



## **BSB Reprints: Flashback to Earle Bruce's 1st Season**

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 Donfey (47), Vince Skillings (48), Luther Henson (54), Todd Bell (25), Art Schlichter (10) and Vladi 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 31-6 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

Continued On Page 34




**AFTER TAILGATES AND TOUCHDOWNS.**

**Huddle at Doubletree Guest Suites Columbus.**

Warm friendly smiles. Chocolate chip cookies. Comfortably spacious two-room suites with separate living room, honor bar, sofa sleeper, wet bar and three televisions. In the morning, join us for a tailgate buffet in the Caucus Room Restaurant. And after the victory, celebrate in the lounge featuring six televisions with all the NCAA action.

We're just 10 minutes from campus in the heart of downtown Columbus. So when heading for the Shoe, let us quarterback everything, with our Fall Football Package that includes a souvenir welcome gift and breakfast buffet for two. For our special package rates and information, call us at 614-222-4600.



50 South Front Street, Columbus, OH  
800-222-TREE  
Sweet Dreams®

In August of 1979, Earle Bruce approached his first game as Ohio State head coach after taking over for his mentor, legendary coach Woody Hayes.

Forty years later, Ryan Day enters his first season at the helm of Buckeye football, following in the footsteps of modern day coaching icon Urban Meyer.

In this installment of BSB Reprints, we look back at an OSU Flashback to the 1979 Buckeyes, published in September of 1999. The featured piece includes details of the roaring start to the season and the eventual Rose Bowl heartbreak.

Click the button below or the image on the left to open the latest BSB reprints.

[nectar\_btn size="large" button\_style="regular" button\_color\_2="Accent-Color"  
icon\_family="default\_arrow"  
url="http://www.buckeyesports.com/reports/BSBReprints\_1979\_Flashback.pdf" text="Download PDF"]

[nectar\_btn size="jumbo" button\_style="regular" button\_color\_2="Accent-Color" icon\_family="none"  
url="http://www.buckeyesports.com/boards/" text="Join The Conversation"]