

## **BITTER END: Florida dominates Ohio State on both sides of ball in winning title**

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**GLENDALE, Ariz.** -- Ohio State might be good at football, but the Buckeyes stink at laser tag.

With dizzying speed and inventive play-calling, underdog Florida crissed, crossed, zipped and scooted its way to a 41-14 victory last night in the national championship game in University of Phoenix Stadium.

An overflow crowd of 74,628 saw Florida (13-1) win its second national title. Florida did it behind a 34-point first-half blitz, led by quarterback Chris Leak and a slew of Gators who seemed to come at the Buckeyes from all angles.

Though they were outnumbered, throngs of joyous Florida fans did the arm-waving "Gator chomp" over and over, celebrating the Gators becoming the first Division I school to hold the football and men's basketball titles simultaneously.

The Gators' ferocity and their margin of victory was stunning. The Buckeyes were outgained 370 yards to 82.

"We had a lot of guys, the media, Ohio State, nobody really gave us a chance," Leak said on Fox television. "Hey, we're national champs."

Ohio State (12-1) had been ranked No. 1 all season and came in riding a 19-game winning streak. The Buckeyes were denied their second national title in five seasons, and suffered their first Bowl Championship Series game loss in five tries. For the first time, OSU quarterback Troy Smith did not rise up in a big game.

He was harassed by swift, swarthy Gators defensive linemen all evening.

Before last night, Smith had been sacked just 13 times, but Florida had five, three by Derrick Harvey.

The Heisman Trophy jinx in title games remains alive. Heisman winners are 1-5 in BCS championship contests. Smith finished 4-of-14 passing for 35 yards and the interception, by far his worst game in 28 starts.

The outcome appeared to validate all the pregame talk about Southern speed.

One scene that captured the game's tone came when Florida linebacker Earl Everett had his helmet knocked off but still swooped in, dreadlocks flopping, and caught a scrambling Smith from behind for a 1-yard gain.

Ohio State is 0-8 against Southeastern Conference teams in bowl games. Coach Jim Tressel's four-game bowl win streak was snapped, and his evening included a failed decision to go for it on a fourth-and-1 deep in OSU territory late in the second quarter.

Ohio State wasn't helped by an early injury to receiver Ted Ginn Jr.'s left ankle. The Buckeyes' fastest player ran back the opening kickoff 93 yards for a touchdown but left late in the first quarter and spent the rest of the game on crutches.

Through 11 games, the Buckeyes were tops in the nation in scoring defense, giving up just 7.5 points per game. But they surrendered 80 in their final two contests.

At the opening kickoff, Ginn blasted upfield, cut right and burst free up the sideline for a score.

Florida answered immediately, though, with a 14-yard Leak TD toss to Dallas Baker on its first drive. That seemed to settle the Gators, who got a quick defensive stop, then a 4-yard scoring run by freshman Percy Harvin to take a 14-7 lead.

When Gators tailback DeShawn Wynn bulled in from 2 yards to make it 21-7, it was the first time all season Ohio

State had trailed by more than seven. In their first 12 games, the Buckeyes had trailed for only 35 of 720 minutes.

At that point, Buckeyes defensive coordinator Jim Heacock gathered his shaken unit on the sideline and gave them a pep talk.

OSU's hopes rekindled when Antonio Pittman burst in from 18 yards to cut the lead to 21-14, and the Buckeyes got a stop on defense.

But Smith threw three straight incompletions and OSU had to punt. Florida's Chris Hetland kicked a 43-yard field goal to up the edge to 24-14.

On the Buckeyes' next possession, they faced fourth-and-1 from their own 29. Tressel called an off-tackle run to bullish freshman Chris "Beanie" Wells, but Everett and defensive tackle Ray McDonald got penetration and Wells was short.

Hetland then kicked a 40-yard field goal. Hetland had made only 4 of 13 tries on the season, but it was that kind of game for the Buckeyes.

When Smith was sacked by Jarvis Moss and fumbled it to the Gators, Florida tacked on a 1-yard Tim Tebow TD toss and a 20-point lead at the break.

During pregame, both teams gathered around the midfield logo, facing each other, and began hopping up and down. Coaches from both teams quickly moved their players back.

At game's end, the only players at the logo were Gators.

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