

Michigan Wolverines Football: U-M Overcomes Sag To Beat Illini, 42-25

John Borton • The Wolverine

Jim Harbaugh's Michigan Wolverines needed a big, deep breath, before launching into the tough second half of its season. Illinois should have qualified as the perfect oxygen mask.

It did for a while, until someone cut the hose. U-M built a 28-0 lead before the Illini rallied to score 25 unanswered points. The Wolverines needed to reel off a final two touchdowns to come away with a slightly unnerving 42-28 win.

The Wolverines let Illinois up for air on a windy day in Champaign, but still moved to 5-1 on the year, 3-1 in the Big Ten. The Illini plummeted to 2-4 overall and 0-3 in the conference, and are sinking fast.

Michigan seemed to pound the drama out of this one early, rushing for 205 yards in the first half alone, on its way to 295 for the day. The Wolverines crushed the Illini in total yardage, 489-256, paced by senior quarterback Shea Patterson's 11-of-22 passing day, with 194 yards and three touchdowns. Patterson also rushed five times for 17 yards and one touchdown.

Redshirt freshman back Hassan Haskins rushed 12 times for 125 yards, while freshman tailback Zach Charbonnet carried 18 times for 116 yards. Each also had a touchdown.

Redshirt freshman Matt Robinson — making his first start for Illinois — finished 16-of-25 passing for 192 yards and one TD.

"You just keep fighting," Harbaugh said afterward. "There was a big momentum swing there. In the third quarter, they made some plays, and we did turn it over. Our guys rose to the challenge.

"They were tested mightily, and they did a great job. They didn't flinch, kept playing, kept fighting."

It took all of five plays on Michigan's opening possession for the Wolverines to match their touchdown total of a week earlier against Iowa. Charbonnet covered 36 yards on four straight tries. Then on third-and-one at the Illinois 29, Haskins spun out of a tackle near the line of scrimmage, sprinting away on a 29-yard touchdown burst.

"Hassan Haskins ran the ball extremely well," Harbaugh said. "So did Zach Charbonnet. [Fifth-year senior] Tru Wilson had some fine runs. I felt our offensive line jelling up front."

	10/12/2019 • ATTENDANCE 37,275				
	MEMORIAL STADIUM • CHAMPAIGN, ILL.				
QT	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	Tot
Michigan	14	14	0	14	42
Illinois	0	7	10	8	25

Only 3:40 in, the Wolverines posted a 7-0 lead and had the Illini playing uphill into the wind.

U-M then saw a chance to make the Illini gone with the wind on a very breezy afternoon in Champaign. They blew that golden opportunity, after driving from their own 20 to the Illinois 10 when, after an incompletion, junior fullback Ben Mason drew an unsportsmanlike penalty for throwing a forearm into a defender after the play.

Set back to their own 25, the Wolverines couldn't get to the end zone, and redshirt junior kicker Quinn Nordin came on. He saw a strong cross breeze blow his 34-yard field goal attempt just outside the right upright.

It wasn't long, though, before the Wolverines had another shot — and took full advantage.

With the Illini deployed in the sieve, U-M just kept coming. Haskins ripped off a 28-yard run on a sweep right, redshirt freshman right tackle Jalen Mayfield pancaking his man to open the door. Patterson then clicked off a slick RPO effort, rolling right and finding redshirt freshman tight end Luke Schoonmaker wide open for a 25-yard touchdown.

The three-play, 70-yard drive made it 14-0 with 59 seconds left in the first quarter.

The Illini were ripe for the burying, and fifth-year senior linebacker Jordan Glasgow bore the shovel. Glasgow fully extended to block an Illini punt, setting Michigan up on the Illinois 7.

"Jordan Glasgow makes the big play for us, stretching out on the blocked punt," Harbaugh noted. "That was huge, and he was around the ball all day."

Charbonnet required one run to slice through Illinois' goal-line welcoming committee, putting U-M in complete control, 21-0, with 12:19 left in the half.

Only the Wolverines could stop themselves, and they mixed in a few of those. A Charbonnet lost fumble killed another drive, but Michigan's defense maintained a first-half anaconda grip on any Illini hopes.

Patterson found sophomore wideout Ronnie Bell (three catches, 98 yards) on a crossing pattern, and Bell turned it into a 71-yard gain, down to the Illinois 9. He had some help, redshirt junior tight end Nick Eubanks shielding off two defenders along the way.

Three plays later, Patterson found Eubanks on a four-yard TD toss, off a play-action bootleg. At 28-0 with 4:33 left in the half, the Illini faithful might have considered some halftime escape strategies.

The Illini had to stick around and rallied long enough for a late TD before intermission. Helped by a facemask penalty away from the play by senior defensive tackle Carlo Kemp, Illinois went 67 yards in five plays for a touchdown.

Robinson scrambled away from pressure to toss the 23-yard touchdown pass to Josh Imatorbhebhe (five receptions, 102 yards), with 55 seconds left in the half.

Illinois placekicker James McCourt nailed a 50-yard field goal with the strong wind, 4:36 into the second half. At 28-10 and nearly 25 minutes remaining, the Illini might have harbored fleeting comeback hopes.

Those built when they manufactured an 80-yard, 14-play touchdown drive, highlighted by Imatorbhebhe's 35-yard jump-ball reception and featuring Robinson's one-yard touchdown sneak. With 30 seconds left in the third quarter, Illinois pulled within 11, 28-17.

Two plays later, fifth-year senior tailback Tru Wilson fumbled it back to the Illini, Stanley Green recovering on the Michigan 36. Five plays later, Dre Brown punched it in from a yard out, then scored a two-point conversion to shockingly pull the Illini within three, 28-25.

The clock read 12:50, and U-M needed to answer.

They did just that, going 79 yards in 10 plays to recreate some breathing room at 35-25. Patterson saw a 10-yard run become 25 when the officials caught the Illini grabbing his facemask. He also hit junior wideout Donovan Peoples-Jones on an 18-yard toss, and picked up a crucial fourth-and-three with a four-yard run from the Illinois 13.

Patterson then gunned a five-yard TD toss to a diving Peoples-Jones, making it a 10-point cushion with 8:57 left.

"Shea Patterson had a great game," Harbaugh said. "It was tough throwing the ball today, but he came up with big throws."

Robinson immediately fumbled it away, Glasgow diving on the ball at the Illinois 20. But Haskins got stuffed on a fourth-and-two run from the Illinois 12.

It didn't matter, when the Wolverines pressured Robinson into tossing a tumbler into Kemp's hands. It gave U-M the football at the Illinois 1, and Patterson sneaked it in for the 42-25 lead with 6:21 left.

For momentarily terrified Michigan fans, it ended that way. Now it's on to a much tougher task in Happy Valley a week hence, with plenty more work to do.

"The thing I'm proud of was, as a team, there wasn't this, 'Here we go again,'" Harbaugh said of the struggles. "They rose up, and we got a few fumbles of our own. We created some of our own.

"I trust and believe in our team. We saw the evidence today. I'm very proud of that fact. There's a callus that has been built there, and a toughness."

Report Card: Grading Michigan Wolverines Football's 42-25 Win Over Illinois

Chris Balas • TheWolverine

CHAMPAIGN, ILL. – Grading all aspects of Michigan's 42-35 win over Illinois Saturday:

Michigan Football Rushing Offense: A-

If there are two quarters you want to own on the ground as a football team, it's the first and the fourth — and Michigan did both. Freshman running back Zach Charbonnet ran through huge holes in the first (eight carries, 78 yards) to help stake the Wolverines to an early 14-0 lead. Redshirt freshman Hassan Haskins added 59 in a 161-yard first quarter, including a 29-yard touchdown that might have been U-M's most impressive run this year.

The Wolverines also ran for 88 yards in the fourth quarter to ice the game and finished with 295 yards on 6.1 per carry, plus three ground touchdowns, in dominating in the running game ... as they should have against a poor defensive football team. Two lost fumbles by the running backs knock this down a half grade. It just can't happen.

Michigan Football Passing Offense: C+

The wind was absolutely a factor Saturday, going against Michigan in the second and third quarters. Both teams had difficulty throwing the ball, but senior quarterback Shea Patterson was able to complete 11 of his 22 attempts for 194 yards and three touchdowns.

His biggest play came against the wind on a 71-yarder to sophomore receiver Ronnie Bell in the second quarter. The Wolverines had 115 yards through the air in that frame, but many of the yards came after the catch on intermediate throws.

Patterson averaged 17.6 yards per completion and threw for three scores. We'd still like to see receivers make tough catches — there were two balls junior Donovan Peoples-Jones had hit his hands and a couple redshirt junior tight end Nick Eubanks could have hauled in.

Michigan Football Rushing Defense: A

Outstanding Illinois running back Reggie Corbin, a 1,000-yard rusher a year ago, managed only 14 yards on nine carries with a long of eight. The Illini totaled only three yards in the second quarter and negative-15 in the fourth on the way to a 64-yard showing on the ground, averaging just 1.5 per carry.

The Wolverines gave up runs of 11 and 15 yards on first down in the first half, but eight of 12 first-down carries in the stanza went for a yard or less, including a handful for negative yardage.

Michigan Football Passing Defense: C-

Illinois didn't move the ball down the field at will against Michigan's secondary, but backup quarterback Matt Robinson shouldn't have been able to throw for the 192 yards he did on 16 completions.

U-M was playing without senior starting corner Lavert Hill, who stayed home due to injury, but there were too many explosive plays — four of 19 yards or more, including a 35-yarder in the third quarter that senior safety Josh Metellus needed to make a play on against receiver Josh Imatorbhebhe, who finished with five catches for 102 yards.

Illinois threw for 122 of its 192 yards behind a strong wind in the second and third quarters.

Michigan Football Special Teams: A-

Redshirt junior kicker Quinn Nordin missed a 34-yard field goal, but that was the only blemish on a solid day. Kick coverage was solid (38 yards allowed on two returns) and fifth-year senior Jordan Glasgow's punt block led to a short U-M touchdown drive.

Redshirt junior Will Hart punted three times with a 44.3-yard average, and Illinois didn't return any of them.

Junior punt return man Donovan Peoples-Jones needed to field a punt that rolled to the 1-yard line in the second quarter.

Michigan Wolverines Football: Top Five Players Of The Game

John Borton • TheWolverine

Michigan saw a wild ride win play out in Champaign, Ill., featuring a jarring comeback by the home team. All turned out well for the Wolverines in the end of a 42-25 win, thanks to some key performers:

1. Fifth-year senior linebacker Jordan Glasgow: The Aurora, Ill., native celebrated his return to his home state in a big way. His punt block set the Wolverines up for a first-half touchdown, and his fumble recovery in the second half blunted an Illinois possession. Glasgow tied for the team lead with 11 stops, including a 16-yard tackle for loss.

2. Redshirt freshman running back Hassan Haskins: Haskins got the most out of his dozen carries, going for 125 yards (10.4 average) and a touchdown. He also didn't put the ball on the turf, something Michigan's other top backs couldn't claim.

3. Senior quarterback Shea Patterson: Patterson helped Michigan answer when it needed to the most. He wound up throwing for three touchdowns and rushing for another, without turning the ball over. Patterson finished 11 for 22 through the air, with 194 passing yards.

4. Illinois wideout Josh Imatorbhebhe: The lanky Imatorbhebhe (five receptions, 102 yards, one touchdown) proved a tough matchup for the Wolverines. He, as much as anyone, helped Illinois put up a fight after Michigan raced off to a four-touchdown lead.

5. Freshman running back Zach Charbonnet: Charbonnet looked like he might go for 200 yards early. He still wound up with 116 on 18 carries (6.4 average) and a touchdown, but a lost fumble during Illinois' big rally kept some fuel on the home team's fire.

Offense Notes: U-M Rushing Attack Finally Finds Its Rhythm Against Illinois

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

The Michigan Wolverines' rushing attack had struggled to find any kind of rhythm all season long, running for 141 yards or fewer in four of its five games, but finally got on track in Saturday's 42-25 win at Illinois.

U-M compiled 295 yards on the ground against the Fighting Illini, shattering its previous season high of 233 in the Aug. 31 victory over Middle Tennessee State. The MTSU game was its only other contest so far with at least 200 yards on the ground, and Saturday's total ranked as the Wolverines' most in a game since it racked up 320 last year against Wisconsin.

The Maize and Blue appeared determined to establish a rushing rhythm right from the get-go, keeping the ball on the ground for their first eight plays and 12 of their first 15. That formula worked to a tee, with the club's first seven runs all going for 10 yards or more.

Redshirt freshman running back Hassan Haskins capped off Michigan's opening drive by finding the end zone for the first time ever, ripping off a career-long 29-yard run.

The first quarter ended with U-M racking up 162 yards on the ground, which were its most in an opening stanza against a Big Ten opponent in 15 seasons.

Haskins finished the afternoon with a personal-best 125 yards on 12 carries (he had 64 collegiate yards entering the contest), while freshman running back Zach Charbonnet also chipped in 116 yards, breaking his previous high of 100 he had established in the Sept. 7 win over Army.

"Hassan Haskins ran the ball extremely well, and so did Zach Charbonnet," head coach Jim Harbaugh said afterward. "[Fifth-year senior running back] Tru Wilson had

some fine runs, and I felt our offensive line jelling up front.

“Our running backs stepped up, with both Charbonnet and Haskins going for over 100 yards. Our offensive line blocked well, sustained it and had very few mental errors.”

Saturday marked the first time the Wolverines had registered two 100-yard rushers in the same game since the 33-10 win over Minnesota in 2017, when Karan Higdon racked up 200 yards and Chris Evans logged 191.

It also marked the most rushing yards for the Wolverines on the road since 486 in a 78-0 win at Rutgers in 2016.

The Maize and Blue offense registered two more key scoring runs on the ground against Illinois following Haskins’ first-quarter scamper, first on a Charbonnet seven-yard dash at 12:19 of the second quarter to make the score 21-0, and then on a one-yard quarterback sneak by senior Shea Patterson with 6:21 left in the game, extending U-M’s lead to 42-25.

QB Shea Patterson Endures Inconsistent Day Through The Air

Patterson tossed three touchdown passes and no interceptions on Saturday, but only connected on 11 of his 22 throws for 194 yards.

Granted, there was a stiff breeze in Champaign, but the senior signal-caller consistently missed targets throughout the afternoon.

His 50.0 completion percentage was also the second worst of his Michigan career (his 43.8 percentage earlier this year at Wisconsin was his low), and marked the fourth time in his last five games that he had hit 53.8 percent of his throws or fewer.

On the flip side, the senior’s three touchdown passes tied his career-high at U-M and marked the seventh time he had accomplished the feat in Ann Arbor.

Patterson’s first scoring toss came with 1:54 to go in the first quarter, when he hit redshirt freshman tight end Luke Schoonmaker on a 25-yard scoring strike to put Michigan up 14-0. It was just the second grab of his career, and his first collegiate touchdown.

“We ran it to the corner, and no one was even in my area,” Schoonmaker exclaimed afterward. “I caught the ball and ran it to the end zone, and everyone came up to me — it was a great feeling.

“I love working with these guys, and they were so excited for me. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without them.”

Patterson’s second TD came with 4:33 to go before halftime, when he found redshirt junior tight end Nick Eubanks in the end zone for a four-yard touchdown to extend U-M’s advantage to 28-0. It marked Eubanks’ first score of the season and the second of his career.

Patterson’s final TD strike of the day occurred with 8:57 remaining in the game, when he hit junior wideout Donovan Peoples-Jones on a diving five-yard catch, lengthening Michigan’s lead to 35-25 at the time.

Peoples-Jones joins fellow junior wideout Nico Collins and senior tight end Sean McKeon as Wolverines with multiple touchdown catches this season (two each). The score marked the 10th touchdown grab of his career.

“We game planed for it [that play] all week,” Patterson revealed about the throw. “Donovan did a heck of a job of getting outside and giving me room to throw the ball.”

MISCELLANEOUS MICHIGAN FOOTBALL OFFENSIVE NOTES

- Junior wideout Nico Collins did not play on Saturday, marking the first game he did not appear in since the 2017 loss to Ohio State.
- The club’s 6.1 yards per rush were its most since averaging 6.7 in a 38-13 blowout of Wisconsin last season.
- Charbonnet racked up 108 yards in the first half, becoming the first Wolverine to crack triple digits in the first half since Higdon compiled 139 yards before the break against Nebraska last season on Sept. 22.
- Michigan’s 489 yards of offense were a season-best and signified the third time in six games this year it eclipsed the 400-yard plateau, also doing so against Middle Tennessee State (453) and Rutgers (476). The 489 yards were also its most in a game since registering 507 last November against Indiana.
- Senior tight end Sean McKeon returned to game action after missing the past two affairs with an injury.
- Wilson’s 10 carries were the second most of his career, trailing only the 11 he had last September against SMU.
- Illinois redshirt junior defensive end Oluwole Betiku had been averaging 1.4 sacks and 2.1 tackles for loss entering Saturday, but the Wolverines’ offensive line didn’t allow him to record any of either. In fact, U-M’s front five yielded just three tackles for loss and no sacks on the day.
- Sophomore receiver Ronnie Bell’s 71-yard reception in the second quarter was the longest catch of his career, now giving him at least one catch of 20 yards in four of the club’s six games. Bell’s 98 yards were also a career-best, with the sophomore having reeled in at least 81 yards in four of the six outings this season.
- U-M strung together four touchdown drives of 65 yards or longer, with three of the four requiring five plays or fewer and lasting no more than 2:35. The lone other such series occurred in the fourth quarter and took 3:48 off the clock, covering 79 yards in 10 plays.

Defense/Special Teams Notes: Two Fourth-Quarter Fumble Recoveries Seal The Win

Austin Fox • TheWolverine

The Michigan Wolverines' football defense endured plenty of ups and downs on Saturday at Illinois. They allowed the Illini to score 25 straight points after U-M had built a 28-0 lead, but forced two turnovers in the fourth quarter to help secure the win.

With U-M clinging to a 35-25 lead and 8:57 remaining in the game, Illinois began a drive from its own 25-yard line looking to cut into the Maize and Blue advantage.

On the first play of the series, redshirt freshman linebacker Cam McGrone swarmed UI redshirt freshman quarterback Matt Robinson and forced the ball loose, allowing fifth-year senior linebacker Jordan Glasgow to recover it at the Illini 20-yard line.

"I saw the opportunity to make a big play, and I had to for my team," McGrone said afterward. "They didn't want to play with us anymore."

The Wolverine offense wasn't able to capitalize off the turnover though, getting stopped on a fourth-and-two play at the UI 12-yard line.

Still clinging to hope, the Illinois offense took the field with 7:14 remaining in the game, looking to once again cut into the 10-point deficit.

The Maize and Blue defense then forced a second consecutive fumble when fifth-year senior defensive end Michael Danna hit Robinson from behind and knocked the ball loose deep in UI territory. The ball fell right into the arms of senior defensive tackle Carlo Kemp.

Redshirt sophomore left guard Kendrick Green tackled Kemp just short of the goal line, denying the 6-3, 286-pounder of his first career touchdown.

"I think he rolled on top of an offensive lineman in the end zone," Glasgow recalled after the game. "I think he got a touchdown, and I think everyone on the defense would say the same. We got a touchdown out of it anyway. So, no harm."

Michigan's offense cashed in on the ensuing play when senior quarterback Shea Paterson snuck it in from a yard out to extend the Wolverines' lead to 42-25.

The Illini possessed the ball one last time but went three-and-out, finishing with just 256 yards for the game (3.6 yards per play), including only 64 on the ground (1.5 per carry).

Jordan Glasgow Makes The Special Teams Play Of The Day

With 12:23 remaining in the second quarter and Michigan already leading 14-0, Illinois lined up to punt. Fifth-year senior linebacker Jordan Glasgow came flying in to block it, getting every bit of the ball and ricocheting it backward.

Senior safety Josh Metellus recovered it at the Illinois 7-yard line, and it led to a touchdown run by freshman running back Zach Charbonnet on the ensuing play to increase the Wolverines' advantage to 21-0.

"I've come close to punts in the past, but they always seem to go by my arms," said Glasgow. "I was surprised when it actually hit and bounced like thirty yards backwards. Every week, we see something we think we can exploit, and it just turned out really good for us this time."

Glasgow was also good on defense — the Aurora, Ill., native tied McGrone for the defensive lead with 11 tackles and eight solo hits, plus 0.5 tackles for loss, the fumble recovery and his first blocked punt of his career.

One of the lowlights for the U-M special teams unit on Saturday occurred on the club's second offensive drive of the day, when redshirt junior kicker Quinn Nordin missed a 34-yard field goal that would have extended Michigan's lead to 10-0 at the time.

The failed attempt dropped the veteran's stat line on the year to 0 for 3.

Redshirt junior Will Hart, meanwhile, entered the day with the second-best punting average in the Big Ten (46.8 yards a punt) and tallied a solid 44.3 yards on three punts in breezy conditions, including a long of 49. The Illini were not able to return any of his punts.

MISCELLANEOUS MICHIGAN FOOTBALL DEFENSE/SPECIAL TEAMS NOTES

- Illinois fifth-year senior running back Reggie Corbin entered the contest averaging 6.6 yards per carry and 95.5 yards per game — the latter figure ranked fourth in the Big Ten prior to Saturday — but was held to just 14 yards and 1.6 yards per touch.

- Saturday's game was Michigan's first trip to Illinois since Nov. 12, 2011, with the Wolverines having played at every Big Ten stadium since then.

Nebraska is now the conference venue U-M has the longest drought in, having last trekked there on Oct. 27, 2012.

- Junior linebacker Josh Ross was held out for the third straight game, after getting injured in the Sept. 21 loss at Wisconsin.

- Junior cornerback Ambry Thomas' three pass breakups were a career-high.

- Michigan improved to 71-23-2 all-time against Illinois in 96 meetings between the two programs.

- Senior linebacker Josh Uche's three-sack afternoon gave him 4.5 on the year, tying him with junior defensive end Kwity Paye for the team lead. His five tackles for loss, meanwhile, gave him 6.5 for the season, which is now good for second on the team behind Paye's 7.5.

- Paye was held out of Saturday's game after getting injured in the third quarter of the 10-3 triumph over Iowa last weekend.

"They [Paye and senior tight end Sean McKeon] gave it a go in warmups but weren't able to play today," head coach Jim Harbaugh revealed afterward.

- The victory snapped U-M's two-game losing streak in road contests (at Wisconsin on Sept. 21 and at Ohio State last year), with the last road victory prior to Saturday occurring at Rutgers on Nov. 10 last season, 42-7.

- Redshirt freshman cornerback Vincent Gray earned his first career start, filling in for injured senior cornerback Lavert Hill. The contest marked the first game Hill had missed since Nov. 18, 2017, at Wisconsin.

“[Junior wideout] Nico [Collins] and Lavert weren’t able to make the trip and didn’t play,” Harbaugh explained in the postgame. “We held them out for this game.”

- Illinois’ second-quarter touchdown (a 23-yard touchdown pass from Robinson to redshirt junior wideout Josh Imatorbhebhe) marked the first TD Michigan’s defense had allowed in its last 10 quarters, dating all the way back to the final frame of the Sept. 21 Wisconsin game.

It also marks just the third passing touchdown the defense has given up this year.

Wolverine Watch: And So It Begins

John Borton • The Wolverine

So much for the “easy” part of the schedule.

Michigan looks like a man who labored across desert terrain for six weeks, surviving and feeling momentarily ecstatic while emerging from fog onto a lake. Then he looks up and sees a mountain range to cross.

On the surface, it’s so far, so good. The Wolverines strode out of the regular season’s first half at 5-1. Wisconsin displaced their dignity, but didn’t steal all the goals that — and they’ll tell you this often — still remain in reach.

It’s one heck of a climb, though.

On the road and under the lights at Penn State. Back home versus against a top-10 Notre Dame crew. The annual hate-fest with Michigan State. A trip to pesky Indiana, and then trying to summit by fighting through the orcs out of Columbus.

It recalls a pithy conversation by Miracle Max and Valerie in “The Princess Bride.”

Valarie: “Bye-bye, boys!”

Max: “Have fun storming the castle!”

Valarie: “Think it will work?”

Max: “It would take a miracle.”

Both: “Buh-bye!”

Of course, that’s why they make climbing boots. The Wolverines took the first, ex-

pected step by taking down an out-manned Illinois crew in Champaign, 42-25. The fact that it wasn’t as easy as expected didn’t go unnoticed.

They ran wild on the initially Pacifist Illini, piling up tons of rushing yards and building a 28-0 lead before the home team mustered any offense. Lovie Smith’s team looked like a rich man’s Rutgers, offering little resistance in Michigan’s first road win of the year.

Then all of a sudden, Illinois came roaring back. A host of Michigan mistakes — turnovers and penalties at the top of the list — threw open that door, and Illinois raced through, scoring 25 straight points.

As a feel-good afternoon, it could have been better. Senior quarterback Shea Patterson did find a rhythm with his receivers, while U-M’s ground game got going, and its defense — after a major lull — teed off on a hapless home team.

They all checked the box, as expected.

“It was a hard-working 42 points,” head coach Jim Harbaugh said afterwards. “Our team was tested, a lot. It was a heck of a challenge.

“Especially going into the wind, it was tough throwing the ball. Our running game really rose to the occasion, and I think Shea did a really good job throwing the ball into the wind. [Sophomore wideout] Ronnie Bell made the huge catch, too, and run after catch.

“There was a lot of good play — a couple of fumbles that I wouldn’t have liked to have seen. Outside of that, I think our offense was playing pretty darned good.”

Now comes the climb.

Michigan sideline reporter Doug Karsch — ever the level-headed one — insists the Wolverines don’t have to take it all in one giant leap. He points out they don’t even need to make it unscathed.

“When it comes to the Ohio State game, they are not playing them this Saturday, which is good for two reasons,” Karsch offered. “One, it gives Michigan a long time to work on their offense.

“Two is, Ohio State is firing on all cylinders right now, and things do change over six weeks. Let’s see where these two teams stand at the end of November. The narrative was the opposite a year ago. Ohio State isn’t going to get anywhere with that defense, and look at what Michigan’s doing to the likes of Penn State, Wisconsin and Michigan State.

“In the end, it didn’t matter. Ohio State rolled ‘em.”

The point is, there’s time for change, on both sides. But it could run out quickly on Michigan’s.

Karsch calls the Penn State showdown in one week the “fulcrum game” of the season. Win it, and suddenly the landscape changes.

“If they go to Penn State, compete, and win that game, I think they have an excellent

shot at getting to the season finale with the Big Ten East title on the line,” Karsch professed. “The Notre Dame game — as much as everybody wants to win every game — is kind of irrelevant.

“Would you take, right now, 10-2 with a win over Ohio State and a Big Ten East championship? I think a lot of people would ... if they’re good enough to go to State College and beat Penn State, the schedule is there for the taking, leading into the season finale against Columbus.

“The clock’s ticking.”

But if Michigan doesn’t hang onto the football, the ticking quickly turns to a bell tolling.

What They’re Saying: Michigan Wolverines Football 42, Illinois 25

Ryan Tice • TheWolverine

A look around the internet and what they’re saying about the Michigan Wolverines after a 42-25 win over Illinois Saturday:

Chris Balas, TheWolverine.com: Notes, Quotes & Observations From Michigan’s 42-24 win

There were a lot of good plays, but the 42 points ... well, two of those touchdowns were set up by a fumble returned to the 1-yard line and a Jordan Glasgow-blocked punt inside the 10. Most of them came in the first half and then in the fourth quarter, sandwiched around a ridiculous third quarter in which they managed only 11 total yards.

That’s when Michigan appeared to decide 28 was enough and stunk up the joint to the tune of 114 yards to 11 in favor of the Illini in the third, and it became a ball game with 30 seconds left in the stanza when Illinois drove and scored to make it 28-17.

It started once again with sloppy ball security when the senior quarterback Patterson put the first ball of the second half on the ground (again), unforced. A four-yard loss, a punt after a minute and a half and a drive-ender into the wind after another poor throw on the slant that probably should have been picked off started the Illinois comeback.

That made it harder than it should have been, cost the backups some playing time and still left us with no answer to the biggest question:

Is this team improving, and can it beat the better teams on the schedule?

Shawn Windsor, Detroit Free Press: Michigan football’s fumbling offense rears its head vs. Illinois — and it’s troubling

For while the defense had its moments, especially late, the offense too often plays like a group of strangers: uncertain, uncomfortable, unable to hold onto the football.

U-M fumbled three more times against Illinois, making that 17 fumbles on the season. Patterson dropped the ball early but recovered it. The other two, by running backs Zach Charbonnet and Tru Wilson, were lost.

How all this translates as the season moves forward — hello, Penn State — can’t be a fun question to consider after watching these Wolverines the past seven weeks.

If Illinois can do this, what on earth will the Nittany Lions do next week in Happy Valley?

This is a confounding team. A week ago, at home against Iowa — a much better outfit than Illinois — U-M played with a kind of controlled rage defensively. While they struggled offensively, part of that could be explained away by the Hawkeyes’ formidable front seven.

Well, Illinois has no such thing. Which explains why the Wolverines pushed them off the line of scrimmage for much of the first half. But doesn’t explain why they couldn’t keep doing that.

Think about it this way: U-M amassed almost 300 yards rushing Saturday yet needed a drive midway through the fourth to ice the game.

Aaron McMann, MLive: Michigan football’s curious case of the fumbles is not going away

The problem seemed to have retreated in recent weeks, though that very well could have been just coincidence.

While Michigan had not lost a fumble in the previous two games, wins over Rutgers and Iowa, they were still dropping the football. That carried over again to Saturday, a 42-25 win over Illinois in which the 16th-ranked Wolverines fumbled the ball three times, losing it twice.

That brings Michigan’s fumble count this season to 17, and fumbles lost to nine. The team entered the weekend with the fourth-most in the country. And head coach Jim Harbaugh brought them up, unprompted, in his post-game news conference.

“I’ve got to look at them,” Harbaugh said. “I know I saw the one with Zach (Charbonnet), as he was going down and maybe just put his foot down on the ground and got hit off to his side. Keep coaching it, keep learning.”

The fumble by Charbonnet that Harbaugh mentioned was the first of the game for Michigan (5-1, 3-1 Big Ten) and first from [him] this season. The Wolverines found success moving the football that drive, starting out at their own 1-yard line before moving past midfield.

But on a handoff to Charbonnet, the ball came out of his hands on contact as he passed the 40. The Michigan defense was able to force Illinois into a three-and-out, nullifying one of the turnovers.

Angelique Chengelis, *The Detroit News*: Patterson made Harbaugh's fourth-down gamble pay in Michigan victory

Michigan coach Jim Harbaugh was confident that when the Wolverines needed a big play Saturday, quarterback Shea Patterson would deliver.

Illinois had scored 25 unanswered points to pull within 28-25 in the third quarter on Saturday at Memorial Stadium, and Michigan started its next possession from its own 21-yard line. Facing 4th and 2, Patterson got the call to make the conversion and extend the drive. He delivered with a 4-yard run to the Illinois 9-yard line.

"Just trusted the play call," Patterson said.

Two plays later, he connected with Donovan Peoples-Jones for a 5-yard touchdown.

The 16th-ranked Wolverines defeated Illinois 42-25, overcoming the scare and improving to 5-1, 4-1 Big Ten.

"A touchdown would have beat us, so wanted to give our offense a chance to make a two-score game," Harbaugh said, explaining why he chose to go for it on fourth down. "Lost a game once like that in my past — I did kick the field goal.

"This time we put the ball in Shea Patterson's hands. He's tenacious in those kinda situations and those kinda big moments. Felt really good he could pick it up for us. The offense was hungry to do it. Made the decision to go for it on that fourth down, and the guys came through."

Tom VanHaaren, *ESPN.com*: What The Week 7 Results Mean

The Wolverines were able to get the offense on track against Illinois in the first half, putting up 355 yards. The second half was a different story, though, as the offense stalled in the third quarter and the defense gave up 25 unanswered points. Turnovers continue to be a problem, with two lost fumbles, something that has hampered this team all season. Michigan needed a confidence booster, but the second half showed some flaws in this team that now has to get through Penn State on the road, followed by Notre Dame, Michigan State and Ohio State to finish out this season. If Michigan is going to have a chance to win those games, it'll need the offense to carry its own weight and not rely on the defense to win games.

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