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## Gutsy Young gets tough with Buckeyes

By Pat Forde  
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COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Vince Young has a gift for making football look easy. He runs so fluidly, throws so effortlessly, you sometimes can be lulled into thinking he's hardly trying.

But muck up the game a little bit, knock the guy around, lay a few grass stains on his white uniform and you see a different side of him: the brass-knuckles fighter within. Vince Young is pretty darned special when he has to work at it, too.

Saturday night, in an atmosphere that is as good as September gets -- heck, as good as November gets -- Young had to work hard at winning. He led Texas past Ohio State, 25-22, in a game that somehow lived up to nine months of steadily swelling hype, and he did it the hard way.

He earned all 346 yards he accounted for against the Buckeyes' hard-edged defense, doing it as much with grit, poise and sheer competitive will as with overwhelming physical talent.

"He's got tremendous character," offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Greg Davis said. "He is tremendously competitive -- tremendously."

Davis then told a story about a game the Longhorns quarterbacks play in their meeting room before practice, something about rolling a can for points. As with anything Young plays, stakes are high.

"If he loses," Davis said, "I've got to get him back up for practice."

There was no keeping Young down after this triumph. Watching him skip out of Ohio Stadium to riotous applause from the burnt orange section of fans, low-fiving linemen and blowing kisses to the crowd, he was the happiest man in the Horseshoe.

"We had heart, baby!" he shouted. "We had heart!"

After flowing through the Ohio State defense for 56 rushing yards and 65 passing yards in the first quarter, the Buckeyes zeroed in on No. 10.

"Basically," Young said, "they didn't want me running the ball no more."

So they spied him with one of their trio of hard-hitting linebackers to reduce his running options. They brought extra rushers to close down the scrambling lanes. They laid licks on him play after play, as Texas saw its 10-0 first-quarter lead disappear.

"They were hitting like crazy," Bucks coach Jim Tressel said of his

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defense. "They were playing as hard as you could possibly play, and I'm sure the guys from Texas will tell you it was a physical game."

**to be out there playing no weak game. "**

— *Vince Young*

The brass-knuckles competitor enjoyed every black-and-blue minute of it.

"I was laughing at the bottom of the pile, saying, 'Man, y'all hitting out here, baby!'" Young said. "I appreciated the hits. You don't want to be out there playing no weak game."

Only the strongest were going to survive this game. Young's final 15 carries netted 20 yards. Not coincidentally, Texas' 10-0 first-quarter lead turned into a 22-16 deficit.

As the momentum shifted and this turned into a classic game of TresselBall -- all defense and field position -- Young kept encouraging his teammates on the sideline.

"It's coming," he told them. "It's coming."

In the end, it boiled down to one thing: down six with five minutes to play and 67 yards from the end zone, VY was going to have to win this game through the air.

That's the only knock anyone has ever been able to pin on the junior: he's phenomenal with his feet, flawed with his arm. Never mind that he'd completed 59 percent of his career passes; two losses to Oklahoma (including a shutout last year) were the alleged proof that he's not good enough to win the big games throwing the ball.

"Vince has thrown the ball throughout his career much better than anybody has ever given him credit for," Davis said. "We feel like he's thrown the ball pretty good."

He threw it perfectly on the winning drive. On third-and-six, he zipped an eight-yard pass to freshman running back Jamaal Charles. Later he threw another eight-yard pass to Charles.

And on second-and-nine from the Ohio State 24, Young read the Buckeyes' cover-two defense perfectly and fired a gorgeous sideline fade for wideout Limas Sweed. He put it where he had to put it.

"It's out of bounds, or it's a touchdown," Young said.

Ring up the six points, and ring up Young's fifth fourth-quarter comeback of his career. For the night, give the quarterback who supposedly can't throw 270 passing yards and two touchdowns.

And by all means, keep his name prominently in the Heisman Trophy discussion.

Ohio State linebacker Bobby Carpenter had popped off during the week, saying Young would leave the Horseshoe with his Heisman candidacy over.

The competitor's response: "You just grunt up hearing that."

The grunting only got louder after kickoff. Fans yelled at Young, "Vince, A.J. Hawk is going to kill you!"

Hawk did his level best, recording an All-American linescore: 12 tackles, two sacks, a forced fumble, a

fumble recovery and an interception. Carpenter chipped in 11 tackles, and the third member of Ohio State's stellar linebacking trio, Anthony Schlegel, had eight.

On the final drive, the accumulated hits actually brought Young to his knees. Slammed head-first into the turf after a one-yard gain, he was slow to get up. When he did finally arise, he sank back down to a crouch.

Backup Matt Nordgren started loosening up, which had to be killing the Texas fans. But the Horns used a timeout to allow Young to clear his head and stay in the game. Three plays later, he threw the winning touchdown.

"It takes heart, man," Young said, pointing at the rubber bracelet on his left arm with that word written on it. "It takes leadership, focus."

It takes all those things -- not just transcendent talent -- to win a street brawl like this one. The guy who makes football look so easy can still get it done when the going gets tough.

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