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The ODE Classified section ... much more than a place for the crossword

Badgers must bounce back

By Jeff Potrykus
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

Madison (KRT) — None of the current Wisconsin players has set out on this treacherous road since coming to Madison.

"I've been here five years," Badgers senior tight end Mark Anelli said, "and I've never seen anything like this."

The question facing Anelli and the rest of the Wisconsin players this week is onerous. How do you wade through all the errors made in a 31-point loss to Indiana, avoid slipping into a state of panic and/or succumbing to an emotional malaise, and prepare to beat Ohio State on Saturday in Columbus?

Wisconsin coach Barry Alvarez may have some answers.

The blowout loss to Indiana marked the seventh time since Alvarez took over the program that the Badgers have lost by 31 or more points. The Badgers' record in games following those first six losses is 4-1-1.

"There are different ways to (prepare)," Alvarez said Monday. "I think in this particular situation, we'll keep our routine the same. In the past, there have been times where we've not even looked at the film."

"We've come in and said that was an aberration. We're going to move on to our next opponent."

Not this time. The team was expected to review the loss later Monday, an exercise the players knew would be painful.

"There were some plays that were uncontested," Alvarez said. "There were some poor fundamen-

tals shown. A lack of being physical. There were a number of things that I saw in that game that I hadn't seen before."

"That's why I want to look at the film. You have to really show them exactly what you're talking about so everyone understands. And then you really have to move on and get this game behind you."

As well as the Badgers have performed under Alvarez following lopsided losses, only one of those victories came against a ranked opponent. One week after suffering a 55-17 loss at No. 7 Colorado in 1994, the Badgers returned home and whipped No. 21 Indiana, 62-13.

Beating the 21st-ranked Buckeyes (3-1 overall, 2-0 Big Ten Conference), who are coming off an impressive 38-20 victory over Northwestern, will take a near-flawless effort.

After limiting Northwestern to 306 total yards Saturday, the Buckeyes are No. 2 in the Big Ten in scoring defense (15.2 points per game) and No. 3 in total defense (303.5 yards).

"They started out the season very strong on defense and they continue to get better," Alvarez said.

And after a slow start on offense, the Buckeyes have found an identity in the form of a power running game that takes pressure off quarterback Steve Bellisari, whose inconsistency is legendary in Columbus.

"Offensively, I have seen them mature," Alvarez said. "It appears they have found exactly what they want. They are going more to the running game and not letting everything ride on the quarterback."

"The thing I see is a team that is

really good fundamentally. They have good athletes and if good athletes play with good fundamentals, they are pretty tough to beat."

"They play football the way I think it should be played."

Alvarez can't make the same statement about his own team, which is 3-3 and 1-1 heading into the Ohio State game.

The Badgers' offense sputtered two weeks ago in a 24-6 victory over Western Kentucky. Their offense started slowly in the loss to Indiana and the defense never got started, surrendering 63 points and 631 yards.

"This is when you find out the leadership that you have and the character that your team has," said Badgers junior quarterback Brooks Bollinger, who is to start Saturday and get most of the playing time. "Because it is not easy to bounce back and move forward from something like this."

One key, according to Alvarez, is to maintain some semblance of the weekly routine. Two others, according to Bollinger, are that the players avoid losing perspective and that the leaders to accentuate their roles even further.

After the loss to Indiana, several players were asked if they thought their chances to win the Big Ten title were already gone, or at least seriously damaged.

At least one player scoffed at that notion.

"That just means we have to win the rest of them," senior linebacker Nick Greisen said.

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