

Pryor, Wells Each Top 100 Yards Rushing as Buckeyes Top Illini, 30-20

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November 15, 2008

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. (AP) -- No way, Jim Tressel figured, would 11th-ranked Ohio State win by throwing the ball.

So on a gray, windy Big Ten kind of day, the Ohio State coach put the game in the hands of Chris Wells -- always a good place to put it for the Buckeyes this season.

The junior running back's 143-yard performance sunk Illinois, 30-20, and kept the Buckeyes (9-2, 6-1) in the chase for the Big Ten title. Freshman quarterback Terrelle Pryor added another 110 yards rushing.

"We knew we would have a lot better chance of winning running the ball," Tressel said. "You could pass it but you couldn't try to make a living doing it."

The game also served as a little revenge for the 28-21 upset the Illini hung on the Buckeyes last November in Columbus, ruining a perfect season.

For Illinois (5-6, 3-4), Saturday was its own dose of cold, cloudy, wind-blown humility. The Illini are running out of chances to claim a spot in a bowl game, just a year after getting to the Rose Bowl.

More immediately frustrating, Illinois had 455 yards of offense Saturday, 101 more than the Buckeyes, but turned the ball over twice and committed a series of wind-aided special teams mistakes that cost them points.

"We've got to take advantage of the opportunities we have," said Illinois quarterback Juice Williams, responsible for both turnovers. "When we get in the red zone, we've got to put up points."

With the stiff, northwest wind and temperatures most of the day in the 30s, Saturday was made for Wells.

"It was a running back's dream," he said. "Cold and wet -- what more could you ask for?"

He carried the ball 24 times, patiently picking his way through Illini defenders for steady early gains and, later, bursting through holes for runs that exhausted Illinois' defense.

His shorts runs were punishing, but his longer ones were ego deflators for Illinois.

On one 25-yard burst early in the third quarter, Wells hurdled safety Donsay Hardeman, drawing gasps from Illini fans.

Another, a 29-yarder later in the third quarter with the score still 23-13, stole the momentum from Illinois on one of its last chances to get back into the game.

Pryor, too, found room to run Saturday. His 110 yards came on just 13 carries, most of them through a tired Illinois defense in the second half.

The freshman quarterback threw the ball just 10 times, completing six for 49 yards and a TD.

Statistically, Illinois was more than a match for Ohio State.

The Illini had 292 yards of offense by halftime, 22 more than the Buckeyes were giving up a game before Saturday.

But by the midway point in the second quarter, the list of Illinois mistakes was long:

- A fumble by quarterback Juice Williams deep in Illinois territory, and an interception with the goal line in range.
- A punt blocked by Malcolm Jenkins for a safety.
- A punt and kickoff into the wind that went nowhere, giving the Buckeyes great field position.

"You can't turn the ball over and have a chance to win" Illinois coach Ron Zook said.

The Buckeyes made Illinois pay for every one of those mistakes.

The fumble, midway through the first quarter at the Illini 17-yard line, set up the game's first points when Pryor eased into the end zone from a yard out.

The safety led to a short kick, knocked down by that 20 mph wind, and set up Ohio State's second touchdown. Wells capped a 42-yard drive by falling into the corner of the end zone for a 16-7 lead.

Kurt Coleman's interception at the Ohio State 12 probably cost Illinois points, too. And then the Buckeyes took the ball 76 yards the other way for Pryor's touchdown pass to Dane Sanzenbacher and a 23-7 lead.

"Sometimes you say to yourself that you dodged a bullet because you gave up yards but got the turnovers," Tressel said.

The Buckeyes kept Williams under heavy pressure, early by the blitz and later via a flood of white jerseys pouring through the Illini offensive line.

"You can't be passive and wait back because they have too many weapons and too much talent," Ohio State linebacker James Laurinaitis said. "You have to attack it and blitz and get after them and not let them take it to you."

Williams was sacked just twice, but was forced to run out of pressure and either throw on the run or scramble for what he could get on another half-dozen plays.

He finished the day 17-of-26 for 192 yards with two touchdowns and the interception. Williams also ran for 60 yards, second for the Illini Saturday to running back Daniel Dufrene's 79 on eight carries.

The Buckeyes head into the last game of the regular season against Michigan with a chance for at least a share of the Big Ten title and an outside shot at the Rose Bowl.

Illinois will play Northwestern to try for a sixth win that could get the Illini to a bowl game -- perhaps the Motor City.