

## No. 1 Ohio State Opens Season with 35-12 Victory vs. Northern Illinois

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**COLUMBUS, Ohio** - No. 1/1 Ohio State scored on its first four possessions of the game while Troy Smith threw for 297 yards and three touchdowns and Ted Ginn Jr. hauled in four catches for 123 yards and two scores in leading the Buckeyes to a 35-12 victory against Northern Illinois in front of 103,896 fans Saturday at Ohio Stadium.

Smith, a Heisman Trophy candidate along with Ginn, completed 18-of-25 passes for 297 yards and three touchdowns without an interception or a sack. Ginn reeled in a 58-yard TD pass in the first quarter and a 56-yard reception in the fourth quarter. He also had 69 return yards with 44 yards on two punt returns and two kick returns for 25 yards. Antonio Pittman carried the ball 19 times for 111 yards and one touchdown, while Anthony Gonzalez caught four passes for 53 yards and one TD. True freshman Chris Wells, in his Buckeye debut, rushed for 50 yards on 10 carries.

The Buckeyes outgained the Huskies in total yardage, 488-343, and amassed 173 yards rushing on 36 carries while they posted 315 yards on 20-of-27 passing. The Huskies totaled 153 yards rushing and 192 yards passing. A lot of that yardage came from Garrett Wolfe, the nation's leading returning rusher. He totaled 171 yards on the ground and had five catches for 114 yards.

The Buckeyes turned the ball over twice, both inside the NIU 10-yard line, and missed two field goals.

"A lot of this game was what we expected in that they had a great back in Garrett Wolfe," Jim Tressel, Ohio State head coach, said. "A lot of times when you get a big lead, you get a little sloppy. You can't have turnovers that keep you from scoring points. Despite how good Garrett Wolfe is running with the ball, we'll see a lot of quality backs over the course of the next 11 games. It was a good win over a tough opponent. I thought we took a step forward today."

Ohio State gave up a couple of plays of 31 and 9 yards to Wolfe on the opening possession of the game, but Vernon Gholston came up with an 8-yard sack of NIU quarterback Phil Horvath that forced a punt. After a 22-yard return by Ginn, Smith hit Brian Hartline for a 32-yard pickup on the first play from scrimmage. Seven plays later, Smith found Ginn in the front right corner of

the south end zone for a 5-yard strike to give the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead with 8:24 to play in the first quarter.

The Huskies were 3-and-out on their next possession. When the Buckeyes got the ball back, they took only 13 seconds to score thanks to a 58-yard pass from Smith to Ginn with 6:38 to play in the first quarter. The quick strike gave Ohio State a 14-0 lead after Aaron Pettrey converted his second PAT of the game.

Gholston again came up big when Northern Illinois got the ball back. With the Huskies facing 2nd-and-12 from the NIU 8-yard line, Gholston recorded his second sack of the day, taking Horvath down for a 5-yard loss. Wolfe had a minimal 6-yard gain before the Huskies were forced to punt. The punt went off the side of the foot of Andy Dittbenner and sailed only 11 yards, giving the Buckeyes possession at the NIU 20-yard line. After two rushes by Pittman, Smith found Gonzalez in the end zone for a 15-yard touchdown. Pettrey converted again to give Ohio State a 21-0 cushion with 3:15 to play in the first frame.

Northern Illinois was mounting a threat as the first quarter was winding down thanks to a 65-yard gain by Wolfe on a screen pass from Horvath. After he gained another yard to set up 2nd-and-9 at the OSU 11, Larry Grant stepped in front of Horvath's pass and returned it 49 yards to the NIU 43. Maurice Wells ran for three yards and then caught a 30-yard pass from Smith to the NIU 10. Chris Wells carried the ball the rest of the way, picking up two yards before capping the drive with an 8-yard rush over the right end for the Buckeyes' fourth score of the game. Pettrey converted again to give Ohio State a 28-0 lead just five seconds into the second quarter.

The last time the Buckeyes scored on four straight possessions was last year against Texas (three Josh Huston field goals and a pass reception by Santonio Holmes). The last time Ohio State scored touchdowns on four-consecutive possessions was in the first half against Kent State in 2002.

The shutout being pitched by a talented, yet inexperienced, Buckeye defense came to an end with 6:16 to play in the first half when Chris Nendick put a 35-yard kick through the uprights to make the score 28-3. Wolfe carried the ball for 39 yards on the nine-play, 48-yard scoring drive. He was tackled in the backfield for a 5-yard loss before an incomplete pass made it 4th-and-15 to lead to the field goal.

The score remained 28-3 at the half with Ohio State leading in total yardage, 297-179, thanks to 208 yards passing by Smith, who

completed 13 of 17 first-half passes, including three for scores. Ginn had three grabs for 67 yards and a pair of TDs, while Pittman had 11 rushes for 69 yards. The Buckeye defense limited Northern Illinois to 46 yards rushing in the first half.

The Buckeye defense came up with another third-down stop on Northern Illinois' opening drive of the second half, forcing the Huskies to kick their second field goal of the game. Horvath bobbled the snap, but recovered it before Gholston and Antonio Smith tackled him for a 5-yard loss to force the Nendick field goal that made the score 28-6 with 8:39 to play in the third quarter.

Pittman got into the scoring for Ohio State with a 1-yard run two seconds into the fourth quarter to cap a 6-play, 38-yard drive. Pittman carried three times for 10 yards on the drive that included passes to Gonzalez for 11 yards, Ray Small for 8 and Rory Nicol for 9. Pittman's score gave the Buckeyes a 35-6 lead with 14:58 remaining in the game.

Northern Illinois finally broke through the Ohio State defense for its first touchdown of the game with 10:27 to play. The 4-yard reception by Wolfe from Horvath pulled the Huskies within 35-12 after a two-point conversion failed when Brandon Mitchell tackled Horvath. The score capped a 10-play, 71-yard drive that took 4:34 off the clock.

Mitchell finished the game with 10 tackles, including one tackle for loss, to lead Ohio State. Freeman added nine tackles. The defense, which had only two starters returning, saw five first-time starters, including Gholston, Antonio Smith, Marcus Freeman, Nick Patterson and John Kerr. Two offensive players - Hartline and Brian Robiskie - made their first starts as Buckeyes.

The win was the 28th straight win for the Buckeyes' in their home opener.

Ohio State travels to Austin next Saturday to meet No. 2/3 Texas, a 56-7 winner over North Texas Saturday and the defending national champion. The game will kick off at 8:12 p.m., EDT, and will be televised by ABC Sports.