

# THE END ZONE: Focus on college football



Maureen Fulton

**W**hen the University of Toledo needed to find replacements for three NFL players in its starting lineup, my prediction was the Rockets would have the easiest time replacing tailback Jalen Parmele. Inserting freshmen in at left tackle and punter seemed like precarious risks in compensating for the loss of John Greco and Brett Kern. Plus UT has a tradition of good running backs under Tom Amstutz and junior DaJuane Collins saw plenty of action in his first two years.

I never gave Parmele enough credit for how hard he is to bring down. He would have gotten the job done at the goal line against Arizona on Saturday. The combination of freshman walk-on Jake Walker, Collins and difficult pass plays to receiver Stephen Williams the first two times the Rockets drove inside the 10 couldn't make up for his absence. The new playmakers need some more plays to get comfortable.

Meanwhile, Mike VanDerMeulen stepped in for Greco and did well — the offensive line allowed one sack and quarterback Aaron Opelt got hit one other time. Bill Claus survived an odd bounce on his first punt to average 40 yards on the evening. The performance of the St. John's Jesuit grad allowed the Rockets coaches to watch Kern punt for the Denver Broncos on *Monday Night Football* and feel pride, not despair.



Ryan Autullo

**D**eadlines can be tedious, and the travel can take its toll. But being a sports writer isn't incredibly brutal. We're not putting ourselves in harm's way to keep your streets safe. None of us is stationed in a laboratory trying to produce a cure for cancer. We report on games — and that's not a bad deal. As for the people and teams we cover ... whew. Tough job. Consider the BGSU football team.

When the Falcons upset Pittsburgh in the season opener, they did an incredible service to the university. As a result, a near sell-out crowd was on hand Saturday at Perry Stadium when BG hosted Minnesota, losing 42-17 to the Gophers. Many of those fans aren't going to bother showing up if BG loses a week earlier. That means the university would have never seen the thousands of extra dollars spent on tickets, parking and pop corn. And then there's the recruiting angle.

A section of Perry Stadium was filled with prospective players and their families and friends. They witnessed an energized student section banging thunder sticks. They saw a line of vehicles backed up on Wooster Street waiting to park. That looks pretty appealing to a 17-year-old pondering his future.

Athletics isn't just about games. It's big business. And it's a tough business.



Matt Markey

**W**hen you take about 15,000 pounds of football players, a dozen-plus coaches, a gaggle of staff, and several tons of equipment, load it all onto chartered jets, fly 1,986 air miles at 29,000 feet at a cruising speed of 479 miles per hour with outside temperatures of minus-50 degrees, leap three time zones, traverse several mountain ranges and deserts and then put the planes down next to the Pacific Ocean, it seems odd that your most serious concern in all of this is a single big toe.

The Buckeyes leave Columbus for LaLa Land today, and all eyes, ears, MRIs and joint specialists are focused on the big toe of tailback Chris "Beanie" Wells. And in California, a joint specialist does not necessarily deal with what supposedly ails Wells — a metatarsophalangeal joint sprain. Wells injured his toe in the season-opener, sat out last week, but plans to play Saturday night against the No. 1 Trojans when Ohio State faces USC.

The game will be staged in front of a national TV audience, in prime time, and puts Ohio State in the best possible position to restore its scuffed-up image. To win, the Buckeyes need Wells to cut and accelerate without any resistance from the most famous big toe since "This Little Piggy Went to Market."



Joe Vardon

**I**t's not Ohio State-USC. Then again, what other game is? Though underwhelming, Saturday's Michigan-Notre Dame matchup is intriguing nonetheless. The Wolverines, especially on offense, have largely sputtered in their first two contests. The Irish were destructively bad in a close-call victory over lowly San Diego State.

Who has the edge?

UM's strength is on defense, where it hasn't given up a touchdown in its last six quarters. But in its first two quarters, against Utah, it allowed 22 points and over 300 yards. What was real, what was an aberration?

And the Irish ... they were literally one play away from suffering an Appalachian State-like upset last week.

But, and this will make Notre Dame haters spit out their coffee: the Irish were four or five plays from turning their 21-13 victory into a blowout. A nearly flawless fourth quarter — with two touchdowns and a forced fumble — saved Notre Dame from a huge embarrassment.

At worst, a victory for one of these storied programs could go a long way toward clinching a non-BCS bowl spot.

At best, it could jump-start a season and, dare I say, wake a sleeping giant.