

Buckeyes Bounce Boilermakers

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WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - Ohio State was trailing on the road and facing fourth down late in the game, with not only a victory but the Big Ten title and a chance at the Fiesta Bowl berth slipping away.

Craig Krenzel found a way to keep it all within reach for the Buckeyes.

He threw a 37-yard touchdown pass to Michael Jenkins on fourth-and-1 with 1:36 left as the third-ranked Buckeyes defeated Purdue 10-6 Saturday to keep their national championship hopes alive.

The Buckeyes (6-0 Big Ten) are off to their fourth 11-0 start in team history, joining the 1975, 1979 and 1995 teams. More importantly, they probably will remain No. 2 in the BCS standings, keeping them on course for a trip to the Tempe, Ariz., and a shot at the national title.

The Boilermakers (4-6, 2-4 Big Ten) were leading 6-3 when Krenzel dropped back and found Jenkins - who sprinted down the sideline before cutting in - for an over-the-shoulder catch in the end zone.

"It's a situation I wish everybody in the world could feel, with that kind of excitement, that natural high," Krenzel said.

Krenzel attempted only 11 passes but completed nine of them for 173 yards. He had been pressured the entire game by a bruising Purdue defense that held Ohio State to only 267 total yards and sacked Krenzel three times.

But Krenzel, using a no-huddle offense, called the game-winning play at the line of scrimmage, and Jenkins beat Antwaun Rogers to get open.

"That's what a receiver has to do. We have to separate when the ball is coming," Jenkins said.

Purdue got the ball again, but Kyle Orton's long pass into double coverage was intercepted by Chris Gamble.

The Buckeyes though, nearly were done in by the deep pass. Two years ago it was Drew Brees who did the damage, and this time it was Brandon Kirsch, whose 59-yard completion to Ray Williams early in the fourth quarter set up Berin Lincecum's 32-yard field goal that put the Boilermakers ahead by three with 7:50 left.

In that 2000 game, Brees connected with Seth Morales for a 64-yard game-winning TD that sent Purdue to its first Rose Bowl in 34 years and knocked the Buckeyes out of the conference title picture.

The Boilermakers have long been out of title contention this season, and they need wins in their final two games to become bowl-eligible for the sixth straight season. They've lost eight straight games against ranked teams.

"This may or may not be hard to believe, but the game played out exactly as we hoped," Purdue coach Joe Tiller said. "We just wanted to be in position to win the game in the fourth quarter. We just didn't get the key stop on a fourth-down play and didn't operate the two-minute offense."

Strong performances by both defenses ensured a low-scoring game.

The Buckeyes barely had enough time to kick a field goal as time ran out in the first half to make it 3-all. Krenzel escaped pressure and scrambled 15 yards down the middle to Purdue's 13. On third-and-9 from the 12, Krenzel ran again, this time for seven yards but short of the first down.

With no timeouts left and the clock ticking down, the field-goal unit hurried onto the field, and the center snapped the ball just in time for Mike Nugent to kick a 22-yarder. Tiller argued to officials that time had expired, but television replays indicated that there was one second showing when the ball was snapped.

Nugent has made 22 straight field goals dating to last season and is closing in on the NCAA Division I-A career record of 30 straight, set by Washington's Chuck Nelson. Nugent has made 21 straight this year and is within reach of the single-season record of 25, which

Nelson set in 1982.

Orton got the start in place of Kirsch, who broke a bone in his right hand when he accidentally struck a wall during a fight at a fraternity party. Orton took command early, going 6-for-9 for 55 yards on the opening drive before a pass was intercepted by cornerback Dustin Fox deep in the far left corner of the end zone.

Orton was benched at halftime for Kirsch but returned in the fourth quarter.

"I don't know the reason, and I didn't ask why," Orton said. "Whatever the head man says goes. There is no discussion or debating the decision."

Orton finished 18-for-28 with three interceptions and 169 yards. Kirsch went 13-for-20 for 116 yards.

Buckeyes running back Maurice Clarett, who had nerve damage in his left shoulder that kept him out of the last two games, started the game and ran 14 times for 52 yards.

Ohio State played without wide receiver Chris Vance, who was attending his brother's funeral.

Ohio State coach Jim Tressel stressed to his team - which plays at Illinois next week - that its first mission should be winning the Big Ten. If it loses and Iowa wins out, the Hawkeyes win the league title.

"We're not going to drop in the Big Ten standings, and that is what's important right now," Tressel said.