

No. 4 Ohio State Buries No. 5 Notre Dame, 34-20

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TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) - Troy Smith found a measure of redemption and Notre Dame found itself a bowl loser again in a Fiesta matchup brimming with big plays by the Buckeyes.

Suspended from last year's Alamo Bowl for taking \$500 from a booster, Smith hooked up on a pair of long touchdown passes and fourth-ranked Ohio State beat the No. 5 Irish 34-20 Monday night, sending them to their eighth straight bowl loss.

Santonio Holmes set a Fiesta Bowl record with an 85-yard TD catch, then said he forgoing his senior season to enter the NFL draft. Ted Ginn scored on a 68-yard end around and caught a 56-yard touchdown pass for the Buckeyes (10-2).

Darius Walker scored all three touchdowns for Notre Dame (9-3). The Irish fell to 13-14 overall in bowls, a disappointing end for Charlie Weis in his first year as their coach.

Smith, the offensive MVP, also sat out this year's opener, but has improved steadily since then. He completed 19 of 28 passes for a career-high 342 yards and ran for another 66 in 13 attempts.

"As you watched Troy throughout his career, every day in practice, he learns a little something and gets better, and he learns from every ball game," Ohio State coach Jim Tressel said. "He's very passionate about being a great quarterback, and each day he's taking a step closer to it."

The junior from Cleveland capped his performance with a pair of third-and-long completions on the Buckeyes' final scoring drive. Antonio Pittman, who rushed for 136 yards in 21 carries, broke free on a 60-yard touchdown run to seal the victory with 1:46 to play.

"First of all, I want to let you know that sitting out of last year's bowl, I didn't think about that as much as you probably think I did," Smith said. "To me, this year's seniors, this group of

guys on the field, that's what it was about. I don't like taking a lot of credit for what goes on on the field because it takes 11 guys."

Forget the stereotype of plodding, but powerful Ohio State; the Buckeyes won with sheer speed.

Ginn caught eight passes for 167 yards. He zigzagged into the end zone on his long run to help the Buckeyes take to a 21-7 halftime en route to their third Fiesta Bowl victory in four years. Holmes caught five passes for 124 yards.

The intricate, efficient offense that Weis brought with him from the New England Patriots sputtered early before the Irish mounted a comeback that cut the lead to seven in the fourth quarter.

A.J. Hawk, Ohio State's Lombardi Award-winning linebacker and the game's defensive MVP, sacked his girlfriend's brother, Brady Quinn, twice. Hawk also ran down Quinn to stop a third-down play early in the fourth quarter.

Quinn, a third-team all-American behind Matt Leinart and Vince Young of Texas, completed 29-of-45 for 286 yards but no touchdowns. Walker gained 90 yards in 16 attempts.

The teams met for only the fifth time in their storied histories, and for the first in a bowl game.

The Irish gave up a season-high 617 yards, 275 on the ground.

A crucial play came when a video replay nullified what would have been an Ohio State turnover in the third quarter.

With Notre Dame trailing 21-13 and the Buckeyes driving, Smith threw over the middle to Anthony Gonzalez, who dropped the ball at the Irish 12. Tom Zbikowski picked it up for Notre Dame and ran 88 yards to the end zone. An illegal block would have brought it back to the Buckeyes' 21, but a video review of the play determined Gonzalez juggled the ball and it was ruled an incompletion.

"That was THE play," Weis said. "What I said to the official on the field is I

hope your guy upstairs was right because that changed the whole complexion of the game."

Josh Huston kicked a 40-yard field goal and Ohio State led 24-13 with 2:20 to go in the third quarter.

Huston's 26-yard field goal with 10:12 to play made it 27-13.

Notre Dame mounted its best drive, 80 yards in 13 plays, to cut the lead to 27-20. Walker's 3-yard run was ruled a touchdown after another video review with 5:27 left.

The Irish blew a chance to go ahead late in the first quarter after Corey Mays sacked Smith and the Ohio State quarterback fumbled. Ronald Tally recovered for the Irish at the Buckeyes' 15. On fourth-and-1 at the 6, Weis decided against a field goal and Quinn was sacked by Hawk.

Then Ohio State's speed took over.

Ginn took Smith's pitch on an end around and raced 68 yards for a touchdown, leaving three Notre Dame defenders sprawled on the ground with a cutback from the sidelines 10 yards from the end zone. The Irish led 14-7 with 14:16 left in the first half.

The Buckeyes were driving for another score, but Smith's too-strong pitch on an option play bounced off Ginn's outstretched arms and was recovered by Notre Dame's Ambrose Wooden at the Irish 9.

Notre Dame drove to midfield, then punted and pinned the Buckeyes at their own 2. No matter. Smith scrambled from the 6 to the 15, then connected with Holmes for an 85-yard scoring play.

The previous record for longest pass in the Fiesta Bowl was 79 yards from Tennessee's Tee Martin to Peerless Price against Florida State in 1999 and Oregon's Joey Harrington to Samie Parker against Colorado in 2002.

It was the 35th and final Fiesta Bowl in Sun Devil Stadium. The game moves to the Arizona Cardinals' new stadium in the west Phoenix suburb of Glendale next year.