes had one punt blocked, lost a fumble and Krenzel was sacked five times for 22 yards in losses - and still led 10-3.

On their first three possessions, the Gophers took over at the Ohio State 27 (after Andy Groom's punt was blocked by Jermaine Mays), and the Minnesota 45, twice. But they managed just 48 total yards on 16 plays, the only points coming on Dan Nystrom's 24-yard field goal.

Minnesota gained just 64 yards in the final three quarters.

Krenzel, who completed 9 of 15 passes for 128 yards, set up the Buckeyes' first touchdown with a 49-yard strike to Michael Jenkins. Ross went off left tackle for the 5-yard TD on the next carry.

Minnesota's Preston Gruening had a punt blocked by Nickey and also dropped a snap. Those two plays led to 10 points as Nugent kicked a field goal, and Ross scored on a 9-yard run two plays after Gruening kneeled after mishandling the snap.

"I was untouched," Nickey said. "I could have run past him. I could have tackled the guy I was there so fast."

The Gophers' Terry Jackson II and Thomas Tapeh had each rushed for more than 100 yards in the last three games - with Jackson topping 200 yards in the last two. But they combined for just 81 yards on 24 attempts.

Vance played after learning of the death of his 21-year-old younger brother, Percy. The senior flanker had his brother's name, birthdate, date of death and "R.I.P." written on his uniform.

"It was my decision to play," Vance said. "And it was my escape. The touchdown was for my brother. I know he would have wanted me to play."