

No. 12 Ohio State Downs No. 25 Northwestern, 45-10

ohiostatebuckeyes.com

November 8, 2008

EVANSTON, Ill. (AP) -No apologies needed after this one.

Terrelle Pryor threw for three scores and Chris "Beanie" Wells ran for two more, leading No. 12 Ohio State to a 45-10 victory over Northwestern on Saturday that showed the Buckeyes are definitely over their loss to Penn State two weeks ago. Pryor was 9-of-14 for 197 yards, and added 33 on the ground. Wells finished with 140 yards on 28 carries.

It was Ohio State's fourth victory in a row over Northwestern, and it delighted the sellout crowd that appeared to be two-thirds Buckeyes fans.

More importantly, the win keeps the Buckeyes' chances for a fourth straight Big Ten title alive. Ohio State (8-2, 5-1) needs to win out and get some help from Penn State and Michigan State, who play each other in the season finale.

Mike Kafka got another start for Northwestern (7-3, 3-3) with C.J. Bacher still nursing a hamstring injury. But Kafka couldn't duplicate his big day from last week, when he set a Big Ten quarterback record with 217 yards rushing. Kafka finished with 83 yards rushing and a score and was 18-of-27 for 177 yards, but the Wildcats were no match for the bigger, stronger Buckeyes.

At least this one was closer than the past three games, when Ohio State outscored Northwestern 160-24.

Pryor apologized to his teammates after the loss to Penn State, saying his mistakes cost them the game. His fumble set up Penn State's go-ahead touchdown, and the Nittany Lions sealed the victory with an interception. With last weekend's bye giving him an extra week to stew about the loss, one question was how the freshman would respond against the Wildcats.

Quite nicely, thank you.

Pryor was 9-of-14 for 197 yards, and he showed the cool and poise of a veteran quarterback. Several times he found himself in jams that would have made most other quarterbacks throw the ball away or, worse, take a sack. Yet he always managed to come up with a big play.

On the first possession of the game, he stayed in the pocket for what seemed like forever on third-and-16. His patience paid off when he found Brian Hartline for a 44-yard reception that could have been a touchdown had Hartline not fallen down at the 2-yard line. Wells scored on the next play.

Pryor's most impressive escape came on Ohio State's sixth scoring drive, when he was chased from his own 32 all the way back to about the 20 on third-and-8. Northwestern linebacker Quentin Davie even got a hand on him, but Pryor shrugged it off.

After scrambling forward for a few yards, he lofted a pass to Hartline down the sideline for a 40-yard gain. Three plays later, Pryor connected with Rory Nicol for a 6-yard touchdown that put Ohio State ahead 31-10.

Wells gained only 55 yards in the loss to Penn State, and he couldn't get much going on Ohio State's first two possessions. But with the ball on his own 45 at the start of the second quarter, Wells let loose.

Taking the ball from Pryor, he ran into a pile at the line of scrimmage. But he found a hole, rumbled through it and had an open path to the end zone. Northwestern cornerback Jordan Mabin finally caught up to Wells around the 3-yard line and got a hand on the big back's shoulders. But he had all the effectiveness of a gnat, and Wells brushed him off and continued into the end zone, doing a little hop over the goal line to give Ohio State a 14-7 lead.

Bacher was upgraded to probable after Thursday's practice, and he was on the field for pre-game warm-ups, throwing a few passes. But it was Kafka who trotted onto the field when the Wildcats got the ball.

Kafka's mobility was even more vital this week, with backup running back

Omar Conteh (knee) joining starter Tyrell Sutton (wrist) on the sideline. It looked as if Kafka might be in for another big day as he ran at will on Northwestern's opening drive. He carried the ball 10 times, including the last seven plays, and ran it in from a yard to tie the game at 7.

But Northwestern's offense was too one-dimensional to give Ohio State much of a challenge.