

# Coaches High On Frosh Tight End Ellis

By Ken Halloy

Some start fast and some start slow, but the one thing about freshmen is, you never know.

Jeff Ellis is off to a fast start. "For a freshman, he's as fine a prospect as I've ever been associated with," says OSU quarterbacks and receivers coach Tom Lichtenberg, who recruited Ellis. "The only other tight end with his type of ability as a freshman was Mark Bavaro when I was (an assistant) at Notre Dame and now he's an All-Pro with the New York Giants. Jeff might be even more advanced than Bavaro."

That's lofty praise for a freshman who hasn't yet played a down of college football. But one look at Ellis, and you'd be inclined to believe Lichtenberg.

Indeed, Ellis looks like a tight end. Measuring 6-2 and 225 pounds, Ellis could play a substantial role for the Buckeyes if first-stringer Alex Higdon doesn't find his niche there. Ellis, whose father, Jimmy Ellis, is a former heavyweight boxing champion, certainly has the credentials to back up his size.

An All-Kentucky and Parade All-American at Male High School in Louisville, Ellis caught 36 passes for 515 yards and 10 touchdowns last year.

Expectations for Ellis are obviously high. What does he think about all the praise?

"I'm very nervous right now," he laughed. "I guess all freshmen go through a period of adjustment wondering if they made the right decision. I don't question it, I really like it here. But this is major college football and I can't expect great things to happen to me overnight."

Ellis believes any playing time he gets will be playing time he earns.

"I'm not expecting a thing. If I get to play at all I'll consider myself extremely lucky."

OSU coach Earle Bruce doesn't believe luck will have anything to do with Ellis seeing action. Bruce sees it more as necessity.

"I really like what I've seen in him so

far. He could really do some things for us this year," Bruce said. "It's still too early to say how much any freshman could contribute this year, but I've got a real good feeling about him."

"Besides," Bruce continued, "we are really questionable at tight end right now. If Higdon doesn't come through, the door is open for anyone. It may come down to where we really need him. He can't be preparing himself as a backup. He has to be ready to step in."

That's fine with Ellis, in spite of his preseason jitters.

"I'm sure the caliber of play is so much higher up here than in high school, but the quarterbacks are also better," he said. "Hopefully I won't have to risk my body making a lot of catches. But I do like to bang it around, though."

"I have to look at it like, instead of him putting the hit on me, I'm going to put the hit on him and gain a few extra yards at the same time, if for any reason, because I'll fall over him."

It's not just his size that has Ellis' new coaches excited.

"He's certainly one of the top tight ends I've ever seen as a freshman," said tackles and tight ends coach Bob Palcic. "He's big, strong and he's been picking up his assignments very well. He has a real good attitude. He could potentially be a three-year starter at Ohio State."

UCLA, Kentucky and LSU all lost out trying to acquire his services. Ellis said the decision to become a Buckeye wasn't all that difficult to make.

"I talked with the coaches about what kind of future I might have here, and the possibility of starting three years came up, though they didn't rule out anything this year," Ellis said. "At times, you try not to get too wrapped up in what everyone thinks you're capable of doing. When you do, you tend to relax. I guess that's why I'm trying to stay so low-key about everything at this point."

Ellis said he came to fall camp out of shape, the result of a pulled groin muscle in his right leg early in the summer. "I didn't get to run at all, so

I've been puffing a little bit more than normal in some of the drills. Right now, all I'm concerned about is getting into shape. I feel like I'm a little behind in that respect right now."

Nevertheless, Ellis can't help but admit the transition just hasn't been as rough as he thought it would be — so far.

"I haven't had much of a problem with anything. I've been picking things up pretty well," he said. "I don't know whether that's good or bad sometimes. I just thought it would be a lot tougher."

"I'm sure it will be, though, when we start getting involved with the hard-hitting from some of the guys on this team. I'm not looking forward to running a pass pattern towards Chris Spielman's way at all."

## Frosh Notes

Bruce says he's not concerned about only having 14 freshmen in fall camp. Four other freshmen, defensive backs Vincent Clark (6-2, 185) and Tim Rutledge (6-1, 185), fullback Tyrone Harrison (6-2, 227) and wide receiver Jeff Graham (6-2, 185) fell victim to Proposition 48 and must sit out this year.

"Overall, I'm very pleased. It's really a joy coaching when these young men are anxious to learn. We don't have a lot of people here, but I would rather have five guys who go all out every day instead of 100 guys who don't want to be here. This is a very intelligent group so far."

Despite having two talented tailbacks in junior Vince Workman and sophomore Jim Bryant, Bruce ended speculation about the possibility of moving one or more of his freshman backs to the defensive backfield.

Carlos Snow (5-10, 200), John Spencer (6-1, 205) and Jim "Scotty" Graham (5-10, 200) could highlight future Buckeye backfields.

"No way will these guys do anything but run the football at Ohio State this year," Bruce said. "Have you seen the numbers these guys stacked up in high school? I know this isn't high school, but they obviously know how to do



Jeff Ellis

some things well."

Snow, an All-Ohio and All-American out of Cincinnati Academy of Physical Education, rushed for an incredible 7,856 yards and scored 104 touchdowns during his career. He averaged 16.2 yards a carry his senior season.

Spencer gained All-Ohio status at St. Clairsville High last year, rushing for 1,549 yards and scoring 19 touchdowns. His career totals include 2,896 yards rushing and 43 rushing touchdowns.

Graham averaged 10.4 yards a carry last year, totaling 1,534 yards for New York's Long Beach High. He scored 17 touchdowns last season, 10 coming on runs of 40 or more yards.

"Now tell me. Wouldn't you keep those three in the backfield?" Bruce asked.

Of the freshmen, only two play defense — linebackers Tom Lease (6-5, 229) and Andrew Gurd (6-3, 215). That has Bruce a little concerned.

"I wish we had more players defensively, but at least these two have been impressive. Again, as thin as we are at linebacker, these guys might get their chance," Bruce said. "I guess the one nice thing about having only two defensive players is that they are both linebackers. We need them."

Bruce said he was also impressed with slender Bernard Edwards, a 6-5, 181-pound wide receiver from Fort Myers, Fla.

"He still has a lot to learn, but he's getting there," Bruce said. "He needs to make his hands softer. He has to bring the ball in, not fight it."

Bruce, as quotable as ever, said about the lanky Edwards, "That's a long drink of water — like a thermometer."



Ohio State freshman football players include (front row, l-r) Mike Huddleston, Mark Smith, Jay Koch, Jim "Scotty" Graham, Carlos Snow, John Spencer; (back row) Bernard Edwards, Andrew Gurd, John Kacherski, Tom Lease, Mike Shoaf, Roy Nichols and Jeff Ellis.



Tight End Receiving Preseason Accolades**Ellis Was One Of Brightest Spots In '88***By Mike Waxman*

Last year was a disappointing one for the Ohio State football team. But even though the team won only four games, through the darkness there were a couple of shining lights and junior tight end Jeff Ellis shone as bright as any.

The 6-4, 250-pounder from Louisville, Ky., caught 40 passes last year for 492 yards and two scores, averaging 12.3 yards per reception. He made several postseason honors teams, including honorable mention All-Big Ten and some All-American accolades.

This year, many experts feel he is the best tight end in America. It is notoriety that he doesn't mind, but if it doesn't come in the framework of the team game, then it rings hollow.

"I usually don't pay attention to things like that," Ellis said. "I just go out and do the best I can do. If the honors come, I'll take them just like anybody else would. If you start paying attention to that in the beginning, that can really mess you up on the football field, because you think you have to do everything."

"There are pros and cons with everything. Sometimes there are problems if you pay attention to your clippings, but sometimes you have to go out believing you are the best. That's the way some people get the most out of themselves. Sometimes that makes you work harder to reach your goals."

Ellis' goal since he came to Ohio State has been to go to the Rose Bowl. Unfortunately for Ellis, the Buckeyes have posted consecutive 6-4-1 and 4-6-1 records and haven't gone to a bowl game either season. This season, Ellis — along with many other Buckeyes — feels the Rose Bowl is an attainable goal.

"I honestly think we belong at number one in the Big Ten," Ellis said. "We proved to Michigan that they could be beat and we have a lot of people back from last year who want to win it. With the program Ohio State has, fans should have high expectations, and they had them last year. But the fans have to understand that things don't go well right away."

"It wouldn't have been smooth like if Coach (Earle) Bruce was still here. But I guess they can expect great things in the near future for Ohio State."

For Ellis, the near future may be now. Coming out of high school, he was rated as one of the top high school prospects in the nation at Male High School in Louisville. He was a *Parade* magazine All-American and also played basketball and baseball, winning three letters in each of those sports.

His mother wanted him to play baseball and his father, former world heavyweight boxing champion Jimmy Ellis, wanted him to play basketball. But the youngest Ellis desired to put on the pads and ply his trade on the gridiron. He won the debate and now his parents aren't the only ones who have noticed his talents.

Offensive coordinator Jim Colletto, who is handling the tight ends for the time being until graduate assistant David Snowball becomes comfortable in the job, has stated that Ellis has the talents to be ranked with the best at his position.

"I think if Jeff gets himself in good shape, he ought to be one of the better tight ends in the country," Colletto said. "He's up to 250 (pounds) now and he's certainly physical enough to be a good

run blocker and he has great hands catching the ball. I just hope he doesn't get too heavy, where he loses his quickness."

"I'd like to see him at the 240-245 range. Sometimes you get that extra weight and you get tired during games. In crucial situations, you need all the energy you can get. So I'm hoping he'll stay in top condition."

This year's team may be a better one than last year, but with a non-conference schedule of bowl teams Oklahoma State and Southern Cal, along with Boston College, in addition to the Big Ten opener at Illinois, it may not be evident in the win column right away.

"I think every game will be a test," Ellis said. "Many people think that Southern Cal will determine how well our season will go. But we can't look past Oklahoma State. They lost (Heisman Trophy winner) Barry Sanders, but when you look past a team, you often lose to that team."

"When I was a kid, everyone always told me Ohio State was the team to beat. People seem to work harder to beat us. All of the games will be a test for us, and the first three should go a long way in showing how well we'll do in the Big Ten."

Improvement has been one of Ellis' main strengths, increasing his receptions from seven in 1987 to 40 last year. He also works very hard, and he has increased his weight to 250 pounds from last year's 238 without losing any speed.

"The backup tight ends on this team (Gary Lickovitch, Jim Palmer and Rich Huffman) make me work much harder," Ellis admitted. "They could start for most teams and that serves as a catalyst to me to succeed. They push me and I push them and we're just a bunch of competitive guys."

Being the only player from the state of Kentucky on the Buckeyes' team, it was tough on Ellis as far as missing his home. However, the Buckeyes recruited speedy Aaron Payne, also from Louisville, and Ellis couldn't be happier.

"I played against his team (Holy Cross) in high school, but he didn't play at that time because he was injured," Ellis said. "I feel good about having a homeboy on the team, because he feels uptight right now, and being able to talk to me should ease him up a little bit. It'll ease me up a little too, because now I'll be able to talk to somebody about home and they'll know what I mean."

Ellis is currently 19th on the OSU career reception list. However, he is third on the list for tight ends, trailing only John Frank (1980-83), who caught 121 passes, third all-time in OSU history, and Ed Taggart (1983-86), who latched onto 57 passes. Ellis needs just 11 catches to pass Taggart, and if he equals his 1988 season total of 40 for the next two seasons, he would end his career third on the all-time list, passing Frank with 127 catches.

He had career highs of eight receptions and 97 yards last year against Iowa, and he expects OSU to call his number just as often this year. Interestingly, before Frank came to OSU, the tight end was not a much utilized scoring threat.

"It didn't really concern me that the tight end wasn't used a lot in the offense," Ellis said. "I came here to be



Junior tight end Jeff Ellis (89) was Ohio State's leading receiver last season with 40 receptions for 492 yards and two touchdowns. Ellis is projected by many preseason publications as an All-American selection in 1989.

## Join The Buckeye Boosters' Game Day Trip To Illinois

The Buckeye Boosters invite you to join them for a trip to Illinois to see Ohio State take revenge on the Illini. The trip is perfect for fans who can't get to see the Buckeyes at home or businessmen who want to entertain their clients. The trip leaves October 7 via private



air charter to Illinois and returns after the game. The trip package is priced at \$299 per person and includes air, meals, game tickets, ground transportation and much more. For more info, call the Buckeye Boosters at (614) 431-2323.

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# Buck Beat

During their stay in Southern California, Ohio State head coach John Cooper made sure the Buckeyes visited one of the more hallowed college football landmarks — the Rose Bowl.

Before a practice session on the day preceding the game, Cooper took his troops on a tour of the Rose Bowl in Pasadena. The Buckeyes haven't appeared in the Rose Bowl since 1984, when they lost a 20-17 decision to Southern Cal. OSU hasn't won a Rose Bowl since a 42-21 win over the Trojans in 1974.

Cooper said he wanted his players to be mindful of the team's common goal — a Big Ten championship — and wanted them to see what they have been missing for the last four seasons.

"I've touched the grass," said offensive tackle Tim Moxley. "Now I want to go back and play on it."

AFTER THE game, several players criticized one another to reporters, blaming various teammates for the loss to Southern Cal.

Cooper said the players who were so outspoken should not be so quick to point fingers.

"I looked at the films of the game," the OSU coach said, "and I didn't see anything that would allow one player to point a finger at the other. I didn't find anyone who played particularly well."

As for the backbiting, Cooper said that practice would be quickly remedied. "We don't want them bitching amongst themselves. We'll take care of that real quick."

ALTHOUGH HE continually refused to blame the officiating for the 39-point loss, Cooper did have some observations about the all Pac-10 crew.

"Don't get me wrong," Cooper said. "You're not going to hear me saying the referees cost us the game. You don't get your fanny kicked that bad and blame the officials."

Still, the OSU coach wondered aloud about two calls, both whistled against senior defensive end Srecko Zizakovic. The first was a holding call which wiped out Bobby Olive's 50-yard kickoff return in the second quarter, the other a personal foul in the first period following Zack Dumas' interception.

"The holding call was a phantom call," Cooper said. "They called it on Srecko and I've looked at that play on film four or five times and I can't find a holding call anywhere."

"The personal foul was called when Srecko was blocking after the play. The referee told me that he told Srecko the play was over. I asked him if he blew the whistle and he told me, 'No, I told him it was over.' I never have had a referee tell me that before."

Cooper also refused to deny that he was a bit peeved that Ohio State agreed to play the game with a full compliment of Pac-10 officials.

"That wasn't my idea," he said. "You ask me why we agree to play at their place and then have their conference's officials? I don't know. I made a lot of mistakes, but that one wasn't mine."

SOUTHERN CAL'S victory broke a deadlock in the overall series with the Buckeyes.

The Trojans have now won 10 of the 20 meetings between the two schools. Ohio State has nine victories and there was one tie, a 13-13 tie in 1949.

The game knotted the regular season series at 6-6-1. Ohio State's last regular season victory over the Trojans was a 17-0 shutout in 1964.

USC's victory over OSU continued the West Coast school's dominance over Big Ten opponents. The Trojans are

now 52-22-2 against the Big Ten. However, the victory over the Buckeyes broke a four-game losing streak for USC against the Big Ten. It had lost to Michigan State twice in 1987, to Michigan in last year's Rose Bowl and Illinois in this year's opener.

USC HEAD coach Larry Smith notched his third victory in as many games against Cooper with the win, while Cooper lost for the first time in three coaching attempts against the Trojans.

While head coach at Arizona State, Cooper led the Sun Devils to a 24-0 victory over USC in 1985 and a 29-20 win in 1986. Conversely, while Cooper was at ASU, Smith was head coach at Arizona and defeated the Sun Devils 16-13 in '85 and 34-17 in '86.

THE BUCKEYES had a large contingent of fans at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, all dressed in one form or another of scarlet and gray.

The Los Angeles area alumni club even showed up with a small pep band which entertained the crowd with the "Buckeye Battle Cry" and "Hang On Sloopy."

The Trojans marching band must have been jealous of the OSU spirit so it enlisted trumpeter Herb Alpert to sit in with it on a couple of tunes in the stands.

Other strange happenings in Southern California included the USC mascot being listed on the injury list.

Traveler IV, the white horse which gallops around the Coliseum track to celebrate each USC score, missed the game. Startled by the Trojans band during a pep rally the day before the game, Traveler IV bucked his rider and then fell, scraping both rear ankles.

Traveler V, who had retired after the 1988 season, was pressed back into action for the game. Traveler IV was expected to be back for USC's Oct. 7 game against Washington.

WITH THE exception of the season-ending knee injury to tight end Jeff Ellis, the Buckeyes came out of the Southern Cal game in good physical shape.

The only players on the injury report were senior guard Karl Coles with some minor bruises and Zizakovic with a minor back problem. Neither player was expected to miss much practice time.

Meanwhile, junior safety Mark

Pelini saw action against USC about two games ahead of schedule. Pelini, who had been nursing a sore shoulder, was not expected back in action until the conference season.

And tailback Carlos Snow did not show up for a Sunday treatment of his knee for the first time this season. Cooper attributed Snow's improvement to a game played on grass. That is the last game on a natural surface for the Buckeyes this year.

SPEAKING OF turfs, the University of Illinois is investigating a fire involving the Memorial Stadium artificial surface on Sept. 24. The Illini are scheduled to host the Buckeyes in the Big Ten opener for both teams on Oct. 7.

According to Illinois officials, damage to the turf was between the 10 and 50-yard line on the north side of the field.

Arson investigators said the fire began in a five-yard circle at the 10-yard line and wind took the blaze north to south, cutting a swath in the middle of the field five yards wide at its narrowest point and 15 yards wide at its widest.

The AstroTurf surface did not burn but melted. The turf was installed in 1985 at a cost of \$1.5 million.

Illinois officials contacted turf specialists who assured them the game between the Illini and Buckeyes could be played as scheduled. Illinois has an open date Sept. 30.

SENIOR STRONG safety Zack Dumas missed a day of practice in preparation for the USC game.

Dumas was reportedly miffed at the way he played in the team's opener against Oklahoma State.

Dumas missed Monday's workout, but returned Tuesday. Junior Jimmy Peel started against the Trojans in place of Dumas, but the senior saw action on the first series of plays in the game.

"I had some personal problems," Dumas said about the absence. "I don't want to comment other than that."

In addition to being dropped from the starting lineup, the team's only other disciplinary action against Dumas involved extra running drills at the end of each practice throughout the week.

DESPITE A subpar performance against USC, junior quarterback Greg Frey moved into fourth place on the Ohio State all-time passing chart.

Frey has now passed for 2,542 yards during his career, moving past Rex Kern (2,444 from 1968-70) and the late Don Unverferth (2,518 from 1963-65).

Despite moving into fourth on the career list, the OSU quarterback now is only halfway toward cracking the school's top three passers. They are Art Schlichter (1978-81) with 7,547, Mike Tomczak (1981-84) with 5,569 and Jim Karsatos (1983-86) with 5,089.

JUNIOR PUNTER Jeff Bohlman is doing a good job silencing his critics so far this season.

After two games, Bohlman was averaging 46.5 yards per punt including a 69-yarder against Southern Cal. For his efforts, Bohlman ranked third in the nation in punting after games of Sept. 23.

His excellence also allows the Buckeyes to lead the nation in net punting with an average of 45.6 yards per kick on eight punts.

THROUGHOUT ITS century of football, Ohio State has given up 40 or more points in a single game only 20 times. However, three of those have come in the last 12 games.

Ohio State was beaten 42-10 by Pittsburgh and 41-7 by Indiana last year and 42-3 by Southern Cal Sept. 23.

Seven of those games came in the 1890s and two more in the 1900s. There wasn't another until three in the 1940s. There was one each in the 1950s, '60s and '70s.

Ohio State has won only once when it gave up 40 points or more. That was the 49-42 victory over Illinois in 1980 when Illini quarterback Dave Wilson set a then-NCAA record by throwing for 621 yards.

FORMER BUCKEYE center Jeff Uhlenhake made history for the NFL's Miami Dolphins Sept. 17, becoming the first rookie ever to start at center for the Dolphins in their 24-year history, excluding the strike year of 1987.

Uhlenhake, an All-American for the Buckeyes last year, started for Miami against the New England Patriots on Sept. 17 and helped the Dolphins to a 24-10 victory.

According to the Dolphins, the only other first-year player ever to start at center was Greg Ours during a replacement game in '87.

Uhlenhake performed so well against the Patriots that he was awarded one of the game balls by the Dolphins coaching staff.

## Ellis Tears Up Knee Vs. USC, Will Miss Rest Of 1989 Season

By Mark Rea

Ohio State's 42-3 loss to Southern California was a costly one as junior tight end Jeff Ellis sustained a serious knee injury. He will be lost to the team for the remainder of the 1989 season.

The injury occurred in the first quarter of the Sept. 23 game at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

Ellis had just caught a pass to extend his streak to 16 consecutive games with at least one reception. Shortly thereafter, he tripped over an opposing player.

"I was just going out for a pass and, out of the corner of my eye, I saw somebody fall down," Ellis said. "I kept on running and then I guess I tripped over the guy who had fallen down."

"When I went down, my leg twisted and it didn't give. Then I felt my knee twist. I knew it was bad when I did it. I was hoping it wasn't as bad as I thought when the trainers came out,

but I guess I knew in the back of my mind that it was."

According to team physician Dr. Robert Murphy, Ellis tore both the anterior cruciate and lateral collateral ligaments in his left knee. Ellis was scheduled to undergo surgery at University Hospitals on Sept. 26.

Murphy said the actual severity of the injury would not be known until the surgery was performed. However, Ellis could be looking at from six to nine months of rehabilitation.

He will receive a medical redshirt for the 1989 season, allowing him two more years of eligibility.

Ellis had caught just two passes this season, good for 39 yards. Last year, he was the Buckeyes' leading receiver with 40 catches for 492 yards and two TDs.

His starting position will be taken over by senior Jim Palmer, while junior Rich Huffman moves up to second team.



Jeff Ellis