



## [BSB Reprints: Looking Back At Former Wolverines To Coach For Buckeyes](#)

# Heater Hopes Coaching Leads To Initial Rose Extravaganza

By Ken Halloy

OSU defensive backfield coach Chuck Heater is now involved in his 10th season of Big Ten football. During that time Heater, who played his collegiate ball at Michigan, has been a part of five Big Ten championships, either as a player or coach, but has never gone to a Rose Bowl.

"It's really hard to believe when you think about it. Five times. It doesn't seem right," said Heater, now in his third year at Ohio State. "Things just never fell into place. Maybe one day they will."

Buckeye fans will likely sympathize with Heater's most recent Pasadena disappointment, that coming last year when the Buckeyes tied Michigan for the conference crown but the Wolverines went West via their win over the Buckeyes.

Ironically, Heater was denied four times as a player for Michigan between 1971-74. The Wolverines played in the 1972 New Year's Day classic, but Heater did not make the trip, being a freshman. Freshmen did not make bowl trips at that time.

The Wolverines tied Ohio State for the Big Ten title the next three seasons, but again, each time wound up spending the holidays at home. A 14-11 Buckeye win in '72 gave the Buckeyes the bowl nod via the head-to-head tiebreaker rule.

It was during that season Heater, a tailback, began a career of consistency. He rushed for 655 yards, averaging 4.7 yards a carry, and scored four touchdowns. He also caught three passes for 31 yards.

The tiebreaker didn't do in the Wolves in '73; instead a vote by the conference's athletic directors did. A 10-10, season-ending tie had the conference bigwigs confounded, as both Michigan and OSU ended the season with 10-0-1 records. To decide the Rose Bowl participant, a vote was held and Ohio State received six of 10 ballots.

"Ohio State probably had the better team that season, but we were the better team that day," the Weston, W.Va., native recalls. As a junior that season, Heater gained 666 yards on the ground, an average of 5.8 yards a carry. He scored six TDs.

In 1974, Ohio State's 12-10 win again gave OSU the tiebreaker edge and sent the Buckeyes to Pasadena, denying Heater his last chance for Christmas in the sun. Instead, he spent his fourth straight holiday season at home in Tiffin, Ohio. Heater, converted to fullback, tacked on another 662 rushing yards and scored seven touchdowns that season.

Michigan posted a 30-2-1 record during the three years Heater was a starter.

Heater isn't bitter about the whole ordeal. He's a realist — an education psychology graduate who analyzes most things in terms of its Xs and Os.

"Going to the Rose Bowl just wasn't meant to be at that time. You can't dwell on it too much," said the second team All-Big Ten in 1973 honoree. "I just have to believe my time will come. You never stop believing."

He was drafted in the 10th round by New Orleans in 1975, but a pro career never materialized. "They were keeping six running backs, and I was the seventh," he said. Hamstring pulls and other nagging injuries hampered his progress at summer camp.

## Meet The Grid Coaches

Somewhat distraught, Heater turned down the opportunity to begin a pro career in Canada. Forever the realist, Heater resisted.

"I just didn't want to play football anymore. My heart wasn't in it. I knew it was time to give it up," he said. "Some guys never stop living those days of glory, and I knew I would always be a marginal player. Maybe I could have made it with the right team, but I would have been a marginal two or three-year player."

"It was just time to move on. I would say I was fortunate because some guys never move on."

Heater applied to graduate school, expecting to eventually land a career in counseling and psychology. He then ran into an old hometown friend, Jerry Janson, who was an assistant at Northern Arizona. Interestingly, Janson was a graduate assistant under Woody Hayes when Heater played for Michigan.

Putting reality on the back burner, Heater accepted when asked by Janson to become an assistant at NA.

"I was single at the time, so I could move very quickly. It was just a situation and I was available to do it," he explained. "Being a football coach was down on my list of things to do in my life. I didn't prepare myself as a player with the attitude of one day becoming a coach."

Heater never took coaching seriously, at least at first.

"I thought I would just have some fun for a while. I thought it might be something I knew a little bit about."

To his delight, coaching wasn't what he expected.

"I had a very narrow view of what coaching was. I realized it was more than just teaching. As I got more involved I realized I had ability to be a coach and it had a lot to do with dealing with people. Communication was pivotal. And that's what I always wanted to do in my life — deal with people."

And so the career began. After one season at Northern Arizona, Heater returned to Ohio when his backfield coach at Michigan, Chuck Stobart, who had now become head coach at Toledo, asked Heater to coach the running backs. Heater spent two years with the backfield before taking over the defensive backfield chores. He rebuilt the Rocket secondary in three years.

"I thought the opportunity to coach the secondary was a better career move for me professionally. If you do a good job there people will have a better chance to evaluate you," he explained.

Having established a name for himself in the coaching realm, Heater went to Wisconsin in 1982 when Dave McClain asked Heater to work with the defensive backfield there. Heater stayed there three years before coming to OSU. The Badgers defeated Ohio State twice during Heater's stay in Madison.

As the times have changed, so has Heater's coaching style.

"From a coaching standpoint, I've become more of a teacher than a yeller over the years," Heater said. "As a

young coach I was pretty radical in my approach. I was extremely aggressive, sometimes in the absence of knowledge.

"I can still yell and scream, but now I'm more interested in knowing why a kid doesn't do it right than I was at one time. Now I give the kid the opportunity to say, 'hey coach, this is what I saw on the play.'"

Heater even boasts about becoming a decent teacher.

"I think the whole key about teaching, like in anything, is to be able to get the whole picture, break it down into something simple," he said. "You do this so that when you try to communicate it, it comes across very progressive. When you cut away all the fat, you'll find that the simplistic form is the best."

That's usually easier said than done, especially for Heater. Though he minimizes his psychology training as "only an undergraduate degree," it's obvious his education has pervaded his coaching technique.

"That's what I like about coaching, it's more than just the Xs and Os. You spend a large portion of your time dealing with people," he said. "It gives me a sensitivity to understanding and



Chuck Heater

appreciating people more. That's what this job is all about, I've learned."

And it's that ability to communicate that makes Heater an effective coach, said OSU coach Earle Bruce.

"Coach Heater understands the kids and that's the number one key to being a coach," Bruce said. "You can teach all you want, but if you don't understand what makes a kid go, then you'll never make it as a coach. Coach Heater knows how to reach a kid. That's why he's a coach today at the Division I level."

And perhaps one day Heater will make it to Pasadena as a head coach. "That would be something, wouldn't it?" he laughed.

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Ohio State co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison and linebackers coach Al Washington made the rare rivalry flip when they were hired in January after coaching for Michigan in 2018.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin looked back to our coverage of other former Wolverines who became coaches at Ohio State.

Chuck Heater played running back for the Maize and Blue from 1971-74 and later became a defensive backs coach for the Scarlet and Gray.

Chuck Hobart served as an assistant coach at Miami (Ohio) from 1967-68 and then at Michigan from 1969-75, under Hall of Fame coach Bo Schembechler, who also coached at OSU and UM, at both schools.

Eventually, Hobart joined the Buckeyes late in his career, serving as wide receivers coach from 1995-99 and offensive coordinator in 2000.

This installment of BSB Reprints travels back through the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives, featuring stories from 1987 and 2000 about Heater and Hobart, who both left their Wolverines ties to become Buckeyes.

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