

Ohio State ends BCS woes, captures first Rose Bowl win since '97

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PASADENA, Calif.(AP) -- Ohio State's bowl woes are over, thanks to a sturdy defense and a quarterback who finally played up to his enormous potential.

Terrelle Pryor passed for a season-high 266 yards and two touchdowns, rushed for 72 more and threw a 17-yard scoring pass to DeVier Posey with 7:02 to play, ending the No. 8 Buckeyes' three-game BCS skid with a 26-17 victory over No. 7 Oregon in the Rose Bowl on Friday.

Posey had eight catches for 101 yards, and Brandon Saine caught an early TD pass for the Buckeyes (11-2), who put together a remarkably fluid offensive performance in their first trip to Pasadena since 1997.

That offense relied on Pryor, the sophomore quarterback who has had a hard time matching his enormous hype. With a Rose Bowl effort that evoked memories of Vince Young's breakout performance in the same stadium four years ago, Pryor shook off his early mistakes and led the Buckeyes confidently through a tense fourth quarter.

"I just wanted to lead the team as best I can," Pryor said. "The defense helped out a lot."

Indeed, Ohio State's defense did much of the work, largely reducing the Ducks' high-flying, no-huddle offense to ineffectiveness. Jeremiah Masoli passed for just 81 yards, while LaMichael James rushed for 70 -- but a series of big plays and kick returns by Kenjon Barner kept the 96th Rose Bowl close until Pryor took control of the final minutes.

"We have an up-tempo defense and they run, they hit and they prepare," coach Jim Tressel said. "Terrelle did a heck of a job."

Oregon (10-3) made a remarkable

comeback from its season-opening loss to Boise State to win its first Pac-10 title since 2001, but the Ducks haven't won the Rose Bowl since the game's third edition in 1917, back when the Granddaddy of Them All was a toddler.

Masoli's 1-yard TD run put Oregon up 17-16 early in the third quarter, but the Ducks' powerful offense never scored again. Oregon ran for 179 yards, the second-most allowed by Ohio State this season, but the Ducks were one-dimensional. Oregon, in its first Rose Bowl since 1995, had scored at least 37 points in its previous six games.

Pryor's career at Ohio State has been about his inadequacies as much as his strengths, and he has been hammered by critics in the Big Ten and elsewhere for numerous flaws in his game. Yet with Ohio State nursing a two-point lead in the fourth quarter, he took charge during a 13-play, 81-yard drive eating up more than six minutes -- part of the Buckeyes' 41:37 total time-of-possession advantage.

Pryor converted a third-and-13 play near midfield with about nine minutes to play on a remarkable 26-yard catch by tight end Jake Ballard, who leaped high to snatch it. After another third-down conversion, Posey made an impressive TD catch, turning both directions and snagging Pryor's pass away from his body before tumbling over the goal line.

After Oregon's Morgan Flint missed a 44-yard field goal, Pryor drove the Buckeyes one more time, finishing with emphasis by gaining a first down with a 12-yard run right after Oregon called its final timeout.

"We knew everything they were going to do, with their blitzes," Pryor said. "I just wanted to come out and show I can be a complete quarterback."

LeGarrette Blount scored an early touchdown for the Ducks, but the once-suspended tailback also fumbled out of the end zone in the third quarter, ending a potential scoring drive.

Blount made an impressive 3-yard scoring run on his first play in the second quarter, clambering over three defenders and knocking off Buckeyes

captain Doug Worthington's helmet before stretching the ball over the goal line.

The cheers Blount received on the way on and off the field highlighted a tumultuous season for the bruising tailback, who was suspended for eight games after punching a Boise State player in frustration after the Ducks' season-opening loss.

Ohio State marched 19 plays for a short field goal 1:05 before halftime, and Ross Homan's 20-yard interception return moments later put the Buckeyes in position for long-injured kicker Aaron Pettrey's 45-yard field goal at the gun, putting the Buckeyes up 16-10.

Barner's big kickoff return to open the second half set up a 38-yard scoring drive finished by Masoli's keeper. Ohio State went back ahead with its fourth field goal before Blount and Pryor traded turnovers.

The crowd appeared to be an even split between scarlet-clad Buckeyes faithful and yellow-and-green Oregon fans who reveled in the postcard-perfect weather in Arroyo Seco well before kickoff. When dusk fell early in the fourth quarter, the nearby mountains lit up with a surreal red-orange glow, setting off hundreds of camera flashes in the crowd.