

OSU sub who saved perfect season still 2nd string

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By RUSTY MILLER

Associated Press

COLUMBUS — It was during a spring workout when someone mentioned to Kenny Guiton that, no matter what, he would always be remembered for one game.

“Yes, sir. That’s pretty cool,” he replied with a wide grin. “That’s something I have to live on for the rest of my life. I’m happy that got to happen.”

“That” was Ohio State’s game last Oct. 20 against Purdue. With a perfect season teetering on the brink, Guiton stepped in for injured standout quarterback Braxton Miller and etched his name forever in the memory banks of Buckeyes fans.

In one of the few appearances of his career when a game was still in doubt, Ohio State’s backup quarterback, just moments after he threw an interception, led the Buckeyes 61 yards in the final 47 seconds for a touchdown and a 2-point conversion that sent the game to overtime. Then he directed traffic as the Buckeyes hung on for a dramatic 29-22 victory.

It was an improbable eighth victory in a season that would end up 12-0.

Miller remembers the exchange he and his good friend Guiton had just before Miller was helped

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off the field and then taken to the hospital for evaluation.

“He told me when I went down, he said, ‘I got you, man’,” Miller remembered. “So I felt good going into the ambulance.”

No matter how long he lives or where he goes, there will likely always be someone around who will recall the day that Guiton, a little-used backup from Texas who snared a scholarship offer only because other big names turned down Ohio State, stepped into the spotlight.

Now, almost a year later, Guiton is once again a backup and once again trying to make the best of it.

“It’s tough,” he explained of his role as Miller’s relief pitcher. “But I keep my head up. I always try to stay ready to go. I continue to do that.”

Even though the games must last forever with Miller taking almost every snap for the past two years, Guiton remains upbeat and popular. He has a ready smile to almost any question. He’s had ups and downs in his Ohio State career but always seems to see the glass as half full.

No wonder his coaches and teammates think so much of him.

Ohio State quarterbacks coach and co-offensive coordinator Tom Herman calls Guiton one of the best backups in the nation, a player capable enough to start for maybe half of the country’s teams.

“Without a doubt,” Herman replied twice when asked if he was comfortable should Guiton get the call to come in.

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Herman believes Guiton has improved, too.

"I think Kenny's getting the ball out a little quicker," he said. "He has all the intangibles that you could ask for of a leader, of a quarterback, and he knew the offense inside and out and he's a coach on the field. The big knock on him was he just didn't quite have the quick release and velocity on his ball. That's improved.

"It's certainly not close to where Braxton's is or maybe some of the elite guys in the country but he makes up for maybe some of that deficiency with his leadership, his ability, his anticipation."

Miller may be on the short list of Heisman Trophy favorites but recognizes the value of having a solid player right behind him.

"Kenny's my big brother," Miller said. "We've got mutual respect, outside of football too. It feels good — he can tell me what I'm doing wrong. He's behind me in practice. He helps me out a lot."

Guiton realizes that had he not come to Ohio State, he might have blossomed into a star somewhere else. Now a fifth-year senior, he tries to dwell only on the positives, on what he's gained from his time in Columbus and not what might have been.

"Sometimes it comes up in my head. What if? What if I did this or that?" he added. "But I'm here. I'm happy I came here, it's a lot of fun. I keep working. I want to play, so that's one thing I'm shooting for."

Even if he never has an impact like he did last October, Guiton will be remembered.

"He's a rock in my meeting group," Herman added. "I can tell you that."