

Cooper tries to rebound from upset loss

■ The Ohio State coach must cope with a crushing loss to Michigan State, which dashed title hopes.

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — In 1963, as a 25-year-old only a year out of college, John Cooper applied for an assistant coaching job at Oregon State. While interviewing with Coach Tommy Prothro, he was given advice that he would never forget. "He said, 'John, in coaching there are a lot of peaks and valleys. The longer you're in it, the peaks don't get any higher and the valleys get deeper,'" Cooper said.

The 61-year-old Ohio State coach added, "I've been through some valleys, but the one this week was particularly deep."

During head coaching stints at Tulsa, Arizona State and 11 years with the Buckeyes, Cooper has won

176 games and lost only 73. But he may be remembered more for some losses than for winning two Rose Bowls and twice leading teams to No. 2 in the final Associated Press poll.

The latest defeat was as painful as any for Buckeyes fans, and that's saying something.

After all, four times in the past six seasons, Cooper's teams have been unbeaten in November. Each time, they lost to a school from Michigan.

Ohio State — ranked No. 1 all season — was a 28-point favorite Saturday against Michigan State. Ahead 17-3 after one quarter and 24-9 midway through the third period, the Buckeyes squandered the lead, depressing fans hoping for the school's first national championship in 30 years.

Cooper has become accustomed to the aftershocks following unexpected defeats.

"When you lose, you can't sleep," he said. "So I got up early and went to work a little earlier than usual, around 7:30 in the morning. And some of the coaches were already there."

The Buckeyes practiced Sunday while still in a state of shock. Cooper said he didn't belittle his players and didn't have to point out mistakes.

"The worst thing you can do when you lose like that is to go out and yell and scream and berate them," he said. "They feel as bad as you do."

If he read the local newspaper, he would have seen the article criticizing his play-calling on Ohio State's final two series. Those calling in to radio shows this week have continually ripped Cooper and his staff for running on 12 straight plays on the next-to-last series, then passing all six downs on the Buckeyes' last chance. Neither produced points.

Cooper was asked about his play selection after the game.

"That's some real good second-guessing," he said.

He declined to say it was the most disappointing loss of his career. Given the opportunity during his weekly news conference to blame his quarterback Joe Germaine, he defended him instead.

"It's a team game," he said.

He got angry when told that some TV analysts had singled out a freshman fullback for missing a block that halted the Buckeyes' next-to-last drive. Cooper said the player did his job and there were breakdowns elsewhere.

"That's ridiculous," Cooper said. With an 8-1 record and a No. 7 ranking, the Buckeyes now must seek something other than a national championship.

"The worst thing you can do is hang your head and feel sorry for yourself," Cooper said.

Newcombe: Team does support him

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ported me since the time I got the injury," Newcombe said. "It's the same with the state of Nebraska — 98 percent of the state, or more, has supported me throughout this."

Throughout the season, Newcombe said, he has learned a great deal from the injury and that every experience would help him be a better player — even when airports lose his luggage.

"I'm just going with the flow," Newcombe said. "Certain things just pop up for me. I lost my luggage, and I had to deal with that situation."

"The experiences I've had over the last two months, money can't buy. It's definitely made me a stronger person."

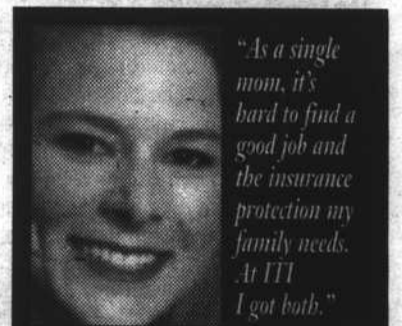
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