

Irish defense hurt by big plays in Fiesta Bowl

TEMPE, Ariz. (AP) — The Notre Dame defense had its worst performance in its biggest game of the season.

The bend-but-don't-break Fighting Irish were shattered by Ohio State's speed, giving up one big play after another in a 34-20 Fiesta Bowl loss Monday night. Notre Dame gave up four Buckeye touchdowns of 55 yards or more and a season-high 617 yards total offense.

The Irish were repeatedly caught flatfooted by the Buckeyes, who handed Notre Dame its eighth straight bowl loss in spectacular fashion.

"Those big plays are our Achilles' heel," cornerback Mike Richardson said. "We always harp on big plays. Giving up those plays put it out of reach."

Notre Dame (9-3) was susceptible to big plays all season — it allowed USC's Matt Leinart to throw

a 61-yard pass on a fourth-and-9 to set up a game-winning play — but nothing like Monday.

"Big plays and mental mistakes bit us in the butt," Richardson said.

The Irish repeatedly got beaten for big plays and in big-play situations. They had a chance to go three-and-out on the Buckeyes' first possession, but Ohio State quarterback Troy Smith dropped back to pass, then took off untouched for a 15-yard gain to the OSU 34.

Four plays later, Ted Ginn Jr. sprinted past cornerback Ambrose Wooden and was wide open for a 56-yard TD pass from Smith.

Two possessions later, Ginn did his best Reggie Bush impersonation and made the Irish defenders look foolish. Ginn took a pitch from Smith, ran left around end unchallenged until safety Chinedum Ndukwe made him cut back at the 10-yard line. But Ndukwe couldn't

stop him, and neither could cornerback Mike Richardson or linebacker Corey Mays.

All three were left lying on the ground watching as Ginn ran into the end zone.

"He's fast. But I think if we would have kept our eyes on our keys and did our responsibilities, those big plays wouldn't have happened," Ndukwe said.

The Buckeyes went ahead 21-7 when Santonio Holmes caught the ball at the 40, made Ndukwe miss, then raced in for an 85-yard touchdown catch.

The Irish had a chance to get back into the game when they closed to 27-20, but the defense couldn't come up with a big play of its own. Twice Notre Dame had the Buckeyes third-and-long, but couldn't hold them either time.

On third-and-9, Smith competed a 10-yard pass to Antonio Pittman.

Then on third-and-11, Notre Dame defensive end Ronald Talley had a chance to sack Smith, but the quarterback escaped and completed a 15-yard pass to Anthony Gonzalez.

The Buckeyes put the game away on the next play when Pittman scored on a 60-yard run.

"The bottom line is they came up with the big play to put the game away," Notre Dame coach Charlie Weis said.

"We had a couple of third downs there when the game was in question where if we got the ball back we would have liked our chances to at least get it to tie and get it to overtime."

The defense never gave them a chance, though.

"That's what we've been dealing with all season," defensive end Victor Abiamiri said. "It was disappointing we couldn't show how good a defense we were."

SportsLine

Eagle wrestlers on the road Thursday

The Colby High School Eagle wrestlers will travel to Goodland Thursday, Jan. 5 for a match. Action starts at 6:30 p.m.

Basketball at Goodland Friday

The Colby High School basketball teams will be on the road at Goodland Friday, Jan. 6. "C" team and junior varsity game start at 4:45 p.m. The varsity girls will play at 6:30 p.m. and the boys will play after.

Conference play begins for Trojans

Jayhawk Conference play for the Colby Community College Trojans will begin on Wednesday at the Colby Community Building. The Lady Trojans will tip-off at 6 p.m., followed by the men's game at approximately 8 p.m. Tom Stephens' Lady Trojans were ranked #1 in the pre-season poll. They currently have an 11-2 record. The men's team, under the direction of first-year head coach John Woods, is 7-6. The Garden City men's team is coached by former Colby coach Brian Marso. The Trojan wrestlers will return to action on Thursday.

Eagle wrestlers to Liberal Saturday

The Colby High School Eagle varsity wrestlers will travel to the Liberal tournament Saturday. Action begins at 10 a.m. The junior varsity wrestlers will go to the WaKeeney tournament, which starts at 9 a.m.

Basketball camp planned

Applications are being accepted and evaluated for the Ten Star All Star summer basketball camp. Camp location for the area will be Sterling, Colo. For information, call (704) 373-0873.

K-State Wildcats top North Dakota State Monday

MANHATTAN, Kan. (AP) — Kansas State coach Jim Wooldridge and Cartier Martin must be pretty chummy by now, after spending virtually the entire offseason talking about the junior forward's role in the program.

Martin showed again Monday night why he has become its centerpiece, scoring 20 points and pulling down seven rebounds as Kansas State used a 20-0 run in the first half to pull away from North Dakota State in an 82-56 win at Bramlage Coliseum.

"It starts with his mind-set," Wooldridge said of Martin. "He's put up big numbers, but he's all about winning. When you get to that point, there's no cobwebs left. It's all about winning."

It was Martin's sixth 20-plus point performance of the season, as the Wildcats (9-2) opened a 40-12 lead by halftime and led by as many as 30 in the second half.

Lance Harris added 16 points and David Hoskins had 11 for Kansas State in its final tuneup before opening Big 12 play at Iowa State on Saturday.

Mike Nelson scored 18 points and Brett Winkelman had 16 to lead North Dakota State (7-8), a newcomer to Division I. Ben Woodside

added 10.

Kansas State had been allowing only 61 points per game, but got a lot of help from the Bison's inept offense. North Dakota State shot only 32 percent from the field and committed 26 turnovers.

"We played some awesome defense," Harris said. "That was a big key."

The Wildcats, who struggled in a 66-62 win over Belmont on Friday, jumped out to a 12-3 lead as Dramane Diarra scored the game's first six points.

North Dakota State closed to within five at 15-10 on Nelson's jumper with 9:29 left in the half, but then Kansas State clamped down on the defensive end, forcing nine of the Bison's 19 first-half turnovers during its 20-0 spurt.

"That first half we really got after it," Wooldridge said. "Our athleticism and quickness bothered them. To create that many turnovers is pretty impressive. We kind of broke their back early in the game."

Mario Taybron's steal and lay-up with 2:34 to go in the half gave the Wildcats a 35-10 lead.

North Dakota State was 3-of-20 from the field before Andre Smith stopped Kansas State's run with a basket inside, but Lance Harris

knocked down a 3-pointer from the corner and Martin scored at the buzzer to make it 40-12.

"I've never been through anything like that in my life," North Dakota State coach Tim Miles said. "It was humiliating. That's what we talked about (at halftime), what it feels like to be humiliated."

The Bison, who picked up their first Division I road win at Montana State last Thursday, never got within 20 in the second half.

"Look at where we've struggled this year — when they turn up the pressure on us," said Miles, who started four freshmen and a junior. "We panicked a little bit. We're good at that."

Regardless of their problems on offense, the Bison had just as much trouble containing Martin, who scored on an assortment of put-backs, driving lay-ups and floating jumpers. His deep 3-pointer mid-

way through the first half helped spur the Wildcats' big run.

"Scoring a lot of points is not a goal of mine," said Martin, who entered the night second in the Big 12 in scoring at 19.4 points per game. "I just do whatever I do best to help my team win. I'm a role player."

Martin's role has changed drastically from last season, when he averaged 10.5 points and played a supporting role to Jeremiah Massey. At Wooldridge's request, the Houston native has turned into a team leader, along with its leading scorer and rebounder.

"We talk about it all the time. He sees the benefits of his leadership," Wooldridge said. "I think he's excited about it."

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