

Buckeyes Enjoyed Fruits Of Coaching Staff's Recruiting Labors

Woody's Approach To Sophs Changed In '68

By JACK PARK
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

During his early years at Ohio State, Woody Hayes was reluctant to use sophomores in his starting lineups. While addressing *The Columbus Dispatch* Quarterback Club one evening, he stated, "You're bound to lose one game for every sophomore you start because of their lack of experience."

Hayes' approach changed drastically in 1968, when his "Super Sophomores" led the Buckeyes to an undefeated national title and one of the greatest seasons in Ohio State football history.

Ohio State's recruiting within its own state was strongly impaired during the early 1960s after the school's Faculty Council turned down a Rose Bowl invitation in 1961. A lot of the state's better talent went elsewhere to play, especially after rival recruiters emphasized, "You don't want to go to Ohio State — the faculty there wouldn't even permit their Big Ten championship team to go to the Rose Bowl!"

After working against this competition for three or four years, Hayes and his staff decided to put more emphasis on recruiting out-of-state talent while still continuing to go after the good Ohio prospects. As a result, the Buckeyes' freshman class of 1967 developed into one of the finest and most successful in college football history.

From 1962 through 1967, OSU won 35, lost 18, and tied one. During those six seasons the Buckeyes beat Michigan four of six but still finished no higher than second in the Big Ten. Ohio State fans were becoming openly dissatisfied — it had been 10 years since the Buckeyes had played in the Rose Bowl.

Ohio State went 6-3 in 1967 but finished on the upswing with four consecutive wins. As expected, the '67 freshman team was extremely impressive (freshmen were not eligible for varsity play until 1972), allowing fans to optimisti-



TWO VITAL COMPONENTS — Sophomore halfback Larry Zelina (16) and senior center John Muhlbach (53), shown here in the Purdue game, were just two important members of Ohio State's 1968 national championship team.

cally look ahead to the next three seasons.

EVERYONE CAN name several of the players who participated on the 1968 national championship team. But how many players can you name who started the first game of the season against Southern Methodist?

Here they are:

Ohio State started with five seniors, eight juniors and nine sophomores. The offensive line was anchored by senior center John Muhlbach and junior

guards Alan Jack and Tom Backhus. Seniors Dave Foley and converted tight end Rufus Mayes started at the tackles.

The tight end and split end positions were filled by sophomores Jan White and Bruce Jankowski.

In the backfield, sophomore Rex Kern earned the quarterback spot over senior Bill Long, who had been the starter the previous two seasons. Juniors Jim Otis and Dave Brungard returned at fullback and left halfback, while sophomore John Brockington

started at the right halfback slot. Defensively, sophomore Mark Debevo and junior Mike Radtke opened at the ends, juniors Paul Schmidlin and Brad Nielsen returned at the tackles, and sophomore Jim Stillwagon edged senior Vic Stottlemeyer at middle guard. The linebackers were seniors Mark Stier and Dirk Worden (team MVP in 1967).

In the backfield, junior halfback Ted Provost was joined by three highly promising sophomores in safety Mike Sensibaugh, cornerback Jack Tatum and halfback Tim Anderson.

OHIO STATE wound up the season as the number one team in the nation but began it as number 15. That was the team's national ranking as it headed into the opener against SMU. The Buckeyes were 11-point favorites in the game.

The 73,855 fans in attendance witnessed one of the most exciting (and) offensive openers in Ohio State history. With the two teams throwing 93 passes and running a total of 178 plays, the game lasted over three hours — at the time, the longest in Ohio Stadium history.

Southern Methodist threw 76 passes, the most ever thrown by one team in an NCAA game until Houston threw 78 times against Arizona State in 1989.

The game might have been much closer had the Buckeyes not intercepted five SMU passes deep in OSU territory. Interceptions ended drives by the Mustangs at the OSU 12, 19, 18, two and 20.

OSU players presented the game ball to Radtke, whose wife had given birth to twins during the game.

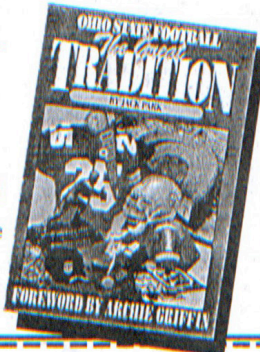
Incidentally, Southern Methodist finished its season with an 8-3 record, losing only to Ohio State, Texas and Arkansas. OSU was the national champ that year, while Texas finished third and Arkansas sixth.

ONE YEAR before Ohio State defeated Purdue, the Boilermakers had

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whipped the Buckeyes 41-6. The defeat in 1967 was the second in the first three games that season and the team's seventh loss in its last 11 games dating back to 1966.

Hayes thanked Purdue head coach Jack Mollenkopf for "holding down the score," but Ohio State fans were getting restless and ever more critical of the Buckeyes' head coach.

That is perhaps why Hayes and the rest of his coaching staff pointed so much toward the Purdue game. A then-record Ohio Stadium crowd of 84,834 saw the Buckeyes start an amazing nine sophomores on offense that day.

However, it was a junior and a senior who carried the afternoon. Junior defensive halfback Ted Provost's 35-yard interception return for a touchdown gave the Buckeyes a 6-0 lead in the third quarter, then senior QB Bill Long came in to relieve a shaken-up Rex Kern and ran 14 yards for the team's second touchdown.

Hayes called it "the greatest defensive effort I have ever seen." The Boilermakers, who had been averaging 41 points per game in three previous wins, had been shut out for the first time in 24 games.

OHIO STATE'S great 13-0 victory over Purdue in 1968 was very significant in the life of one of the Buckeyes' most devoted fans — Ed Linser.

Linsers grew up in New York City and joined the Navy in 1948 at age 19. While stationed at Great Lakes Training Center, he became good friends with Bill Wade, an enlistee from Chauncey, Ohio, who was an avid Buckeye fan.

After Linser and Wade were discharged from the Navy, they roomed together for a short time in Columbus. Ed quickly became hooked on the Buckeyes, even though he had never attended a game. He met his wife, Shirley, and the two moved to New York City in 1951.

Finally, after more than 17 years of keeping close account of the Buckeyes, the Linsers returned to Columbus to see their very first game in Ohio Stadium — the famous Purdue game of 1968. Ed went insane! He had never been part of anything as fantastic as an Ohio State football game.

The following spring, Linser, deciding he had to be closer to Ohio Stadium, made a decision that is almost beyond belief. He quit his job, sold his home and moved his family to Columbus. Friends told him he was crazy to give up a good job, especially when he had four school-age children to support and no job waiting in Columbus.

The Linsers lived with Shirley's parents until Ed found a job. They later purchased a home, but Ohio Stadium became their "second home."

THE TEAM'S closest call of the 1968 season came against Michigan State. The Buckeyes were pushed to the limit by the Spartans before earning a 25-20 victory.

Hayes started six sophomores on offense and five more on defense before a Parents Day crowd of 84,859, at the time the largest in Ohio Stadium history.

Coach Hugh "Duffy" Daugherty's 16th-ranked Spartans were 4-2 but had upset Notre Dame 21-17 the previous week. The Buckeyes were ranked second at 5-0.

OSU took a 19-7 halftime lead, but the Spartans fought back and had come within five at the end of the third quarter. That was when the Buckeyes' defense took over. Mike Radtke was especially impressive in the fourth quarter, sacking MSU quarterback Bill

Triplett once and causing him to fumble the ball away twice.

Turnovers helped spell the difference in the game. The Spartans threw three interceptions and lost four fumbles.

ALTHOUGH THE Buckeyes wound up with a 27-16 victory over Southern Cal in the Rose Bowl, there were some hairy moments in the beginning of the game.

USC converted a field goal early in the second quarter to go ahead 3-0 and later in the period took possession of the ball again at their own 20-yard line.

On the first play from scrimmage, Heisman Trophy winner O.J. Simpson got hemmed in at left end, cut back and then sprinted 80 yards for a touchdown. It put the Buckeyes behind 10-0 and put Hayes in a frenzy.

At the end of the first half, defensive backfield coach Lou Holtz tells the story that Hayes put his hands on Holtz and demanded an explanation.

"Why did he go 80 yards?" the head coach asked. "Because that's all he needed, Coach," is what Holtz said he replied.

Later, when Hayes was asked about the play, he said, "O.J. could have run all the way to the Pacific Ocean."

Despite falling behind, though, the Buckeyes were able to rally.

"There was no panic," said quarterback Rex Kern. "I went into the huddle and told the guys, 'We better start playing football.' I think O.J.'s run did more to wake us up than to excite his teammates. I thought Woody did a great job not coming out of his game plan after O.J. scored."

The Buckeyes came back to tie the score 10-10 at halftime, then tallied 17 unanswered points in the second half. The Trojans scored their final points with 46 seconds left in the game on a pass play, even though it appeared that OSU defender Mike Polaski had wrestled the ball away for an interception.

Before the next day's national championship was announced, Hayes was on his way to Vietnam for one of his volunteer trips to visit with U.S. military personnel.

THE NATIONAL championship season of 1968 is one of only two in which two games appear among "Ohio State's Ten Greatest Wins."

Ranked number six is the victory over Southern California in the Rose Bowl. It was a battle of the country's two top-rated teams and Ohio State won it, coming back from a 10-0 deficit.

Ranked as the top victory in OSU football history was the 13-0 win over Purdue. It was a shutout of the nation's number one team just a year after the Boilermakers had beaten the Buckeyes 41-6.

The only other season with two games in the top 10 is 1954. Not coincidentally, that was also a national championship year for OSU.

THERE COULD also be a category called "The Five Greatest Games Ohio State Never Played."

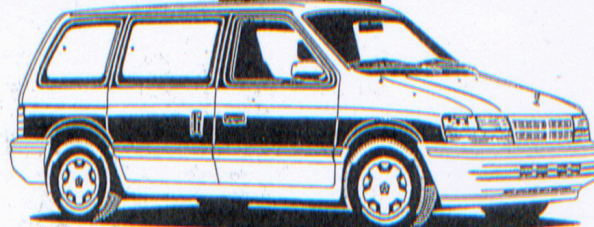
One of those games might have been in 1968 had Penn State been a member of the Big Ten at that time.

The Buckeyes, of course, defeated Southern Cal in the Rose Bowl and won the national championship with a perfect 10-0 record. The Nittany Lions finished second in the national rankings with an 11-0 mark after defeating Kansas in the Orange Bowl.

(Jack Park is a noted college football historian and is the author of *Ohio State Football: The Great Tradition*, a book dealing with the history of the Buckeyes.)

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TURNOVERS ASIDE, BUCKS PLUCK DUCKS

By MARK REA
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

Ohio State used an opportunistic defense and a big-play offense to help overcome six turnovers in a 21-6 victory over the University of Oregon in front of more than 70,000 fans at Ohio Stadium.

The Buckeyes moved their record to 2-0 for the 1968 season after the season-opening 35-14 victory over Southern Methodist. Ohio State then looked ahead to its next game, the Big Ten opener against Purdue, the top-ranked team in the country.

"We played pretty well on offense, but we just made too many mistakes," said head coach Woody Hayes following the game. "Four interceptions and two lost fumbles are just too many for any one team to make. Against teams like Purdue we better not make those mistakes, I'll tell you that."

Against Oregon, the Bucks' offense appeared to be running on all cylinders as it piled up 456 yards in total offense to just 140 for the Ducks. However, the Buckeyes repeatedly got within scoring position, then made a turnover.

The OSU turnovers kept the score from ever getting out of hand. OSU kicker Dick Merryman also missed two field goals of less than 30 yards.

Sophomore quarterback Rex Kern had another excellent game. He completed 11 of 19 passes for 113 yards and rushed eight times for 49 yards.

Kern threw one interception during



OFFENSIVE STARS — Split end Bruce Jankowski (82), shown here blocking for halfback David Brungard (12), caught four passes for 75 yards and a touchdown as Ohio State defeated Oregon 21-6 in the second game of the 1968 season.

the contest. Meanwhile, sophomore Ron Maciejowski also had a pass picked off and senior backup Bill Long's only two attempts of the afternoon were intercepted.

Junior fullback Jim Otis was the leading rusher in the game. Otis carried

the ball 17 times for 102 yards, 35 of the yards coming on a touchdown in the third quarter. The OSU fullback also caught three passes for 40 yards.

Another of the super sophs, split end Bruce Jankowski, was the game's leading receiver, hauling down four passes for 75 yards, including a 55-yard TD from Maciejowski in the fourth quarter.

On defense, several players stood out with big plays in the game. Sophomore defensive end Mark Debeve and junior defensive back Ted Provost each picked off an Oregon pass, while junior end David Whitfield pounced on a fumble. But the biggest play was reserved for defensive end Mike Polaski, who set the

tempo for the game by blocking an Oregon punt and then scooping it up and running nine yards for a touchdown before many of the 70,191 had settled into their seats on the cool afternoon.

The defense also held the Ducks' leading rusher, halfback Claxton Welch, to just 49 yards on 21 carries. The rest of the Oregon backfield combined for only 13 yards on 20 carries.

The team's futility against the Ohio State defensive charge was shown in the Ducks' third-down efficiency. They converted only two of 17 third downs all day.

Things started out well for the Buckeyes less than 90 seconds after they gave the ball to Oregon on the opening kickoff. OSU's defense limited the Ducks to just five yards on the game's first three plays.

Then, with Oregon's quarterback-punter Alan Pitcaithley in punt formation, Polaski blew through the line almost untouched to block the kick. The 5-10, 190 pound Columbus native scooped up the football and scampered nine yards to pay dirt. Merryman added the extra point and gave the Buckeyes a 7-0 lead with 13:37 still remaining in the first quarter.

The Ducks were stunned but got the ball back in good field position at their own 45. On first down Welch sliced through the line for a 17-yard gain, his longest run from scrimmage in the game.

Later, on a fourth-and-six call at the Ohio 34, Pitcaithley picked up 11 yards on a keeper. But two plays later Debeve picked off a pass to end the scoring threat.

Two plays after that, the Buckeyes turned the ball over to the Ducks when sophomore halfback John Brockington fumbled after catching a seven-yard pass from Kern.

The game began to take on the flavor

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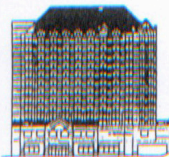
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of a ping-pong match when Oregon miscued again just three plays later at the OSU 25-yard line. An option pass from John Harrington was broken up by Polaski at the 12-yard line, ending another Ducks scoring threat.

The Buckeyes finally got together on offense, stringing together a nine-play drive that stalled near midfield. Sophomore punter Mike Sensibaugh then pinned Oregon back at its own 12-yard line.

Two running plays by Welch netted seven yards and, facing a third-and-three at his own 19, Oregon head coach Jerry Frei ordered a quick kick. The tactic worked beautifully as the Buckeyes were caught off guard. The kick traveled 65 yards and pinned OSU at its own 16-yard line.

OSU went back to work on offense. Kern hit Jankowski for an eight-yard gain and then picked up nine more when he kept the ball on an option play. Then the sophomore QB tossed a strike to Otis on the Oregon 44, which the junior fullback gathered in and took all the way down the sideline for a touchdown.

However, the officials ruled Otis had stepped out of bounds after catching the ball and had to settle for an 18-yard gain. The offense stalled from there and was forced to punt the ball away again.

The teams played much of the rest of the half in the middle of the field. Ohio State mustered plenty of offense but couldn't get into the end zone, failing twice on fourth-down plays and fumbling once on a first-and-10 play.

Then, near the end of the first half, the Buckeyes took over again on their 20. Instead of protecting their 7-0 lead, however, they tried to get more points. Kern attempted a pass to sophomore end Dick Kuhn on first down but was intercepted at the 28.

Six plays later, Harrington hit Denny Schuler for a nine-yard touchdown with just 55 seconds left in the half. The Buckeyes got a break, though, when the point-after attempt was wide right.

OSU got the ball back at its own 36 and again tried for more points. Kern threw 14 yards to Otis and then pitched the ball to Dave Brungard, who gained four yards on the play. But Kern was shaken up and replaced by Long, who threw an interception on his first play.

The first half ended in a flurry as Oregon took over and Greg Lindsey

hauled in a 40-yard pass. But Lindsey was ridden out of bounds on the OSU 12-yard line as time ran out, preserving the Buckeyes' 7-6 halftime lead.

As the third period began, the Buckeyes picked up almost where they had left off. Kern engineered a drive that started at the OSU 22-yard line but had to exit the game when he was shaken up again. Long relieved him again and on his first pass was intercepted again.

Once again the Buckeyes' defense rose to the challenge by containing Oregon's offense. Kern re-entered the game and started another drive for OSU, moving the ball 43 yards in 15 plays by mixing the run and pass equally with the option. But the drive stalled when Kern couldn't sneak ahead for a single yard on fourth and one at the Oregon 22.

The Ducks took over from there but couldn't generate any offense and had to punt the ball away. This time, sophomore Larry Zelina set the Buckeyes up with good field position by returning the punt 37 yards to the Ducks' 35-yard line.

From there it took OSU just one play — Hayes' patented off-tackle play to the fullback — to score. Otis wrapped his hands around the ball and took off on a 35-yard touchdown run. Merryman added the extra point to give Ohio State a little breathing room at 14-6.

One play later, almost the entire OSU defense slammed into Welch and he coughed up the football with Whitfield recovering at the Oregon 17. But the Buckeyes couldn't turn their good fortune into any points as Merryman eventually shanked a 22-yard field goal try.

The Buckeyes got another chance as the fourth quarter began. Starting at their own 39, Otis bulled his way ahead for three yards before Maciejowski, now in the game in relief of Kern, gained three more on a keeper.

Then came the play that sealed the victory. Maciejowski flipped the ball on a short sideline pattern to Jankowski, who beat his man and then flew down the side of the field into the end zone for a 55-yard catch-and-run play. Merryman tacked on the extra point, giving OSU a 21-6 advantage with 13:34 left in the game.

The long touchdown play seemed to demoralize the Ducks as their offense sputtered in the final quarter. Oregon had the ball on four possessions in the final period and failed to gain a single first down.

Ohio State's last try for points came at the 2:21 mark when Merryman missed another field goal.

BUCKEYES 21, DUCKS 6

OREGON	0	6	0	0	6
OHIO STATE	7	0	7	7	21

OSU — Polaski, 9 blocked punt return (Merryman kick) 13:38
 UO — Schuler, 1 pass from Harrington (kick failed) 0:55
 OSU — Otis, 35 run (Merryman kick) 3:19
 OSU — Jankowski, 55 pass from Maciejowski (Merryman kick) 13:34
 Att. — 70,191

	UO	OSU
First Downs	6	22
Rushing	3	15
Passing	3	7
Penalty	0	0
Rushes-Yards	41-62	70-288
Passing-Yards	78	168
Passes	21-8-2	25-12-4
Plays	6 ^c	95
Total Net Yards		456
Third Down Efficiency		9-22
Punts	13- ^v	5-36.8
Fumbles-Lost	3-1	3-2
Penalties	1-5	3-33

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) — UO: Welch 21-49; Pitcaithley 5-9; Olson 1-9; Camplin 2-5; Marshall 7-4; Veruti 1-3; Harrington 4(-17). OSU: Otis 17-102; Kern 8-49; Brungard 18-35; Maciejowski 4-30; Brockington 7-25; Coburn 2-8; Zelina 1-6; Huff 6-3; Hayden 5-3; Long 1-2; Gillian 1-0.

PASSING (Att.-Comp.-Int.-Yds.-TD) — UO: Pitcaithley 8-2-1-2-0; Harrington 12-5-1-36-1; Olson 1-1-0-40-0. OSU: Kern 19-11-1-113-0; Long 2-0-2-0-0; Maciejowski 4-1-1-55-1.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) — UO: Schuler 4-29; Lindsey 1-40; Kantola 1-6; Welch 1-3; Smith 1-0. OSU: Jankowski 4-75; Otis 3-40; White 3-28; Brockington 2-27.

PUNTING (No.-Yds.-Avg.) — UO: Marshall 1-65-65.0; Pitcaithley 11-443-40.3; Team 1-0-0-0. OSU: Sensibaugh 5-184-36.8.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.-Lg.) — UO: None. OSU: Zelina 2-21.0-37; Polaski 1-8.0-8; Provost 1-6.0-6; Sensibaugh 1-2.0-2.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.—Lg.) — UO: Welch 2-14.5-23; Pamplin 2-9.5-15. OSU: None.

DEFENSIVE FUMBLES RECOVERED BY — UO: Sherman, Gassner. OSU: Whitfield.
INTERCEPTIONS — UO: Kish, Hilbert, Ranstad, Wathey. OSU: Debevc, Provost.

Players In The Game

OREGON — Hay, Roberson, Gassner, Kantola, Rust, Drougas, Pettungell, Shur, Hedges, Dames, Walker, Wooton, Sherman, Hildreth, Luger, Stambaugh, Grote, Phillips, Nicolaisen, Wathey, Johnson, Schuler, Lewis, Kish, Lindsey, Pitcaithley, Harrington, Olson, Hearn, Welch, Gleason, Ranstad, Veruti, Pamplin, Franklin, Sinclair, Brauner, Smith, Marshall, Richards, Hilbert.

OHIO STATE — Radtke, White, Kuhn, Whitfield, Stowe, Schmidlin, Urbanik, Cheney, Hart, Hutchison, Crapsier, Stier, Pollitt, Backhus, Donovan, Stillwagon, Stottlemeyer, Muhlbach, J.Roman, Qualis, Debevc, Bartley, Jack, Strickland, Kurz, Waugh, B.Smith, Nielsen, Holloway, Mayes, Roush, Debevc, Jankowski, Rusnak, Sobolewski, Kern, Long, Maciejowski, Brungard, Hayden, Gillian, Greene, Anderson, Ehraam, Brockington, Zelina, Coburn, Provost, Burton, Otis, Huff, Polaski, Sensibaugh, Merryman.

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