

OSU FLASHBACK: THE 1979 BUCKEYES

# Bruce Didn't Take Long To Leave His Mark

By MIKE WACHSMAN  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Earle Bruce knew something was going to happen in 1979 — he just wasn't sure what it would be.

His first year as head coach of the Ohio State Buckeyes had immediate obstacles — most notably that he was following one of the game's all-time legends, Woody Hayes.

Though Bruce was Ohio State through and through — he attempted to play for the Buckeyes before an injury curtailed his career and he served under Hayes as an assistant on the school's 1968 national championship team — it's not every day that you have to fill the shoes of the man many regard as the master of Ohio State football.

Surprisingly, Bruce seldom gave following Hayes a thought. He was more concerned with guiding the Buckeyes to the upper echelon of the Big Ten, something the experts felt was nearly impossible. OSU went 7-4-1 in Hayes' last season and was tabbed fifth in a preseason media poll heading into 1979.

"That presented a challenge in itself because I've always thought of Ohio State being at the top of the Big Ten, not in the middle," said Bruce, who 20 years ago this fall guided OSU to an 11-1 mark and a Big Ten title in his debut season.

"We started out with what I thought was a fine football team. We had speed, good skill positions, a good quarterback in Art (Schlichter), good wide receivers and running backs, but our offensive line was inexperienced and small and not too talented.



SOURCE: 1980 OHIO STATE FOOTBALL MEDIA GUIDE

**MAINSTAYS IN '79** — This photo appeared on the cover of OSU's 1980 football media guide. It depicts OSU coach Earle Bruce (left) with some of the top players from the school's 1979 Big Ten championship team, including Doug Donley (47), Vince Skillings (48), Luther Henson (54), Todd Bell (25), Art Schlichter (10) and Vlade Janakievski (13).

But they were willing to work and they jelled as the season went on."

The defense was truly ferocious, allowing just 126 points in 12 games. Included in that total were six straight games with foes scoring seven points or less.

Bruce figured his team would hang its hat on the defense, at least until the young offensive line came together.

"Defensively we had good linebackers,"

said Bruce, now an OSU football analyst for Columbus' WTVN-AM. "We weren't overly big in the defensive line and probably a little inexperienced there. We had good speed. The kids were willing to hit you, boy. They loved to hit you. Our kicking game was solid."

And solid was all most people expected from Ohio State. But it was soon evident this was no ordinary Buckeye team.

**Gaining Confidence**

OSU opened the season innocently enough with a nothing special 31-8 win over Syracuse. But peril came the next week at Minnesota, which was at the time much more than the pushover it's been of late.

OSU trailed 17-7 at intermission and

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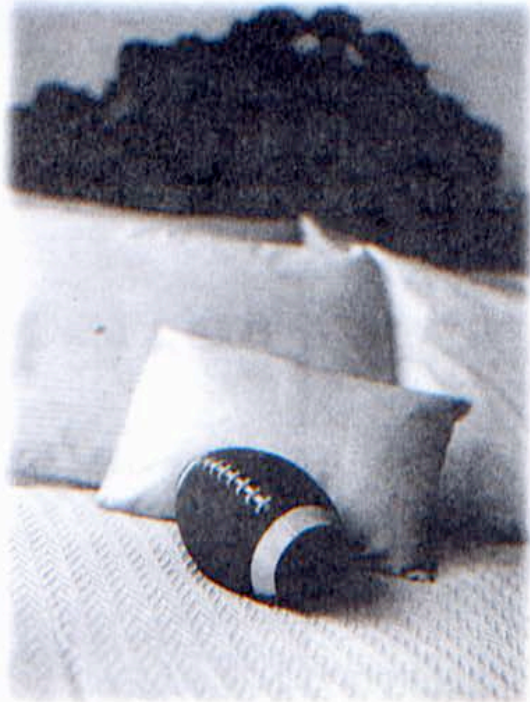


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**OSU FLASHBACK: THE 1979 BUCKEYES**

# Victory Over UCLA Boosted '79 Group's Confidence

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looked to have no clue how to stop the Gophers' powerful double winged-T offense. So Bruce came up with a simple plan: Hold the ball and run the clock. It worked to perfection as OSU scored two touchdowns in the second half to pull out a 21-17 win. Schlichter's 32-yard touchdown run provided the winning score.

A 45-29 win over Washington State followed, highlighted by tailback Cal Murray's 86-yard catch-and-run touchdown from Schlichter.

Then came the second real confidence booster. OSU traveled to the Los Angeles Coliseum to play UCLA, and the Bruins looked to have the game secured, leading 13-10 with just under three minutes remaining. But Schlichter ran a masterful two-minute drill, finding Paul Campbell alone in the end

zone for a 2-yard score. The drive took just 95 seconds but it was enough to keep UCLA from coming back.

"We won some close games early in the season," Bruce said. "That helped get us together as much as anything, those two games. We really felt we might be on to something after those wins."

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FILE PHOTO

**THE ALL-AMERICAN** — Quarterback Art Schlichter earned first-team All-American honors as a sophomore in 1979. He threw for a then school record 1,816 yards and 14 touchdowns in leading OSU to an 11-1 mark.

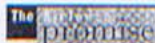
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# Blowouts Sent Buckeyes To No. 2

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Former OSU linebacker Marcus Marek vividly remembers the action, because he was in the middle of it quite often. He was second on the team in tackles as a freshman with 106 and also picked off three passes.

He remembers Bruce being upbeat about the team, even though everyone was still finding his way.

"He just told us to do the little things that meant the difference between winning and losing," Marek said. "He wouldn't allow us to play above our heads. There were certain things we could do and others we couldn't, and the coaching staff handled all of that very well."

"The Minnesota and UCLA games were when we felt, as a team, that we could really do better than what people predicted for us."

A sleepwalking 16-7 win over Northwestern followed, with freshman tight end Brad Dwelle scoring the only touchdown on a pass from Schlichter.

But then the Buckeyes really took off. In succession, they blasted Indiana 47-6, Wisconsin 59-0, Michigan State 42-0, Illinois 44-7 and Iowa 34-7.

That collection of blowout wins helped lift Ohio State, unranked in the preseason, all the way to No. 2 in the national polls headed into the regular-season finale at No. 13 Michigan.

Marek's running mate at linebacker, Glen Cobb, felt OSU was as good as any team in the country at that juncture, and the Buckeyes played like it.

"We were really confident by then and we just weren't going to let teams beat us," he said. "We weren't playing the strongest teams, but the good teams beat the teams

they're supposed to beat. We took care of business. We were preparing for Michigan because we knew we'd get their best shot."

With a Rose Bowl berth and undefeated regular season on the line, it turned out to be the Buckeyes who delivered the mortal blow to the Wolverines.

The lead changed five times in this showdown before linebacker Jim Laughlin blocked a Bryan Virgil punt and watched as defensive back Todd Bell scooped it up and sprinted 18 yards to the end zone. Still one of the most legendary plays in school history, the "Buckeye Block Party" paved the way to an 18-15 OSU win that meant an unbeaten regular season and an ascent to No. 1 in the polls.

## 1979 OSU Football

No.	Player	Roster		
		Pos.	Cl.	Hometown
69	Andria, Ernie*	OG	Sr.	Wintersville, Ohio
1	Atha, Bob	K	So.	Worthington, Ohio
82	Barwig, Ron	TE	Jr.	Willoughby Hills, Ohio
25	Bell, Todd*	LB	Jr.	Middletown, Ohio
34	Belmer, Cliff	FB	Jr.	Mansfield, Ohio
29	Bisco, Tom	LB	Jr.	Lewisville, N.Y.
74	Brown, Bernard	C	Fr.	Manietta, Ohio
52	Brown, Tim	OT	Sr.	Warren, Ohio
76	Burke, Tim*	OG	Jr.	Wapakoneta, Ohio
63	Burris, Scott	OT	Jr.	Point Pleasant, W.Va.
4	Burrows, Norman	CB	Jr.	Portsmouth, Ohio
38	Campbell, Paul	FB	Sr.	Ravenna, Ohio
7	Castiglione, Greg	QB	Sr.	Trenton, Mich.
35	Cobb, Glen	LB	Fr.	Washington C.H., Ohio
96	D'Andrea, Mike	OLB	So.	Akron, Ohio
50	DeLeone, Jim	C	Jr.	Kent, Ohio
47	Donley, Doug*	FL	Jr.	Cambridge, Ohio
60	Dulin, Gary	DT	Sr.	Madisonville, Ky.
81	Dwelle, Brad*	TE	Fr.	Sandusky, Ohio
73	Echols, Reggie	DT	Jr.	Chardon, Ohio
27	Ellis, Ray*	CB	Jr.	Canton, Ohio
39	Ellison, Leon	OLB	Jr.	Washington, D.C.
59	Epirotopoulos, Ernie	OG	Jr.	Warren, Ohio
33	Epirotopoulos, John	LB	Jr.	Warren, Ohio
65	Ferguson, Keith*	OLB	Jr.	Miami, Fla.
55	Foster, Jerome*	DT	So.	Detroit, Mich.
56	Fritz, Ken (Capt.)*	OG	Sr.	Ironton, Ohio
17	Galloway, Tim	S	Fr.	Columbus, Ohio
26	Gayle, Jim	TE	So.	Hampton, Va.
16	Gerley, Rod	CB	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
12	Guess, Mike (Capt.)*	CB	Sr.	Columbus, Ohio
3	Hall, Ted	LB	So.	Gahanna, Ohio
54	Henson, Luther*	DT	Jr.	Sandusky, Ohio
37	Hicks, Tyrone	SE	Jr.	Warren, Ohio
80	Houston, James	TE	So.	Akron, Ohio
89	Hunter, Chuck	SE	Sr.	Newark, Del.
57	Hutchings, John	C	Jr.	Fremont, Ohio
87	Jaco, Bill	TE	Sr.	Toledo, Ohio
13	Janakievski, Vlade*	K	Jr.	Columbus, Ohio
21	Johnson, Ricky	TB	Jr.	Santa Maria, Calif.
5	Laughlin, Jim (Capt.)*	OLB	Sr.	Lyndhurst, Ohio
86	Lee, Ben	OLB	So.	Canton, Ohio
78	Levenick, Tom	OT	So.	Washington, Ill.
23	Lewis, Doyle	CB	Fr.	Canton, Ohio
20	Lindsay, Kevin	FL	Fr.	Sandusky, Ohio
72	Lukens, Joe*	OT	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
36	Marek, Marcus*	LB	Fr.	Masury, Ohio
85	Meade, John	TE	So.	Mokena, Ill.
90	Megaro, Tony	LB	Jr.	Chicago, Ill.
99	Miller, Nick	DT	Jr.	Upland, Pa.
91	Miller, Ron	DT	Jr.	Auburn, N.Y.
28	Murphy, Bob	S	Jr.	Santa Ynez, Calif.
43	Murray, Calvin*	TB	Jr.	Woodbine, N.J.
19	Orosz, Tom*	P	So.	Fairport Harbor, Ohio
30	Payton, Joel	FB	Jr.	Mentor, Ohio
93	Riehm, Chris	DT	Fr.	Wadsworth, Ohio
68	Sawicki, Tim*	MG	Jr.	Mayfield, Ohio
10	Schlichter, Art*	QB	So.	Bloomington, Ohio
48	Skilling, Vince*	S	Jr.	Brenzer, Pa.
67	Smith, Joe	C	So.	Cincinnati, Ohio
46	Spencer, Tim	TB	Fr.	St. Clairsville, Ohio
6	Strahine, Mike	QB	Fr.	Lakewood, Ohio
97	Sullivan, Mark	MG	Sr.	Timberlake, Va.
9	Taylor, Alvin	FL	Jr.	Newport News, Va.
22	Volley, Ric*	FB	Sr.	Lynchburg, Va.
15	Washington, Alvin*	LB	Jr.	Cleveland, Ohio
11	Watson, Otha	LB	So.	Dayton, Ohio
58	Wauth, Tom (Capt.)*	C	Sr.	Norwalk, Ohio
44	Williams, Gary*	SE	So.	Wilmington, Ohio

\*Denotes starter.  
Coach: Earle Bruce. Assistant Coaches: Pete Carroll, Dennis Fryzel, Glen Mason, Bill Myles, Wayne Stanley, Steve Szabo, Bob Tucker, Fred Zechman.

### Season Results (11-1; 8-0, Big Ten champs)

Date	Opponent (AP Ranking*)	Result
Sept. 8	SYRACUSE	W, 31-8
Sept. 15	(15) at Minnesota	W, 21-17
Sept. 22	(16) WASHINGTON STATE	W, 45-29
Sept. 29	(14) at UCLA (17)	W, 17-13
Oct. 6	(8) NORTHWESTERN	W, 16-7
Oct. 13	(8) INDIANA	W, 47-6
Oct. 20	(6) WISCONSIN	W, 59-0
Oct. 27	(4) MICHIGAN STATE	W, 42-0
Nov. 3	(5) at Illinois	W, 44-7
Nov. 10	(3) IOWA	W, 34-7
Nov. 17	(2) at Michigan (13)	W, 18-15
Jan. 1	(1) Southern California (3)@	L, 17-36

Final AP Ranking: 4th  
\*OSU's game day ranking appears before opponent; opponent's game day ranking appears after opponent's name.  
@Rose Bowl at Pasadena, Calif.

### Statistical Leaders

- Rushing: Calvin Murray, 173 carries, 872 yards.
- Passing: Art Schlichter, 105 comp., 200 att., 1,816 yards.
- Total Offense: Art Schlichter, 2,246 yards (430 rushing, 1,816 passing).
- Scoring: Vlade Janakievski, 97 points (43 PATs, 18 FGs).
- Receiving: Doug Donley, 37 catches, 800 yards.
- Tackles: Alvin Washington, 120 tackles (69 solo, 51 asst.).

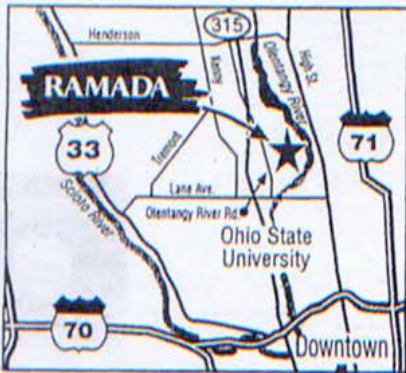
### Award Winners

- Team MVP: Jim Laughlin, OLB.
- All-Americans: Ken Fritz, OG; Art Schlichter, QB.
- All-Big Ten: Mike Guess, CB; Ken Fritz, OG; Vince Skillings, S; Vlade Janakievski, K; Jim Laughlin, OLB; Luther Henson, DT; Todd Bell, LB; Tom Waugh, C; Art Schlichter, QB; Doug Donley, SE.



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"There we were, looking at our undefeated season going down the tubes, when we had a chance to step up and make a play," said Laughlin, who had already blocked punts against Washington State and Indiana. "That's what college football is all about. I'm glad I had the chance to go out there and make such a big play."

The play, along with his stellar efforts all season from the linebacker spot, helped Laughlin edge out Schlichter as the team's most valuable player.

While Bruce was thrilled to beat Michigan in his first try, the block wasn't the chief thing that came to his mind about the contest.

"Ohio State hadn't scored a touchdown against Michigan for three years," Bruce said. "That's what concerned me. Art threw one to Chuck Hunter, so we got that out of the way. We blocked a punt to beat Michigan, and it doesn't get much better than that."

**Trojans Wilt The Roses**

The 1980 Rose Bowl was one of the classics of the series, with both teams featuring standout players. USC may have had one of its greatest collections of talent ever, with Ronnie Lott, Paul McDonald, Charles White, Marcus Allen and Anthony Munoz being just a handful of names who would later star in the National Football League.

"They had a great football team," Bruce said. "When you put it on paper I don't know how we kept it that close. We should have beaten them."

USC got on the board first with a field goal and extended the lead on a McDonald touchdown. OSU got on the board with a 35-yard field goal by Viade Janakievski and a 53-yard TD pass from Schlichter to Gary Williams.

OSU went ahead 13-10 on another Janakievski field goal and increased the lead to six on his third field goal of the day. But USC would not be denied as McDonald led the Trojans 83 yards in eight plays. The all-important extra point gave USC a 17-16 lead and, ultimately, the win.

One crucial juncture in the game came with Ohio State inside the USC 10 on fourth-and-1. Bruce disdained the field goal for a running play but was stuffed.

"That's one thing I would do over again," he said. "The way Janakievski was kicking, a field goal there wins us the game. They never could have driven for that last score to beat us."

Charles White was the hero of the day for USC, setting a since-broken Rose Bowl rushing record with 242 yards. USC's 519 yards was the most allowed by the Buckeyes all season.

The Buckeyes finished the year fourth in the nation, not the desired destination but a far cry from where they were expected to settle.

"If we were two points better in the Rose Bowl, we would have been national champions," Bruce lamented.

The 1979 team was the last Ohio State unit to finish the regular season unbeaten, but Bruce prefers to remember the strides made by the team rather than the season as a whole.

"The offensive line made the greatest move from any unit we had," Bruce said. "They did a good job. They helped make it all possible. We were a good team that practiced



FILE PHOTO

**DOUBLE THREAT** — Tailback Cal Murray proved to be a lethal weapon for OSU in 1979, rushing for 872 yards and also catching 19 passes out of the backfield. Murray scored six touchdowns on the year.

hard, played hard and took coaching. They were determined. Ohio State is known for that. They don't just have kids who want to play football, they have kids who want to win.

"Our kids were tough. They may not have been the most talented football team around, but they sure as hell were tough and fast as anybody. They played with intensity."

**The Aftermath**

Seventeen of the 24 starters from this team returned a year later, including nine on defense, as the Buckeyes went into 1980 as the nation's No. 1-ranked team.

But the pressure proved to be too much as UCLA blanked the Buckeyes 17-0 at home and OSU dropped games to Michigan (9-3) and Penn State (31-19 at the Fiesta Bowl) to end the year 9-3.

That was the first of six straight 9-3 seasons for Bruce, who got pieces of three other Big Ten titles and a berth in one more Rose Bowl in 1985 during his nine-year stint as the head coach.

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