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Playing Fast

TIM MOODY

MAKING CHANGES – Co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley is aiming to simplify the Ohio State defense during his first spring with the Buckeyes.

New Scheme Set To Simplify Things For Ohio State On Defense

By TIM MOODY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Editor

The Ohio State defense has long been dubbed the Silver Bullets, but in 2019 the Buckeyes will really have a bullet on the field. That's just one of the changes coming to the stop troops in Columbus during the first season of Ryan Day's tenure as head coach.

And every change was certainly warranted.

The offense, led by Day as coordinator before he took over for Urban Meyer after the Rose Bowl, was tops on the Big Ten by scoring 42.4 points per game. That's in stark contrast to the defense, which was seventh in the league at 25.5 points allowed per contest.

The Silver Bullets were even worse from a yardage standpoint, allowing 403.4 per game to rank 10th. (The offense was first at 535.6.)

Ohio State also struggled at times to separate the ball from its opponent, coming up with just 11 interceptions in 14 games. Iowa led the Big Ten with 20 in 13 contests.

None of that was good enough, which is a big part of the reason the Buckeyes finished with one loss and came close to suffering a few others. That means it's a big part of the reason they missed the College Football Playoff as well.

When something isn't good enough at this level, it's on the head coach to make sure that changes. As soon as Day took over, he went to work to overhaul the defense, bringing in two new coordinators, a new linebackers coach and two new secondary coaches (one of whom is also a co-coordinator). It was clear from that point that changes were coming, but spring practice has finally started to shed some light on how the defense will look.

Let's break it down.

The 'Bullet'

The most obvious difference when the team lines up will be the "Bullet" – a hybrid safety/linebacker who will often take the place of the "Sam" linebacker. It's a way to put more speed and coverage ability on the field without necessarily sacrificing physicality.

"The origination of that position was you take a guy who is maybe not as fast and you plug him into that position, but now that guy is a guy who

Continued On Page 8

Holtmann Has OSU Hoops On The Rise

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Chris Holtmann was recently asked what his expectations were for getting the Ohio State men's basketball team back in the NCAA Tournament when he was hired as coach on June 12, 2017.

The head coach was brought to Columbus from Butler to instill energy into a program that was 21-14 with an NIT appearance in 2015-16 and a 17-15 record the following season, losing to Rutgers in the Big Ten tournament.

Although coach Thad Matta had tremendous success with the Buckeyes over 13 seasons (school-record 337 wins, five Big Ten regular-season titles, four Big Ten tournament titles, two Final Four appearances), there was a sense that OSU was slipping from national prominence and a change was needed.

It was in that context that Holtmann had a timeline to get Ohio State to the NCAA Tournament again and, more importantly, be an annual participant.

So, back to the original question, what was the plan?

"To get here as quick as possible, that really was the goal," he said. "How quickly could we get our group tasting March Madness and what that is? We've got talented kids and talented players, and I didn't know when all that would happen given all the changes that came upon us there when we took over the program.

"That was it."

What he said was not as significant as where and when he gave the answer. Holtmann spoke to reporters in the hallway outside the Buckeyes' locker room at the BOK Center, in Tulsa, Okla., some 40 minutes after losing 74-59 to third-seeded Houston in the second round of the Midwest Regional on March 24.

For the second straight season Holtmann guided OSU (20-15) to the NCAA Tournament and an opening-round win. Two days earlier the 11th-seeded Buckeyes had beaten No. 6-seed Iowa State, 62-59.

Now, looking back on what had been accomplished in such a short time for the program, he allowed himself a chance to reflect.

"I'm not going to sit here and say did I expect this in the first two years and two wins (in the NCAAs)?" he said. "No, but it was just get here and get here with the process that we believe is the right way.

"You're not going to mortgage your future for trying to get there in one year. I

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Not So Slow

I am surprised Mark Rea chose the March 23 issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin to vent his dislike of college basketball as the nation was watching great March Madness games!

He says college basketball has a "mind-numbing total of play stoppages … four media timeouts per half and at least four more per team …"

I researched college football television timeouts, and it says they need 10 per half. College basketball has four media timeouts per half, and each team gets four timeouts per game. If a team does not use one of their four timeouts in the first half, they forfeit the timeout. When a team calls a timeout in college basketball within the 30-second window before the next scheduled TV timeout break, the called timeout takes the place of the scheduled TV timeout.

The average college basketball game is around two hours. The average college football game is three hours and 24 minutes.

Peter Hurtubise
Minneapolis

On B1G Expansion

I'd like to comment on Mark Rea's column in the March 23 issue with regard to Big Ten expansion. Specifically, his comments on Penn State and Nebraska. To be sure, Nebraska has not lived up to their potential in football, although they were, until quite recently, annual contenders in their division.

Penn State, on the other hand, has certainly proven to be a power in the conference. Tradition and emotion aside, the Nittany Lions have been a much more consistent thorn in the side of our Buckeyes than our historical rival, Michigan. Not just in football, but in basketball, wrestling, soccer, hockey and lacrosse as well as women's sports, they have given the Bucks more grief since joining the league than Michigan.

As to Maryland and Rutgers, I believe Maryland will prove to be much more competitive in football. Clearly in basketball and some of the other sports they already are. I do doubt if Rutgers will ever prove to be any more competitive consistently in football than Indiana, but they certainly hold their own in men's and women's basketball and in wrestling and lacrosse.

Pete Lively
Chaumont, N.Y.

If you would like to express an opinion concerning Ohio State University sports, please send your letter to BSB Letters, P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, OH 43212, or email it to bsb@buckeyesports.com for use in BSB. Letters must be signed and include the writer's hometown and a daytime telephone number for verification. Publication priority will be given to those letters that are brief, and we reserve the right to edit letters for publication.

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1984

Among tweaks in Ohio State's personnel on offense in the Buckeyes' 1984 spring camp was Kirk Lowdermilk's latest position change. He had experience on the defensive line before moving to offensive guard and finally settling at center.

The coaching staff picked the 6-3, 265-pounder for his versatility and seniority with a pair of freshmen – Tim Odom and Rich Morris – behind him.

"I think we should be very powerful," he said of OSU's offensive line. "I think the only position we'll have trouble replacing is (tight end) John Frank – but I think we'll be the best … maybe the best in the country."

30 Years Ago – 1989

Ohio State and Northwestern were reportedly in negotiations to open the 1989 season with a game in Vancouver, British Columbia, at B.C. Place Stadium's 60,000-seat venue.

The matchup in the dome, also the home of the University of British Columbia, was in the preliminary stages of being mapped out. OSU athletic director Jim Jones had no comment on the possibility of the Sept. 2 contest.

"It's not much more than a concept at this point," B.C. Pavilion Corp. director of corporate relations Norman Stowe told BSB. "It is a possibility. There is still a fair amount work to be done concerning television, sponsorship and marketing. But we are very interested in such a game."

25 Years Ago – 1994

In spring camp, head coach John Cooper vowed to have Ohio State reload rather than rebuild after the Buckeyes lost an abundance of key starters on both sides of the ball.

"Rebuilding season? Are you kidding me?" Cooper said. "Sure, we have some big holes to fill. But we're not looking to rebuild. We're looking to reload."

Among the voids to fill, Eddie George was a candidate to become OSU's next running back after leading rusher Raymont Harris departed. George had 223 yards and three touchdowns in 1993, and Cooper saw him as one to watch.

"Did we lose some great players? You bet we did," Cooper said. "The biggest thing we have to do this spring is replace the guys we lost last year. But we think that we have recruited some quality players the last couple of years, and we're all anxious to see what they have to offer."

20 Years Ago – 1999

Although the Buckeyes came up short in the 1999 NCAA men's basketball tournament with a loss to eventual national champion Connecticut in the Final Four, Ohio State returned to Columbus with pride. The team, which went 29-7 on the season, was received by a crowd of approximately 3,000 fans at the Oval for an appreciation rally. Among the dignitaries in attendance were Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, Ohio State board of trustees member Michael Colley and Columbus mayor Greg Lashutka.

"They believe in themselves, and they put teamwork above individual story," Taft told the crowd. "They set high goals and exceeded those goals."

15 Years Ago – 2004

After 17 years, tight ends coach and recruiting coordinator Bill Conley resigned April 1 as the Buckeyes started spring camp.

"I thought it was a bad April Fool's joke," said tight end Ryan Hamby.

Conley, the longest-tenured member of OSU's coaching staff, stepped down effective April 1 but stayed on in a volunteer capacity through spring camp.

"You look back at the great experiences you had at Ohio State and the great moments as a player and as a coach," Conley said. "You get closer and closer and the love that this football team has with the players and with the coaches, it makes it extremely tough because it's a family and that's the way it is.

"I just felt in my gut this was the time."

10 Years Ago – 2009

Although the economy was slow, the Buckeyes still brought in the big bucks. On March 30, Ohio State announced that its athletic department had reached a 10-year multimedia rights deal with IMG College and RadiOhio for a total of $128 million.

Of the total, $110 million was guaranteed – the largest multimedia rights deal in college sports history, with $18 million from IMG's assumption of production, payroll, tickets for sponsors and other expenses previously shouldered by OSU.

The new agreement gave IMG and RadiOhio all rights to managing and marketing for publishing, live radio play-by-play broadcasts and coaches' shows.

"We are extremely pleased to partner with IMG and look forward to a long-lasting venture," said athletic director Gene Smith. "This arrangement helps to ensure the long-term financial stability of Ohio State athletics by continuing to fund our 36-sport program."

Five Years Ago – 2014

As spring camp continued at Ohio State, head coach Urban Meyer's third year in Columbus presented depth concerns up and down the roster. The questions trickled to quarterback where, beyond incumbent starter and rising senior Braxton Miller, there was no established backup.

OSU was banking on Miller to be healthy by the fall as he missed all of spring camp and recovered from his shoulder injury, which left sophomore Cardale Jones and redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett to duke it out for first-team reps in the meantime. By March 18, Meyer said Jones was working the starting offense while Barrett had been improving but lacking consistency. Meyer noted Jones' maturity since an infamous tweet his freshman year when he questioned on Twitter why football players had to attend class.

"He was a guy that couldn't get out of his own way," Meyer said. "You're starting to see the progress in the classroom. You remember the famous tweet? It's a different guy."

One Year Ago – 2018

Near the end of the spring, Ohio State saw a top player go down with a camp-ending injury.

After the Buckeyes' practice April 2, Meyer announced Tuf Borland had suffered an Achilles injury, cutting the sophomore linebacker's spring short but the coach kept an optimistic outlook for Borland's 2018 season. OSU expected him to recover in time for the early fall, targeting a September return.

"Tuf Borland, it just breaks your heart because he's one of the best kids I've been around in my life," Meyer said. "A very good player. He'll be back."

For the time being, Meyer pegged junior Justin Hilliard and sophomore Baron Browning atop the candidates to replace Borland at middle linebacker as the team completed camp.

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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

EDITOR
Tim Moody

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway, Terry Gilliam, Kevin Dye, Josh Winslow

CONTRIBUTORS
Bill Armstrong, Bob Roehm, David Breithaupt, Julie Roy, Bill Conley, Mark Schmetzer, Joe Dempsey, Steve Siegfried, Rich Exner, Garrett Stepien, Andrew Lind, Jeff Svoboda, Eric Loughry, Mike Wachsman, Craig Merz

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Jan Jager, Dave Tebay, Ron Friedman

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OPINION

Staff Around Bruce Led To Early OSU Success

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
Mark Rea

Ohio State holds its spring football practice under a new head coaching regime about as often as you see a leprechaun riding a unicorn. OK … maybe it's not quite that rare, but it has happened only six times over the past 68 years.

One of those times came exactly 40 years ago when the Buckeyes convened their first spring practice under Earle Bruce, a man wholly unafraid of being the successor to the legendary Woody Hayes.

Bruce was steeped in Ohio State tradition as a proud alum of the university as well as a veteran (some would claim "survivor" as a more accurate term) of six seasons on Hayes' staff from 1966 to 1971. That was a period during which the Buckeyes enjoyed almost unparalleled success that included a then program-record 22 consecutive victories, three undisputed Big Ten titles and the 1968 national championship.

Plucked away from Iowa State, where he had twice been named Big Eight Coach of the Year, Bruce was an immediate success in Columbus. His 1979 team rose to the nation's No. 1 ranking after winning each of its 11 regular-season games and then came just one point shy of securing the national championship, losing a 17-16 decision to third-ranked USC in the Rose Bowl.

At least a portion of that initial success was due to the coaching staff Bruce assembled for his first season in Columbus. It included three holdovers from Hayes' staff – interior offensive line coach Glen Mason, tackles and tight ends coach Bill Myles and quarterbacks/wide receivers coach Fred Zechman.

Bruce also brought four assistants with him from Iowa State – Wayne Stanley (running backs), Bob Tucker (outside linebackers), Steve Szabo (interior defensive line) and Pete Carroll (defensive backs) – and he hired friend Dennis Fryzel away from the Air Force Academy to be his defensive coordinator.

Despite the passage of time, every Ohio State fan knows what happened to Bruce after that first season. He spent eight more years as head coach of the Buckeyes before being unceremoniously fired six days before the 1987 Michigan game despite an 81-26-1 record, four conference titles and five bowl victories.

Bruce, who later had coaching stops at Northern Iowa and Colorado State, finished his college coaching career with a 154-90-2 record, and he was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 2002.

By that time, he had returned to Columbus as a radio analyst as well as unofficial ambassador for the Buckeyes, positions he continued to enjoy until his April 2018 death at the age of 87 due to complications of Alzheimer's disease.

As for what happened to the members of Bruce's first coaching staff at Ohio State, some enjoyed lengthy careers on the sidelines, and some of them did not.

None lasted the entire length of the head coach's nine-year tenure, with Mason coming closest, serving Bruce for eight seasons until he embarked upon his own head coaching career that began at Kent State in 1987.

In addition to Kent State, Mason was head coach at Kansas and Minnesota, compiling a 123-121-1 record over 21 seasons. He also turned a rare career hat trick, winning conference Coach of the Year honors in the MAC, Big Eight and Big Ten.

Mason, who turns 69 on April 9, has been a college football analyst for the Big Ten Network since 2007.

Myles served on Bruce's staff for six seasons before being promoted to associate athletic director at Ohio State in March 1985. He continued as associate AD until his official retirement from the university in 2007, but he remained as an advisor to head coaches John Cooper, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer before suffering a massive stroke in December 2014.

Even that couldn't keep Myles down, though. He has since made a near-miraculous recovery and continues to attend football games from his perch in the Ohio Stadium press box. Now approaching his 83rd birthday, Myles lives in suburban Columbus with his wife, Lorita.

Zechman, who had been Art Schlichter's coach in high school, left Ohio State after the 1982 season to become head coach at New Mexico State. His tenure with the Aggies lasted only three years and resulted in a 9-24 record, effectively ending Zechman's coaching career.

But the end of one career sparked the beginning of another. While living in New Mexico, Zechman became a financial advisor, and he continues working in that field today. He returned to Ohio in 1989, and the 73-year-old continues to live in the Dayton area with his wife, Linda.

Differing Career Paths

Zechman wasn't the only member of Bruce's first staff to switch careers.

Stanley coached OSU running backs through the 1984 season after which he went into business for himself, first as a liaison between potential franchise owners and investors and later as owner of his own apparel company that included novelties and awards.

Since 2012, he has been a partner in Stanley-Haines Apparel, a Columbus-based promotional product distributor.

Tucker also stayed with Bruce through the 1984 campaign and then became head coach at his alma mater, the College of Wooster. He spent 10 seasons with the Fighting Scots and then joined Tressel's staff at Youngstown State in 1997. Tucker returned to Ohio State when Tressel was named head coach of the Buckeyes in 2001, working as director of football operations until his retirement in 2009.

After retirement, Tucker remained with the OSU football program assisting with military visits and recognition. He continued in that capacity until suffering a fatal heart attack in March 2017. He was 73.

Szabo holds the dubious distinction of being fired twice by Bruce. The first came after the 1981 season at Ohio State, and the second came at Colorado State following the 1990 campaign. Szabo always managed to land on his feet, however, and eventually spent 40 years in coaching – and that was after graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy, where he was a teammate of Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback Roger Staubach, and a four-year stint in the U.S. Marine Corps that included a tour of duty in Vietnam.

Szabo, now 75, finally left coaching in 2011 after serving as defensive coordinator at Illinois State. In recent years, he has provided video coaching tips for the website CoachesChoice.com, videos that are available on YouTube.

Unquestionably the most famous of the assistant coaches on Bruce's first staff at Ohio State was Carroll, who lasted only one season in Columbus before he moved to North Carolina State in 1980 to become defensive coordinator.

Over the subsequent 20 years, Carroll changed jobs six more times, including twice becoming a head coach in the NFL – first with the New York Jets in 1994 and then with the New England Patriots in 1997. But he was fired from both of those jobs and was just another recycled coach looking for a job when USC took a chance on him in 2001. The Trojans were just 31-29 in their previous five seasons and were only 6-6 in Carroll's first season.

But USC won a piece of the Pac-10 championship in 2002 and followed with back-to-back national titles, signifying a return to prominence for the program. Carroll left USC in 2009 amid NCAA allegations of wrongdoing, allegations that eventually stripped the program of its 2004 national championship.

Carroll landed on his feet, however, taking over as head coach of the Seattle Seahawks. Now 67 and the oldest head coach in the NFL, Carroll is set to begin his 10th season in Seattle, where he has won four NFL West titles as well as Super Bowl XLVIII.

Dismissal Ends Friendship

Fryzel's free-wheeling, devil-may-care nature often contrasted with that of Bruce's no-nonsense approach. Nevertheless, the two were apparently good friends and had been since 1972 when Fryzel served as Bruce's defensive coordinator at the University of Tampa.

That all seemed to change on New Year's Eve 1981, however.

Ohio State had finished its season with a 31-28 decision over the U.S. Naval Academy in the Liberty Bowl, but the three-point bowl win left Bruce with a sour taste in his mouth.

Tired of what he believed to be an underachieving defense, the head coach was fuming again about his team's sloppy play against Navy when he saw Fryzel stop after the game to talk with reporters. Szabo would later call it the straw that broke the camel's back as Bruce stormed into the locker room and started throwing anything that wasn't nailed down.

The team's charter plane arrived back in Columbus at around 2 a.m., and six hours later, Bruce informed Fryzel, Szabo and defensive backs coach Nick Saban that their one-year contracts would not be renewed when they ran out June 30.

"I'm devastated to be honest," Fryzel told reporters at the time. "I can't believe it. I've got nothing to be ashamed of in my time here."

Apparently, there had been a growing friction throughout the 1981 season between Bruce and Fryzel. The team had split into factions with most of the defense embracing Fryzel's go-for-broke attitude, and that didn't sit well with the head coach.

As the season wore on, the rift grew larger, and even Szabo and Saban began to defer more and more to Fryzel. Then, when things that should have stayed behind closed doors in staff meetings began showing up in the press, Bruce demanded his assistants stop talking to reporters.

"So, when Earle saw Denny talking to a couple of reporters after the Liberty Bowl, he blew a gasket," Szabo told ESPN in 2016. "It was the straw that broke the camel's back."

Fryzel was so devastated by the firing that he entered the private business sector and never coached again. He did, however, remain friends with Saban, and it was Fryzel in 2007 who suggested Saban – then the head coach of the NFL's Miami Dolphins – look into the vacant head coaching job at Alabama.

Fryzel, a native of Garfield Heights, Ohio, and a halfback at Denison University in the mid-1960s, died in Duluth, Ga., in July 2009 after a bout with kidney cancer. He was 67.

INSIDER

OSU Announces New Leadership Institute

The Ohio State Department of Athletics on March 26 unveiled the Eugene D. Smith Leadership Institute, a three-pillar program that will provide leadership, character and career development to student-athletes.

"We are excited to share with you a new initiative that we are so proud to have the opportunity to lead," said Ohio State associate athletic director for sport administration and student-athlete development Carey Fagan in a press release. "Thanks to the unbelievable generosity of donors who are passionate about what we do, we have launched this comprehensive program for student-athletes to best prepare them for careers and life after graduation."

The institute is composed of three pillars: Real Life, which focuses on career readiness and preparing student-athletes to enter the workforce; LIVE LIFE, which focuses on increasing social awareness and educating student-athletes about issues within each team and the community at large; and LEADERSHIP, which will provide training for both coaches and student-athletes to enrich their individual leadership styles.

Former head football coach Urban Meyer – who brought Real Life Wednesdays to the football team and is now an assistant athletic director – will oversee rising leaders from all sports in the Lead Like a Buckeye Program for captains in all 36 varsity sports as part of his new role as assistant athletic director of athletics initiatives and relations.

WR Smith Leaves Ohio State

Ohio State redshirt freshman wide receiver L'Christian "Blue" Smith has left the football program and intends to transfer, head coach Ryan Day confirmed during his media availability March 23.

The 6-4, 220-pound Smith appeared in three games as a true freshman last season and was in line to redshirt as a result but faced a difficult path to playing time with 12 other scholarship wide receivers on the roster.

There was quite a bit of speculation leading up to his commitment in August 2017 as to whether Smith would be best utilized as a wide receiver or tight end in college, but he was steadfast in his desire to stay out wide and practiced exclusively at receiver last season.

A two-sport standout at Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne, Smith also heavily contemplated pursuing a basketball career after high school. It remains to be seen which path he'll take, though Kentucky – the runner-up in Smith's recruitment the first time around – is among the favorites to secure his pledge if he continues his career on the gridiron.

WR Babb, LB Hilliard Out Indefinitely

On March 26, Ohio State announced indefinite absences for redshirt freshman wide receiver Kamryn Babb and fifth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard.

Babb reportedly suffered his third knee injury in as many years during a non-contact drill in practice, while Hilliard underwent surgery to repair an Achilles injury. Ohio State did not disclose either injury, but the extent of both ailments were first reported by Lettermen Row.

Babb missed both his senior year at St. Louis Christian Brothers College and freshman year at Ohio State with opposing ACL injuries. He told BSB in the Buckeyes' locker room following the Big Ten Championship Game in December that he felt he was ahead of schedule on the second injury.

"I'm cutting and doing a lot of stuff I wasn't doing (this early) my last surgery, so I'm blessed to be where I'm at right now and just taking it all in. I'm trying to get to where I want to be, but just leaving it all up to God to get there."

Babb expected to compete for a spot in the rotation this spring and fall but will instead focus on his rehab once again.

Hilliard, meanwhile, is targeting a return to the field by the middle of the 2019 season. It's not unprecedented, either, as team captain Tuf Borland ruptured his Achilles on the same day last spring and was ready for the season opener against Oregon State.

The 6-1, 235-pound Hilliard was limited early in his career by separate biceps inju-

PROJECTED 2019 SPRING DEPTH CHART

S
4 JORDAN FULLER, SR.*
14 Isaiah Pryor, Jr.
17 Marcus Williamson, Jr.
28 Ronnie Hickman, Fr.

S
24 SHAUN WADE, SO.
15 Josh Proctor, So.
29 Marcus Hooker, R-Fr.

CB
1 JEFFREY OKUDAH, JR.
12 Sevyn Banks, So.
26 Cameron Brown, R-Fr.

LB
39 MALIK HARRISON, SR.
19 Dallas Gant, So.

LB
32 TUF BORLAND, JR.
OR 5 BARON BROWNING, JR.
7 Teradja Mitchell, So.

LB
20 PETE WERNER, JR.
36 K'Vaughan Pope, So.

BULLET
25 BRENDON WHITE, JR.
23 Jahsen Wint, Jr.

CB
3 DAMON ARNETTE, 5TH-SR.
10 Amir Riep, Jr.
13 Tyreke Johnson, R-Fr.

DE
2 CHASE YOUNG, JR.
11 Tyreke Smith, So.
33 Zach Harrison, Fr.
38 Javontae Jean-Baptiste, R-Fr.

DT
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53 Davon Hamilton, 5th-Sr.
72 Tommy Togiai, So.
98 Jerron Cage, So.

DT
9 JASHON CORNELL, 5TH-SR.
92 Haskell Garrett, Jr.
6 Taron Vincent, So.
90 Antwuan Jackson, Jr.

DE
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54 Tyler Friday, So.
97 Noah Potter, Fr.
17 Alex Williams, R-Fr.

WR
10 BINJIMEN VICTOR, SR.
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15 Jaylen Harris, Jr.
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LT
75 Thayer Munford, Jr.*
58 Joshua Alabi, 5th-Sr.

LG
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RG
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74 Max Wray, R-Fr.

TE
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88 Jeremy Ruckert, So.
13 Rashod Berry, 5th-Sr.
81 Jake Hausmann, Jr.

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1 Justin Fields, So.
12 Matthew Baldwin, R-Fr.
4 Chris Chugunov, 5th-Sr.

WR
11 AUSTIN MACK, Sr.
17 Chris Olave, So.
87 Ellijah Gardiner, So.

P
91 DRUE CHRISMAN, JR.

K
95 BLAKE HAUBEIL, Jr.

RB
2 J.K. Dobbins, Jr.
30 Demario McCall, Jr.
33 Master Teague, R-Fr.
23 Marcus Crowley, Fr.

H
14 K.J. HILL, 5th-Sr.
26 Jaelen Gill, So.
80 C.J. Saunders, 5th-Sr.

*Out for spring practice with injury.

Get Instant Spring Game Coverage Online

The biweekly spring print issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin are winding down, with only two more scheduled. However, BSB's coverage of spring football, including the spring game on April 13, is ongoing at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com. The next two print issues are scheduled to be mailed on April 16 and 30, with no print issue after that until the June BSB, scheduled to be mailed on June 4.

BuckeyeSports.com, however, is available 24/7/365 with all the breaking news posted, including the latest in recruiting, and then discussed by readers and staff on The Forum.

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2019 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2018 Record
Aug. 31	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	TBA	TBA	5-7 (3-5 Conference USA)
Sept. 7	CINCINNATI*	TBA	TBA	11-2 (6-2 American Athletic Conference)
Sept. 14	at Indiana	TBA	TBA	5-7 (2-7 Big Ten)
Sept. 21	MIAMI (OHIO)*	TBA	TBA	6-6 (6-2 Mid-American)
Sept. 28	at Nebraska	TBA	TBA	4-8 (3-6 Big Ten)
Oct. 5	MICHIGAN STATE*	TBA	TBA	7-6 (5-4 Big Ten)
Oct. 18	at Northwestern*	TBA	TBA	9-5 (8-1 Big Ten)
Oct. 26	WISCONSIN*	TBA	TBA	8-5 (5-4 Big Ten)
Nov. 9	MARYLAND	TBA	TBA	5-7 (3-6 Big Ten)
Nov. 16	at Rutgers	TBA	TBA	1-11 (0-9 Big Ten)
Nov. 23	PENN STATE*	TBA	TBA	9-4 (6-3 Big Ten)
Nov. 30	at Michigan*	TBA	TBA	10-3 (8-1 Big Ten)
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	FOX	

* – 2018 bowl team
** – at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

ries, but he appeared in all 28 games the last two seasons.

"It means so much, just because I know what I've been through," Hilliard said last April. "Just kind of pushing through that and some of the difficulties – not only physically, but mentally – it means a lot to just be out here in the spring."

Bosa Dines With Cardinals

According to a report from ESPN's Adam Schefter, former Ohio State defensive end Nick Bosa had dinner with the Arizona Cardinals on March 29 in his hometown of Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Arizona holds the first pick in April's NFL draft and is widely expected to take former Oklahoma quarterback Kyler Murray at No. 1 overall. But Bosa is considered by most analysts to be the best prospect regardless of position, and he believes the Cardinals will be making a "big mistake" if they pass on him.

"I would just say that I'm somebody who loves the game more than anybody," Bosa said during the NFL Combine in late February. "I'm going to come in and I'm going to work every day, every practice trying to find new things to better myself. If you do draft me, then you have somebody who's going to improve throughout my entire career."

In three seasons at Ohio State, Bosa recorded 77 tackles, 29 tackles for loss, 17½ sacks, two forced fumbles, two pass breakups and one defensive touchdown despite missing most of his junior campaign with a bilateral core muscle injury.

"That would just mean so much to me to be thought of as the best player in the draft," he said.

Bosa finished the combine with 29 bench press reps, a 33.5-inch vertical jump, 116-inch broad jump, 7.1-second three-cone drill and 4.14-second 20-yard shuttle. He declined to work out at Ohio State's Pro Day on March 20, since there was little he could do to improve his stock as a certain top-five pick.

If Murray – last year's Heisman Trophy winner – does come off the board first, most draft projections have Bosa being selected by the San Francisco 49ers with the No. 2 overall pick.

Schiano Steps Away From Football

Former Ohio State defensive coordinator Greg Schiano announced in a statement on March 28 that he would be stepping down from his position on the New England Patriots' coaching staff.

"This is not the result of any one event, but rather a realization that I need to spend more time on my faith and family," Schiano said. "I don't want to look back years from now and wish I had done things differently. Therefore, I am taking time away from the game to recalibrate my priorities."

Though Schiano's hiring was never officially announced by the team, he was expected to take over as New England's defensive play-caller after former linebackers coach – and de facto defensive coordinator – Brian Flores accepted the Miami Dolphins' head coaching job.

"I respect Coach Schiano greatly and appreciate his contributions to our staff and team," Patriots head coach Bill Belichick said in a statement. "He is a friend who we support completely."

The two have a close relationship, as Belichick's son Steve was a long snapper at Rutgers under Schiano.

Schiano, who also spent two years as the head coach of the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, was Ohio State's defensive coordinator for the last three years. He was not retained by Day following a season in which the Buckeyes gave up the most points and most yards per game in school history.

NFL To Honor Columbus Panhandles

In celebration of its centennial season, the National Football League announced on March 26 that it will host live telecasts in eight communities that were part of the league's inaugural season to announce picks on Day 3 of the NFL draft.

Those original teams include the Akron Pros, Canton (Ohio) Bulldogs, Columbus Panhandles, Dayton Triangles, Hammond (Ind.) Pros, Muncie (Ind.) Flyers, Rochester (N.Y.) Jeffersons and Rock Island (Ill.) Independents.

"There's no better way to bring the league's hundred years of history full circle than to partner with these communities and recognize their important place in history as part of the NFL's centennial celebration," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said.

The Panhandles were founded in 1901 by workers at the Pandhandle shops of the Pennsylvania Railroad. They played their games at Indianola Park, just east of the Ohio State campus, until 1922.

The NFL Foundation will also lead the construction and installation of an artificial turf field in Dayton's Triangle Park, the site of the first-ever NFL game where – on Oct. 3, 1920 – the Triangles defeated the Panhandles, 14-0.

"This is a really special moment for our city," Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley said. "We're excited that the NFL is recognizing the places that were there in the very beginning and that they are celebrating Dayton's special history in paving the way for the league with a donation that will leave a lasting impact in the community."

Other original teams include the Buffalo (N.Y.) All-Americans, Chicago Tigers, Cleveland Tigers, Decatur (Ill.) Staleys and Racine (Ill.) Cardinals.

Conley Sets Grizzlies' All-Time Scoring Mark

Former Ohio State point guard Mike Conley became the Memphis Grizzlies' all-time leading scorer when he scored his 11,687th point in the third quarter of a 118-103 loss to the Golden State Warriors on March 27. He passed former all-star and current Toronto Raptors center Marc Gasol for the franchise record.

Conley, who is in the midst of his 12th season in the league after being selected by Memphis with the No. 4 overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft, also holds the franchise records for career games played, assists, steals and three-pointers. And despite being just one of three players in NBA history to hold those five franchise records (LeBron James, Cleveland Cavaliers; Reggie Miller, Indiana Pacers), Conley has never been recognized as an NBA All-Star.

As of press time, Conley was averaging 21.1 points, 6.4 assists and 3.4 rebounds per game this season. The Grizzlies were 31-45 overall this season, sat at 13th in the Western Conference and had already been eliminated from playoff contention.

Sheffield To Work Out For Pro Scouts

According to a report from NFL Network's Ian Rapoport, former Ohio State cornerback Kendall Sheffield will hold an individual workout at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for NFL scouts on April 11.

Sheffield suffered a partially torn pectoral muscle on the seventh rep of the 225-pound bench press at the NFL Combine in late February that prevented him from participating in on-field drills that afternoon and at Ohio State's Pro Day on March 20.

A former five-star prospect who initially signed with Alabama out of high school, Sheffield spent two seasons in Columbus after transferring from Blinn Community College in Brenham, Texas. He appeared

Continued On Page 6

INSIDER

Continued From Page 5

in 28 games (17 starts) and recorded 74 tackles, 15 pass breakups, two interceptions, two forced fumbles and one fumble recovery for the Buckeyes.

The 5-11, 193-pound Sheffield was also a track standout at Ohio State, as he set the school indoor track record in the 60-meter dash with a time of 6.63 seconds. Sheffield is widely projected to be a mid-round pick thanks to that speed, so this workout will not only be a chance to prove he's healthy but improve his draft stock, as well.

The NFL draft will be April 25-27 in Nashville.

Signee Liddell Named Mr. Basketball Again

Ohio State four-star power forward signee E.J. Liddell was named Illinois' Mr. Basketball on March 27, which made him just the second player in state history to win the award twice, joining former Chicago Simeon standout and current Washington Wizards power forward Jabari Parker.

The 6-6, 220-pound Liddell averaged 20.3 points and 9.3 rebounds in leading Belleville West to its second consecutive Class 4A state championship last season. He accumulated 2,508 points, 1,004 rebounds, 500 blocks and 322 assists in his four-year high school career.

Liddell received 95 of 114 first-place votes for the award, which is chosen by the state's basketball coaches and media. His 506 points were more than the combined total of the other 38 players who received votes.

Liddell is considered the eighth-best power forward and No. 45 prospect overall in the class of 2019. He, along with Iowa four-star point guard D.J. Carton and Cleveland native Alonzo Gaffney, helped give the Buckeyes the top-rated class in the Big Ten this recruiting cycle.

Martell Granted Immediate Eligibility At Miami

The University of Miami announced on March 19 that former Ohio State quarterback Tate Martell had his transfer waiver approved by the NCAA, which means he'll be eligible to play in 2019.

"We are pleased with this ruling and appreciate the NCAA recognizing that this waiver met the criteria under the membership established guidelines," Miami director of athletics Blake James said in a statement. "We would like to thank the NCAA, as well as Ohio State University, for their assistance and support throughout the waiver process. We look forward to seeing Tate compete for the Hurricanes this season."

The 5-11, 210-pound Martell saw limited action with the Buckeyes as a redshirt freshman in 2018, completing 23 of 28 passes (82.1 percent) for 269 yards and one touchdown. He also rushed 22 times for 128 yards and two more scores, but he announced his transfer to Miami on Jan. 16, shortly after former five-star quarterback Justin Fields transferred from Georgia to Ohio State.

Martell's relationship with the staff was reportedly strained because of Fields' arrival.

"No efforts were made by Ohio State to rectify the feelings between the two," said Barry Jackson of The Miami Herald "Tate felt it was in his and Ohio State's best interests to transfer. Ohio State did not object to that or try to get him to change his mind."

Martell will battle semi-incumbent N'Kosi Perry, who started six games for Miami last season, and redshirt freshman Jarren Williams this spring and fall for the starting position. The Hurricanes open the 2019 season against Florida on Aug. 24 at Camping World Stadium in Orlando, Fla.

Fields Sheds Black Stripe

It was only a matter of time, but Fields officially became a member of the Ohio State football team on March 26 when he had his black helmet stripe removed following the team's sixth practice of the spring.

The Georgia transfer was the fifth member of the team to have his stripe removed this spring but is notably the first scholarship player. He joined walk-on linebackers Logan Hittle, Cade Kacherski and Ben Schmiesing, as well as cornerback Darryl Sinclair, in the ceremonial rite of passage for all new Buckeyes.

"First off, I want to thank all y'all boys out here for getting me better every day," said Fields, who is battling redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin for the starting quarterback spot this spring. "I also want to thank my unit. Matt, Coach (Mike) Yurcich, Coach Niko (Palazeti) and all the weight coaches for just getting me better every day."

Former OSU WR Arrested

Former Ohio State wide receiver Corey Smith was arrested in Columbus on March 16 on several outstanding warrants, including aggravated robbery and firing shots.

Police responded to the 1700 block of Cordell Avenue that morning to conduct a ShotSpotter follow-up, which is an "advanced system of sensors, algorithms and artificial intelligence that detects, locates and alerts police to gunfire." Smith claimed to know nothing about the shorts being fired, but nearby residents told officers he had been firing a gun during a party the night before.

After researching the address and reviewing body-camera footage, it was determined the 26-year-old Smith was wanted by U.S. Marshals for an aggravated robbery in Akron in July 2018.

SWAT officers arrived at the address as Smith was leaving, which led to a short foot chase before he was arrested. He was held on the Akron warrants, while Columbus gun charges are pending.

Smith spent three seasons at Ohio State following a transfer from East Mississippi Community College. He caught 31 passes for 351 yards in his career for the Buckeyes but missed significant time along the way with a broken leg and hand injury.

Smith signed with the Cincinnati Bengals as an undrafted free agent in April 2017 but never appeared in an NFL game.

Former Buckeye DT Arrested In West Virginia

Former Ohio State defensive tackle Michael Hill was arrested in Greenwood, W.Va., on March 29 and charged with possession of methamphetamine with intent to deliver, according to the West Virginia Regional Jail and Correctional Facility Authority. His bond was set at $300,000.

The 24-year-old Hill – a native of Pendleton, S.C. – started all 13 games for Ohio State in 2016, but was suspended for the first six games of his senior season after he failed a drug test prior to the Buckeyes' College Football Playoff loss to Clemson. He played in seven games that year, recording just one tackle and one sack.

Hill was not selected in the 2018 NFL draft, although he did have a tryout with the Detroit Lions. He never played in an NFL game but did recently launch a clothing line, How She Gone Eat, with former Ohio State teammates Tracy Sprinkle, Jalyn Holmes and Tyquan Lewis.

106 Buckeyes Earn Winter Academic Honors

Ohio State had 106 student-athletes earn Academic All-Big Ten honors from winter sports, equaling the number the university had in the fall.

The winter honorees come from sports such as men's and women's basketball, men's and women's gymnastics, men's and women's swimming, wrestling and men's hockey. Eligible students must be on a varsity roster and enrolled full time for at least 12 months while carrying a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or better.

Three of the 106 honorees carried perfect 4.0 GPAs: gymnast Joseph Wilmot, a sophomore, senior swimmer Reed McGraw and Makayla Waterman, a women's basketball standout who was competing as a graduate student this year.

What follows is a complete list of Ohio State's winter Academic All-Big Ten honorees, listed in alphabetical order by sport.

Men's Basketball – Danny Hummer, Sr., economics; Musa Jallow, Jr., pre-exercise science; Joey Lane, Sr., marketing; Kyle Young, So., sport industry.

Women's Basketball – Karlie Cronin, Sr., sport industry; Savitha Jayaraman, So., operations management; Makayla Waterman, Gr., masters of sports coaching.

Men's Gymnastics – Joseph Bonanno, Sr., health science; Andrew Browner, Jr., animal science; Michael Chan, Jr., accounting; Robert Costea, Jr., history; Jacob Gricar, So., art; Sean Neighbarger, So., exercise science and computer science; Joshua Seltzer, So., engineering; David Szarvas, Sr., microbiology; Alexander Wilson, Sr., civil engineering.

Women's Gymnastics – Nevin Adamski, Jr., psychology; Olivia Aepli, Jr., marketing; Brooke Chesney, So., information systems; Peyton Hinterberger, Jr., human nutrition; Amanda Huang, Sr., finance; Morgan Lowe, So., exercise science education; Janelle McClelland, Sr., speech and hearing science; Kali Schierl, So., human nutrition; Jamie Stone, Sr., psychology; Jenna Swartzentruber, So., exercise science education.

Men's Ice Hockey – Wyatt Ege, Sr., consumer and family financial services; Freddy Gerard, Sr., strategic communication; Mason Jobst, Sr., real estate; Brendon Kearney, Sr., finance; Tanner Laczynski, Jr., sport industry; Sasha Larocque, Sr., earth sciences; Evan Moyse, So., pre business; Gordi Myer, Jr., finance; Tommy Parran, Sr., English; Austin Pooley, So., finance; Sean Romeo, Sr., finance; Michael Rounds, So., consumer and family financial services; John Wiitala, Sr., finance.

Men's Swimming & Diving – Carson Burt, So., finance; Joseph Canova, So., pre data analytics; Mateo Chavez, So., communication; Mossimo Chavez, Sr., sport industry; Aaron Daniels-Freeman, Sr., studio art; Paul DeLakis, So., biology; Quinlan DeVal, Jr., computer science and engineering; Alex Dillmann, Jr., political science; Daniel Gloude, Jr., biology; Nick Hogsed, Sr., geography; Connor Isings, So., mechanical engineering; Alex Jahan, Jr., marketing; Kalvin Koethke, Jr., biology; Noah Lense, Jr., electrical and computer engineering; Andrew Loy, Jr., marketing; Michael Lynch, Jr., computer science and engineering; Colin McDermott, So., management and industry exploration; Evan McFadden, So., aero and astronautical engineering; Reed McGraw, Sr., biomedical engineering; Henrique Painhas, Sr., computer and information science; Brad Shannon, Sr., international studies; Jacob Siler, So., speech and hearing science; Ben Sugar, So., finance.

Women's Swimming & Diving – Genevieve Angerame, So., political science; Laura Banks, So., biology; Lexie Barker, So., zoology; Rebekah Bradley, Jr., biochemistry; Maria Coy, Sr., actuarial science; Kathrin Demler, Jr., psychology; Kendyl Ferrara, So., communication; Quinn Fike, Jr., sociology; Emma Fish, Jr., health promotion, nutrition and exercise science; Nicole Fye, So., microbiology; Brooke Glesenkamp, So., exercise science education; Hanna Gresser, So., biology; Ali House, So., health sciences program; Natalia Jaspeado, So., food science and technology; Lucija Jurkovic-Perisa, Jr., hospitality management; Marianna Kahmann, Jr., geographic information sciences; Molly Kowal, Jr., accounting; Lauren Kurzydlo, Jr., accounting; Devin Landstra, Jr., marketing; Becca Luft, Jr., human resources; Mikayla Murphy, Sr., marketing; Taylor Petrak, So., marketing; Freya Rayner, So., world literatures; Kristen Romano, So., anthropology; Sarah Sperber, So., neuroscience; Lara Tarvit, Jr., human resource management; Katie Trace, So., communication; Kerrigan Vargo, Sr., psychology; Hannah Whiteley, So., human development and family science; Katie Wright, Jr., communication.

Wrestling – Brendan Fitzgerald, Jr., marketing; Ke-Shawn Hayes, Sr., logistics; Jaimen Hood, So., mechanical engineering; Micah Jordan, Sr., sport industry; Joey McKenna, Sr., operations management; Luke Pletcher, Jr., sport industry; Clay Ragon, Jr., marketing; Aaron Rehfeldt, Jr., computer science engineering; Kaleb Romero, So., marketing; Fritz Schierl, Jr., family resource management; Ethan Smith, So., family resource management; Kevin Snyder, Jr., finance; Zach Steiner, So., agricultural communication.

– Tim Moody

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"Your Head to Toe Buckeye Source"

Mitchell: New Defense 'Allows Us To Play Faster'

Continued From Page 1

can rush the passer," linebackers coach Al Washington said. "Not every safety can do that. He has to be able to play at the line of scrimmage but cover man, a slot. Not every linebacker can do that."

It just so happens that Ohio State has a perfect fit to play "Bullet" right away in junior safety Brendon White, who was arguably one of the most valuable defensive players for the Buckeyes down the stretch in 2018. At 6-2 and 215 pounds, White already has the frame needed to play closer to the line or drop into coverage. In fact, he has even practiced with the linebackers at Ohio State before – when he first arrived to work with the Buckeyes during bowl prep at the end of the 2016 season. He also spent time at wide receiver before settling in at safety and becoming a starter last year.

"It's a versatile spot, so I can play the safety spot, or I can come down and play the run with the 'backers," White said. "So I'm just trying to do anything I can to learn the position as fast as possible and try to help the team out to win."

With White in the fold, Ohio State has a chance to be more flexible on defense and get more out of a talented linebacker room that underperformed last season. (For a full profile on White, see page 15.)

Simplify Things

While the "Bullet" is an added wrinkle, the overall defensive approach is getting simplified in Columbus. That means players should always have a clear understanding of their role, allowing them to attack quickly rather than constantly having to process the next move.

"I love the new defense, it's a lot more simple," sophomore linebacker Teradja Mitchell said. "It allows us to play ball faster. I'm all for it."

Especially in spring practice, keeping things simple is key for Ohio State.

Co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley, who also coaches the secondary, stressed the need to simplify the defense and make sure everyone is on the same page. Players should be able to fill in different roles, and every coach should know the roles of each position. That's made easier in a streamlined system.

ANDREW LIND

FITTING IN – Ohio State defenders such as sophomore linebacker Teradja Mitchell (right) are learning a more streamlined system this spring.

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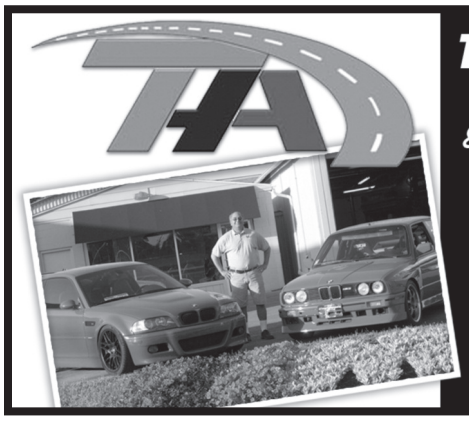

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"What we're trying to do right now is be very simple," said Hafley, who most recently coached in the NFL with the San Francisco 49ers from 2016-18. "We want our guys to learn and play fast so we can evaluate them."

By the time the season does roll around, the defense will get more complicated. But not overcomplicated.

"We are putting some things in during the spring, but we don't want the guys being complicated by scheme," Hafley added. "We want them to learn the basics and build a foundation so they can play fast.

"That will allow us to go back and watch the film and evaluate them. If we get into training camp and we need more, we'll have more."

Under Hafley's direction, the Buckeyes are set to make changes in coverage as well. Ohio State has, especially in recent years under Meyer, relied almost exclusively on man-to-man coverage. In 2019, more looks will be mixed in as the Buckeyes look to maximize the skill set of the players on the roster.

Those coverages will work in unison with the play of the linebackers, and it's all connected to the line up front. If executed properly, the Buckeyes plan to have a much more cohesive and – at least theoretically – a much more successful defense.

"Our defense, the way we're trying to build it, is very plug-and-play," Hafley said. "If they can learn the why and see the big picture, they can plug into those spots."

The Constants

Of course, not everything will change on the Ohio State defense. Why would you tamper with Larry Johnson's defensive line, after all?

That unit was arguably the best on the team last season and has been disruptive for years under Johnson's guidance. Even after losing defensive end Nick Bosa and defensive tackle Dre'Mont Jones early to the NFL draft, the Buckeyes are poised to have one of the best lines in the nation once again.

That group will be led by junior end Chase Young, who racked up 15½ tackles for loss and 10½ sacks to lead the team in both categories last year. Senior end Jonathon Cooper is a returning starter as well, while such players as sophomores Tyreke Smith and Tyler Friday and freshman Zach Harrison provide a huge amount of talent off the bench.

On the interior, the Buckeyes are still led by fifth-year senior tackle Robert Landers while others such as fifth-year seniors Jashon Cornell and Davon Hamilton and sophomores Tommy Togiai and Taron Vincent have all proved to be impactful as well.

"You can never have too many," Johnson said when asked about rotating players up front. "You're one play down and the next guy is up. We have a plan to play all of those guys. It's a long game. We average about 75 plays a game, so if each guy gets 20 plays and some of them may play 30 or 35. I like where we are right now."

Scheme changes will impact the line, too, but there won't be drastic differences. Johnson noted that there will be some 3-4 packages (three defensive linemen, four linebackers), but Ohio State won't want to take one of its talented linemen off the field very often.

"We're based out of the 4-3, and that's what we're going to do," Johnson said.

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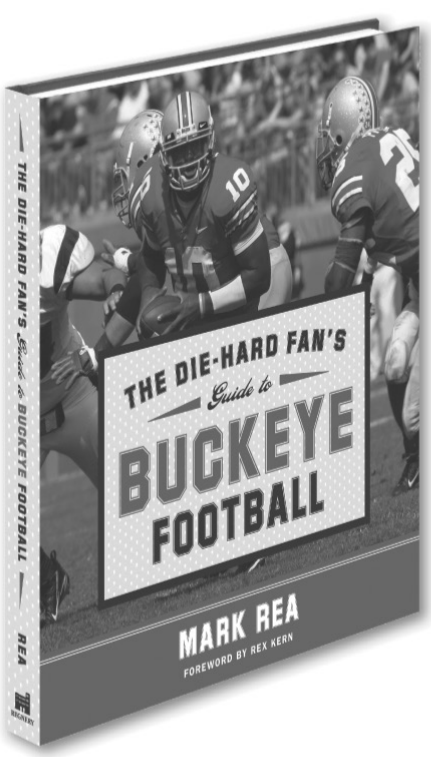

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Buckeyes Building RB Depth Behind Dobbins

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

ANDREW LIND

FIGHTING FOR CARRIES – Redshirt freshman running back Master Teague (33) is among a crop of players vying to back up incumbent starter J.K. Dobbins in 2019.

While the 2018 season will be remembered more for the record-breaking passing of Dwayne Haskins, the Ohio State running backs enjoyed an excellent season overall.

J.K. Dobbins, who was a sophomore, and Mike Weber, a junior, led the way for the Buckeye tailbacks, both amassing more than 1,000 yards from scrimmage. Dobbins totaled 1,316 yards from scrimmage, rushing for 1,053 yards, and Weber piled up 1,066 yards on offense, with 954 coming on the ground.

Weber is headed to the NFL, and Dobbins is left as the "lead dog," as head coach Ryan Day said earlier in the spring. The former ESPN Freshman All-American said that he felt like he regressed as a sophomore after his first season in Columbus, when he ran for 1,403 yards at a 7.2 yard-per-carry clip.

Having seen his rushing yardage total drop 350 yards and his yards-per-carry rate slide from 7.2 to 4.6, Dobbins blamed his "regression" on the fact that he was trying to "hit home runs" instead of taking the sure yards ahead of him.

"It was all mental," said running backs coach Tony Alford. "He was worrying about stuff he didn't need to worry about. He was worrying about what other people are doing, what other people are saying, what other people are thinking, how someone is reacting to something that was completely out of his control. And in some regards, overthinking it.

"But in his defense he was always trying to make this huge play because we were rotating backs. And so, his thing was like, 'If I'm only going to get so many reps and I know my rep count's getting cut, every chance I get I'm going to try to blow this thing – blow the doors wide open.' And that's not how the game works. You've got to stay with the flow of the play and the design of the play."

Dobbins is typically not a man of many words during interviews, and he kept it simple when discussing what he needs to do to take his game to the next level.

"Just be patient," Dobbins told BSB, "and just stick to the basics and stop trying to hit home runs."

In order to get back to the explosive and dynamic form of his freshman season, Dobbins requested that Alford work him like he was a freshman again. Alford accepted.

"I thought that when J.K. got here he was so hungry and wanted to take every single rep and we said, 'Run 100 yards and sprint back, and do it again, and do it a third time' – he'd do it," Alford said. "But then he had a little bit of success. And we spoke about it and in some regards it was kind of like, OK, like he had arrived. And he hadn't. So our whole thing this whole offseason – and really toward the end of last season – was listen, get back to what you were. This is the J.K. that I know – has kind of fallen off the edge a little bit. And we have to get back to this, and we're going to get back to that.

"But it wasn't a fight because he wanted to do it. Because he admitted it. J.K.'s a very mature young guy, and he said, 'You're right, I need to do a better job here,' and, 'Help me.' So it's a work in progress. I'm working with it, too. And one thing about him is he's extremely coachable. And he's been great. I mean, he has been fantastic. He's practicing like he did when he was a true freshman, which is exactly what I wanted."

With Dobbins poised for a rebound performance as a junior, who will replace Weber remains to be unseen. Junior tailback Demario McCall has bounced back and forth between H-back and running back throughout his time at Ohio State and is back where he feels most comfortable – in the backfield.

"A lot of people say patience is the key, but to be honest, I don't go by that," said McCall, who has averaged 6.1 yards per carry as a Buckeye. "I feel like if it's time, it's time. I know some stuff takes time, but then again, some stuff you got to go get."

McCall, who was the No. 2 all-purpose back in the 2016 recruiting class, came to Columbus with high expectations but was small in stature and struggled in pass protection. The North Ridgeville, Ohio, product moved to H-back and has primarily played more of a slot-receiver role for the Buckeyes. Up to 195 pounds and back in the backfield, McCall sees his experience on the outside as beneficial.

"No," he responded when asked if shuffling between positions made his transition to college more difficult. "I feel like it made me a better football player for the future. That's just the type of athlete I am. I can be a tailback and a receiver. And I feel like last year playing mostly receiver helped me become a better tailback, even a better athlete overall."

Weber sees McCall's versatility as a strength and even likened him to one of his favorite players, New Orleans Saints All-Pro running back Alvin Kamara.

"I think he's a playmaker," Weber told BSB of McCall at the recent Ohio State Pro

Day, March 20. "He's a guy who can get in space and make you miss, a guy who can catch the ball out of the backfield or in the slot receiver. He reminds me a lot of like an Alvin Kamara type guy. It should be a big year for him."

With Dobbins (5-10, 217) all but set to the main guy, McCall (5-9, 195) will have to fight for carries. Redshirt freshman Master Teague (5-11, 220), and true freshmen Marcus Crowley (6-1, 205) and Steele Chambers (6-2, 215) will also compete for playing time. Crowley is already enrolled while Chambers is set to arrive in the summer.

"One thing we do is compete," McCall said. "We're at Ohio State. You have no choice but to compete. We've got the best of the best. So whatever happens, happens."

Teague is the only other Buckeye tailback with D-I experience, carrying 17 times for 106 yards and one touchdown as a true freshman.

"At the beginning of last season, I wasn't too happy with my performance," Teague said. "But as time went on, I just grew in the position, bettered my craft and improved a lot. This year, I feel a lot more comfortable on the field."

The sophomore back from Murfreesboro, Tenn., has impressed Alford in his development from year one to year two.

"You can tell he's much more settled," Alford said. "Much more comfortable. I'd say he's much more comfortable in his own skin, if you will. There's a toughness factor that he's come along – this grittier, grimier type of player and finishing things off more. Just his knowledge of what's going on around him is allowing him to play faster."

While Dobbins, McCall and Teague have an advantage when it comes to experience, the Buckeyes brought in the two talented freshman backs to not only give them depth, but to compete for meaningful snaps.

Crowley, a four-star recruit, came to Columbus from Jacksonville, Fla., and enrolled early, hoping to use the spring to acclimate himself to the offense and improve as a runner.

"He's swimming, as he should be," Alford said of Crowley. "But the good thing is what we're doing is we have thrown him into the fire so to speak. And he's responding. He's going to make mistakes. And these are very prideful guys. They make mistakes, it bothers them, as it should. But that's what he needs. He needs to get thrown in the fire. But he's got some skills. All of the sudden he'll flash and do something like, OK, here he goes. But he's a tough kid."

While Crowley endures the growing pains of an early enrollee going through his first spring camp, Chambers prepares for the season while finishing out high school. Although Chambers, a four-star recruit from Roswell, Ga., has yet to practice with the Scarlet and Gray, Alford is excited about what he will bring to the program.

"Well, I don't know. We're going to find out when he gets here because he's got to learn the offense," Alford said of Chambers. "He's a big, strong, physical athlete and a guy that's a high achiever, an extremely high achiever in all facets of his life. He's got a great family behind him and support system behind him. He's smart, so I think he's going to be able to grasp what we're doing very rapidly. And so I'm excited to get him here. It's just a matter of time. Teaching him right now, trying to teach him the offense from afar, is hard, but he'll be fine."

ANDREW LIND

READY TO ROLL – Junior running back J.K. Dobbins is Ohio State's unquestioned workhorse heading into 2019.

With a room full of talented tailbacks and only one football to go around, Alford faces the dilemma, albeit a good dilemma, of determining who will emerge in the Buckeye backfield and help carry on the elite lineage of Ohio State running backs.

Coaches like intrasquad competition because it drives players to reach their potential and combats complacency. However, not everybody can play, and teams usually feature just one or two main backs. Alford was asked how difficult it is for running backs to wait their turn.

"Well, I think anybody that's an alpha male, that's hungry and has a strong desire to be elite and be great, it's hard to wait your turn," Alford said. " 'I've never had to wait my turn for anything, so why would I start now?' And that's a hard pill to swallow, because if you think about these kids that come to school here, especially skill players, they've been the best since they started playing at maybe 6 years old. No one's ever told them no. They've been the absolute best, and they worked for those things.

"Then all of the sudden, they get thrust in through high school through recruiting. They're told they're God's gift to whatever it is and the sun shines and sets on their behinds. All of the sudden they come to college, it's like, 'Whoa, what do you mean I'm not playing?' They've never had to experience that, and so that is hard."

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ANDREW LIND

ON THE RISE – Former Ohio State wide receiver Brian Hartline experienced instant success as the Buckeyes' interim receivers coach in 2018 – enough for head coach Ryan Day to remove that interim tag this year.

Hartline Has WRs Trending Up Despite Departures

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Brian Hartline's audition as Ohio State's wide receivers coach went better than anyone could have anticipated.

After stepping in for the fired Zach Smith just before the start of fall camp, Hartline, who at the time served as an offensive quality control coach, led a previously underwhelming receiving unit to single-season school records for receptions, yards and touchdowns. And because of that record-breaking output and his knack for recruiting, head coach Ryan Day removed Hartline's interim tag following the season and elevated him to a full-time position on the staff.

"I just focused on doing my part," Hartline said. "I'm just really worried about the guys and how I can do better, how I can add more value to our team and our staff."

Hartline played wide receiver for Ohio State from 2005-08, won four Big Ten championships and appeared in back-to-back BCS National Championship games under former head coach Jim Tressel. He also spent seven seasons in the NFL with the Miami Dolphins and Cleveland Browns, so he clearly knows how to play the position.

Those credentials were a big reason that fifth-year senior receivers Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon and Terry McLaurin bought into what Hartline was teaching last season. And it showed, as the trio combined for 167 receptions for 2,433 yards and 31 touchdowns while leading the Buckeyes to another conference title and win in the Rose Bowl.

Campbell also went over 1,000 receiving yards on the season, becoming only the fifth Ohio State wide receiver to reach that mark, joining Cris Carter (1986), Terry Glenn (1995), David Boston (1998) and Michael Jenkins (2002).

Now Hartline is tasked with replacing their production.

"It's definitely different," Hartline said of his unit this spring. "When they left, I cried. Literally. From a culture standpoint and a relationship standpoint and how we've gotten to know each other … I'm sure I'm going to do it again this year, but we're developing right now. It's a lot of fun. If you try to take yourself back to where we were last spring, it's very similar to some guys I have now. I feel like we're really far ahead. We're doing a really good job. We're doing a lot of good things, and we're only going to get better. Right now we're developing our culture in our room and seeing who is going to step up."

Fortunately for Hartline, the Buckeyes return three rising seniors once again this fall in K.J. Hill (fifth-year), Binjimen Victor and Austin Mack, who are the front-runners to start at H-back (slot), X (split end) and Z (flanker), respectively. And though Mack missed the last six games last season with a broken foot, the group still tallied a combined 1,570 yards and 11 touchdowns on 117 catches last season.

That experience will be invaluable.

"There isn't anything he doesn't do," Hartline said of Hill, who surprised many when he turned down a chance to enter the NFL draft and returned to Columbus for one final season. "He's not going to be a Parris Campbell burner, but there's a lot of things he does that Parris didn't do. He's going to be a great leader. He's growing up. It's an absolute pleasure, and we're blessed to have him back this year. I'm glad he came back to not only lead this group, but stay on my hip and get better. He's a staple in our receiver room."

Mack and Victor, meanwhile, used to rotate at X. But this spring, the former has moved to Z in an effort get all three seniors – and arguably Ohio State's three best receivers – on the field at the same time.

"Having Ben and Austin at the same position doesn't help anybody," Hartline said. "It gets three seniors on the field, and (we can) play ball."

Wide receivers are typically recognized for the plays they make with the ball in their hands, but Ohio State's unit takes excessive pride in blocking. It's an overlooked aspect of the game, but one that highlights the leaders on the team – just ask McLaurin, whose unselfish, team-first mentality is a big reason he's projected by some to be a surprise first-round pick in the upcoming draft.

The current batch of receivers isn't there just yet, but that's OK. It's still spring, after all.

"They're doing a really good job of leading by example first, but they haven't really stepped out of their comfort zone and barked at anybody and got things going that way yet," Hartline said. "That comes with time."

With Heisman Trophy finalist and likely top-10 pick Dwayne Haskins off to the NFL following a record-breaking season of his own, Ohio State is breaking in a new quarterback for the second time in as many seasons. And though the unit won't know until the fall whether sophomore transfer Justin Fields, the heavy favorite, or redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin will be behind center for the season opener against Florida Atlantic on Aug. 31, they have established a strong rapport with the signal-callers this spring.

"A lot of the credit goes to the quarterbacks," Hartline said. "They have done a great job reaching out, and we have done a great job reaching back. That will continue to grow. Back to last year when we had a new quarterback stepping in, the growth we had from spring to fall was paramount. We have to have that again, but I think we're on a really good track."

Behind Hill, Mack and Victor is a bevy of talented receivers looking to crack the rotation, including sophomore Chris Olave, who scored two touchdowns in last season's 62-39 win over Michigan and figures to play a prominent role within the offense again this year. There's also fifth-year senior C.J. Saunders; junior Jaylen Harris; redshirt sophomore Ellijah Gardiner; redshirt freshman Jaelen Gill; and early enrollee Garrett Wilson waiting in the wings. Redshirt freshman Kamryn Babb was in the mix as well before he suffered a third serious knee injury in as many years this spring.

"I think they all can (make those plays)," Hartline said. "They're all fast, they're all strong, they're all working hard. The film is going to tell me what I need to do. The best players play. Based on what they have earned through their film, we will just see how time goes. We are an up-tempo offense, so we need guys. We need depth. We just can't play fast unless we have legs. The more guys the better.

"It's about – at some point in time – who will make those plays when they have the opportunity," Hartline said. "Right now, it's all about reps, how we're executing and if we can do it day in and day out."

Consistency will be key for the relatively inexperienced unit and will ultimately dictate whether the receivers reach their full potential this season.

"I always tell the guys greatness is measured only one way, and it's by consistency," Hartline said. "Everyone makes the same shot that Michael Jordan makes. They just don't make it as consistently. They don't make it at crunch time. Everyone can do it. The question is, 'How often can you do it?' "

Hartline specifically challenged Olave, who was thrust into the rotation as a true freshman when Mack went down with the foot injury late in the season. He found the end zone three times in four games thereafter, including once in the Big Ten Championship Game win over Northwestern.

"His level of consistency will change whether he's a good player or a great player," Hartline said. "People work for years to become as consistent as possible, but he's on the right track."

Gill, meanwhile, recorded just one catch for 11 yards in two games last season. Hartline believes he's made great strides this spring as he battles with Saunders for the backup H-back position.

"He's one of the guys that have made the biggest jumps," the coach said. "He's playing fast and he's on my hip. He wants to learn and learn. He's doing a great job with his academics and (handling himself) off the field.

"There are still things we have to clean up – and he knows that – but in the end, he's doing a great job on the field, and I'm excited for him."

Though many believe Gill has the higher ceiling, the Buckeyes are in good hands if Saunders ultimately wins that battle.

"He does a phenomenal job," Hartline said. "To me, he's a guy who I use as an example a lot, whether it would be taking tests in our room, whether it would be overall effort in our room, he does a great job. It's really hard for me to find a bad clip on film. It's really hard to find lack of effort on a test.

"I don't tell guys how hard to go all the time, but I can't find a half speed from C.J. Saunders on film. It's impossible. He's really doing a great job of helping lead the room by example."

Harris' development, meanwhile, is a big reason that Hartline felt comfortable with moving Mack to Z. The plan is to rotate him with Victor at X.

"That says a lot about him," Hartline said. "If I didn't feel good about the next guy up, it would be hard to make that move. With how he's coming along, it's a great example of why I felt comfortable moving Austin."

Add in Wilson, a former five-star prospect who has been on campus for less than three months, and you could seemingly pit the Buckeyes' backups against almost any starting unit in the country.

"My best compliment to him was, 'You don't act like a freshman,' " Hartline said of Wilson, who flashed tremendous hand-eye coordination with an acrobatic catch along the sidelines during Student Appreciation Day practice on March 23. "When he first got here, he'll tell you it was kind of a culture change. The kid should still be in high school. He's just doing a phenomenal job, whether I'm throwing him at Z or X. His mental retention is really good. He really wants to learn from the guys. He's buying into the culture.

"Everything he's doing right now is on the right track, and I'm excited for him to continue to take small steps forward. From Day 1 of camp to now, it's been a steady improvement. It's been great."

While it's important to keep in mind Ohio State is just a little over halfway through spring practice, Hartline believes his unit has taken positive steps in that time. The upperclassmen are developing leadership skills, while the youngsters are eager to make their marks.

"Overall, the guys are working really hard," Hartline said. "That's all I can ask, especially in the spring. I'm really excited for them."

Fans should be, too.

Sophomore Gant Could Be A Fast Riser In 2019

By GARRETT STEPIEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

After he quietly spent the 2018 season working on special teams and learning behind a veteran crop of linebackers, Dallas Gant's second year at Ohio State starts with a real chance to make an impact on defense.

While the Buckeyes return all three starting linebackers from last fall – junior Tuf Borland (6-1, 232) in the middle with senior Malik Harrison (6-3, 245) and junior Pete Werner (6-3, 239) on the outside – no rotational spot is truly safe after a shaky season for the position group and two new coaches brought in to turn things around.

Since spring camp started March 6, Gant has grown into a natural candidate to compete for a starting job – or, at the least, more time in the unit's rotation.

"You take a guy like Dallas Gant, who's a young player," linebackers coach Al Washington said March 21 after OSU's fourth practice of spring camp at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center. "He's getting an opportunity, and he's emerging."

Washington was hired away from Michigan along with co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison in January as head coach Ryan Day looked to revamp his staff. Washington and Mattison have both been working with the linebackers ever since.

With the coaching changes, rising sophomores such as Gant, Teradja Mitchell (6-2, 242) and K'Vaughan Pope (6-1, 231) are getting a closer look this spring.

Gant enrolled early last January from Ohio State's 2018 class as a four-star recruit – the 247Sports composite's No. 166 overall prospect, No. 10 outside linebacker and No. 5 player in Ohio – out of Toledo St. John's Jesuit.

After a jump in weight from 202 pounds last spring, Gant (6-3, 232) is gearing up for another leap on the field. Beyond the 30 pounds of muscle he packed on over the past year, Gant's game has grown in all aspects.

"The first spring that I came here, it helped me in fall camp and stuff like that," Gant said March 21. "And obviously, going through the season and going against the ones and stuff helped me to this point. Just getting used to the college atmosphere, you play a lot faster when you get used to the system. And obviously, with the new system that we have, just learning it better gets you to play faster and play better and then, obviously, getting the weight and getting my body right to adapt to situations."

COURTESY OF DALLAS GANT/TWITTER

TURNING HEADS – Sophomore linebacker Dallas Gant has caught the attention of the coaching staff during his second spring practice.

Part of Gant's progression came on kickoff coverage. A staple for freshmen under former head coach Urban Meyer, special teams put Gant in position to play early and make an impact. He came away from his freshman campaign with just six tackles in 13 games, but the influence of special teams on Gant went deeper than the numbers.

"It was fun," Gant said of kickoff coverage. "Guys that we have in the kickoff room and the special teams room are just incredible guys that are great mentors. They help me in life and stuff outside of football. So starting out on special teams was obviously a good start."

Gant, who in the fall followed defensive tackle Tommy Togiai as OSU's second freshman from the 2018 class to have his black stripe removed, stayed ready on kickoff coverage. The exposure on the field has since translated to spring camp, with Ohio State nine practices into its slate as of BSB press time.

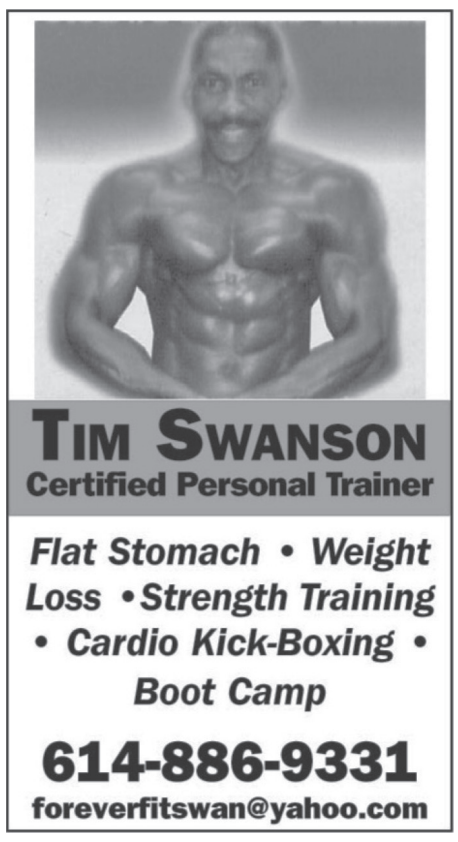
"Man, that guy, he's done all the little things," Washington said of Gant. "You talk special teams and our culture is something that's been here for Coach Meyer and coaches that have worked under Coach Meyer. But special teams is huge. And so a lot of times, it's the rite of passage for a young player.

"And so Dallas Gant, he has taken that and run with it. He's done a great job. His role is at linebacker – man, you watch the tape, he shows up. And he's competing, and he's every day getting better. So I'm really excited about him. He's done a great job."

Camp culminates April 13 at noon from Ohio Stadium with the spring game, so Gant still has his work cut out for him. The addition of Mattison and Washington to the staff has brought along a new defense, and the scheme's changes are still getting worked out with the hybrid safety/linebacker "bullet" position among the tweaks. While the linebackers are put in position for faster play, personnel packages aren't finalized, which keeps Gant focusing on himself.

"To me, I don't really know (about playing time)," Gant said. "The only people that know will be Coach Washington and Coach Mattison. Right now, I'm just trying to play ball – just like everybody else – and encourage other people to play ball. Then whatever it turns out, it turns out.

"Just hard work and playing as fast as I can, as hard as I can, as violent as I can," he said of what he is trying to do this spring. "And then just trying to win a spot like everyone else."



OSU's White Tailor-Made For Bullet Position

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

TIM MOODY

PERFECT FIT – Junior safety Brendon White has been working this spring at the "Bullet" position – a new spot in the Ohio State defense that will serve as a hybrid between a linebacker and a safety.

After spending time during his first two seasons at Ohio State practicing at linebacker and safety, Brendon White may have found a home in a position that combines the two: the "Bullet."

White arrived in Columbus as a consensus four-star athlete from Powell (Ohio) Olentangy Liberty who did a little bit of everything for the Patriots, regularly lining up at quarterback, running back, wide receiver and defensive back. He didn't mind. He simply focused on doing whatever the team needed – a mind-set he's carried with him as he moved around the Buckeyes' defense (and offense – he spent parts of his freshman year working at wide receiver).

"I like it a lot," White said of the "Bullet" position, which is being implemented by new co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison and linebackers coach Al Washington. "It's a versatile position, so I can play the safety position or I can come down and play run with the linebackers. I'm trying right now to just learn the position as fast as possible and try to help the team out (any way I can)."

The Bullet isn't necessarily a defined position but rather situational. It will mimic the Viper position deployed by Mattison and Washington and played by Jabrill Peppers and Khaleke Hudson at Michigan in recent years. It's also similar to how Ohio State sometimes used linebacker Darron Lee on the way to the 2015 College Football Playoff national championship.

"That guy is a guy who can sack, he can rush the passer," Washington said when asked what the staff looks for in a potential Bullet. "Not every safety can do that. He's a guy that has to be able to play at the line of scrimmage and use his hands. Not every safety can do that. The guy has to be able to cover man and the slot. Not every linebacker can do that."

Standing 6-2 and 215 pounds, White fits into the mold of those players. He's also shown he can cover athletic tight ends while stopping the run, rather than using a slower outside linebacker in every situation.

"They said the Bullet position is more like a bigger safety," White said, comparing himself to New York Jets all-pro safety Jamal Adams. "I'm probably one of the big safeties that we have, so that type of position is why they picked that for me."

White and junior Jahsen Wint, who also played safety for Ohio State last season, have been taking the majority of repetitions at the Bullet so far.

"He's an established player," Washington said of White. "He's one of those guys that's put his body of work in, he's a great kid, works his tail off. He's in all the time, trying to get extra tidbits."

After playing almost exclusively on special teams during Ohio State's first eight games last season, White was thrust into duty when starting safety Jordan Fuller was ejected for targeting against Nebraska. White then proceeded to record a team-high 13 tackles, including two for loss, in the 36-31 win over the Cornhuskers.

White started at safety opposite Fuller for the remainder of the season, a move that paid dividends time and time again. He recorded an interception against Michigan and earned Rose Bowl Defensive Player of the Game honors after he thwarted a two-point conversion attempt that would have cut the Buckeyes' lead to just three late in the fourth quarter.

After bouncing around for two seasons, White was looking forward to settling into and bringing consistency to the much-maligned strong safety position this spring. But the new coaching staff had other ideas.

"(We're looking for) a playmaker," Washington said. "You know, try to figure out what he does well and then put him in a position to do it."

Playing the Bullet position requires White to know and understand the responsibilities of both the linebackers and safeties, so he's constantly rotating back and forth during practice. He's also spending a considerable amount of individual time with Mattison, Washington and co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley.

"It's definitely not easy, so I'm just taking it one day at a time," White said. "The coaches understand it's going to take time and it's going to take patience, so I'm in the film room all the time with them and trying to come in all the time so I can get that stuff down pat. They can put me in that type of position and put that pressure on me because I've become more of a leader and have more confidence in myself now. Right now, it's just kind of confusing and difficult to play both. And it's a new defense, as well. Once fall camp hits, I'll probably be 100 percent at it."

White's versatility will ultimately give the Buckeyes a chance to use multiple looks on defense, as well as get talented underclassmen such as sophomore safety Josh Proctor on the field alongside White and Fuller.

"It definitely puts more pressure on the quarterback because he won't have as many spots to go since we're covering more ground," White said. "The passing game won't be as good. And, at the same time, we have a really good defensive line, so we should be able to stop the run game, as well."

Ohio State will continue to tinker with the Bullet as White continues to learn the intricacies of the position. But after two years of moving around and a slew of new position coaches, it appears White has found himself a permanent home in the Buckeyes' defense.

"It's definitely relaxing, but – at the same time – it allows me to put more focus on that position now that I know what I'm playing," White said. "Being able to dive into that and learn that will help me and my teammates. If the coaches think putting me in this position is going to help the team win, then I'm going to do that. At the end of the day, I've got to be a team player."

Student Appreciation Day Brings Top Targets

On March 23, Ohio State's fifth practice of spring camp was far from the usual. In addition to the university's students at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for student appreciation day, the Buckeyes hosted an abundance of top recruiting targets from all over the country for multiple classes.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK
Garrett Stepien

ANDREW LIND

NEXT IN LINE – Former Ohio State wideout Johnnie Dixon (left) spent time with five-star receiver prospect Julian Fleming (right) during a Buckeye practice March 23.

After practice finished, head coach Ryan Day was asked about the move and openly discussed the plan in motion from a recruiting perspective.

"Today was great because we're attracting some of the best players in America to come visit," Day said. "There were a lot of them here. One of the things in my visions is that there's just so much energy when guys walk into the facility, when they go on the practice field, when they're in the meeting rooms, and that's the kind of environment we want to create."

Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia five-star wide receiver Julian Fleming (6-3, 210), Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive back Lejond Cavazos (6-1, 190) and Miami Central four-star cornerback Henry Gray (5-11½, 172) headlined OSU's top targets for 2020 in attendance. Fleming is the 247Sports composite's No. 1 wide receiver, Cavazos remains a priority since he announced his decommitment Dec. 4 and Gray is a top-70 overall prospect back on the market after he decommitted from Miami (Fla.) on Dec. 13.

Other recruits on hand included Cincinnati Elder three-star offensive tackle commitment Jakob James (6-5, 275); Mars (Pa.) Area 2020 four-star offensive tackle target Michael Carmody (6-6, 285); Aurora (Colo.) Eaglecrest 2020 four-star center target Reece Atteberry (6-5, 280); Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco 2021

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Grove's Marc Givler

How are head coach Ryan Day and the staff assessing a talented pool of options at running back?

"I think if they could map this out perfectly for them, they could get a guy like (Tucson [Ariz.] Salpointe Catholic five-star Bijan) Robinson or even (Clovis [Calif.] Buchanan five-star) Kendall Milton. I think chances are a little bit better with Robinson than Milton right now. Both guys are (interested). Obviously, Milton's going to visit here (April 5) and Robinson doesn't have anything set, but they're working on getting him up here in the next couple of months.

"I think their ideal scenario would be getting one of those two guys. Then you could add (Dublin [Ohio] Coffman four-star Michael) Drennen as kind of more of a Jaelen Gill, H-back type of guy, and that would still leave you the opportunity to add (Fairfield, Ohio, three-star JuTahn) McClain or (Akron Hoban four-star DeaMonte) Trayanum, who's an athlete and may be a running back. They're also looking at (three-star) Miyan Williams from (Cincinnati) Winton Woods.

"One of the more unpredictable things in the class is how this running backs thing is going to shake out because they're probably going to need two. And then within that group, there's guys like Trayanum and Drennen who could potentially fit at other spots. But the perfect thing would be to get a guy like Robinson or Milton."

Ohio State has four offensive linemen committed – including three in-state recruits – with room for two more. Where do the Buckeyes go from here at the position?

"They definitely have kind of gone the opposite direction of what they did last year, which was they were a little bit picky at the beginning of last year and they kind of missed on some guys and then they kind of had to scramble at the end and it just wasn't an ideal sight for them. Now, it looks like they've taken the opposite approach of they know they're going to take a big class of probably six.

"A guy like (Cambridge [Mass.] Buckingham Browne & Nichols four-star tackle) Zak Zinter (6-6, 300), a guy like (Aurora [Colo.] Eaglecrest four-star center) Reece Atteberry (6-5, 280). It just opens up things a little bit more for a guy like that."

How are Day and passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich navigating such a talented crop of underclassmen at quarterback?

"Looking at Ohio State, they're in on a lot of guys. This has been a recent phenomenon, for me, the last year or two, is the amount of quality quarterbacks around the country that are really looking at Ohio State. It just feels like it used to be – maybe we're going back six or seven years – that if you didn't have a guy locally, like Ohio or the Midwest or western Pennsylvania or something like that, then it might be a struggle to get a nationally ranked quarterback to go to Ohio State. That's not the case now. These guys are knocking down their doors. They have great options in 2021 already. So I think that, obviously, Day has a lot of clout right now after what he did with Dwayne Haskins. And then even though he hasn't taken a snap yet, I think Justin Fields choosing to go play with Day also gave him an added boost with recruits and people around the country. So Ohio State's in a pretty good spot right now with quarterbacks, which it hasn't been in the past. So that's interesting.

"And then Yurcich is doing a really good job. He had a prior relationship with (La Grange Park [Ill.] Nazareth Academy 2021 target) J.J. McCarthy (6-2, 180), which has helped. And I think some of these West Coast guys, too, have had relationships there as well. So there's been some guys he's been able to open doors with as well. So I think the outlook is really good for them, whether it's McCarthy or who knows – (Charlotte [N.C.] Myers Park 2021 target) Drake Maye (6-4, 200) seems very interested. Whoever it might be, it seems like there's no shortage of options. I think they've got several very good options."

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

Players in the class of 2020 who have issued verbal commitments to play football at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jakob James	OT	6-5	275	★★★	Cincinnati Elder
Paris Johnson	OT	6-7	285	★★★★★	Cincinnati St. Xavier
Trey Leroux	OT	6-8	320	★★★	Norwalk, Ohio
Jack Miller	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral
Gee Scott	WR	6-3	211	★★★★	Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-1	188	★★★★	Rockwall, Texas
Luke Wypler	C	6-3½	285	★★★★	Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional

Player in the class of 2021 who has issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	240	N/A	Pickerington (Ohio) North

wide receiver target Beaux Collins (6-4, 195); Pickerington (Ohio) Central 2021 wide receiver target Lorenzo Styles (6-1, 170); and Steilacoom, Wash., 2021 wide receiver target Emeka Egbuka (6-1, 190).

Also on hand were La Grange Park (Ill.) Nazareth Academy 2021 quarterback target J.J. McCarthy (6-2, 180); Charlotte (N.C.) Myers Park 2021 quarterback target Drake Maye (6-4, 200); St. Louis Lutheran North 2021 defensive end target Travion Ford (6-4, 215); Groveport (Ohio) Madison 2020 three-star defensive tackle prospect Terah Edwards (6-4, 310); Pickerington (Ohio) Central 2020 defensive end prospect Ty Hamilton (6-3, 250); Southlake (Texas) Carroll 2020 tight end prospect Blake Smith (6-4, 247); and Columbus Franklin Heights 2022 quarterback prospect Jeffery Beverly (6-4, 195).

"This was a big home run for us," Day said.

Trayanum Makes Return To Campus

Before the Buckeyes hosted recruits for student appreciation day, a top in-state target made the trip down to Columbus.

On March 19, Ohio State's third practice of spring camp featured a priority prospect in attendance when DeaMonte Trayanum returned to campus.

The four-star athlete from Akron Hoban has held an offer from OSU since Jan. 29, 2018, the first of 14 offers, and has made multiple visits with his home-state school since then.

While the Buckeyes are involved with an abundance of running backs for 2020, Trayanum also is an option at outside linebacker and remains a top target, regardless of position.

The 6-0, 215-pounder is the 247Sports composite's No. 335 overall prospect, No. 23 running back and No. 6 player in Ohio for 2020.

In-State 2021 OLB Sets Visit

As the efforts to recruit Ohio continue under Day, Ohio State is leaving no stone unturned, discovering a hard-hitting outside linebacker from Ironton along the way in Reid Carrico.

The 6-3, 218-pounder took to Twitter and announced a string of Midwest visits to Big Ten and Big 12 programs throughout the spring. Carrico plans to check in on the Buckeyes on April 3 for practice.

Carrico stopped by Michigan State (March 23), Iowa State (March 29) and Nebraska (March 30) before OSU. He is slated to see Wisconsin the weekend of April 14.

Carrico holds three offers to date – Marshall, Ohio and Toledo. The Thundering Herd became his first offer March 20, followed by the Bobcats (March 22) and Rockets (March 23).

Local Commit, Target Make Multiple Visits

Already having been on hand March 21 at the WHAC for Ohio State's fourth practice of spring camp, a 2021 commitment and a 2020 target returned March 23 for student appreciation day.

The pair of local standouts from Ohio were Pickerington North 2021 defensive end commit Jack Sawyer and Dublin Coffman 2020 four-star all-purpose back Michael Drennen. Each visited twice that week, for those two practices in a three-day span.

Committed to OSU's 2021 group since Feb. 3, Sawyer (6-5, 219) has been a frequent visitor on campus as he looks to build his class around him. Before the spring, Drennen (5-11, 195) previously checked in Dec. 15 with Dublin Coffman teammate and 2021 safety A.J. Kirk (6-0, 200), returning twice in three days and catching up with running backs coach Tony Alford, whom he considers his closest relationship among college coaches.

In possession of an offer from Ohio State since June 22, Drennen's recruitment has continued to explode over the past year. He saw his offer list surpass 30 recently with offers from Ole Miss, Alabama and Florida at the end of March.

Drennen is among the Buckeyes' top targets as they aim to fill their upcoming class beyond running back, as he fits the H-back mold in the OSU offense. Drennen is the 247Sports composite's No. 185 overall prospect, No. 5 all-purpose back and No. 3 player in Ohio for 2020.

Ransom Looks To Trim List

Ohio State recently hosted Lathan Ransom, a four-star safety from Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic. On March 21, he cut an offer list of close to 30 in half with the Buckeyes among the 14 options going forward.

The 6-2, 200-pounder unofficially visited OSU the weekend of Feb. 24 and is likely to return for an official visit at a later point.

"I hope to have a top five by July," Ransom told Richard Obert of azcentral.com. "And then I haven't really decided when I'm going to commit yet. I've thought about before the season, I've thought about during the season, but I haven't really come up with a decision yet. But that's all been great. I'm loving the attention, just competing in these 7 on 7s and all these camps and stuff, and just trying to get better."

Ransom, who spent Feb. 22 on an unofficial visit with Notre Dame, has penciled in Oklahoma the weekend of April 13 among his official visits. He is the 247Sports composite's No. 68 overall prospect, No. 4 safety and No. 5 player in Arizona for 2020.

Martinez Changes Columbus Visit Plans

Originally slated to visit Ohio State the weekend of March 23, Cam Martinez changed his visit plans.

Jeremy Birmingham of Lettermen Row first reported that the three-star athlete from Muskegon, Mich., pushed his trip to Columbus back a weekend.

Instead, Martinez March 29 before The Opening Canton Regional at Massillon (Ohio) Washington, which took place March 31.

In possession of an offer since Feb. 15, Martinez picked up his 20th scholarship bid Feb. 20 from Wisconsin. Martinez made a visit to the home-state Wolverines the weekend of March 24.

The 5-11, 175-pounder is the 247Sports composite's No. 411 overall prospect, No. 29 athlete and No. 9 player in Michigan for 2020.

Mills Locks In Official Visit

With the end of the spring in sight, Ohio State begins to lock in its official visitors, and Rylie Mills was the Buckeyes' initial prospect to do so.

On the weekend of April 26-27, the four-

Continued On Page 18

4-Star OSU Commit Picks All-American Bowl

Continued From Page 17

star defensive end from Lake Forest, Ill., will take a trip to Columbus in an official capacity. The 6-5, 275-pounder possesses 28 offers with OSU's coming May 14 of last year.

Mills added offers from Alabama, Clemson and Georgia, among others, to his list in the subsequent months. He is the 247Sports composite's No. 122 overall prospect, No. 8 strongside defensive end and No. 3 player in Illinois.

The 247Sports crystal ball projects Mills staying close to home with Notre Dame receiving 100 percent of four predictions. The Fighting Irish offered him Feb. 7, 2018, for his second offer, and he is slated to officially visit South Bend, Ind., the weekend of April 6.

Wypler Sets Return, Announces Bowl Decision

Luke Wypler has been committed to Ohio State since July 7, 2018, but he made a new pledge March 27. The four-star interior linemen from Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional announced his plans to play in the 2020 All-American Bowl.

Wypler (6-3½, 285) becomes the third future Buckeye slated to participate in the annual all-star game. Cincinnati St. Xavier five-star offensive tackle Paris Johnson and Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic four-star wide receiver Gee Scott are the other two OSU commits to have accepted bids.

For the first time since he made his unofficial visit June 9, 2018, Wypler returns to campus the weekend of April 5.

Wypler's return is critical after the Buckeyes saw changes in its coaching staff following seven-year head coach Urban Meyer's retirement, resulting in three-year defensive coordinator and New Jersey area recruiter Greg Schiano's move to the NFL with the New England Patriots (Schiano has since resigned from that post). Wypler stayed aboard as Day took over and kept offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, but Stanford – which was originally the other finalist last summer – remains a threat.

One of OSU's four offensive linemen committed for 2020, Wypler is an imperative piece in the upcoming cycle. The 247Sports composite ranks him its No. 51 overall prospect, No. 1 center and No. 2 player in New Jersey for 2020.

Ohio State Offers 2020 California OLB

Among the St. John Bosco players in attendance March 23, Kourt Williams joined Beaux Collins as the second from the high school to have an offer from the Buckeyes.

Upon his arrival March 22 for the weekend trip to Columbus, OSU offered the three-star Williams – his 18th.

The 6-1, 216-pounder is the 247Sports composite's No. 383 overall prospect, No. 29 outside linebacker and No. 35 player in California for 2020.

Buckeyes Offer 2021 Connecticut QB

As the quarterback derby for Ohio State in 2021 continues, Jack Brandon entered the race March 24 with an offer from the Buckeyes.

The 6-3, 185-pounder from Cheshire (Conn.) Academy visited Columbus for student appreciation day, coming away with his first college football scholarship.

He told 247Sports of a sit-down conversation with Day after practice in the head coach's office that resulted in the offer.

Time on his visit included connecting with passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich.

Formerly of Buffalo (N.Y.) Canisius before transferring high schools, Brandon is also receiving interest from Duke, Northwestern, Stanford, UCLA and USC.

2020 OLB, 2021 QB Watch Spring Practice

While the sixth practice of spring camp was closed to media, several recruits were able to watch, including a 2020 outside linebacker offered by the Buckeyes and a 2021 quarterback Ohio State's staff is keeping tabs on.

On March 25, OSU hosted Olney (Md.) Good Counsel 2020 three-star outside linebacker Mitchell Melton and Powder Springs (Ga.) McEachern 2021 quarterback Carlos Del Rio.

Lettermen Row first reported the attendance of Melton, whom Ohio State offered Dec. 3. Melton made the visit after previously spending the weekend of Nov. 24 in Columbus for the Buckeyes' 62-39 rout of Michigan at Ohio Stadium, returning for spring camp – his first trip since the offer – before making a March 27 visit to Notre Dame. The 6-4, 225-pounder is the 247Sports composite's No. 628 overall prospect, No. 50 outside linebacker and No. 20 player in Maryland for 2020.

Also on campus for OSU's spring practice, Del Rio does not possess an offer but boasts nine early scholarships from other national programs. The 6-2½, 201-pounder's list includes Arkansas, Florida, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Louisiana State, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, North Carolina State and Tennessee.

OSU Hosts 2020 Targets McClain, Zinter

Two top targets for 2020 headlined those in the building as the Buckeyes hit the halfway point of spring camp March 27.

As he announced on his Twitter account March 24, Fairfield, Ohio, three-star all-purpose back Jutahn McClain made the visit. The 5-10, 180-pound playmaker took the trip up with high school head coach Jason Kraus and was seen with Alford after practice.

OSU offered McClain, then his sixth Big Ten bid, on an Oct. 13 visit for the 30-14 win over Minnesota at Ohio Stadium. He has since totaled 15 offers with Michigan State the latest Jan. 16.

Prior to Columbus, McClain visited Notre Dame and West Virginia at the end of February. McClain told Bill Greene of 247Sports that he wants to take his visits and sort through all options before figuring out a decision timeline.

"Ohio State is a place I've been to a few times already, and it will be good to get back there this week," McClain told Greene. "I want to build the relationships with the staff and meet some of the new coaches. I was being recruited by (former cornerbacks coach) Taver Johnson, but now he's gone and I'm now hearing from (linebackers coach) Al Washington. I also speak to Coach Alford, and he's glad I'm visiting. I'm also looking forward to meeting Ryan Day and getting to know him. I would also consider Ohio State for an official visit."

The Buckeyes also hosted Zak Zinter, another recruit to emerge on Ohio

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago – 1989

Defensive back recruit Darrell Lewis had an eye on early playing time at Ohio State, hoping to break into the Buckeyes' secondary after the unit suffered a down year in 1988. OSU had surrendered 2,122 yards and 13 touchdowns on a 57.1-percent completion rate.

Head coach John Cooper was clear about the disappointment he felt, pointing directly to Lewis as a potential solution.

"We think the players we recruited, including Darrell Lewis, have a legitimate shot to come in here and play for us this coming season.

Hearing those sentiments, Lewis (6-2, 190) looked forward to the opportunity.

"All I want is the chance to play, the chance to show the coaching staff at Ohio State I want to play," the San Diego native said. "I'm really looking forward to working hard this summer and then getting at Ohio State in August."

25 Years Ago – 1994

While the Tennessee recruiting class of 1994 finished among the best in the nation, one big miss boosted Ohio State for the cycle when Marcus Spriggs chose to sign with the Buckeyes. The 6-6, 285-pound defensive lineman spurned the Volunteers for OSU – which caught many by surprise, including Washington (D.C.) Woodson head coach Bob Headen.

"I thought he was going to Tennessee. I really did," Headen told BSB. "He was going to cancel his visit to Ohio State, but I told him to take all of his visits. Then, when he came back from Ohio State, he decided that's where he wants to go."

Spriggs shocked UT head coach Phillip Fulmer as well but said he was unable to pass on a chance to crack Ohio State's defensive line rotation.

"When you have a chance to play early in your career, it gives you something extra to shoot for," Spriggs told BSB. "That's what I'm shooting for now."

20 Years Ago – 1999

With spring camp in full swing, Ohio State anticipated over 50 visitors for its annual junior day festivities April 17. The Buckeyes were hoping to bolster their 2000 recruiting class as they had only Alliance, Ohio, lineman Larry Kinnard committed. The previous year, OSU had 10 pledges in its 1999 class by that time.

"We usually have an academic day in the summer," said recruiting coordinator Bill Conley. "We will be incorporating some of that program on this day.

"It will start with our practice session. They'll be able to watch us practice, and then they can tour our facility and the campus."

15 Years Ago – 2004

When Ohio State offered Jacksonville (Fla.) Sandalwood running back Maurice Wells, the opportunity conjured up thoughts of home. The 5-10, 180-pounder was originally from Columbus and naturally took high interest in the Buckeyes upon his offer. He also held offers from Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Georgia Tech and Maryland at the time.

"I have a lot of family in the area and really right by the school in Columbus," Wells told BSB. "It would be nice to go there to be with them."

Wells was considered one of the best tailbacks in the 2005 recruiting class. After leading the state of Florida in rushing as a junior with 3,079 yards and 31 touchdowns, he landed in Rivals.com's top-100 rankings of prospects for the upcoming cycle. His high school coach, Adam Geis, added that Conley had high praise for Wells.

"(Conley) said hands down he is the best running back they've seen in years," Geis told BSB.

10 Years Ago – 2009

Rumored to be Ohio State's next commitment in the 2010 recruiting class, Fort Wayne (Ind.) Paul Harding four-star running back Roderick Smith pressed pause on the process when he told BSB of an updated timeline.

"The earliest commitment I probably will give will be right after my senior football season," the 6-3½, 215-pounder said. "I'm really not stressing over it too much. I still have one more football season to go so I'm going to wait until then."

Ranked by Scout.com as the No. 11 tailback in the nation for 2010, Smith picked up an offer from the Buckeyes in the middle of March, which caught him by surprise.

"I didn't know it was going to be so soon," Smith said. "I was just shocked. I'm a lot interested because I know in the past they've always had great running backs and great linemen that help block. That's what I really like about them."

Five Years Ago – 2014

Among the early commitments in Ohio State's 2015 recruiting class, Jamel Dean detailed to BSB his journey back from a freak knee injury he had suffered in the fall of 2013. As a junior at Cocoa, Fla., Dean tore his ACL when he went up for an interception during a midseason practice, and that started a long road to recovery.

College interest was unaffected as Dean committed Dec. 1, 2013, to the Buckeyes over Florida, Miami (Fla.), Mississippi State and Temple.

Although he was still limited in football activities for the spring, Dean neared a return to track and field. As he neared 100 percent in his knee, Dean eyed working back for a strong senior year before heading off to OSU.

"I feel like I could fit in their defense," Dean said. "When I went up there, the atmosphere is amazing. The fans, they get you hyped and ready to play there."

One Year Ago – 2018

An accelerated recruiting calendar with an NCAA rule change made for an enormous weekend April 14 at Ohio State. With high school football prospects allowed to take official visits in the spring, the Buckeyes acted accordingly as five top targets were slated to arrive April 13-15. The priority prospects in the class of 2019 included Houston St. Pius X four-star wide receiver Jalen Curry; Buford, Ga., four-star center Harry Miller; Huntington (W.Va.) Spring Valley four-star offensive tackle Doug Nester, who was Ohio State's first pledge of the 2019 class; Austin (Texas) Lake Travis four-star wide receiver Garrett Wilson; and Avon (Conn.) Old Farms four-star athlete Marquis Wilson.

On another note, OSU was without a quarterback commitment for 2019. The situation stemmed from what head coach Urban Meyer considered limited depth nationally for the cycle. In the previous year, Meyer's staff had secured a pledge from Franklin (Ga.) Heard County signal caller Emory Jones months earlier by Dec. 20, 2016.

"We're not on purpose taking it slower," Meyer said. "There's not a lot of depth at quarterback this year in the recruiting world. So other than that we're just working as hard as we can to get them here. We've had a bunch visit, so now we have to find the right marriage between them and us."

State's radar in the fall. In possession of an OSU offer since Sept. 17, the four-star offensive tackle from Cambridge (Mass.) Buckingham Browne & Nichols stopped by Columbus during a Midwest swing.

Prior to Ohio State, Zinter visited Notre Dame (March 23-24) and Penn State (March 26). Earlier in the month, he checked out Duke (March 2) for junior day and Boston College (March 19) for spring practice.

He added an offer March 26 from Iowa, his latest as the list of scholarship tenders approaches 30 schools. Zinter is the 247Sports composite's No. 225 overall prospect, No. 23 offensive tackle and No. 3 player in Massachusetts for 2020.

Ohio State Offers 2021 Under Armour Commit

Ohio State's efforts in 2021 continued March 24 in New Jersey when Jersey City St. Peter's Prep defensive tackle George Rooks added the Buckeyes as his 12th offer. He previously picked up offers from Louisville, Virginia Tech, Nebraska, Boston College, Virginia, Notre Dame, Syracuse, Rutgers, Michigan, Penn State and Auburn.

The 6-4, 246-pounder projects as one of the best prospects nationally for 2021. In fact, Rooks is already committed to play in the 2021 Under Armour All-American Game – the annual all-star game in Orlando, Fla., on ESPN2 every January.

2021 Florida OG Offered By Buckeyes Commits Elsewhere

Three days after Ohio State offered Greg Crippen, the 2021 offensive guard from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy committed elsewhere. The 6-4, 270-pounder took to Twitter March 27 and announced a pledge to Notre Dame. The Fighting Irish had offered him March 21.

Originally from Milton (Mass.) Academy, Crippen compiled offers from Alabama, Boston College, Duke, Michigan, Pittsburgh, Purdue and Syracuse, in addition to OSU.

Crippen cited academics and his relationship with ND offensive line coach Jeff Quinn when he broke down the decision with Tom Loy of 247Sports.

"(Quinn) is a great coach," Crippen told Loy. "I really feel like I got to know him well, and I love his coaching style. I really grasped what he was talking about."

2022 Indiana QB Makes Return

While the Buckeyes have already targeted a multitude of quality arms for 2021, Ohio State's recruiting efforts have been under way with several offer candidates in 2022.

Among the crop of rising sophomores, Fort Branch (Ind.) Gibson Southern 2022 quarterback Brady Allen made his latest trip to OSU when he watched practice March 25.

The 6-5, 185-pounder previously came to Columbus twice in the fall. Allen made his first visit Oct. 13 for Ohio State's 30-14 win over Minnesota at Ohio Stadium and returned Dec. 14 during the Buckeyes' bowl practices.

Targeted by Day – then the second-year offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach when Meyer was still head coach – in the fall, Gibson has since seen his recruitment take off across the coaching staff. He has built up relationships with Yurcich, offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson and senior offensive quality control/assistant quarterbacks coach Corey Dennis.

2020 New Jersey DE Cuts To 5

After he spent his weekend in Columbus for Ohio State's fifth practice of spring camp March 23, Aaron Lewis emerged from student appreciation day at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center with the Buckeyes in a favorable spot.

On March 26, the three-star defensive end from Williamstown, N.J., included OSU among his top five. He also included Penn State, Michigan, West Virginia and Wisconsin in the cut down from 20 offers.

Ohio State offered the 6-6, 235-pounder Jan. 30 and moved fast to get him on campus. Lewis has emerged as the 247Sports composite's No. 420 overall prospect, No 21 strongside defensive end and No. 12 player in New Jersey after a 2018 season when Williamstown won a state sectional championship.

"He's the best I've ever coached on the defensive side," Williamstown head coach Frank Fucetola told Phil Anastasia of The Philadelphia Inquirer. "He takes over games. He's just getting started. I never had one like him. It's not even close."

2022 Ohio OT Visits OSU

Blake Miller remains without an offer from Ohio State, but there is no doubt of the Buckeyes' interest in the in-state offensive tackle.

The 6-6, 300-pounder from Strongsville, Ohio, made his latest trip to Columbus March 27. After the visit, he posted a picture to his Twitter account thanking Day, Studrawa and director of player personnel Mark Pantoni for the time.

Miller made the trip after a March 25 visit where he saw Clemson's spring practice. Prior to the time spent with the Tigers, Miller picked up his first offer Jan. 28 from Akron.

Miller emerged on Ohio State's recruiting radar Nov. 3 when he first visited campus for the Buckeyes' 36-31 win over Nebraska at Ohio Stadium. His second trip came Dec. 15, checking in with Day and Pantoni.

According to Greene, Miller has drawn additional interest from Michigan State. Miller called the possibility of an offer from home-state OSU a blessing.

"I was able to visit Ohio State for bowl practice, and I got to meet with all the coaches, including Coach Day," Miller told Greene. "He was awesome to speak with, and he told me that he wants to make sure I don't go out of the state of Ohio for college. He was saying that he's going to be recruiting kids from Ohio more than they have been recently."

West Coast CB Goes Cross Country

La Habra, Calif., 2020 four-star cornerback Clark Phillips (5-10½, 178) arrived in Columbus for a visit March 28.

He picked up an offer Jan. 24 from the Buckeyes and has since surpassed the 30-scholarship plateau, stopping by for OSU's practice March 29 before going to Notre Dame for the weekend.

Phillips is the 247Sports composite's No. 37 overall prospect, No. 4 cornerback and No. 8 player in California for 2020.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB print subscribers, daily. For simple sign-up information, see page 5.

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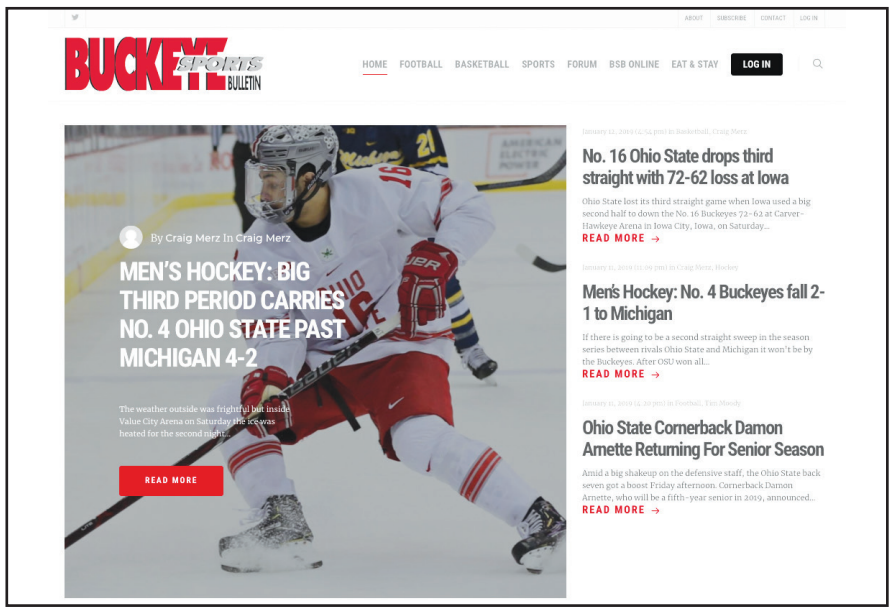

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OSU Visit Exceeds 4-Star CB Gray's Expectations

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

"It's a dream come true."

That's what Miami (Fla.) Central four-star cornerback Henry Gray told Buckeye Sports Bulletin when he received an offer from Ohio State last May, noting he grew up idolizing and modeling his game from afar after former Buckeye first-round draft picks Bradley Roby, Eli Apple, Marshon Lattimore, Gareon Conley and Denzel Ward.

The 5-11½, 172-pound Gray was committed to his hometown Miami Hurricanes at the time but admitted he was looking forward to seeing what Ohio State had to offer from both an academic and athletic standpoint. And now following his first trip to Columbus – a three-day visit that coincided with Student Appreciation Day on March 23 – it appears the Buckeyes have put themselves at the forefront of his recruitment.

"It exceeded my expectations by far," Gray told BSB. "The school is great, and the facilities are awesome."

Gray, the nation's sixth-ranked cornerback and No. 70 prospect overall, arrived in Columbus late Friday night and departed for home Tuesday morning. He and his mother were accompanied for most of the visit by first-year co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach Jeff Hafley, as well as quality control coach and South Florida native Keenan Bailey, who extended the offer to Gray last spring. They toured campus, watched two practices and also met with head coach Ryan Day.

"The staff's work ethic and attention to detail are crazy," Gray said. "Coach Hafley really knows what he's doing. Even though he's new, I can tell everybody already loves him there."

That growing relationship will be especially important as Ohio State looks to secure Gray's pledge in the coming months, since his interest in the program dates back to when Tennessee Titans defensive backs coach Kerry Coombs was in charge of the OSU cornerbacks.

COURTESY OF HENRY GRAY/TWITTER

COLUMBUS BOUND? – Four-star cornerback prospect Henry Gray, a former Miami (Fla.) commit, is a top target for Ohio State.

Gray's relationship with former position coach Taver Johnson – whose second stint in Columbus lasted just one season – was practically nonexistent, which allowed defending national champion Clemson to make a significant push in his recruitment. If there's any team that is a threat to the Buckeyes' chances, it's the Tigers.

That said, sources close to the program told BSB they feel extremely confident in the staff's pitch to Gray and his mother, which included a look at Real Life Wednesdays and heavy discussion about Hafley's background in the National Football League, the program's knack for producing first-round defensive backs and the favorable depth chart.

The fact that this was an unofficial visit during the offseason allowed the staff to go more in-depth and make it more personal than an official visit in the fall, when coaches are more focused on the game than the recruits in attendance. Gray is already planning an official visit for late in the 2019 season, and he'll return already familiar with campus, the coaches and players.

"It was a very fun visit," Gray said. "I can't wait to get back there soon."

Gray – who narrowed down his list of more than two dozen scholarship offers to Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio State, Penn State and Tennessee – plans to take all five official visits and then announce his college decision at the Under Armour All-America Game in January 2020.

The Buckeyes need to reload at the cornerback position this recruiting cycle with redshirt senior Damon Arnette down to his last year on campus and former five-stars Jeffrey Okudah and Shaun Wade eligible for the NFL draft after the season. Presumably, the staff will look to add three cornerbacks – maybe more – to replace them.

Ohio State is in great position to resecure a commitment from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Lejond Cavazos, who was also on hand with his father for student appreciation day. Landing his pledge once again would help in the staff's pursuit of LSU five-star commit Elias Ricks, who is a friend of the Cavazos family. Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro five-star Kelee Ringo is also among the staff's top targets, as he is close friends with four-star quarterback commit and fellow Arizona native Jack Miller.

The Buckeyes are also very interested in prospects such as La Habra, Calif., four-star Clark Phillips, who also visited campus for the first time this month; Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy four-star Fred Davis, a former teammate of the aforementioned Wade and redshirt freshman corner Tyreke Johnson; and Southlake (Texas) Carroll four-star R.J. Mickens, who attended Friday Night Lights last summer.

Cedar Hill (Texas) Trinity Christian School four-star Dwight McGothern, Arlington (Texas) Mansfield Timberview four-star Jalen Kimber and Little Elm, Texas, four-star Ryan Watts are also names to keep in mind, but it will be difficult to gauge the temperature of their respective recruitments until they make a trip to Columbus.

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NCAA Experience Could Pay Off Despite Loss

Ohio State bowed out of the second round of the NCAA Tournament Midwest Regional with a 74-59 loss to Houston in Tulsa, Okla., on March 24. That the Buckeyes, the 11th-seed, were expected to lose to the No. 3-seed Cougars didn't diminish the pain.

COURT REPORT
Craig Merz

KEVIN DYE

STRONG CORE – Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann has the core of his 2018-19 NCAA Tournament team coming back to Columbus for his third season with the Buckeyes.

"This stings, and it stings in a really real way," coach Chris Holtmann said.

He can take solace that his players saw the defeat as an opportunity to learn, just as losing 12 months earlier to Gonzaga in the second round was motivation.

"We've been working our butts off since last March when we lost," sophomore guard Musa Jallow said after the Houston game. "Just to be here we battled through a lot of adversity as a team. You can't say that about other teams.

"Now we have to put it behind us and get back to work so we can get here again next year."

The players heard repeatedly that they weren't as good as last season's team and making the NCAA Tournament a second straight season was a long shot.

"Everybody thought this was going to be a down year for us," graduate transfer Keyshawn Woods said. "Everybody thought we were an NIT team or not in the (NCAA) tournament at all."

The Buckeyes proved they were tournament-worthy this season, and Holtmann said it's the 10 returnees for 2019-20 – not the incoming freshman class, which is rated the best in the Big Ten – that will make a difference in how next season plays out. That's how it worked this season.

"Our freshmen were incredibly important," Holtmann said post-Houston. "But if you ask me why we're sitting here today, I would say it's because of the guys who were sitting in last year's locker room against Gonzaga.

"The improvement they made and character they showed – and our freshmen were tremendous – but if we're going to continue to move forward, it's going to be because of those guys in that locker room. We will see how this fuels us moving forward."

Holtmann said junior forward Andre Wesson benefited as much as anyone by playing in the 2018 NCAA Tournament.

"There's no question being here helped Andre Wesson," the coach said. "He played an important role in those two games last year. I just think it did because Andre will tell you the reason he is here is to play in the NCAA Tournament, and it helped him have a great offseason and he had a terrific junior year. We'll see if that motivates and challenges other guys.

"All of our returners need to have the kind of offseason that a guy like Andre Wesson had, where he came back early and established himself as clearly a good player."

Holtmann will have to replace the leadership qualities of Woods and seniors C.J. Jackson and Joey Lane.

"If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be here playing in the tournament," freshman guard Luther Muhammad said.

Added Jallow, "The seniors taught me a lot this year. They were solid, they were consistent every single day in practice picking me up, picking everybody else up. They're great leaders, and you saw everything rides on their shoulders. I'm so proud of them."

As the only junior with significant playing time this season, Wesson is expected to have more responsibilities next season.

"He's been tremendous," Holtmann said. "I want him to grow in his leadership and be willing to lead. He was tremendous for us this year."

Wesson said he had good mentors in Jackson, Lane and Woods.

"They've done so much for this program," he said. "They've been like brothers to me. Anything I can do to continue to make them proud of me I'll do in helping this team try to get back."

Wesson Lesson

Wesson's brother, Kaleb, a sophomore center, had a trying season with the constant battle to stay in games because of foul trouble and his late-season university-imposed suspension that coincided with a three-game losing streak that put an NCAA bid in peril.

There's no question he has the skills to someday play at the next level, but he put off any talk of leaving for the NBA for the time being.

"I don't want to talk about that right now," he said immediately after the Houston game.

He acknowledged that if he returns, as an upperclassman he needs to act the part.

"Younger guys have to step up where now it's our team," he said. "We've got to mature."

Holtmann said there will be a time when Kaleb Wesson's future is discussed.

"He's a great kid, and he wants to do the right thing," Holtmann said. "The offseason's incredibly important. I think he had a good offseason last year. You saw it in kind of what he added to his game."

Up And Down

Jackson's NCAA run mirrored his season. Called upon to play the point occasionally when he was better suited off the ball, he was inconsistent, erratic and sometimes impactful.

He was 1 of 8 from the floor in the 62-59 semifinal win over Iowa State in March 22 but led the Buckeyes with 18 points in the loss to Houston.

"The last couple of games shooting the ball I was a little disappointed in myself, but I've continued to be who I am all season," he said after his final game.

He wants his legacy to be one of commitment among teammates.

"The biggest thing is to stay together through the tough times," he said. "I'm pretty sure next season, like the last two seasons, they're going to count them out as

2018-19 Ohio State Men's Basketball Statistics

20-15 Overall (8-12 Big Ten)
Final season statistics

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds O-D	Rebounds T-Avg.	PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
Kaleb Wesson	32-31	829-25.9	156-312	.500	26-75	.347	130-177	.734	77-144	221-6.9	103-5	59	73	21	33	468-14.6
C.J. Jackson	34-31	1,045-30.7	137-337	.407	62-168	.369	73-95	.768	17-118	135-4.0	63-1	119	76	6	41	409-12.0
Andre Wesson	35-34	1,049-30.0	102-237	.430	37-110	.336	59-79	.747	45-97	142-4.1	101-3	62	62	15	20	300-8.6
K. Woods	35-15	961-27.5	108-257	.420	27-90	.300	40-49	.816	14-93	107-3.1	80-1	86	47	5	23	283-8.1
L. Muhammad	34-28	905-26.6	83-222	.374	36-96	.375	56-74	.757	16-76	92-2.7	67-1	59	49	2	32	258-7.6
D. Washington	35-2	603-17.2	91-246	.370	41-134	.306	22-34	.647	9-78	87-2.5	45-0	37	37	0	10	245-7.0
Kyle Young	31-14	636-20.5	78-116	.672	1-6	.167	28-48	.583	48-88	136-4.4	65-1	28	23	16	17	185-6.0
Justin Ahrens	25-4	239-9.6	25-61	.410	19-49	.388	10-11	.909	4-40	44-1.8	23-0	8	14	5	6	79-3.2
Jaedon LeDee	26-2	171-6.6	18-47	.383	0-3	.000	41-55	.745	18-27	45-1.7	27-0	6	12	6	3	77-3.0
Musa Jallow	35-13	525-15.0	36-85	.424	12-36	.333	18-26	.692	31-70	101-2.9	42-1	23	29	9	17	102-2.9
Joey Lane	15-1	38-2.5	4-8	.500	3-6	.500	0-0	.000	0-6	6-0.4	3-0	6	3	0	2	11-0.7
Danny Hummer	9-0	21-2.3	1-3	.333	0-1	.000	0-2	.000	0-1	1-0.1	4-0	1	4	0	2	2-0.2
Harrison Hoofkin	1-0	1-1.0	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	.000	0-1	1-1.0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0-0.0
TEAM									49-49	98-2.8			10			
Ohio State	**35**	**7,023**	**839-1,931**	**.434**	**264-774**	**.341**	**477-650**	**.734**	**328-888**	**1,216-34.7**	**623-13**	**494**	**439**	**85**	**206**	**2,419-69.1**
Opponents	**35**	**7,019**	**814-1,929**	**.422**	**236-722**	**.327**	**454-613**	**.741**	**310-861**	**1,171-33.5**	**651-16**	**408**	**426**	**107**	**218**	**2,318-66.2**

OSU Men's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2019 who have signed letters of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
D.J. Carton	PG	6-1	190	★★★★	Bettendorf, Iowa
Alonzo Gaffney	SF	6-9	190	★★★★	Wolfeboro (N.H.) Brewster Academy
E.J. Liddell	PF	6-6	220	★★★★	Belleville (Ill.) West

well. Hopefully by then people learn their lesson as far as that. We as a program need to continue to have great leadership and just do it together."

His advice to the teammates he's leaving?

"Don't take possessions off, don't take games off, don't take days off because you only get so many times you get to put this uniform on, so hopefully me, Keyshawn and Joey can leave that way of thinking behind to them," Jackson said.

Showed You

Woods also struggled in his only season with the Buckeyes after graduating from Wake Forest, but he came through in the postseason.

He had 12 of his 19 points in the second half vs. Iowa State and 10 points vs. Houston. In four postseason games (two Big Ten, two NCAA), he averaged 15.7 points while making 23 of 48 shots (47.9 percent). It's quite an upgrade from his regular-season average of 7.7 and 42.2 percent.

"It's amazing. I got a chance to play with a great group of guys, great group of coaches," he said. "I got to play for a great school. I'm happy I was able to come here and spend my last year here."

Jackson, a junior college transfer who played three seasons at Ohio State, noted it had to be difficult for Woods to get acclimated in just one season.

"It's tough," Jackson said. "You want to come in and win immediately and make an impact, but you don't want to step on too many toes. That's how it was for me. Luckily, I was still young and still had time to figure things out."

Woods said he was playing with a chip on his shoulder for himself and the team.

"With the young group of guys we had and the situation we were in, we proved a lot of people wrong," he said. "Now, we've set the standard, and these guys get to take over and prove everybody else wrong, and they'll be back next year."

Here's what he said about how he wants to be remembered in Columbus: "A guy who was able to take a young group of guys to the NCAA Tournament and more importantly prove my doubters wrong that I shouldn't be here, or I shouldn't be playing, or I should be on the bench.

"I'm happy I was able to prove the doubters wrong."

LeDee LeLeaving

Freshman forward Jaedon LeDee (6-9, 230) received his release from Ohio State and will seek a transfer, the school announced March 28.

LeDee averaged 3.0 points, 1.2 rebounds and 6.6 minutes in 26 games (two starts). He last played double-digit minutes (22) at Purdue on March 2, scoring 16 points in place of the suspended Kaleb Wesson, and did not play at all in Ohio State's four postseason games.

It was also telling that during a stretch that sophomore forward Kyle Young was injured, Holtmann often went with a smaller lineup when Kaleb Wesson got into foul trouble, rather than turn to LeDee. The same was true while Kaleb Wesson was suspended with LeDee playing just five minutes each in the other two games that the center missed.

Young and Kaleb Wesson are the only interior players on the roster for next season. The Buckeyes have two scholarships available and will certainly look to add at least one big man.

Diallo To Decide

Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep three-star center Ibrahima Diallo has narrowed down his list of scholarship offers to Ohio State and Pittsburgh and is expected to make a decision in the coming weeks, according to a report from Stockrisers' Jake Weingarten.

The Buckeyes extended an offer to the 7-0, 200-pound Diallo – a native of Senegal who moved to the United States in 2016 – during his official visit for the regular-season finale against Wisconsin.

Ohio State has a glaring need in the frontcourt following the departure of the aforementioned LeDee, who found himself thrust into the starting lineup when Kaleb Wesson was suspended. Without him, the Buckeyes do not have a backup center.

Diallo suffered a season-ending broken hand just 10 games into his senior year, but he averaged 11.3 points, 10.8 rebounds and 3.5 blocks per game for the Crew before the injury.

For complete coverage of Ohio State's two NCAA Tournament games, go to BuckeyeSports.com, BSB's full-service website that is free to all print subscribers.

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Buckeyes Have 2 Tourney Wins In As Many Years

Continued From Page 1

think there is a process to this. But at the same time, we want to stay committed to the process and yet get here as quickly as we could. You hear that all the time with guys who take over jobs. I'm glad I think we stayed committed and true to our process, and yet we were fortunate to be here these first two years."

While that may sound a bit self-congratulatory, anyone who knows Holtmann understands that "getting there" is not going to be good enough anymore.

He wants, and the job demands, that there be Big Ten titles, top-10 rankings and extended runs in the NCAA Tournament.

What currently is the ceiling will be the foundation for future Ohio State teams.

"There is no guarantee to be (at the NCAA Tournament)," he said. "But as we go through this together, I'm incredibly appreciative of this year's team and last year's team.

"I want to strive so hard to continue to move this forward. I know how hard that is. I know how hard it is to get here, to win a game, to win two games and to move forward. And I don't want to get ahead of ourselves, because there are no guarantees, but I do think being in this locker room tasting victory and defeat can only help us moving forward.

"The important thing is building your program where getting here is the consistent goal and advancing is a consistent goal, and that's the challenge in front of us."

Each season presents its own tribulations, but Holtmann said he's experienced nothing like what he and his players went through this season. Whether the 2018-19 Buckeyes overachieved, as they believe, or met low expectations is up to debate.

After a surprising 25-9 mark and a second-place finish in the Big Ten (15-3) last season, the Buckeyes saw the early departure to the NBA of Big Ten Player of the Year Keita Bates-Diop and a solid senior class.

The Buckeyes were picked for eighth in the conference this season, and that's where an 8-12 record landed them. It's how they got there that was so interesting.

They were 12-1 overall through December, which included Big Ten wins over Minnesota and Illinois, but Holtmann knew the record was misleading because of some of the nonconference opponents such as South Carolina State, Samford and High Point, although OSU beat Cincinnati and Creighton on the road.

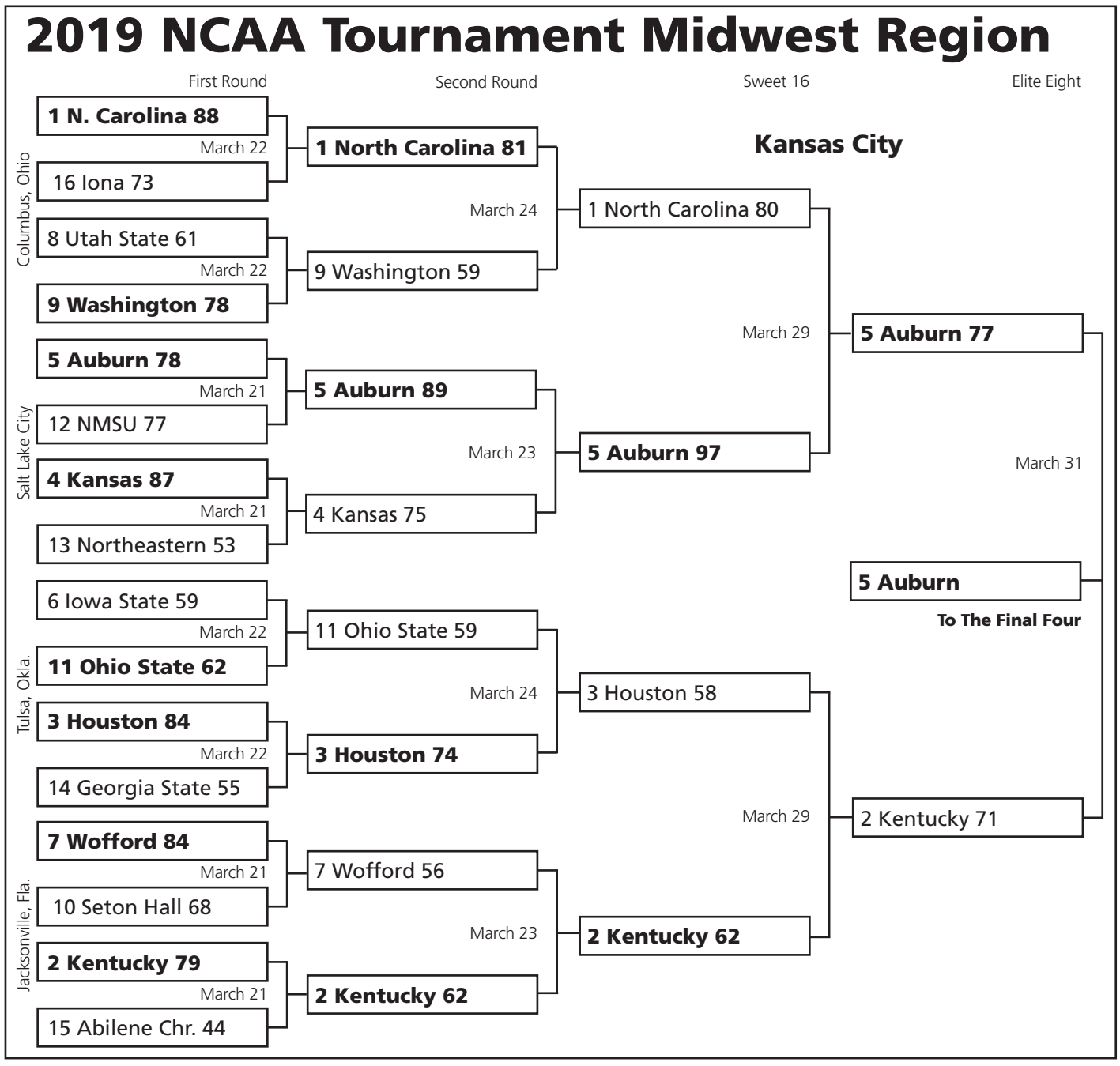
"We had a great start, a little bit of fool's gold with the schedule in my opinion," Holtmann said.

Once OSU entered league-only play, the losses started piling up. An 86-77 defeat to Michigan State on Jan. 5 was the first of five straight setbacks, the longest losing streak for the program in 21 years and the worst of Holtmann's career.

"The challenge for us is we have to find a way to be better in stretches in early conference, in January and February," Holtmann said. "You're going to take some hits, but looking back, that's an area where I have to figure out as a coach how to get us better in those months."

The slump was followed by a solid stretch of six wins in 10 games. The last of those was a 90-70 thumping of then-No. 22 Iowa on Feb. 26 that seemed to solidify the Buckeyes as a nine- or possibly eight-seed for the national tournament. But three days later sophomore center Kaleb Wesson was suspended for violating school policy, and OSU lost its final three games heading into the Big Ten tourney.

It took a first-round victory over Indiana in Wesson's return to secure an at-large bid to the NCAAs.



"Nobody expected us to be an 11th-seed in the tournament, nobody projected us to have a good year, they said we'd have a bad year," graduate transfer Keyshawn Woods said after the Houston loss that ended his collegiate career. "Yeah, we had our slumps at different situations, but at the end of the day with the group of guys we had, we had a successful season.

"A month ago, I didn't know where we'd be but we regrouped."

Wesson's older brother, junior forward Andre, said the challenges made the journey more satisfying.

"Anytime the season ends, you're hurt, but just everything this team has been through, nobody expected us to even be here," the elder Wesson said. "Just the toughness that every guy in this locker room has is crazy, it's wonderful."

Crazy and wonderful all at the same time. No wonder Holtmann repeatedly used the word "proud" in that hallway when discussing his team.

"I'm incredibly proud of this team, maybe as much as any team I've ever coached. I've really enjoyed coaching them," he said. "There was as much in this season in terms of stuff this team had to go through and deal with – the five-game losing streak. You can go down the line. I've never had that as much with a group.

"There are some real lessons in grit and persevering and the importance of staying connected and the importance of having a group that believes in each other and believes in something."

Woods and seniors C.J. Jackson and Joey Lane will be gone, but a core that includes the Wessons, current sophomores Musa Jallow and Kyle Young and freshmen Justin Ahrens, Luther Muhammad and Duane Washington will be joined by four-star recruits D.J. Carton, Alonzo Gaffney and E.J. Liddell.

Also, Florida State transfer point guard CJ Walker becomes eligible as a junior for next season. There could be additions as well since freshman forward Jaedon LeDee announced March 28 that he would enter the transfer portal.

Once he leaves, that will give the Buckeyes two scholarship slots. They are a finalist for Ibrahima Diallo (7-0, 200) from Napa (Calif.) Prolific Prep as Holtmann looks to fill a glaring lack of size. He could go the graduate transfer route again as Woods proved to be invaluable down the stretch.

The next step for the Buckeyes is making the NCAAs three years in a row and winning more than one tourney game a season. Not doing that so far is Holtmann's biggest regret.

"I would have loved to get this group to the second weekend. I feel bad as a coach that I was not able to do that," he said. "I don't know if I've ever been more proud of a team. It's really in light of these 2½, three weeks. It's been a lot of good stuff. A lot of really gutsy performances. It didn't look good there for a while."

The future, though, looks much brighter.

Buckeyes Fall In 2nd Round Of NCAA Tourney

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State men's basketball team made the NCAA Tournament for the second year in a row and picked up a first-round win once again.

The dance didn't last any longer than that, though, as head coach Chris Holtmann's squad fell to Houston in the round of 32 after topping Iowa State. What follows are recaps of each contest.

Ohio State 62, Iowa State 59

Ohio State entered the NCAA Tournament as an underdog, at least as far as the seedings go.

That didn't matter as Kaleb Wesson had 21 points and 12 rebounds and Keyshawn Woods added 19 points when the 11th-seeded Buckeyes upset sixth-seed Iowa State, 62-59, at BOK Center in Tulsa, Okla., in the first round of the Midwest Regional on March 22.

"We didn't feel like we were the underdogs, but as you saw we came out and played our hearts out," said OSU junior forward Andre Wesson.

The Buckeye defense came through against a team averaging 77.4 points per game.

"Defense, you can't question it," Kaleb Wesson said. "It's always going to be there on defense. Shots missed, shots made, but that defense is always going to be there."

Even though Iowa State shot 57.7 percent (15 of 26) in the second half and 43.4 percent (23 of 53) for the game, the Cyclones were limited to 29.6 percent (8 of 27) in the first 20 minutes when they went nearly 10 minutes without making a field goal.

"I think a little bit was on them," Iowa State coach Steve Prohm said of Ohio State. "I think a lot of it was on us, too, from a standpoint of pace, shot selection, ball movement."

OSU led 26-24 at halftime in a back-and-forth game before an announced crowd of 12,443 that was about 75 percent in favor of the Cyclones (23-12).

The Buckeyes (20-14) missed three shots on their first trip down the court then heated up to take an 11-2 lead thanks to a 9-0 run led by sophomore Musa Jallow canning a pair of jumpers. He finished with 11 points.

Then it was the Cyclones' turn by scoring 10 straight to take a 12-11 lead at the 12:52 mark on a bucket in the paint by Cameron Lard. ISU pushed the lead to 17-13 then went cold, missing six straight that allowed consecutive field goals by Kaleb Wesson to tie the score at 17 at the 8:09 mark.

Wesson went to the bench with his second foul with 6:31 left. Lindell Wigginton made a free throw to make it 20-20, but the Buckeyes responded without their sophomore center.

C.J. Jackson hit a jumper and Woods followed with a basket for a four-point lead. Andre Wesson and freshman Duane Washington each hit a free throw to make it 26-20 with 3:18 remaining, but that was it for the OSU scoring in the half. Marial Shayok ended the Cyclones' 0-11 drought on a trey with 1:29 to go, and Wigginton added a free throw with 32 seconds left to bring the 26-24 halftime score.

In the second half, the Buckeyes were up 44-38 when Wigginton made a three-pointer from the right corner while being fouled by sophomore Kyle Young, and he made the free throw for a 44-42 score with 11:41 left in the game. Kaleb Wesson countered with an old-fashioned three off an offensive rebound 30 seconds later. Andre Wesson followed with a bucket underneath to make it 49-42.

Later, the Buckeyes got three offensive rebounds on one possession, Kaleb Wesson made two foul shots and OSU led 53-50 with 4:35 left.

A jumper by Shayok gave Iowa State its first lead of the second half, 54-53, with 3:37 left, but Woods regained the lead by a point on a bucket. Woods, a graduate transfer from Wake Forest, made a trey off the inbound to extend the lead to 58-54 at the 2:44 mark. After an Iowa State basket, Kaleb Wesson made two from the line to make it 60-56 with 1:59 left.

Wigginton swooshed a three-pointer with 20.8 seconds left to make it 60-59. With 18.7 left, Woods made two foul shots to make it 62-59.

"That's a dream everyone thinks about," Woods said. "You want to ice the game, have it on your back. Be the man and seal the deal."

Shayok, an 88.3 percent shooter from the line, missed a free throw and Kaleb Wesson was fouled on the rebound. He missed his free throw, and Nick Weiler-Babb tried a trey with five seconds left. He missed and Wesson grabbed the final board to end the game.

"This is what you live for," Jackson said. "These are moments that we worked hard for all year, all season, and preseason. These guys did an unbelievable job, the coaching staff did an unbelievable job preparing us, and we just went out there and won."

OSU was 39.7 percent from the floor (23 of 58), including 25 percent (5 of 20) from the three-point line. The Buckeyes outrebounded the Cyclones 38-31 with 12 caroms coming off the offensive glass.

Shayok led Iowa State with 23 points.

Houston 74, Ohio State 59

The Buckeyes got pounded inside BOK Center and were left outside the NCAA Tournament following a 74-59 loss to third-seeded Houston in the second round of the Midwest Regional on March 24.

Houston (33-3) had a 34-12 advantage in the paint and outscored the Buckeyes 16-7 on fastbreak points.

"They're a fast team," Jallow said. "They got into transition a lot. They got to their spots. Nothing really surprised us. We knew how athletic they were, how they kept up on us defensively."

The other key was forcing Kaleb Wesson away from the bucket when OSU (20-15) had the ball. Of his seven shots, he was 2 for 6 on three-pointers.

"That means we won that battle," Houston coach Kelvin Sampson said. "If we got him taking threes, that's a good thing for us. I just thought that our guys executed defensively what we wanted to do."

Wesson took just three shots in the second half and finished with 15 points. OSU, which averaged 7.5 three-pointers per game, was 10 for 29 (34.5 percent) from beyond the arc.

"They work hard on their defense, and it shows," Kaleb Wesson said.

Jackson led the Buckeyes with 18 points, and Woods added 10. Corey Davis Jr. topped four Cougars in double figures with 21 points, and Galen Robinson Jr. chipped in with 13.

The Buckeyes trailed 39-31 at the half and never got closer than four from there (39-35), although on three occasions they were within five.

"We were a couple of stops away from tying it up, a couple of miscues on my part," Jackson said. "We were right there. I'm definitely proud of that part."

Houston's speed was evident in the first five minutes. The Cougars got their first four points off steals, and Robinson made it 9-5 when he grabbed a rebound and, as the Buckeyes headed up court with their backs to him, he sped by for a layup.

Kaleb Wesson hit consecutive three-pointers for an 11-9 lead at the 14:47 mark before Davis ran off eight straight points for the Cougars'17-11 advantage. The run was stopped by Jackson's trey to give the senior 1,001 career points. The Buckeyes finally regained the lead, 21-19, on an Andre Wesson triple at the 10:27 mark.

Kaleb Wesson went to the bench with 5:44 left in the half because of an off-the-ball foul, his second personal. The Buckeyes trailed 27-25 at the time.

Wesson returned with 2:52 left in the half and the Buckeyes down 37-28. He went to the bench 37 seconds later with no scoring change.

Woods and Houston's DeJon Jarreau were issued a technical for a dust-up at the buzzer that had both teams gathering on the floor.

"Heated battles, heated game," Woods said. "Words were exchanged, and me and him got a tech."

The Cougars increased their second-half lead to 49-39 before Jackson hit a two and a three to draw within five at 49-44 with 11:44 remaining. OSU hung around and trailed 52-47, the last time they were within five, before two free throws by Brison Gresham and a fastbreak basket by Armoni Brooks made it 56-47 with 8:31 to go. The Cougars methodically pulled away from there and were up 64-53 with 4:09 left.

OSU went more than eight minutes without a field goal until Kaleb Wesson scored with 3:27 left to make it 64-55. He was fouled on the play but missed the free throw. The Buckeyes twice more had the margin at nine, the last on a Woods shot to make it 68-59 with 1:05 remaining.

Houston freshman guard Nate Hinton applauded the Buckeyes' effort.

"They played one heck of a game and it showed," he said. "They played great and they competed, they got here and every team is good in the NCAA Tournament. We just have to give our hats off to a great program, and their coach is doing a great job."

OSU was 19 of 49 (38.8 percent) from the floor and 8 of 25 (32.0 percent) in the second half.

The Cougars' shot 46.4 percent (26 of 56) and were at 26.3 percent (5 of 19) on triples, including just 1 of 8 (12.5 percent) in the second half.

Ohio State 62, Iowa State 59

March 22, 2019
BOK Center • Tulsa, Okla.

	1	2		F
Ohio State (20-14)	**26**	**36**	**–**	**62**
Iowa State (23-12)	**24**	**35**	**–**	**59**

Ohio State	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
A. Wesson	39	1-7	3-4	3-2	3	2	5
K. Wesson	31	8-15	5-6	5-7	2	3	21
Jallow	29	5-5	0-0	2-4	2	2	11
Jackson	31	1-8	0-0	0-6	3	1	2
Woods	40	7-16	2-2	1-3	2	2	19
Muhammad	6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Washington	9	1-5	1-2	0-0	0	0	4
Young	15	0-2	0-0	1-2	0	2	0
Totals	**200**	**23-58**	**11-14**	**12-26**	**12**	**12**	**62**

Percentages: FG: 39.7%. **FT:** 78.6%. **3-point goals:** 5-20 (A. Wesson 0-3, K. Wesson 0-2, Jallow 1-1, Jackson 0-5, Woods 3-6, Washington 1-3). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (A. Wesson, Jallow). **Turnovers:** 11 (Jallow 3, A. Wesson 2, Muhammad 2, K. Wesson, Washington, Young, TEAM). **Steals:** 7 (Jallow 3, K. Wesson 2, A. Wesson, Woods).

Iowa State	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Jacobson	17	0-3	0-0	1-4	1	1	0
Weiler-Babb	38	1-8	2-2	2-4	4	4	4
Shayok	40	9-17	2-3	0-5	1	2	23
Horton-Tucker	15	1-6	0-0	0-1	0	2	2
Haliburton	38	2-4	0-0	0-2	1	2	4
Lard	19	6-7	0-0	2-4	1	3	12
Conditt	4	0-0	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Wigginton	29	4-8	3-5	1-2	1	1	14
Totals	**200**	**23-53**	**7-10**	**6-25**	**9**	**15**	**59**

Percentages: FG: 43.4%. **FT:** 70.0%. **3-point goals:** 6-22 (Weiler-Babb 0-3, Shayok 3-9, Horton-Tucker 0-3, Haliburton 0-2, Wigginton 3-5). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Lard, Conditt). **Turnovers:** 12 (Wigginton 4, Shayok 3, Horton-Tucker 2, Haliburton, Lard, TEAM). **Steals:** 9 (Shayok 3, Jacobson 2, Haliburton 2, Weiler-Babb, Wigginton). **Officials:** Dixon, Brill, Ayers. **A:** 12,443.

Houston 74, Ohio State 59

March 24, 2019
BOK Center • Tulsa, Okla.

	1	2		F
Ohio State (20-15)	**31**	**28**	**–**	**59**
Houston (33-3)	**39**	**35**	**–**	**74**

Ohio State	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
A. Wesson	38	2-4	0-0	0-5	2	4	5
K. Wesson	29	3-7	7-10	1-5	2	3	15
Jallow	18	2-3	1-2	1-5	0	2	6
Jackson	37	7-15	0-0	1-0	3	1	18
Woods	36	4-11	1-2	1-2	4	4	10
Muhammad	17	1-5	0-0	0-4	1	4	3
Washington	12	0-3	2-2	1-2	0	2	2
Ahrens	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Lane	0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Young	12	0-0	0-0	1-0	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**19-49**	**11-16**	**6-25**	**12**	**20**	**59**

Percentages: FG: 38.8%. **FT:** 68.8%. **3-point goals:** 10-29 (A. Wesson 1-2, K. Wesson 2-6, Jallow 1-2, Jackson 4-11, Woods 1-5, Muhammad 1-2, Lane 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** None. **Turnovers:** 14 (K. Wesson 5, Jallow 4, A. Wesson 2, Woods 2, Jackson). **Steals:** 4 (A. Wesson 2, K. Wesson, Washington).

Houston	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Brady	16	1-4	1-3	2-1	0	3	3
White	30	4-8	3-6	3-2	0	3	11
Brooks	34	4-11	0-0	0-6	0	0	10
Davis	38	6-15	6-6	0-6	2	1	21
Robinson	35	6-9	1-2	0-3	5	3	13
Harris	9	1-1	0-0	1-1	0	1	2
Hinton	11	0-1	3-4	0-4	1	0	3
Jarreau	7	1-3	0-0	0-2	2	4	2
Alley	5	0-1	0-0	0-1	0	0	0
Gresham	15	3--3	3-4	1-2	0	5	9
Totals	**200**	**26-56**	**17-25**	**9-28**	**10**	**20**	**74**

Percentages: FG: 46.4%. **FT:** 68.0%. **3-point goals:** 5-19 (Brooks 2-7, Davis 3-9, Hinton 0-1, Jarreau 0-1, Alley 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Harris, Hinton). **Turnovers:** 6 (Davis 2, White, Robinson, Jarreau, Gresham). **Steals:** 12 (Robinson 6, Davis 3, White 2, Brooks).
Officials: Henderson, Reed, Pollard. **A:** 12,606.

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Buckeyes Have Strong Foundation For Future

After the Ohio State women's basketball team walked off the floor March 20 at Value City Arena following its 71-61 loss to Morehead State in the first round of the Women's National Invitation Tournament, head coach Kevin McGuff had a familiar feeling.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE
Garrett Stepien

For the third straight time, the Buckeyes unraveled after leading late in the second half and fell by 10 points. OSU followed its previous two defeats – 66-56 against Rutgers to end the regular season March 3 and 73-63 against Wisconsin in the Big Ten tournament March 7 – with another dud at the hands of an Ohio Valley Conference opponent.

"It's unfortunate because we made so much progress," McGuff said March 20 when asked by BSB about Ohio State's three-game skid, which followed a season-long four-game winning streak in February. "I'm proud of where we were and where we got to – it's just unfortunate. It's going to hurt because it just wasn't reflective of the growth we made, but it is what it is. Hey, I can't change that.

"But right now, or at some point … we'll look back and be proud of the growth. We're kind of laying the foundation for another run for our program. It's just tough to see that right now with three straight losses at the end."

Although the Buckeyes, who had lost their top six players in terms of production from the 2017-18 Big Ten championship team, dipped below the .500 mark to end the 2018-19 campaign at 14-15 overall, McGuff tried to keep a big-picture approach.

"It was tough from a standpoint of we've become accustomed to competing for Big Ten championships and being extremely relevant nationally," he said. "But as coach, the goal was always to help the young women in your program reach their potential – and I think we did that. We didn't finish with that, necessarily playing like that, but I think we did that. And I just appreciate the process that we had in place that kind of allowed us to improve, and I think I got better as a coach.

"I had to do a lot of different things this year than I have in the past, and I probably got a little bit complacent in how we were playing on offense because we were scoring a lot but maybe not in as efficient a manner as we wanted. I think we're going to look back at this year and, like I said, I think I'll be better for it, I think our program will be better for it and we'll have better things in the future because of this year."

Fifth-year senior forward Makayla Waterman went from secondary rotational option off the bench for the past few years to a top scorer at times and exceptional leader. In a transitional season, she saw the team grow up before her own eyes.

"I would say, I guess, this program as a whole – we've been very successful over my five years," Waterman said. "We were a lot more successful this year than I think a lot of people thought we were going to be, and I think that being a part of teams that have been so much fun to be on because we're winning all those games is a cool thing.

"I was talking to my friend the other day. Everybody doesn't get to go to the NCAA tournament, and that didn't even occur to me until this year because we were going every year, no matter what. So I just think the memories that I was able to make on such a talented roster – not many people get that opportunity."

With the 2019 recruiting class signed, sealed and delivered, Ohio State's coaching staff is setting the foundation for the 2020 and 2021 cycles. The Buckeyes already have a pair of Westerville (Ohio) South 2020 commitments in the three-star duo of guard Anyssa Jones (5-9) and forward Gabby Hutcherson (6-2).

"In women's basketball, right now, we're in a contact period," McGuff said. "So we can actually be out doing home visits, and we have kind of been scheduling around (the WNIT) and were hoping that it would be disruptive for a while. So we'll kind of turn our focus to that for the next few weeks and make sure (recruiting is solid) because we've got a great 2019 class, we're on our way with the '20s and in good shape, and hopefully in these next couple of weeks we can even take another step with that and just kind of put ourselves in position to get the right young women in this program.

"But that's what the next couple of weeks will be. We're going to focus on that, and we'll give our players a little bit of time and get them back together and move forward with the program in terms of offseason stuff for them."

Waterman Was Leader Buckeyes Needed

Before she decided to go through with her fifth and final year of eligibility, Waterman nearly gave up the game. After four seasons spent battling injuries – an ACL tear, a sprained ankle and a scary neck strain – Waterman ultimately decided to give basketball one more go-around, and she came away glad she did.

"This season was definitely an interesting one for me," Waterman said, "fighting through injury the whole season, trying to figure out a way to get it done. It was kind of the first year I had to play big minutes for the team, and I don't mind doing that, I enjoy doing that. I just learned a lot about myself and how I can be as a leader, which I think will help me with my coaching. That's kind of what I'm taking away from this year. Win or lose, I just learned a lot through Coach McGuff and my teammates and just about myself."

Waterman fought through a knee injury, which kept her out for several contests late in the season before she returned for Ohio State's stretch run as the calendar flipped from February to March. "Holding on by a thread" after the Buckeyes' campaign-ending loss to the Eagles, Waterman was bittersweet about her playing career coming to a close as she transitions to the next chapter on the sidelines.

"Hopefully, I'm going to start coaching," Waterman said. "I've got to finish my master's degree and then find a job, hopefully. After this (spring) semester, I have two more semesters. So hopefully by this time next year (coaching will start)."

McGuff summed up Waterman's value to the team's success – from the locker room to the hardwood – over the past five months. At a pivotal time for the program, he noticed the job she did as the glue that kept OSU together.

"This was a fantastic year for Kay Kay," McGuff said. "She really put her imprint on the program with her leadership this season and did a really great job with so many new faces. She really was instrumental in us making the progress that we made, and I think it was a wonderful year for her. She wants to have a career in coaching, and I think this is the best thing that could have happened to her, in terms of growth and learning and stepping up and really understanding what it takes to have a new team and how to lead and everything. So I'm happy for her. I'm grateful that she was so good and embraced that so well this year."

Waterman finished her final campaign averaging 7.6 points and 5.3 rebounds, second best on the team.

Freshmen Make 'Significant Progress'

In the fall, McGuff mentioned multiple times that he had wanted the freshman trio of Janai Crooms, Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty to make an immediate impact.

After the season, his reflection was honest on how the first-year Buckeyes not only adapted to the next level but also upped Ohio State's competitiveness by the time Big Ten play began.

Juhasz emerged as OSU's leading scorer en route to earning All-Big Ten second-team and freshman-team honors, while Crooms became a two-way threat and Patty provided physicality in the post.

"They all had good years, and they all made significant progress and gained valuable experience, and that's what I told them," McGuff said. "It's like, 'Hey, we made a lot of progress.' The freshmen are fortunate enough they get to move forward and have more opportunities, but they've just got to learn from this. You can't make the same mistake twice. You've got to learn about focus and intensity and showing up and playing each possession like it matters this time of year."

Waterman echoed those sentiments.

"I think our younger kids grew a lot this year," Waterman said. "They had to all play big minutes, which you don't see freshmen doing around the country in top-tier programs. I think that's going to help them a lot next year. We're definitely moving in a positive direction.

"You can see it in their numbers, and I can just see it in their maturity. They had to play big minutes for us and contribute a lot for us, and I think that alone just matured them. I can say that they're only getting better and, come next

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Freshman Forward
Pecs, Hungary

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year, they'll be even better than what they are now. So I'm excited to see what they do."

Juhasz finished her freshman campaign averaging 11.7 points a game and 9.0 rebounds. Crooms tallied 8.8 points and 3.5 rebounds and was second on the team with 64 assists. Patty, playing primarily off the bench, averaged 6.2 points and 3.8 rebounds.

Future Buckeye Competes At All-America Game

Before she takes her talents from Canton, Ohio, to Columbus, McKinley guard Kierstan Bell took the floor for the first of two all-star games March 27 when she participated in the 2019 McDonald's All-American Game.

Bell (6-1) is slated to join fellow Ohio State signee and Middle Village (N.Y.) Christ the King five-star wing Kaelynn Satterfield (6-0) in the 2019 Jordan Brand Classic April 20 before enrolling in the summer.

In the McDonald's All-American Game, where the East beat the West, 83-68, Bell posted five points on 2-of-8 shooting (1 of 4 from three-point range) for the West in 15 minutes.

"The next step – we have the Jordan Classic I got invited to, so I'm just blessed for the opportunity to show them what I can do," Bell told Joseph Fenelon of nyghoopsreport.com. "But college, the next four years, I've got to show out and put on for the city. It's show time. We've got to win some national championships out here."

Bell becomes a Buckeye in a 2019 recruiting class ranked fourth nationally by espnW's HoopGurlz team standings. OSU welcomes Bell with Satterfield, Indianapolis North Central five-star guard Rikki Harris (5-11), Dublin (Ohio) Coffman five-star guard Jacy Sheldon (5-7) and Pamplona, Spain, three-star forward Aixa Wone (6-2).

"She had an unbelievable season," McGuff told BSB of Bell, who led McKinley to a 25-2 record while averaging 27.0 points per game and winning Ms. Ohio Basketball for the third straight year. "It's amazing that Kierstan's coming here as the only three-time Ms. Basketball in the history of this great state, and the only other person to (win three times) was LeBron James, so a special recognition for her and she's a part of a special recruiting class that we think is going to be able to do great things here."

Plank's Lady Buck Of The Month

Despite three defeats, Ohio State received strong performances from Juhasz. For those efforts, the rising sophomore received one more honor as Plank's Lady Buckeye of the Month for her play in March.

Juhasz bounced back from an off performance against Rutgers, where she managed just six points and one rebound in the Buckeyes' loss to the Scarlet Knights, with consecutive double-double outings.

She put an exclamation mark on a breakout freshman campaign with her 11th and 12th game of at least 10 points and 10 rebounds. Juhasz went for 10 points and 16 rebounds against Wisconsin before posting 15 points and 10 rebounds vs. Morehead State.

2018-19 Ohio State Women's Basketball Statistics

14-15 Overall (10-8 Big Ten)
Final season statistics

Player	G-GS	Min.-Avg.	FG-FGA	Pct.	3P-3PA	Pct.	FT-FTA	Pct.	Rebounds O-D	Rebounds T-Avg.	PF-FO	A	TO	BS	ST	Pts.-Avg.
Dorka Juhasz	27-25	757-28.0	119-260	.458	18-71	.254	61-97	.629	65-177	242-9.0	48-0	22	61	18	33	317-11.7
Carly Santoro	29-29	918-31.7	104-262	.397	42-127	.331	78-126	.619	38-75	113-3.9	51-0	34	60	3	29	328-11.3
Janai Crooms	29-19	764-26.3	98-204	.480	20-43	.465	38-80	.475	9-92	101-3.5	62-2	64	93	16	31	254-8.8
Carmen Grande	29-29	1,007-34.7	75-243	.309	30-93	.323	62-75	.827	20-89	109-3.8	70-0	144	88	2	42	242-8.3
M. Waterman	27-24	816-30.2	69-187	.369	10-36	.278	57-78	.731	52-90	142-5.3	93-4	46	60	40	31	205-7.6
Aaliyah Patty	29-9	564-19.4	75-162	.463	6-32	.188	24-36	.667	24-87	111-3.8	88-5	9	51	25	19	180-6.2
Adreana Miller	29-9	475-16.4	47-130	.362	33-76	.434	22-33	.667	18-29	47-1.6	64-2	9	21	4	8	149-5.1
Jensen Caretti	23-0	216-9.4	23-65	.354	7-29	.241	12-16	.750	4-29	33-1.4	4-0	12	17	6	7	65-2.8
N. Queenland	23-1	306-13.3	22-56	.393	7-20	.350	10-15	.667	13-29	42-1.8	35-0	17	26	1	12	61-2.7
Savitha Jayaraman	3-0	3-1.0	0-2	.000	0-1	.000	0-0	.000	0-0	0-0.0	0-0	0	0	0	0	0-0.0
TEAM									44-58	102-3.5			7			
Ohio State	**29**	**5,826**	**632-1,571**	**.402**	**173-528**	**.328**	**364-556**	**.655**	**287-755**	**1,042-35.9**	**515-13**	**357**	**484**	**115**	**212**	**1,801-62.1**
Opponents	**29**	**5,825**	**661-1,683**	**.393**	**174-556**	**.313**	**393-535**	**.735**	**326-737**	**1,063-36.7**	**547-5**	**373**	**424**	**77**	**194**	**1,889-65.1**

OSU Women's Basketball Signees & Verbal Commits

Players in the class of 2019 who have signed letters of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings via ESPN.com.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School/Hometown
Kierstan Bell	G	6-1	★★★★★	Canton (Ohio) McKinley
Rikki Harris	G	5-11	★★★★★	Indianapolis North Central
Kaelynn Satterfield	W	6-0	★★★★★	Middle Village (N.Y.) Christ The King
Jacy Sheldon	G	5-7	★★★★★	Dublin (Ohio) Coffman
Aixa Wone	F	6-2	★★★	Pamplona, Spain

Players in the class of 2020 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings via ESPN.com.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Gabby Hutcherson	F	6-2	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South
Anyssa Jones	G	5-9	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South

Morehead State Eliminates Buckeyes In WNIT

By GARRETT STEPIEN
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's basketball team made the postseason, but the Buckeyes couldn't take advantage of the opportunity. Head coach Kevin McGuff's team fell to Morehead State, 71-61, on March 20 in the first round of the WNIT in front of 1,114 at Value City Arena in Columbus.

The loss ended OSU's 2018-19 season with three straight losses, and the team dipped below the .500 mark at 14-15 overall. Morehead State (24-10) extended its campaign, but the Eagles fell to Western Kentucky, 68-65, on March 24 in the second round of the invitational.

"From a concentration, focus and will-to-fight (standpoint), we just didn't have the same edge that we had in January and most of February," McGuff said when asked by BSB about the team's second-half collapses against Rutgers (66-56, March 3), Wisconsin (73-63, March 7) and Morehead State. "That's the hard part because we had made so much progress and then kind of regressed there at the end."

Ohio State received another double-double performance from freshman forward Dorka Juhasz, who paced the team with 15 points and 10 rebounds. Freshman guard Janai Crooms contributed 13 points and six assists, while graduate guard Adreana Miller added 11 points.

Juhasz left the game late in the fourth quarter and did not return after she appeared to fall awkwardly on her right ankle. She got off the floor with the help of team trainers before she walked to the locker room under her own power.

"I think she's fine," McGuff said. "She kind of rolled up on her ankle."

The Buckeyes battled back from a 10-4 deficit at the 5:24 mark of the opening period with a 13-1 run to end the first quarter. Carly Santoro's layup with 29 seconds left put OSU up 17-11 at the end of the frame.

The Eagles took back the lead, 20-19, with 6:30 to play in the half and led, 23-22, as late as the 4:29 point before Ohio State ended on another surge. The Buckeyes ripped off a 9-2 run, culminated by Juhasz's layup with two seconds left to beat the buzzer and allow the Buckeyes to take a 31-25 lead into halftime.

The Buckeyes' advantage grew to 38-27 at the 7:25 point in the third, but Morehead State clawed back and ended the quarter on a 21-7 run. OSU lost its lead with 2:18 left in the period on the first of Aaliyah Jeune's consecutive three-pointers, making it 42-41. The Buckeyes came back to tie, 45-45, after a 4-0 spurt featuring two Miller free throws and a Juhasz layup. But Jeune drilled another triple with 42 seconds remaining to give the Eagles a 48-45 lead heading into the fourth quarter.

The contest's last 10 minutes featured offensive momentum for Morehead State and fading hopes for Ohio State. After the Buckeyes scored the first bucket of the fourth quarter on Carmen Grande's layup 19 seconds in, the Eagles surged ahead. Morehead State's lead ballooned to 59-49 with 5:35 left, its largest of the game and equal to the 71-61 margin at the final horn.

"It was definitely a tough game to go out to," said fifth-year senior forward Makayla Waterman, who had a pair of points and rebounds off the bench. "If we did well and we gave it our all, we'd be happy. But I think that was a pretty bad game for us."

Jeune (game-high 20), Darianne Seward (17), McKenzie Calvert (15) and Miranda Crockett (10) notched double figures for Morehead State. The quartet combined for 62 of the team's 71 points.

The Buckeyes did not help their cause with a 12-of-20 game from the stripe (60.0 percent) and 17 turnovers, with Crooms being tagged with eight. Morehead State held a 44-34 edge on the boards.

SONNY BROCKWAY

ONE LAST GAME – Ohio State forward Makayla Waterman played her final collegiate contest against Morehead State.

Morehead St. 71, Ohio St. 61

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	1	2	3	4	F
MSU (24-10)	**11**	**14**	**23**	**23**	**71**
OSU (14-15)	**17**	**14**	**14**	**16**	**61**

Morehead St.	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Calvert	30	6-14	1-2	1-5	4	3	15
McGowan	32	3-3	0-0	0-3	0	4	6
Seward	33	6-15	5-6	2-3	5	2	17
Crockett	36	5-16	0-0	4-4	3	3	10
Simmons-Cozar	34	1-3	0-0	3-2	1	2	3
Jeune	22	6-13	2-4	1-8	2	3	20
Avery	8	0-2	0-0	0-1	0	1	0
Jackson	3	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Johnson	2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**27-66**	**8-12**	**14-30**	**15**	**18**	**71**

Percentages: FG: 40.9%. **FT:** 66.7%. **3-point goals:** 9-25 (Calvert 2-6, Seward 0-4, Simmons-Cozar 1-3, Jeune 6-11, Avery 0-1). **Team rebounds:** 7. **Blocked shots:** None. **Turnovers:** 14 (Calvert 3, Seward 3, Simmons-Cozar 3, Jeune 2, Crockett 2, McGowan). **Steals:** 6 (Calvert 2, McGowan 2, Seward, Simmons-Cozar).

Ohio State	Min.	Total FG M-A	FT M-A	Reb. O-D	A	PF	Pts.
Juhasz	24	6-10	3-6	4-6	0	0	15
Patty	13	1-3	0-0	0-2	1	1	2
Grande	35	2-5	2-2	1-4	4	4	6
Crooms	32	5-10	2-2	0-4	6	0	13
Santoro	30	2-8	1-4	1-2	0	1	6
Waterman	19	1-4	0-0	0-2	1	3	2
Miller	26	3-7	3-4	0-2	0	4	11
Caretti	10	1-3	0-0	0-2	0	0	2
Queenland	10	1-4	1-2	0-2	0	2	4
Jayaraman	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Totals	**200**	**22-54**	**12-20**	**7-27**	**12**	**15**	**61**

Percentages: FG: 40.7%. **FT:** 60.0%. **3-point goals:** 5-18 (Juhasz 0-1, Patty 0-1, Grande 0-2, Crooms 1-3, Santoro 1-4, Miller 2-4, Caretti 0-2, Queenland 1-1). **Team rebounds:** 2. **Blocked shots:** 2 (Crooms, Waterman). **Turnovers:** 17 (Crooms 8, Patty 3, Caretti 3, Juhasz, Grande, Santoro). **Steals:** 5 (Miller 2, Grande, Santoro, Queenland).
Officials: Enlund, Morris, Maxey. **A:** 1,114.

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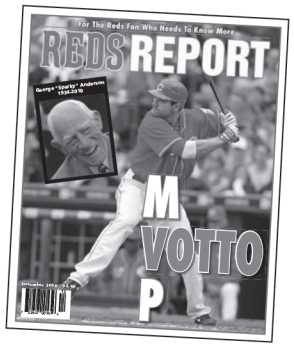

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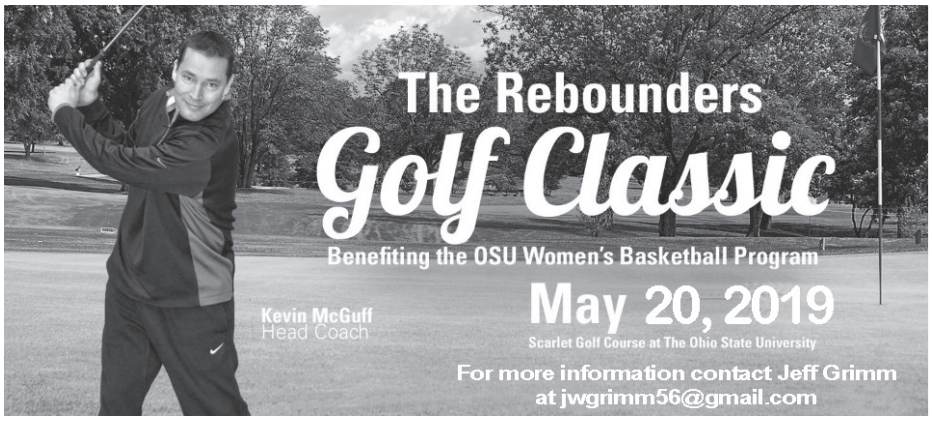

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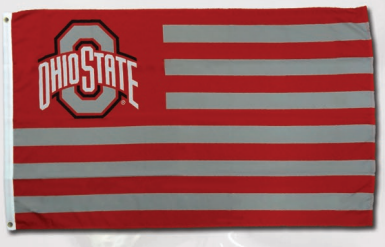

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Nebraska Fires Hoops Coach Miles, Hires Hoiberg

Nebraska hired Fred Hoiberg as its men's basketball coach, the program announced March 30. Hoiberg, the former head coach of the Chicago Bulls and Iowa State, takes over for Tim Miles, who was fired earlier in the week after seven seasons as the Cornhuskers' head coach.

BIG TEN NOTES
Joe Dempsey

Hoiberg agreed to a seven-year deal worth $25 million.

"First, I want to thank (Nebraska athletic director) Bill Moos, Chancellor (Ronnie) Green and President (Hank) Bounds for the opportunity to lead the Nebraska men's basketball program," Hoiberg said. "I can't express how excited I am to be back on the sidelines and to be coaching at a university that means a lot to my family and me.

"Lincoln is a special place for our family. I was born in Lincoln, my grandfather Jerry Bush was the head coach at Nebraska, my other grandfather was a longtime professor there, and my parents are proud graduates of the University of Nebraska. Nebraska has always felt like a second home."

Hoiberg rose to national prominence in the coaching scene for what he was able to accomplish at Iowa State – his alma mater. In his five seasons at the helm, from 2010-15, Hoiberg led the Cyclones to four NCAA Tournament appearances and one Sweet 16.

Landing Hoiberg represents a big win for Nebraska basketball, especially after Moos received criticism for his handling of Miles' final days.

Moos believes the Cornhuskers can become contenders on the court, calling for three NCAA Tournament berths within the next five years before the hiring.

"We've got to get it up and going and running and the talent pool, the roster looking fine," Moos said. "But we had eight in the Big Ten in the tournament this year. The Big Ten was tough, and seven of them won their first games. Why can't we be one of those?"

With growing expectations, which Moos thinks are reasonable, Nebraska is invested in Hoiberg, with the expectation that he will turn around the program.

"We are excited to welcome Fred, his wife, Carol, and their family to Nebraska," Moos said. "He will be an outstanding representative of the university and a great leader for our men's basketball program.

"When you look at him, you see an individual who has had success as a player and a coach. Fred's background will sell itself on the recruiting trail, and help us bring in the type of student-athletes needed to compete at the highest level. His style of play not only will be appealing to prospective recruits but will also provide our great fans an entertaining brand of basketball."

Following his five-year stint at Iowa State, Hoiberg became head coach of the Chicago Bulls in 2015. The former Cyclone lasted just more than three years, where he posted a 115-155 record. After a 5-19 start to the season, Hoiberg was fired in December. Hoiberg had a 10-year NBA career, playing for the Indiana Pacers, Chicago Bulls and Minnesota Timberwolves.

He faces the daunting challenge of taking Nebraska to the NCAA Tournament, a place it hasn't been since 1998.

Big Ten Cashes In

The Big Ten earned at least $35.5 million through the NCAA's system for paying conferences based on how their teams perform in the men's basketball tournament.

Earnings are measured in the form of units, which is the term the NCAA uses for the bids and wins that qualify for payment. Since the Big Ten boasted eight teams in the tournament, and those teams won 13 combined games through the Elite Eight, the conference had 21 units.

There is no more money to be earned through the payout system, because it stops once the Final Four is reached.

Each of the 32 conferences at the Division I level are guaranteed at least one unit, then more money is distributed based on at-large bids and wins in the tournament prior to the Final Four.

The NCAA sets a value for units each year and makes annual payments based on results from the previous six tournaments. In 2020, the set value for a unit is $282,100.

Michigan State's thrilling victory against Duke on March 31 not only sent the Spartans to the Final Four but earned unit No. 21 for the Big Ten, surpassing the ACC and setting a conference high.

Long Road To B1G Football

Juwan Mitchell will finally get his opportunity to play Power 5 football following a tumultuous track after high school.

Mitchell used Twitter to make his commitment to Minnesota on March 29.

Minnesota was not the only school trying to bring in Mitchell, who is the No. 1 inside linebacker out of junior college in the 2020 class.

Rutgers had targeted Mitchell, initially for the 2019 class, dating back to when it began recruiting him in October. Rutgers head coach Chris Ash offered Mitchell a scholarship following an official visit in November, and the prospect committed before leaving campus.

The 6-1, 228-pound linebacker stayed committed to the Scarlet Knights until the early signing period. At that time, however, Mitchell faced a tough decision. Rutgers does not accept mathematics credit from community colleges, so he would have had to take an additional course to be admitted, according to NJ.com.

If Mitchell went to Rutgers, he would have had to find a way to get the math credit and pay for it on his own dime. If he returned to Butler (Kan.) Community College, the course expenses would be covered and he could still play during the 2019 season. He decided to stay and play.

"Nothing happened," Mitchell said at the time. "I've just got to do what's best for me."

Continuing his recruitment, Mitchell took a two-day unofficial visit to Minnesota, and came away impressed. His commitment makes him the sixth member of the Golden Gophers' 2020 class, which ranks No. 22 in the country, according to 247Sports.

Mitchell plans to graduate from Butler in December and enroll at Minnesota in January.

Despite the long journey from Middletown (N.J.) Mater Dei Prep to Fort Scott (Kan.) Community College to Butler Community College, to Rutgers to Minnesota, Mitchell will have two years of on-field eligibility left once he officially becomes a Golden Gopher.

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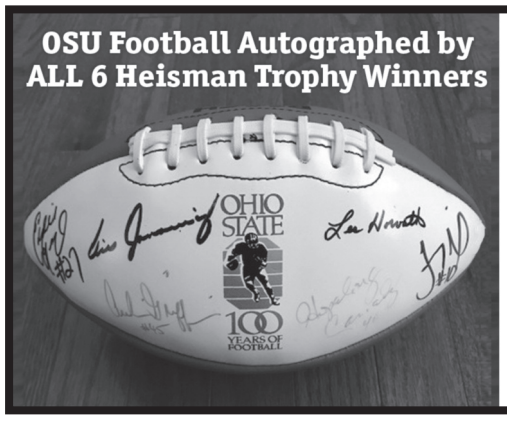

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Rohlik: Ohio State 'Could Have Won Everything'

Ohio State missed a golden opportunity to make history because of a late-season swoon that culminated in a 2-0 loss to Denver in the West Regional semifinal on March 29.

IN THE CREASE
Craig Merz

It was a quiet exit to what was once a promising season with dreams of not only a second straight trip to the Frozen Four, but a legitimate shot at the Buckeyes' first NCAA championship.

"I think I had a team that could have won everything, I really do," coach Steve Rohlik told BSB the day after the season ended. "You've got to get a little lucky, you've got to stay healthy and you've got to stay away from playing a hot goaltender."

That's a hat trick the Buckeyes (20-11-5) did not get. They weren't lucky against the Pioneers. OSU allowed only 13 shots, and the only one for Denver in the third period was an empty-net goal with 58 seconds left. At the other end, Pioneers goalie Filip Larsson was outstanding in making 24 saves, including two breakaways.

Injuries during the season robbed the Buckeyes of their confidence and resulted in a three-seed instead of a possible top regional seed. Add it up and Ohio State went from being No. 2 in the nation in mid-February to a 1-6-1 finish.

"It's so hard to win in college hockey," Rohlik said. "Look at St. Cloud, 30 wins and they're out."

He referenced the other side of the West Regional semifinals in Fargo, N.D., where St. Cloud State (30-6-3), the overall top seed among the 16 teams, was stunned 2-1 by American International College playing its first tournament game ever.

Denver (24-11-5) defeated AIC 3-0 the next day to advance to the Frozen Four in Buffalo, N.Y., on April 11 and 13.

OSU's loss was bitter because so much had been accomplished. The Buckeyes at the beginning of the season were ranked No. 1 for the first time since the 1983-84 season. They were picked to win the Big Ten and did so, running away for a nine-point margin over Notre Dame.

It was the first conference regular-season title since winning the inaugural Central Collegiate Hockey Association crown in 1972.

"I'm just really proud," Rohlik said. "Three years in a row in the NCAA tournament, win the Big Ten title. It's something special for this program that we've got to continue."

The sudden end of it all against Denver was why the eight seniors lingered on the ice at Scheels Arena after the game to hear the OSU band play "Carmen Ohio" one last time.

"It was a little bit of a goodbye, I guess," said senior defenseman Sasha Larocque. "It's tough to accept the best four years of your life are behind you. You're never going to throw this jersey on again and play a real game."

Larocque and fellow seniors Freddy Gerard, Mason Jobst, Dakota Joshua, Brendon Kearney, Tommy Parran, Sean Romeo and John Wiitala were part of 81 wins, three straight 20-win seasons, three NCAA appearances and the first Frozen Four since 1998.

And to think their Ohio State careers started with seven straight losses as freshmen.

"It's not easy to accept that it's over, but at the end of the day everyone's got a future," Larocque said. "There's a reason we went to this school to get good degrees. I'm excited to see where all these guys end up."

Off The Rails

So where did it go wrong?

The Buckeyes went on the road Feb. 8-9 to sweep Wisconsin to run their winning streak to seven. They returned home the following weekend needing six points to clinch the title. Despite losing the first game to Minnesota, other results reduced the magic number to three.

"We didn't play great the first Minnesota night, then after that we might have felt a little squeeze a little bit," Rohlik said.

OSU lost again the next night and again at Michigan on Feb. 22 but finally clinched the following game vs. the Wolverines by earning the point it needed with a tie.

The Buckeyes ended the regular season splitting with visiting Michigan State on March 1 and 2 and didn't play again until being upset 5-1 by Penn State in the conference semifinal on March 17 at Value City Arena.

Rohlik goes back to the second game at Penn State on Jan. 19 as the start of the Buckeyes' spiral. Junior forward Tanner Laczynski injured his shoulder, and he left the lineup to join injured freshman forward Gustaf Westlund.

Laczynski missed the next six games. Westlund was out a total of 11 games during the second half of the season. Joshua was suspended the final four regular-season games, and Larocque missed three games because of injury.

"It's the what ifs, right?" Rohlik said. "Every team goes through some things, but the past eight days (before the Denver game) were the first eight days I got to practice with the entire group.

"It was not being able to have my team for the last two months, not be able to practice every day as a group. If you don't have your full group to practice special teams, maybe you lose a little confidence when it comes time to play the games."

Another factor was the Buckeyes appeared to become complacent after they knew in early February that they were going to win the Big Ten. The rest of the conference was fighting for playoff positioning, and in some cases stating a case for the NCAAs, while Ohio State was sitting pretty.

"Maybe we didn't handle it the right way," Rohlik said.

Looking Ahead

The Buckeyes next season won't be a preseason favorite to win the conference or qualify for the NCAA tournament a record fourth year in a row next season based on who's departing.

"We might be the underdog," Rohlik said. "That's OK. I'm excited about the group."

In addition to losing the seniors, there's a chance Laczynski, a 2016 sixth-round pick in the NHL draft by the Philadelphia Flyers, turns pro. He had 30 points (10 goals, 20 assists) in 26 games.

The cupboard is not bare, though. Sophomore Tommy Nappier, the 2019 Big Ten Goaltender of the Year, will be back as will five regulars on defense. If Laczynski leaves, then Columbus Blue Jackets prospect Carson Meyer (2017, sixth round), a junior, will be looked upon for more production along with juniors Ronnie Hein and Austin Pooley, Westlund, freshman Quinn Preston and others.

"I think we're going to be sneaky good next year," Rohlik said. "We have good guys coming in. You bring a goaltender back. You bring a D corps back. Then up front, we can be deep but maybe not have the high-end names like we've had the past couple of years."

Kudos

In addition to Nappier, the other conference award winners were Larocque (defensive Player of the Year) and Rohlik winning the Coach of the Year honor for the second straight season. … Nappier and Jobst were named first-team All-Big Ten. Larocque was on the second team, and Laczynski was an honorable mention. Westlund was on the all-freshman team, and Kearney received the Big Ten Sportsmanship Award for Ohio State.

Welcome Back

Tanner Fritz, a Buckeye from 2011-15, played in Columbus for the first time as a member of the New York Islanders on Feb. 26 vs. the Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. Former OSU teammate Ryan Dzingel plays for Columbus.

Fritz said he keenly follows the Buckeyes and is thrilled that they've made the NCAA tournament a habit.

"I'm jealous of those guys," he said. "I never got to experience that in my four years. To see the program going in that direction is awesome. I'm a super fan of the team. I always keep an eye on them.

"Rohlik and the staff have done another great job in bringing in some really good prospects. It's good to see."

Fritz got married last summer – he met Brandy as a freshman at Ohio State – and they are expecting their first child in June. He spent part of the day before facing the Blue Jackets scouting areas in Columbus to live in the offseason.

Fritz had 9:45 of time against the Blue Jackets and had a minus-1 rating.

Icer Of The Month

Jobst, from Speedway, Ind., is the Varsity Club Icer of the Month not as much for March as for a lifetime achievement award.

He led the team in goals (17) and points (36) this season and ended his career 12th in Ohio State history with 164 points (69 goals, 95 assists) in 150 games, the most for a Buckeye since Andy Forcey also finished with 164 in 1989. He had 28 power-play goals and five shorthanded along with a plus-29 rating.

For a complete recap of Ohio State's game vs. Denver, go to BSB's BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Martin Comes Up Short, OSU Takes 2nd At Nationals

The Ohio State wrestling team outscored every school in the nation besides Penn State, finishing as national runner-up at the NCAA championships in Pittsburgh on March 21-23.

ON THE MAT
Joe Dempsey

Penn State convincingly won its eighth NCAA wrestling team title in the past nine years, sending five wrestlers to the championship round and winning three individual titles.

Although the Nittany Lions are the best in the sport, the Buckeyes are not far behind, improving to the point of becoming a recognized national powerhouse. The Ohio State wrestling team expects to be among the top in the country annually. Since winning its first NCAA championship in 2015, Ohio State finished third the following year and came in second place to conclude each of the past three seasons.

Penn State scored 137.5 points as a team, while the Scarlet and Gray tallied 96.5. Traditional wrestling powerhouses Oklahoma State (84.0) and Iowa (76.0) followed, and Michigan (62.5) rounded out the top five, giving the Big Ten four of the country's top five programs.

After graduating a trio of four-time All-Americans just a year ago, many expected the Buckeyes to be in rebuilding mode. However, they restocked the shelves quickly and came away from the NCAA tournament with five All-Americans and three NCAA finalists.

Seniors Joey McKenna and Micah Jordan and junior Kollin Moore each advanced to the national finals but came up short. Junior Luke Pletcher placed fourth at the tournament for the second year in a row to earn his second All-American honor. Senior Myles Martin placed third, becoming just the seventh four-time All-American in program history. Martin joined the elite club featuring the following former Buckeyes: Tommy Rowlands (2001-04), Lance Palmer (2007-10), Logan Stieber (2012-15), Bo Jordan (2015-18), Kyle Snyder (2015-18) and Nathan Tomasello (2015-18).

Martin, who entered the tourney as Ohio State's lone No. 1 seed, suffered perhaps the biggest upset of the championships, dropping a 5-4 decision to Cornell's 184-pounder Max Dean. Although Dean was a respectable No. 5 seed, Martin, who was undefeated, had already beaten Dean twice during the season: a convincing 17-7 major decision at the Cliff-Keen Invitational and a 13-6 decision in a dual meet at Cornell.

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan was interviewed following the semifinal matches, and while he lauded the efforts of Jordan, McKenna and Moore, he was visibly upset.

"My mind keeps going to the wayward son, the one that just strayed away and is just in so much pain," Ryan said of Martin. "That's where my mind is right now, unfortunately. Myles – to lose the way he lost last year in the finals and to be such a great leader at Ohio State, a great example to so many people there. To lose like that – that's the one that my mind's most focused on right now.

"You've got to trust God's plan. It's hard to see his plan, and how one of the most dominant wrestlers I've coached and I've seen could lose a match like that."

Martin's dominance is undeniable, having never finished outside of the top five at nationals, winning an individual title as a freshman and concluding his collegiate career with a 121-19 record.

After the crushing defeat to Dean, Martin bounced back the next day in the consolation rounds. Despite losing the chance at reaching his ultimate goal for his senior season, the Penns Grove, N.J., native showed what kind of person he is in the wrestlebacks.

Martin faced another familiar opponent, No. 4 Emery Parker of Illinois, whom he had also beaten twice earlier in the season. Trailing by a single point entering the third period, Martin flipped the switch with a quick escape to tie the match at 1-1. A pair of takedowns in the final frame led to a 5-2 decision.

After beating Parker, Martin found himself in a rematch with No. 8 Ryan Preisch of Lehigh, whom he had defeated with an 11-2 major decision in the quarterfinals. A third-period takedown sealed a 5-3 decision for Martin and locked up third place. Despite being unable to attain his goal of winning another national title, Martin found motivation elsewhere.

"I think it's just wrestling for something greater than myself," Martin said. "Just representing Ohio State, being a Christian, it just makes me feel like it makes it a little bit easier to get motivated for my matches just because I know I'm doing it for more than just me."

Martin was devastated by the defeat, but while he had higher aspirations than what he attained, he maintained some perspective on what he was able to accomplish at Ohio State.

"When I came to Ohio State I just wanted to make an impact on the program, and I think I did pretty well the last couple of years," Martin said. "Obviously there are some goals I wish I could have gotten."

Runners-Up

In the wake of Martin's upset loss to Dean, Moore found himself pitted against No. 3 Preston Weigel of Oklahoma State in the semifinals at 197 pounds.

Moore, who was the No. 2 seed, took care of business against Weigel, winning via major decision, 12-4. Ryan was asked if it was as if Moore was wrestling for his teammate Martin, too.

"I think that there was a look in Kollin's eye that we needed to see in the semifinals," Ryan said. "He fell short as a freshman in the semis in a match that was winnable. I think it was the quarters last year, he fell short. I think seeing that – it galvanized him a bit. It galvanized his thoughts and how hard it is – how hard this is – that there is no guarantee. There is no guarantee in any of this. So I definitely think it had an impact on Kollin. He wrestled extremely well today."

After knocking off Weigel, Moore fell in the national finals to No. 1 Bo Nickal of Penn State, 5-1. Nickal will leave Penn State with three individual titles and one runner-up performance, which came as a freshman when he lost to Martin.

Jordan, who was brilliant as a senior, also came up short of his ultimate goal in Pittsburgh. In a 29-3 season, he posted eight major decisions and six tech falls while also leading the team with seven pins.

Jordan defeated No. 6 Austin O'Connor of North Carolina, 4-2, in the semifinals at 149 pounds, putting him one win away from winning his first individual title.

"It was pretty close going throughout the whole match," Jordan said. "I tried to keep a high pace, and he was strong, and I just wanted to get to my attack."

Following the victory, Jordan faced No. 1 Anthony Ashnault of Rutgers, who was the only wrestler to defeat him during the season. Ashnault prevailed once again, with a 9-4 decision.

Jordan took an early 1-0 lead, but Ashnault used a takedown to take a 2-1 edge into the third frame. Ashnault added an early escape point, giving him a 3-1 advantage. Jordan had a takedown to make it 3-3, but when he attacked, Ashnault countered and put him in a cradle.

"That's what pretty much sealed the deal for him," Jordan said. "I was going for my offense, that's where I'm good at. I got a takedown on him and then I was going for another one, and then he locked up the cradle on me."

McKenna defeated No. 3 Nick Lee of Penn State, 4-3, in the semifinals at 141 pounds, garnering praise from Ryan following the match.

"I couldn't be happier for Joe," Ryan said of McKenna. "Joey seeks perfection. He seeks perfection. In every single thing he does he seeks perfection. He's a 4.0 student, he seeks perfection in practice, and when you seek perfection and you put everything on the line, there is some fear that you won't attain the things that you really want. And it's good to see Joe, and others here, take the fear and put it over here for a while and go in and compete and just wrestle."

Unfortunately for McKenna and the Buckeyes, a questionable call altered his fate in the national finals against No. 1 Yianni Diakomihalis of Cornell. McKenna scored first with a takedown and then they later exchanged escape points, giving McKenna a 3-1 advantage at the start of the third period.

In the last seconds of the final frame, Diakomihalis ended a wild scramble by taking down McKenna, tying the match at 4-4 at the end of regulation.

Ohio State threw the challenge brick, arguing that Diakomihalis did not have control, but the call was upheld after review. McKenna lost, 6-4, in overtime.

"I didn't think it was two," McKenna said. "I was fighting the whole time, he never had a leg in, never had dominant control. We challenged it, the refs saw two, I got the escape anyway (and) had a chance to take him down in overtime.

"A frustrating finish there. I was in on his legs, he didn't have any offensive scores on me, everything was re-attacks and the same thing in the dual. There's a lot of frustration going through my mind. I had one chance to get it done and didn't get it done."

While a devastated McKenna, who concluded his career with a 103-11 record, took responsibility for the loss despite the questionable call, Ryan pleaded for change.

"I've looked at the position, I've froze it 100 different ways. There's no way it's two," Ryan said. "There's no way it's two. What we need to do as a sport – we need to go to – the reviewer needs to be off site, no sound of what's happening in here. Off site. The reviewer needs to be the most intelligent rule mind we have in the sport because there's too many calls that just aren't right."

OSU Starting Shortstop West Out For Season

Ohio State junior shortstop Noah West will miss the remainder of the season with a knee injury. The Westerville (Ohio) Central product was a late scratch from the Buckeyes' lineup against Northern Kentucky on March 19.

FROM THE STRETCH
Joe Dempsey

"He is going to have surgery next week, and we've got to adjust our infield defense accordingly," head coach Greg Beals said on March 21.

Beals added that West's injury caused the coach to move freshman third baseman Zach Dezenzo over to shortstop. Dezenzo had been enjoying a solid start to his season at the hot corner, but moving him to shortstop opened up opportunities for others at third.

A pair of freshman infielders – Marcus Ernst and Nick Erwin – have received additional playing time since the injury to West.

Ernst, a native of Dublin, Ohio, is hitting .273 (12 of 44) with six runs scored and three RBI. Erwin, a Grove City, Ohio, native, is hitting .208 (5 of 24) with five runs scored and three RBI. While Ernst has hit for more contact, his on-base percentage of .319 is slightly behind Erwin at .321.

As his fellow freshmen try to figure it out at the plate, Dezenzo continues to enjoy a hot start to his collegiate career.

The versatile infielder from Alliance, Ohio, is hitting .258 (24 of 93) with nine runs scored and a .303 on-base percentage. Those numbers are not particularly special, but Dezenzo has made his presence felt by providing power to the Ohio State lineup.

Dezenzo ranks third on the team in home runs (five), RBI (19) and total bases (45). His .484 slugging percentage is good for fourth on the team.

West was hitting .284 with 13 runs scored and nine RBI at the time of the injury.

Quality Control For The Win

Ohio State defeated Hawaii, 6-4, at Nick Swisher Field at Bill Davis Stadium to open a four-game series on March 21. What was unique about the Buckeyes' weekday win was that the team's quality control coordinator received the game ball.

Junior left-handed reliever Andrew Magno stood on the hill for a chance at his second save of the season, but it was far from a typical outing. The Rainbow Warriors trailed 6-3 in the ninth inning and came through with a two-out, two-run single, apparently cutting the Buckeye lead to just one run.

However, the second Hawaii base runner to score had missed the bag while rounding third base, and the game was called as Ohio State held on for a 6-4 victory.

Magno credited Ohio State quality control coordinator Kirby Pellant for bringing attention to the base runner's costly mistake.

"Kirby had the call on that, so I gave him the game ball after the game," Magno said. "Good eyes on Pellant."

Pellant played for Beals at Ohio State from 2012-13.

Dingler Returns

Ohio State sophomore catcher Dillon Dingler returned to the lineup after missing extended time following a broken hamate bone in his wrist that he suffered during the first game of the season.

"It's huge to get Dillon back in the lineup with his presence and production," Beals said. "It's awfully nice to write Dillon Dingler on the lineup card."

Noah West

Dingler, who started in center field as a freshman, is hitting .233 (7 for 30) with five runs scored and one RBI. Although his production hasn't been there yet, Dingler has drawn six walks to just four strikeouts and boasts a .351 on-base percentage.

While Dingler was on the mend, sophomore catcher Brent Todys filled in admirably. The transfer from Andrew College is hitting .241 (19 of 79) with two home runs, 10 runs scored and 11 RBI, while slugging .405. Showing a good eye at the plate, Todys has 13 walks to 12 strikeouts and an on-base percentage of .365.

"Rock solid," Beals said of Todys' performance. "And Brent was brought here to be a plus-defender, and I knew he'd be a good catch behind home plate. He's going to receive our pitchers, he's going to block and do all the things behind home plate, be a great catcher, and that's what we need.

"And he's been also productive offensively, which helps out. We started the season with Dingler hitting in the three-hole, you lose your three-hole guy and that hurts, but Brent's been able to give us some offense as well."

Dingler is the Buckeyes' main man behind the dish, but his versatility may allow for Todys to earn playing time, even with both healthy. Todys started at designated hitter in Dingler's first game back, indicating he will receive his opportunities to earn more playing time.

Lonsway's B1G Debut

Redshirt freshman left-handed pitcher Seth Lonsway recorded a complete-game shutout in Game 1 of a doubleheader, leading the Buckeyes (16-11, 2-0 Big Ten) to a 2-0 victory at Rutgers (6-17, 0-2) at Bainton Field on March 30.

"Really awesome," Lonsway said. "We played a really good game in the field, and I was just feeling really good out there, so I'm glad we got the win."

Lonsway improved to 4-2 on the season in his Big Ten debut, dominating the Scarlet Knights from the first pitch.

"I was throwing strikes with my fastball and curveball," Lonsway said. "I just had a lot of confidence in my off-speed today, and I was just locating it when I needed to."

Lonsway's accuracy was on point at Rutgers, limiting the Scarlet Knights to just two walks and three hits on 115 pitches in nine innings.

Lonsway, a Celina, Ohio, native, came to Columbus with high expectations, rated the No. 4 Big Ten prospect for the 2020 draft by Perfect Game. The Cincinnati Reds actually selected the southpaw in the 19th round of the 2017 MLB Draft, but Lonsway elected to play for the Buckeyes with hopes of raising his draft stock.

Lonsway was originally pegged to start for the talented 2018 team but was ruled ineligible because of academic issues from high school. At the time, Beals said that his first semester at Ohio State went great academically, but the NCAA took issue with a few of the classes on his high school transcript, deeming him ineligible.

Finally eligible, hitters are batting just .212 off Lonsway, and his ERA is 3.76. While his numbers are solid, he experienced a couple of bumps in the road earlier in the season.

Following his previous start against Hawaii, where he allowed three runs (one earned) and struck out nine in a win, the first-year starter said he had been working on simplifying his approach on the mound.

"I try and be as consistent as possible," Lonsway said March 23. "We are figuring some things out and trying to be better than the previous start, not trying to do too much on the mound, but trying to command all three pitches and establishing first-pitch strikes."

Lonsway must have been successful while "figuring some things out," because his next start was the complete-game shutout.

Beals analyzed Lonsway after his performance against Hawaii, hoping to see some improvements, particularly with the southpaw's off-speed pitches.

"His breaking ball's nasty," Beals said March 23. "When he is able to utilize it, he's going to be tough because the fastball has a little life."

Whatever Lonsway worked on throughout the week paid off because he posted a season-high 12 strikeouts against Rutgers in his shutout performance. The southpaw became the first Ohio State pitcher to strike out at least 12 batters in a game since Alex Wimmers recorded 14 against Indiana on April 9, 2010.

Lonsway's complete-game shutout victory also marked the first of its kind since Ryan Riga did the same thing at Rutgers on March 29, 2015. Riga is a student assistant coach for the Buckeyes and was actually sitting next to Lonsway throughout the game.

"He was just kind of talking to me, keeping me calm throughout the whole game," Lonsway said of Riga. "We were just kind of staying loose and having fun in the dugout, and I didn't really know he was the last guy to throw a complete game, and here, until after the game. But it's definitely really neat."

Lonsway, who earned Big Ten pitcher of the week honors for his performance, also became the first Buckeye to toss at least seven innings in his conference debut since Tanner Tully went seven in 2014.

Stone Steps Up As Leader, Changes OSU's Culture

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In just the second season of head coach Meredith Paulivic's tenure, the Ohio State women's gymnastics team has experienced a shift in culture. Senior Jamie Stone is a big reason the program has taken on a new identity.

"It's really important because we're going through kind of a culture shift with this team," Paulivic said of Stone's leadership. "And with that are some hard things. I mean, it's easy in year one; everything is easy and it's fun. In year two, it's like, 'Whoa, this is really hard work.' You've got to have those leaders there to back you up like, 'Yes, this is what we're doing. Get in the boat and row this way.'

"It's very helpful that she will come in and go through the grind. She's not afraid to come in and do the work and push throughout the hard days, and so that's very important for the future of our program. And I think she genuinely cares about this university, and I think she sees my vision and my direction where I'm taking the team and does a good job of helping me to get these freshmen and sophomores on board."

Stone, who was a Big Ten champion on vault as a junior, could have become disgruntled and caused dissension among the team amid a coaching change midway through her collegiate career. Instead, she embraced her coach and stepped up when the program was in need of guidance.

Freshman Claire Gagliardi spends a lot of time with Stone as her "little sister" on the team. The first-year Buckeye has experienced the leadership that Paulivic spoke about firsthand.

"I see her every day talking to other people on the team, helping them through bad days, helping pump them up," Gagliardi said of Stone. "Or before meets she explains to us, 'I have faith in this team, I believe we can do this and let's just get out there and do what we know how to do.'

"Or after a meet, no matter what the circumstance is, she always is like, 'I'm still super proud of you, I don't want to be with any other team.' And she really gives positive reinforcement back to you. So it's like, 'OK, just got to keep trucking, keep trying.' So she just helps the team to not back down, to keep going and to keep fighting, no matter what the circumstances are."

Being a Division I student-athlete can be grueling, taking a physical, mental and emotional toll on young men and women, especially those who lack experience. Stone, who is considering nursing school and coaching after graduation, has taken it upon herself to make sure the younger Buckeyes feel welcomed.

"I think she does a good job kind of being a mother to them," Paulivic told BSB. "She's kind of helping them to understand how to always stay ready because you never know when you're going to be put in. She's been a big help for me acclimating them to the stresses of NCAA competition in gymnastics."

Stone said she enjoys helping out her teammates and that assisting them can actually benefit her by easing her mind ahead of competition.

The senior suffered a back injury early in the season, forcing her to miss a lot of valuable training time. However, Stone bounced back with the best season of her career.

"She exudes confidence," Gagliardi said. "She is confident every meet, and I know when she goes up to do any event, I know she's going to hit it. She's very consistent in the gym. At the beginning of the season her back was hurting so she wasn't able to do as much. So we were talking about resilience and determination and everything, and I believe she has every single one of those qualities."

A Chesapeake, Va., native, Stone earned first-team All-Big Ten honors, which was announced on March 28. She had already received second-team honors as a freshman and as a junior, when she qualified for the NCAA championships.

Stone is a decorated gymnast and a senior captain at Ohio State, but her path was not quite as smooth as her gymnastics. She was always prone to gymnastic activities, however.

"I was 3 years old, my sister was five – we were crazy, running around the house, flipping off couches," Stone said. "And my mom really didn't know what to do with us, so we found a gym."

After instantly falling in love with the sport, Stone continued to develop as a gymnast throughout her youth. However, she longed for more competition and became restless at her gym, to the point that she actually quit for a month or so.

After mustering up the courage to talk to her coach (with help from her mother) about her concerns, the coach understood why she might want more out of the sport and encouraged her to continue elsewhere.

Gymnastics were taken much more seriously at her new gym, much to Stone's pleasure. She had no idea that the move would change her path. And she could have never imagined that a joke with one of her friends at the gym, Taylor Harrison, a former Buckeye gymnast, would alter her life forever.

"I didn't have my mind set on college gymnastics, I just thought once I graduated I was going to be done," Stone said. "She was like, 'You should just come to school with me.' And it started as a joke actually. And then I was like, 'OK, I seriously will. Give me the emails, hook me up.' So she put in a word for me, and then I communicated with the coaches back and forth for about a couple months and then they offered me.

"I called my mom, I was like, 'I think I just got a full-ride scholarship.' And she was like, 'No, you didn't, we need to talk about this.' I was like, 'No, I already committed. I told them yes.' So it actually started out as joke, and then I'm here and I love it. I wouldn't have picked a different school, that's for sure."

Stone, a competitor in every sense of the word, likes to find motivation in anything that she can, particularly if that motivation is fueled by a naysayer who is just asking to be proven wrong.

"I remember at one of my gyms that somebody told me that I would never be a college gymnast, and that to me was like, 'Watch this,' " Stone recalled. "So that pushed me to get where I am today, and I still look back on that and I'm like, 'I hope they're watching.' "

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BUCKEYE SCOREBOARD

2019 FOOTBALL
(All Times TBA)

April 13 SPRING GAME, Noon.

Aug. 31 FLORIDA ATLANTIC.

Sept. 7 CINCINNATI; **14** at Indiana; **21** MIAMI (OHIO); **28** at Nebraska.

Oct. 5 MICHIGAN STATE; **18** at Northwestern; **26** WISCONSIN.

Nov. 9 MARYLAND; **16** at Rutgers; **23** PENN STATE; **30** at Michigan.

Dec. 7 Big Ten Championship Game at Indianapolis.

MEN'S BASKETBALL
(20-15, 8-12 BIG TEN)

Nov. 1 UNC PEMBROKE (exhibition), W 81-63; **7** at Cincinnati, W 64-56; **11** PFW, W 107-61; **15** at Creighton, W 69-60; **18** SOUTH CAROLINA STATE, W 89-61; **20** SAMFORD, W 68-50; **23** CLEVELAND STATE at St. John Arena, W 89-62; **28** SYRACUSE, L 72-62.

Dec. 2 MINNESOTA, W 79-59; **5** vs. Illinois at Chicago, W 77-67; **15** BUCKNELL, W 73-71; **18** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 75-56; **22** vs. UCLA at Chicago, W 80-66; **29** HIGH POINT, W 82-64.

Jan. 5 (8) MICHIGAN STATE, L 86-77; **9** at Rutgers, L 64-61; **12** at Iowa, L 72-62; **18** (19) MARYLAND, L 75-61; **23** PURDUE, L 79-67; **26** at Nebraska, W 70-60; **29** at (5) Michigan, L 65-49.

Feb. 2 RUTGERS, W 76-62; **7** PENN STATE, W 74-70; **10** at Indiana, W 55-52; **14** ILLINOIS, L 63-56; **17** at (11) Michigan State, L 62-44; **20** NORTHWESTERN, W 63-49; **23** at (24) Maryland, L 72-62; **26** (22) IOWA, W 90-70.

March 2 at (14) Purdue, L 86-51; **6** at Northwestern, L 68-50; **10** (21) WISCONSIN, L 73-67 (OT); **14** Big Ten Tournament Second Round at Chicago vs. 9-seed Indiana, W 79-75; **15** Big Ten Tournament Third Round at Chicago vs. 1-seed Michigan State, L 77-70; **22** NCAA Tournament First Round at Tulsa, Okla., vs. 6-seed Iowa State, W 62-59; **24** NCAA Tournament Second Round at Tulsa, Okla., vs. 3-seed Houston, L 74-59.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL
(14-15, 10-8 BIG TEN)

Oct. 28 IUP (exhibition), W 72-50.

Nov. 6 (22) USF, L 71-47; **9** DETROIT MERCY, W 55-41; **11** at (2) UConn, L 85-53; **16** at Sacramento State, canceled; **18** at Stanford, canceled; **29** NORTH CAROLINA, W 76-69.

Dec. 2 CINCINNATI, W 69-56; **5** at Washington, L 69-59; **16** FLORIDA at St. John Arena, W 46-41; **20** vs. Butler at West Palm Beach, Fla., L 66-53; **21** vs. Virginia Tech at West Palm Beach, Fla., L 81-73; **28** at Purdue, L 60-42; **31** NEBRASKA, L 78-69.

Jan. 5 at (4) Maryland, L 75-69; **10** (25) INDIANA, W 55-50; **14** (25) MICHIGAN STATE, W 65-55; **17** at Penn State, W 76-71 (OT); **20** at Michigan, L 62-58; **24** (11) MARYLAND, L 70-57; **28** at Minnesota, W 65-55; **31** ILLINOIS, W 78-70.

Feb. 3 at Northwestern, L 76-59; **6** PENN STATE, W 78-73; **10** (16) IOWA, L 78-52; **14** at (23) Rutgers, W 59-39; **17** WISCONSIN, W 70-68; **21** at Michigan State, W 77-70; **28** at Wisconsin, W 61-50.

March 3 RUTGERS, L 66-56; **7** Big Ten Tournament Second Round at Indianapolis vs. 13-seed Wisconsin, L 73-63; **20** WNIT vs. MOREHEAD STATE, L 71-61.

BASEBALL
(16-12, 2-1 BIG TEN)

Feb. 15-17 Snowbird Classic at Port Charlotte, Fla., vs. Seton Hall, W 4-3; W 6-0; W 5-3; **18** at FGCU, W 2-0; **22** Kleberg Bank Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas, vs. BYU, L 5-1; **23** Kleberg Bank Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas, vs. Texas A&M Corpus Christi, L 8-7; **24** Kleberg Bank Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas, vs. Oral Roberts, W 8-3; **25** Kleberg Bank Tournament at Corpus Christi, Texas, vs. Texas A&M Corpus Christi, L 3-2.

March 1-4 at Bethune-Cookman, L 4-3; W 6-0; W 16-9; L 8-3; **9** Greenville Drive 1st Pitch Invite at Greenville, S.C., vs. Michigan State, L 7-1; **10** Greenville Drive 1st Pitch Invite at Greenville, S.C., vs. Western Carolina, L 8-5; **11** Greenville Drive 1st Pitch Invite at Greenville, S.C., vs. Furman, L 11-10 (10 innings); **12** at Wofford, L 8-6; **15-17** LIPSCOMB, W 14-3; L 9-3; W 7-6; **19** NORTHERN KENTUCKY, W 10-8; **21-24** HAWAII, W 6-4; W 6-5; W 7-5; L 15-3; **27** TOLEDO, W 9-4; **29-31** at Rutgers, W 5-3 (11 innings); W 2-0; L 3-2 (15 innings).

April 3 CINCINNATI, 6:35 p.m.; **5-7** NORTHWESTERN, 6:35 p.m.; 3:05 p.m.; 1:05 p.m.; **9** at Ohio, 6 p.m.; **10** DAYTON, 6:35 p.m.; **12-14** MICHIGAN, 6:35 p.m.; 3:05 p.m.; 1:05 p.m.; **16** XAVIER, 6:35 p.m.; **19-21** at Maryland, 6:30 p.m.; 2 p.m.; 1 p.m.; **26-28** IOWA, 6:35 p.m.; 3:05 p.m.; 1:05 p.m.

May 1 at Miami (Ohio), 5 p.m.; **3-5** at Minnesota, 9 p.m.; 3 p.m.; 2 p.m.; **8** WRIGHT STATE, 6:30 p.m.; **10-12** PENN STATE, 6:35 p.m.; 3:05 p.m.; 1:05 p.m.; **14** at Youngstown State, 6 p.m.; **16-18** at Purdue, 6 p.m.; 6 p.m.; 1 p.m.; **22-26** Big Ten Tournament at Omaha, Neb.

MEN'S GYMNASTICS
(6-7, 3-3 BIG TEN)

Jan. 12 Rocky Mountain Open at Colorado Spring, Colo., 4th/6 (398.500); **26** at (1) Oklahoma, L 423.950-395.400.

Feb. 2 at (4) Michigan, L 413.900-402.700; **15/17** Winter Cup at Las Vegas, NTS.

March 2 ARNOLD CHALLENGE vs. (6) PENN STATE, W 413.150-409.000; **8** MINNESOTA/NEBRASKA, 2nd/3 (405.550); **16** at (9) Iowa, L 400.650-396.400; **24** (4) ILLINOIS, W 406.600-404.000.

April 5-6 Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa; **19** NCAA Qualifier at Champaign, Ill.; **20** NCAA Championships at Champaign, Ill.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS
(7-10, 3-7 BIG TEN)

Jan. 5 at (7) Georgia, L 196.600-194.900; **12** at (25) N.C. State, W 196.025-194.550; **19** at Penn State, W 196.075-194.850; **27** at Michigan State, W 196.200-195.225.

Feb. 2 IOWA, W 195.000-194.775; **8** at Maryland, L 195.950-194.250; **16** (17) NEBRASKA, L 196.400-195.750; **23** Big Five Meet at Toledo, Ohio, vs. Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois & Rutgers, 5th/5 (194.600).

March 2 (24) WEST VIRGINIA, W 196.850-196.100; TEMPLE, W 196.850-194.000; **9** BOWLING GREEN, W 195.875-194.875; **17** vs. West Virginia, Penn State & N.C. State at Morgantown, W.Va., 4th/4 (194.925); **23** Big Ten Championships at University Park, Pa., 7th/10 (195.775).

April 5 NCAA Regional Second Round; **6** NCAA Regional Final; **19** NCAA Semifinals at Fort Worth, Texas; **20** NCAA Championships at Fort Worth, Texas.

MEN'S ICE HOCKEY
(20-11-5, 13-7-4 BIG TEN)

Oct. 12-13 at Arizona State, W 3-2; W 3-0; **19-20** MASSACHUSETTS, L 6-3; W 3-1; **26** (15) BOWLING GREEN, L 8-2; **27** at Bowling Green, T 2-2 (OT).

Nov. 2-3 at (5) Notre Dame, W 1-0; L 2-1; **9-10** at Colgate, W 3-0; W 1-0; **16-17** WISCONSIN, W 4-0; W 3-1; **23-24** (6) PENN STATE, L 4-3; W 5-2; **30-Dec. 1** at Minnesota, T 2-2 (OSU 3x3 OT Win); T 2-2 (OSU 3x3 OT Win).

Dec. 28-29 MERCYHURST, W 3-1; W 5-4.

Jan. 4-5 at Michigan State, T 7-7 (OSU 3x3 OT Loss); W 6-0; **11-12** MICHIGAN, L 2-1; W 4-2; **18-19** at (13) Penn State, W 4-1; W 6-4.

Feb. 1-2 (11) NOTRE DAME, W 4-2; W 2-0; **8-9** at Wisconsin, W 2-1 (OT); W 4-1; **15-16** MINNESOTA, L 4-3; L 4-3; **22-23** at Michigan, L 4-2; T3-3 (OT, 3x3 OT W).

March 1-2 MICHIGAN STATE, W 5-1; L 3-2; **17** BIG TEN TOURNAMENT SEMIFINALS vs. 4-SEED PENN STATE, L 5-1; **29-31** NCAA West Regional Semifinal at Fargo, N.D., vs. Denver, L 2-0.

MEN'S LACROSSE
(7-1, 0-1 BIG TEN)

Feb. 2 CLEVELAND STATE, W 12-9; **9** BOSTON, W 17-10; **16** at UMass, W 11-7; **23** BUCKNELL, W 16-13.

March 2 vs. Marquette at Dallas, W 13-9; **9** at Hofstra, W 14-8; **16** DENVER, Cancelled; **23** at Notre Dame, W 11-10 (OT); **31** RUTGERS, L 14-6.

April 7 at Penn State, 7 p.m.; **14** at Johns Hopkins, Noon; **20** MARYLAND, 1 p.m.; **26** at Michigan, 6 p.m.

WOMEN'S LACROSSE
(8-4, 0-2 BIG TEN)

Feb. 8 at Cincinnati, W 16-6; **10** DETROIT MERCY, W 19-5; **18** BROWN, W 15-14 (OT); **22** NOTRE DAME, L 19-10.

March 1 MARQUETTE, W 11-9; **3** NIAGARA, W 16-12; **9** BINGHAMTON, W 13-7; **11** vs. UMass at Deland, Fla., L 15-14; **16** at (2) Maryland, L 16-1; **21** (12) MICHIGAN, L 15-10; **24** SAN DIEGO STATE, W 16-10; **30** US Lacrosse at Sparks, Md., vs. Oregon, W 11-5.

April 4 at Penn State, 7 p.m.; **9** at Louisville, 1 p.m.; **13** JOHNS HOPKINS, 1 p.m.; **20** at Rutgers, Noon; **25** NORTHWESTERN, 4:30 p.m.

May 3/5 Big Ten Tournament at Baltimore.

SOFTBALL
(19-10, 4-1 BIG TEN)

Feb. 8 Friends of Jaclyn Tournament at Orlando, Fla., vs. George Mason, W 7-0; vs. Ole Miss, W 4-2; **9** Friends of Jaclyn Tournament at Orlando, Fla., vs. North Florida, W 3-0; vs. UCF, L 3-2; **10** Friends of Jaclyn Tournament at Orlando, Fla., vs. Ole Miss, cancelled; **15** ESPN Elite Invitational at Clearwater, Fla., vs. Florida State, L 3-1; **16** ESPN Elite Invitational at Clearwater, Fla., vs. LSU, L 7-2; vs. Utah, W 10-2 (5 innings); **17** ESPN Elite Invitational at Clearwater, Fla., vs. Notre Dame, L 3-2; **22** Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. Army, W 4-0; **23** Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. Utah, W 2-0; vs. Duke, W 2-0; **24** Mary Nutter Classic at Palm Springs, Calif., vs. New Mexico State, W 5-1.

March 8 Husky Classic at Seattle vs. Seattle, W 6-4 (8 innings); vs. (6) Washington, L 3-0; **9** Husky Classic at Seattle vs. Seattle, L 3-0; vs. Idaho State, W 9-3; **10** Husky Classic at Seattle vs. NIU, W 3-2; **12** at Portland State, W 8-4; W 7-0; **15** GCU Invitational at Phoenix vs. Weber State, L 4-0; vs. Lehigh, W 2-0; **16** GCU Invitational at Phoenix vs. Lehigh, W 12-3 (6 innings); vs. Grand Canyon, W 8-7; **17** GCU Invitational at Phoenix vs. Grand Canyon, L 4-3 (8 innings); **22-24** (22) INDIANA, W 7-6; W 5-3; W 2-0; **27** at Kentucky, postponed; **29-31** at Maryland, L 3-2; W 10-1 (5 innings); W 15-3.

April 3 at Pittsburgh, 4 p.m.; **5-7** RUTGERS, 6 p.m.; 2 p.m.; 1 p.m.; **9** at Penn State, 5 p.m.; 7 p.m.; **12-14** MICHIGAN, 6 p.m.; 2 p.m.; 1 p.m.; **16** OHIO, 6 p.m.; **19-21** at Michigan State, 6 p.m.; 11 a.m.; 1 p.m.; **26-28** ILLINOIS, 6 p.m.; 2 p.m.; 1 p.m.

May 3-5 at Ioa, 6:30 p.m.; 2 p.m.; 1 p.m.; **9-11** Big Ten Tournament at Bloomington, Ind.

SWIMMING & DIVING

Jan. 4-5 at Florida, Men: L 317.50-263.50; Women: L 403-178; vs. Kentucky at Gainesville, Fla., Men: W 336-245; Women: L 375-206; **19** at Michigan, Men: L 202-98; Women: L 196-104; **25-26** Shamrock Invitational at Notre Dame, Ind., Men: 1st/4; Women: 3rd/4.

Feb. 16-17 WINTER INVITAITONAL, NTS; **20-23** Women's Big Ten Championships at Bloomington, Ind., 3rd/12 (1,162.5); **27-March 2** Men's Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa, 3rd/10 (1,243.5).

March 3 LAST CHANCE MEET (women), NTS; **10** Last Chance Meet (men), NTS; **14-16** CSCAA National Invitational at Cleveland, NTS; NCAA Zone Diving at West Lafayette, Ind., NTS; **20-23** Women's NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas, 25th/44 (43); **27-30** Men's NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas, 9th/44 (124).

MEN'S TENNIS
(20-2, 4-0 BIG TEN)

Jan. 7 COLUMBUS CHALLENGER, NTS; **20** CLEVELAND STATE, W 5-0, W 4-0; XAVIER, Cancelled; **26** VCU, W 4-0; **27** ARKANSAS, W 4-1; TOLEDO, W 4-0.

Feb. 2 (9) STANFORD, W 6-1; **8** ARIZONA STATE, W 6-1; **10** (24) GEORGIA, W 4-0; **12** (5) SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, W 5-0; **15** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago vs. (19) Tulane, W 4-0; **16** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago vs. (13) Virginia, W 4-0; **17** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago vs. (6) Texas, W 4-0; **18** ITA National Indoor Team Championships at Chicago (Finals) vs. (1) Wake Forest, W 4-2; **20** KENTUCKY, W 4-0; **24** (12) NOTRE DAME, W 6-1.

March 1 at Penn State, W 4-1; **11** at Texas A&M, L 4-3; **14** at (4) Texas, L 4-1; **22** MICHIGAN STATE, W 7-0; **24** at (16) Michigan, W 6-1; **29** WISCONSIN, W 6-1; **31** MINNESOTA, W 7-0.

April 5 at Nebraska, 7 p.m.; **7** at Iowa, Noon; **12** at Northwestern, 7 p.m.; **14** at Illinois, 1 p.m.; **19** PURDUE, 6 p.m.; **21** INDIANA, Noon; **26-28** Big Ten Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich.

May 3 NCAA First & Second Round; **10** NCAA Regional; **16** NCAA Championships at Orlando, Fla.

WOMEN'S TENNIS
(15-3, 4-1 BIG TEN)

Jan. 19 Michigan Tournament at Ann Arbor, Mich., NTS; **26** ITA Kickoff at Atlanta vs. Geogia Tech, W 4-0; **27** ITA Kickoff at Atlanta vs. Kentucky, W 4-1.

Feb. 1 (6) TEXAS, L 4-3; **3** NOTRE DAME, W 6-1; **8** ITA National Team Indoors at Seattle vs. (4) Duke, L 4-3; **10** ITA National Team Indoors at Seattle vs. (10) Syracuse, W 5-2; **20** CLEVELAND STATE, W 7-0; AKRON, W 7-0; **23** at Arizona State, W 4-3; **24** vs. TCU at Tempe, Ariz., W 7-0; **28** YOUNGSTOWN STATE, W 6-1; W 7-0.

March 3 BAYLOR, W 5-2; **17** PENN STATE, W 6-1; **22** at Nebraska, W 5-2; **24** IOWA, W 5-2; **29** at Michigan State, W 4-1; **31** at Michigan, L 4-1.

April 5 WISCONSIN, 6 p.m.; **7** MINNESOTA, Noon; **12** PURDUE, 6 p.m.; **14** INDIANA, Noon; **20** at Northwestern, 11 a.m.; **21** at Illinois, Noon.

OUTDOOR TRACK & FIELD

March 23 Power 5 Trailblazer Challenge at Miami, Fla., NTS; **28-30** Florida Relays at Gainesville, Fla., NTS; **29** Raleigh Relays at Raleigh, N.C., NTS.

April 5-6 All-Ohio Championships; **6** Battle On The Bayou at Baton Rouge, La.; **12-13** Gamebock Invitational at Columbia, S.C.; **19-20** Virginia Challenge at Charlottesville, Va.; **26-27** JESSE OWENS RELAYS.

May 10-12 Big Ten Championships at Iowa City, Iowa; **23-25** NCAA East Preliminary at Jacksonville, Fla.

June 5/7 NCAA Championships at Austin, Texas.

MEN'S VOLLEYBALL
(8-18, 3-9 MIVA)

Jan. 4 CHARLESTON, W 3-0; **5** PENN STATE, W 3-1; **10** at (5) BYU, L 3-0; **12** at (11) Stanford, L 3-1; **18** GEORGE MASON, L 3-1; **19** ERSKINE, W 3-1; **26** at Ball State, L 3-1.

Feb. 1 SAINT FRANCIS, L 3-2; **2** LINCOLN MEMORIAL, W 3-1; **5** at (15) Purdue Fort Wayne, L 3-0; **8** at (6) U.C. Santa Barbara, L 3-0; **9** at (1) Long Beach State, L 3-0; **15** at Lindenwood, L 3-0; **16** at Quincy, W 3-1; **21** LEWIS, L 3-2; **24** LOYOLA CHICAGO, L 3-0.

March 1/3 MCKENDREE, W 3-1; L 3-2; **8** at (5) UCLA, L 3-0; **9** at (11) USC, L 3-2; **15** LEES-MCRAE, W 3-0; **19** at Penn State, L 3-0; **22** LINDENWOOD, L 3-1; **23** QUINCY, W 3-0; **29** at Loyola Chicago, L 3-0; **30** at Lewis, L 3-0.

April 4 PURDUE FORT WAYNE, 7 p.m.; **6** BALL STATE, 7 p.m.; **13** MIVA Quarterfinals; **17** MIVA Semifinals; **20** MIVA Finals; **26** NCAA Play-In Match at campus sites; **30** NCAA Play-In Match at Long Beach, Calif.

May 2 NCAA Semifinals at Long Beach, Calif.; **4** NCAA Finals at Long Beach, Calif.

WRESTLING
(12-2, 7-2 BIG TEN)

Nov. 3 vs. Navy at Owings Mills, Md., W 28-9; **11** Ohio Intercollegiate Open at Cleveland, NTS; **16** at California Baptist, W 42-0; **18** at Arizona State, W 22-17; **30-Dec. 1** Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational, 1st/43 (148).

Dec. 9 (19) WISCONSIN, W 23-13.

Jan. 6 (4) N.C. STATE, W 26-10; **11** at Indiana, W 43-3; **13** MICHIGAN STATE, W 37-4; **25** (5) MICHIGAN, L 19-17.

Feb. 1 at Illinois, W 23-14; **3** at Northwestern, W 27-15; **8** (1) PENN STATE, L 28-9; **15** at Purdue, W 34-3; **17** (6) NEBRASKA, W 21-12; **22** at (7) Cornell, W 25-9.

March 9-10 Big Ten Championships at Minneapolis, 2nd/14; **21-23** NCAA Championships at Pittsburgh, 2nd/63 (96.5).

Season A Success With Another NCAA Tourney Win

It's amazing what the NCAA Tournament can do to change the entire landscape of the season.

I'm not talking about 1983 N.C. State, 1985 Villanova or anything that stark – just getting one win in the Big Dance and feeling much better about the entire campaign.

RAPP AROUND
Jeff Rapp

That's what the Buckeyes did in Tulsa, Okla., of all places, stunning Big 12 tournament champion Iowa State in a 6-11 upset on March 22 that wiped a lot of the grime off the 2018-19 Ohio State men's basketball season.

OSU led for all but 29 seconds of the second half and never let the explosive Cyclones rip off the 10-0 run they were sure would emerge but didn't.

Solid play, clutch rebounds, key free throws and important stops – the Buckeyes produced all of them in a workmanlike 62-59 win that looked fairly similar to the gut-check victory over Indiana in the Big Ten tournament that propelled Chris Holtmann's team to the NCAA's field of 68.

"It's hard to overstate it," Holtmann said of the win over Iowa State. "I think we beat a really high-level basketball team and a really quality program and coach (Steve Prohm). They were obviously playing very well.

"To come here and play as well defensively as we played, our guys were tremendous. This one is maybe as sweet as any opening-round win I've had, for a variety of reasons."

Holtmann improved to 5-0 in NCAA first-round games in his last five years as a head coach – all three at Butler and the two he has been in charge at Ohio State. Only six other NCAA Division I coaches have advanced to at least the Round of 32 in the last five years. You may have heard of them: Mike Krzyzewski, Jay Wright, Mark Few, Bill Self, Roy Williams and John Calipari.

That the Buckeyes lost two days later to Houston by 15 points didn't seem to matter very much. They already proved they could control a game against a perceived superior opponent on a big stage, and they corralled their 20th win of the season in the process.

Ohio State ended up 20-15 to give Holtmann a streak of six straight years with at least 20 wins. He turned Big South doormat Gardner-Webb into a league contender in 2012-13, finishing that season 21-13. (Gardner-Webb, by the way, made this year's NCAA Tournament, and Holtmann watched his former team while taking a two-hour hiatus from Iowa State game prep.)

Now the focus going forward is on making the Buckeyes a Big Ten power that can stand toe-to-toe with the likes of Michigan State, Michigan and Purdue. Holtmann already has hinted he is worthy of the challenge. The 2017-18 Buckeyes were a surprising 25-9 in his first year on the job, finished second in the Big Ten and won an NCAA tourney game before being bounced by Gonzaga.

This was a little more trying. At times I couldn't figure out if the 2018-19 Buckeyes had an aptitude issue or a lack of heart, or if something else was getting in the way. Granted, this most recent version of the Scarlet and Gray was never going to blow anyone out of the water in terms of raw talent. Freshman guards tend to be up-and-down performers, and that's exactly what we saw from Luther Muhammad, Duane Washington and Justin Ahrens. Plus, an already thin front line was hurt by an injury to starting power forward Kyle Young and an untimely suspension of center Kaleb Wesson.

And then there is the conundrum that was point guard C.J. Jackson, whose maddening inconsistency and occasional carelessness with the ball were on full display in his final season.

However, Jackson did come through at key times in some of the bigger wins of the season, as did fellow senior Keyshawn Woods, who played his best basketball down the stretch. This team was methodical but difficult to handle when Wesson did damage in the post and stayed away from the silly fouls that often derailed his effectiveness. Case in point was his 21-point, 12-rebound effort against Iowa State.

As I watched the proceedings from Senior Day and listened to the farewell speeches of Jackson, Woods and former walk-on Joey Lane, a thought occurred to me: None of them was even supposed to be here or in this position. The group that should have been leaving to applause was the top-five recruiting class of 2015, which consisted of guards A.J. Harris, Jaquan Lyle and Austin Grandstaff; and forwards Mickey Mitchell and Daniel Giddens. Each of them was a four-star prospect, and at the time experts claimed that Thad Matta had the best incoming group in the Big Ten and one of the best in the nation.

We know the rest of the story. Every single one of that version of the "Thad Five" flaked out and left at some point, and Matta uncharacteristically bad-mouthed them and eventually lost his job. Considering what a disaster that class was and how it led to the demise of the winningest coach in program history, it's now safe to say Holtmann has steadied the ship.

This March, the Buckeyes salvaged an acceptable season after losing star junior Keita Bates-Diop to the NBA and senior forward Jae'Sean Tate to graduation. They weathered a five-game losing streak to begin the calendar year and slowly crept back toward respectability. Their 12-1 start earned a national ranking and belief that the Buckeyes were formidable again.

It also should be noted that Ohio State beat Cincinnati in an in-state showdown to begin the season and managed to make it to the NCAA Tournament in a year when several normally successful Midwestern programs failed to do so – Indiana, Illinois, Notre Dame, West Virginia, Xavier and Dayton to name a few.

"As far as comparing to other programs, listen, there are no guarantees to be here," Holtmann said moments after the season ended. "But as we go through this together, I am incredibly appreciative of this team and this year and last year and last year's team. I want to strive so hard to continue to move this forward. I think tasting victory and defeat can only help us moving forward."

Several Veterans Back In Fold

The backcourt certainly will take on a different look for the 2019-20 Buckeyes with Jackson and Woods out of eligibility, but the roster still will include several key players familiar with Big Ten battle and the grind of a 35-game season.

Here's a quick peek at who's returning:

Senior (1): Andre Wesson, 6-6 forward – Andre Wesson started all but one game as a junior and produced averages of 8.6 points and 4.1 rebounds per game. He's a fill-in-the-cracks player who doesn't mind drawing a tough defensive assignment or taking the big shot. This past season, he was OSU's most consistent performer in terms of effort and execution, although he is prone to the occasional shooting slump.

Juniors (4): Kaleb Wesson, 6-9 center; Kyle Young, 6-8 forward; Musa Jallow, 6-5 wing; C.J. Walker, 6-1 guard – Kaleb Wesson (14.6 ppg, 6.9 rpg) was named honorable-mention All-Big Ten, but everyone knows he is better than that when he keeps his focus on and off the court. He's a load down low who presents an immediate option on any important half-court possession. It's time for Big K to come into his own and be a consistent force. If he stays in shape this summer and Holtmann gets him some inside help, there's no reason he can't be first- or second-team All-Big Ten next season.

"He is a great kid and he wants to do the right thing," Holtmann said. "The offseason will be incredibly important for him."

Young (6.0 pgg, 4.4 rpg) overcame a stress fracture rather quickly during the season and never stopped playing all-out, as is his calling card. The ultimate lunch-pail player, he could be a major asset for the Buckeyes going forward if he can hurt defenses with intermediate jumpers and become more effective on pick-and-roll plays. Still, it will be difficult to improve on a team-leading field-goal percentage of 67.2.

Jallow (2.9 ppg, 2.9 rpg) still needs to develop his game and improve his shooting. He also could get caught in a numbers crunch next season with talented players about to enter the program. However, Jallow, who is still only 19, can be a defensive stopper and earn an important role going forward.

Walker practiced all season with the Buckeyes but had to sit out after transferring from Florida State. The Indianapolis native played two seasons at FSU, helping the Seminoles to the 2018 Elite Eight. He averaged 8.0 points, 2.5 rebounds and 2.4 assists as a sophomore.

Sophomores (3): Duane Washington, 6-3 guard; Luther Muhammad, 6-3, guard; Justin Ahrens, 6-5 wing – If there's an emerging star in this group, it's Washington, who figures to only improve on averages of 7.0 points and 2.5 rebounds per game as well as his three-point percentage of 30.6 (41 of 134). Whether he starts or comes off the bench, Washington is a spark for the OSU offense and capable of hitting buckets in bunches.

Muhammad (7.6 ppg, 2.7 rpg), on the other hand, is not a pure shooter, but he somehow managed to hit 36 of 96 shots from behind the arc (37.5 percent), even while trudging through a scoring slump much of the second half of the season. His competitive fire and desire to improve should lead him to even more success down the line.

Ahrens is best remembered for the 29-point sideshow he gave the hometown fans in a breakout performance against Iowa. But in true freshman form, he followed that up with a donut in the next game. Ahrens has good size, boasts a fluid stroke, and is left-handed and confident, all of which immediately make him a weapon. But for him to find regular court time, he'll have to gain some trust on defense.

LeDee Departs, Promise Enters

Another freshman who contributed to the cause is power forward Jaedon LeDee (3.0 ppg, 1.7 rpg). He played in 26 games and started two but apparently wasn't happy with receiving just 6.6 minutes per game. LeDee has put his name into the NCAA transfer portal, which means he's actively seeking to transfer out of the program.

Holtmann recently confirmed the move, calling LeDee "a terrific young man," and adding, "We appreciate the contribution he made to our team and wish him the best going forward."

LeDee played in only three of the team's final nine games – and those were when Kaleb Wesson was serving a suspension. He likely saw the writing on the wall knowing the program is getting ready to welcome a pair of highly talented true freshman forwards in 6-9 Alonzo Gaffney and 6-6 E.J. Liddell. There are reports OSU is still pursuing a pair of front-liners for the 2019 class in 6-5 forward Ben Roderick of Powell (Ohio) Olentangy Liberty and 7-0 center Ibrahima Diallo of Senegal, who is now at a California prep school.

The incoming class currently includes Gaffney, Liddell and 6-1 point guard D.J. Carton – all of them considered to be four-star prospects and among the top three players in their state by virtually all recruiting services. Even if Holtmann doesn't add on, that group is expected to make a major impact in Columbus.

Carton is a playmaking lead guard who can hit shots from all over the court as well as set up others. A prep standout from Bettendorf, Iowa, Carton averaged right around 26 ppg while shooting 57 percent from the field and 84 percent from the free-throw line. He is the only player in Iowa high school history to surpass 2,000 points and 1,000 assists in his career, with 2,332 and 1,106, respectively.

Gaffney hails from the Cleveland area but has been a bit of a nomad. After prepping at Cleveland Villa Angela-St. Joseph and Garfield Heights, he transferred to Brewster Academy in New Hampshire and helped that school win the National Prep Invitational.

Like Carton and Gaffney, Liddell, who hails from Belleville, Ill., is a top-50 player nationally in the 2019 class. Illinois has been good to the program over the years, especially when considering Bates-Diop and former National Player of the Year Evan Turner both hail from the Prairie State.

Descriptions of Liddell's play often include phrases like "elite motor" and "toughness." Analysts also point out he seems to play bigger than his actual size. Illinois' Mr. Basketball as a junior and again as a senior, Liddell is not a great shooter but improving in that area and still manages to be a reliable scorer.

That all sounds like Tate to me, and I would think Buckeye fans would take that right now.

Spring Game Should Shed Light On Individuals

Spring football is a time of many questions, a few answers and a lot of curiosity.

The biggest questions for Ohio State Buckeye fans, of course, surround rookie coach Ryan Day.

EXNER POINT
Rich Exner

He's the first OSU head coach with no previous head coaching experience since Paul Bixler in 1946, unless you count 2011 interim coach Luke Fickell.

Both Bixler and Fickell were one and out as a Buckeye boss. I think nearly everyone would agree that there's only a tiny – really tiny – chance of that happening with Day.

There will be a lot of curious eyes watching Day during the spring game, hoping to get some clues of what the Day Era of OSU football will be like.

Day will run a high-scoring team. That's a given in these times. His two years as an offensive coach ranked as the fifth- and fourth-highest scoring teams in OSU history.

But from the spring game I don't expect many answers about his style or any big changes for OSU football. Spring games just don't offer the platform for such insight.

What spring games do offer, however, is a peek at individual talent. For that, the game on April 13 likely will be well worth the $5 for admission.

Here's what I'll be looking to find out:

How Good Is Justin Fields?

We know that Justin Fields was rated as high as the No. 2 recruit in the country in the class of 2018. We know he put up impressive numbers during his brief opportunities as a freshman at Georgia (27 of 39 passing for four touchdowns and zero interceptions).

But all but the most hard-core fans really know little about what Fields looks like behind center running an offense.

Everyone will now get a chance to see his arm strength, his accuracy, his speed and his decision making.

By all accounts, he is the real deal. We'll get to see for ourselves.

We'll also get to see Matthew Baldwin, who brings a pretty impressive résumé to the competition. The Buckeyes grabbed the four-star recruit out of Texas, where he passed for 44 touchdowns and more than 4,000 yards as a high school senior.

Baldwin is a freshman eligibility-wise; Fields a sophomore.

How Good Are The Backups?

There's no question about the starter at running back.

Back for a third year is J.K. Dobbins – the only player in Ohio State history to rush for 1,000-plus yards in both his freshman and sophomore seasons. (The only other freshmen to have 1,000 yards were Robert Smith in 1990, Maurice Clarett in 2002, and Mike Weber in 2016. In case you're wondering, Archie Griffin came up short, with 867 yards in an 11-game season in 1972.)

The returning running backs other than Dobbins (1,053 yards) totaled just 156 yards in 2018.

I want to see who that No. 2 back likely will be in 2019 and learn more about his running styles.

We have received a small sampling of 220-pounder Master Teague (106 yards on 17 carries as a freshman) and a larger sampling of Demario McCall (with declining rushing numbers of 270, 111 and 50 yards in his first three seasons.) I'll be looking to learn more about those two players.

Among the others, I'm most curious about 6-1, 200-pound freshman Marcus Crowley out of Jacksonville, Fla. He was Mr. Football in Florida a year ago and enrolled at Ohio State this winter.

What About The Receivers?

This is low on my curiosity meter this spring, despite losing the most dangerous target from 2018 – Parris Campbell and his 90 catches, 12 touchdowns and 1,063 yards receiving. There's lots and lots of good talent back, including emerging Chris Olave and veterans Austin Mack, C.J. Saunders and Binjimen Victor.

Ohio State will be loaded at receiver again, and I'm sure there will be some valuable newcomers in the bunch.

What About The Defense?

Ohio State on defense returns eight regulars, defined as players starting at least six games last year.

On the surface, that sounds like a good thing.

But is that really good news when you also consider that Ohio State ranked just 51st nationally in points allowed (25.5 points a game), 42nd in pass efficiency defense (122.2 rating) and 72nd in yards allowed (403.4 yards a game)?

I don't think so.

Furthermore, the two best players from the best part of the defense – the line – are gone. Nick Bosa, who missed most of the season with injury, and Dre'Mont Jones have entered the NFL draft.

Ohio State needs dominating playmakers to emerge.

On the line, I expect Chase Young to earn that label. As for the rest, a peek at the spring game could start providing answers, even if there won't be any big sack numbers under practice rules that most likely will protect the quarterbacks.

I'll be looking for new faces to step into playing time there and throughout the rest of the defense.

The defensive backfield is filled with familiar names, such as Jeffrey Okudah, Shaun Wade, Jordan Fuller, Isaiah Pryor and Brendon White.

But will new names begin to surface there as playmakers?

NFL Draft Time

While we'll get a look at some of the newest Buckeyes during the spring game on April 13, ex-Buckeyes will be drawing attention April 25 when the NFL draft gets under way.

It still looks like Bosa has a good shot of becoming the first player taken. That would put Bosa in rare territory in Ohio State history.

The only previous No. 1 overall picks are linebacker Tom Cousineau to the Buffalo Bills in 1979, defensive end Dan "Big Daddy" Wilkinson to the Cincinnati Bengals in 1994 and offensive tackle Orlando Pace to the St. Louis Rams in 1997. (Side note: that's two of coach John Cooper's players, and one who played under Woody Hayes.)

Only one Buckeye has been selected second overall. That was Jim McDonald in the third year of the draft in 1938. He played two seasons as a back for Detroit.

No. 3 overall (four Buckeyes all-time) – Howard "Hopalong" Cassady in 1956, John Hicks in 1974, Shawn Springs in 1997 and Joey Bosa in 2016.

No. 4 overall (4) – Chris Ward in 1978, Art Schlichter in 1982, Ezekiel Elliott in 2016 and Denzel Ward in 2018.

No. 5 overall (3) – Bob Ferguson in 1962, Bob Vogel in 1963 and A.J. Hawk in 2006.

It's Time To Admit Fields Is Already The Starter

There was a quarterback competition last spring at Ohio State. There's a quarterback competition this spring, too.

Except there wasn't. And there isn't.

MOODY MUSINGS
Tim Moody, Editor

That's just an honest assessment of the state of the quarterback room over the past year in Columbus. Joe Burrow, as good a player as he is, was never going to beat out Dwayne Haskins to be Ohio State's starter in 2018. He stuck around for the spring and performed at an extremely high level, but that was always preparing him to be the starter somewhere else – LSU, in the end – rather than for the Buckeyes. Everybody knew Haskins was going to be the guy, and he proved why in the fall when he broke basically every major single-season passing record in program history.

The situation in spring 2019 isn't all that different. The Buckeyes entered camp with a clear "favorite" at quarterback in Georgia transfer Justin Fields, a soon-to-be sophomore who simply has an "it" factor from a physical standpoint, not unlike Haskins. His competition – redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin – is a talented gunslinger who has more experience in the program, not unlike Burrow.

The only reason I put quotation marks around "favorite" is that term doesn't really fit. Fields isn't just the favorite to win the job, he's the guy who has to win the job. Seeing Baldwin in the lineup come September would mean one of two things – bringing in Fields was a huge mistake, or he got hurt. There's no reasonable scenario where Baldwin is simply that far ahead.

Fields is the highest-rated prospect ever to enroll at Ohio State in the Internet recruiting era. He's already proven to be an impact player at the collegiate level, albeit in limited action with the Bulldogs, and he has a combination of arm talent and athleticism that has simply never been seen in Columbus before. There might not even be a great comparison for his skill set nationally.

And we already know that Fields has impressed. He had his black helmet stripe removed March 25, nearly three full weeks before taking the Ohio Stadium field for the first time for the April 13 spring game.

Head coach Ryan Day, for his part, has been coy, but it's clear that he's impressed with his new starting quarterback – even if he's not willing to publicly call Fields that just yet.

"He's only been in the offense I guess for eight practices, nine practices and has picked it up pretty quickly overall," Day said April 1. "The fact that he is able to run the offense right now with not a lot of reps under his belt is pretty significant."

Perhaps the only legitimate thing that could have prevented Fields from taking the job and running with it was the mental aspect of the game. That's clearly not an issue.

All that said, there's still plenty of pressure on Fields to perform this spring. And there's pressure on Baldwin, too – he has to be ready and, even if it doesn't happen this year or in 2020, he's still in line to be the Buckeyes' starter sometime down the road. The reps he gets this spring while working with the first-team offense, even in a somewhat fake competition, could prove invaluable later on.

Nobody should take any of what happens this spring to mean Ohio State doesn't rate Baldwin. When you have a chance to bring in a player like Fields, you do it, even if that means a guy like Tate Martell will take his talents to South Beach. Fields is an instant upgrade – the type of prospect that you might never get on the roster again.

Even though Fields is going to start, Ohio State can still look at things as if there is a competition. It's ideal to evaluate a player like Baldwin in a situation like that – where he's truly pushing himself to compete for a job rather than just going through the motions as a backup. That evaluation process is starting to ramp up, too.

"Later today, actually, I kind of want to see the numbers and kind of see where we are at with that," Day said when asked about when he'll dive deeper into the quarterback evaluation. "We are starting to get to the point where I think there is enough snaps of film where we can start to get an idea of where guys are at."

That's a more in-depth idea – more analytical and exact. Day, of course, already has an idea of where the quarterbacks are at. He probably didn't need more than a practice or two to cement the idea that Fields will, in fact, be starting for the Buckeyes when Florida Atlantic comes to town Aug. 31.

So, if all that is true – and I certainly believe it is – why hasn't Day just gone ahead and named Fields the starter yet? I'd answer that with another question: Why does it matter?

Within the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, the coaches and players know what's going on. They know who is getting how many reps with the first team and who's working more often with the backups. They know which quarterback is the better player. The coaches know Fields will start. His teammates know that. They've known that for a while.

Just because Day hasn't come out and said it doesn't mean the battle is close. It doesn't mean there isn't already stability within the offense.

There's just no reason to actually publicly finalize the battle in the spring, a time that is best used for experimentation and getting reps for a variety of players anyway.

But rest assured, Ohio State is in good hands at quarterback, and Day and the Buckeyes know that.

Buckeye Sports BulletinBoard

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Difficult To Determine Success Of Hoops Season

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH
Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

This is the time of year when the debate is held about the success of the Ohio State men's basketball team.

Was this season a success in terms of contending for championships or earning a place as one of the better teams in Ohio State history? No. Was the season a success when you realistically evaluate the team and its potential? That's when the debate starts.

Put me down as one who didn't think the team overachieved, but I certainly don't think it underachieved.

The team's wildly unexpected success in Chris Holtmann's first season, when the Buckeyes finished 25-9 and, more surprisingly, 15-3 in the Big Ten to tie for second in the conference, created tremendous expectations for this year's squad. The former Butler coach had earned a quick reputation in Columbus as somewhat of a miracle worker.

Expectations remained high when the Buckeyes got off to a 12-1 start in 2018-19 that included wins over Cincinnati, Creighton and UCLA and conference-opening victories over Minnesota and Illinois.

"We had a great start, a little bit of fool's gold with the schedule in my opinion," Holtmann admitted.

And then reality set in.

The reality about this year's team is that it came to play without two of its best players from the year before – Keita Bates-Diop and Jae'Sean Tate – and its three top veteran leaders in Bates-Diop, Tate and Andrew Dakich. Mix that with the lost freshman class of 2015, coupled with the small class cobbled together at the last-minute by Holtmann upon his hiring in June of 2017 as well as the abrupt departure of Micah Potter just before the start of this past season, and the Buckeyes were left with an indelible void on the club, both in terms of bodies and experience.

Once the likes of Bucknell (only a two-point Buckeye victory) and Youngstown State were in the rearview mirror, the Buckeyes began the new year with five straight conference losses, and it was up and down from there.

I actually didn't think Ohio State – brace yourself, Buckeye fans – belonged in the Big Dance, based on its 19-14 record, but more importantly its 8-12 record in the conference. Fresh in my mind was the fact that Nebraska was left out of the mix last season despite a 13-5 Big Ten mark.

The selection committee disagreed, sending the Buckeyes to the Dance with an 11 seed.

Once there, the Buckeyes knocked off No. 6 seed Iowa State before falling to a perhaps underrated Houston team.

Now if you are one of the many (many, many) college basketball fans who rate the success of a team strictly on how it does in the tournament, that would mean that this year's club was as successful as last year's with its one tourney victory.

While I prefer to rate teams on their full body of work each season, I do find Ohio State's victory over the Cyclones significant. Because if you do rate teams on their performance in March, that would leave Ohio State among the top 32 teams in the country, which I think is pretty good for this edition of the Buckeyes.

With the addition of a solid recruiting class, a transfer in C.J. Walker, an additional year of experience under the belts of the returning players, and with what I believe to be a top-notch coach in Holtmann, I will expect much more in 2019-20.

Revisiting Springs Past

Our look at the first springs of football coaches during the BSB era, as part of our Reprint Thursdays at the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, entered a new phase on March 28. After reprinting stories from the Spring Previews of John Cooper, Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer, we are now running recaps of each of their first spring games, starting with Cooper's scrimmage on April 30, 1988.

It's worth checking out the reprints from the May 1988 issue of BSB just to see the picture of the youthful looking Cooper on the cover. Being the head football coach at Ohio State can age a man quickly, but few showed the wear and tear as much and as quickly as Cooper ultimately would.

In fact, it was an exuberance that Cooper, then 51, brought from Arizona State that had ignited the OSU fan base in that honeymoon period and helped bring out a then-unheard of 54,302 to that first spring game.

"I was tremendously impressed when I walked out to the stadium here and saw this many people come out to watch a ballgame," said Cooper, who questioned whether as many as even 20,000 had ever come out for a spring game during his three-year tenure in Tempe. "The importance of football in this state is just unreal, so I'm probably more excited now about being the head football coach than anytime since I've coached here. I know what's expected, and I know the support we have."

Even your humble publisher was caught up in the excitement.

"The big story coming out of Ohio State's annual spring game may have been the excitement that seems to be surrounding the program right now," I wrote in this space (it's hard to believe) 31 years ago in a column that was reprinted on BuckeyeSports.com. "It's not every day that more than 54,000 people show up for what is basically a scrimmage – no kickoffs, no punt returns, 12-minute quarters.

"John Cooper has apparently caught the fancy of the Ohio State faithful, and they proved it by turning out in force."

I added a note of caution, however.

"Ohio State fans have proven through the years that what they ultimately want is winning football, and the Buckeyes will have a tough way to go in Cooper's first season with opening games against Syracuse, Pitt and LSU before the always grueling Big Ten slate."

Coop's first team won two of those three nonleague games, but after a nearly flawless opener against the Orangemen, the Buckeyes lost an ugly 42-10 game at Pittsburgh and the honeymoon was officially over. Ohio State finished 4-6-1 that '88 season.

As is the case this spring under first-year head coach Ryan Day, the Buckeyes were in search of a new quarterback in the spring of 1988.

Sophomore Greg Frey seemed to cement his position as the starter in the spring game, though he was only 6 of 16 passing for 61 yards and no scores and rushed for 24 yards on five carries. However, he did not throw an interception, while chief competitor John Wagoner was 13 of 23 for 171 yards and a touchdown but threw a pair of picks. Wagoner gained 6 yards on three carries.

"I was pleased overall with the way Greg played," quarterbacks coach Bill Dudley said. "He assumed the controls of the offense and played with a lot of confidence and played like a guy who's played there before. He's very sharp mentally, and with our offensive scheme, the quarterback really has to be a mental gymnast.

"If we put a good unit around him, I'll be surprised if he doesn't do very well this year."

Cooper was a little more diplomatic about the quarterback battle, just as Day continues to maintain that Justin Fields and Matthew Baldwin are still battling it out this spring.

"I was encouraged with both quarterbacks," Cooper said after the game. "I like the way they held themselves under game conditions. I thought Greg Frey did an outstanding job running his offense, and I thought John Wagoner was equally as impressive."

Just as Ohio State, following the success of the combination of Day and quarterback Dwayne Haskins last season, may be shifting to more of a passing attack than Ohio State featured under Urban Meyer, Cooper brought a more pro-style passing attack to Columbus that spring than the program had been accustomed to under Bruce. It was an offense similar to the one Frey had run in high school at Cincinnati St. Xavier.

"I felt comfortable from day one of the spring practice," Frey said. "There's really nothing about this offense I can't handle. It definitely fits me more. The passing game is diversified. It attacks any part of a defense. We can do anything."

Sounds like a passing attack Day would appreciate.

There's one other picture from that 1988 issue, in addition to the youthful Cooper, that readers should check out on BuckeyeSports.com. It is a punishing hit put on Wagoner by linebacker John Kacherski. It is notable for a couple of reasons. For one, yes there was contact on the quarterback allowed in the spring of '88, big-time contact in the case of Kacherski on Wagoner. And though the hit would have been applauded mightily by coaches, fans and players alike in 1988 (maybe not Wagoner), it would have resulted in Kacherski's ejection for targeting in today's "restrict the defense" world of football.

Kacherski, described in the reprinted BSB story as a "6-3, 245-pound brute," was a sophomore to be, making a switch to outside linebacker after blowing his redshirt in 1987 while filling in on a depleted Buckeye defensive line.

"We're really glad we moved him," outside linebackers coach Fred Pagac said of Kacherski, who had a team-leading 440-pound bench press. "He's got the ability. He's strong, and he covers the ground. And he's a worker. He is really determined. If it wasn't for his determination, he may not have made it."

His pictured hit on Wagoner was one of two he made as the QB released the ball in the spring game, and Kacherski, whose son Cade is a walk-on linebacker on this year's team, ended the scrimmage with six stops, including two for loss.

Be sure to check out the picture.

In a bit of 2019 coincidence, Kacherski was vying to fill the spot vacated by Eric Kumerow, uncle to Nick and Joey Bosa. Only days before the spring game, Kumerow had been selected in the first round by the Miami Dolphins with the 16th overall pick. Kumerow had been expected to go much later.

"I know a lot of people didn't expect me to go in the first round, so I started thinking that maybe I would go later down the line, maybe as late as the fifth round," Kumerow told BSB at the time.

Also selected in that draft, in addition to Chris Spielman who went in the second round to Detroit, was William White, father of current Buckeye Brendon White, who was selected by the Lions in the fourth round.

There was one other interesting reprinted picture and note in that 1988 BSB. It was a presidential election year, and Vice President George H.W. Bush, in town campaigning in the always battleground state of Ohio, showed up at Ohio Stadium and delivered the game ball while pictured in an Ohio State jacket. He received what was described in BSB as "a nice ovation."

As mentioned previously, we are reprinting stories about the first spring games of Cooper, Tressel and Meyer after running reprints previewing their first springs.

In what I found rather amazing for Buckeye Sports Bulletin following the hiring of an Ohio-born and two-time national championship coach following a dysfunctional 2011 season, coverage previewing Meyer's first spring of 2012 was rather minimal in the March 31, 2012, edition of BSB, from which reprints were plucked for Reprint Thursday on March 20.

Meyer and his football Buckeyes had to take a back seat in that edition to the Ohio State basketball team, which dominated the issue after punching its ticket to the Final Four in New Orleans. The basketball Buckeyes had knocked off top-seeded Syracuse, 77-70, in the East Regional to earn the trip to the Bayou.

As a bonus to the minimal coverage previewing Meyer's first spring, we included plenty of reprints featuring Thad Matta's Final Four Buckeyes.

As for Meyer, he was not only learning about his players, but he was also getting acquainted with his coaching staff that included cornerbacks coach Kerry Coombs, running backs coach Stan Drayton, defensive coordinator Luke Fickell, offensive coordinator Tom Herman, tight ends coach Tim Hinton, wide receivers coach Zach Smith, defensive line coach Mke Vrabel, offensive line coach Ed Warinner and co-defensive coordinator Everett Withers.

Meyer had worked with Drayton and Smith at Florida and was a graduate assistant along with Hinton in the '80s under Bruce at Ohio State, but he was just getting to know the others.

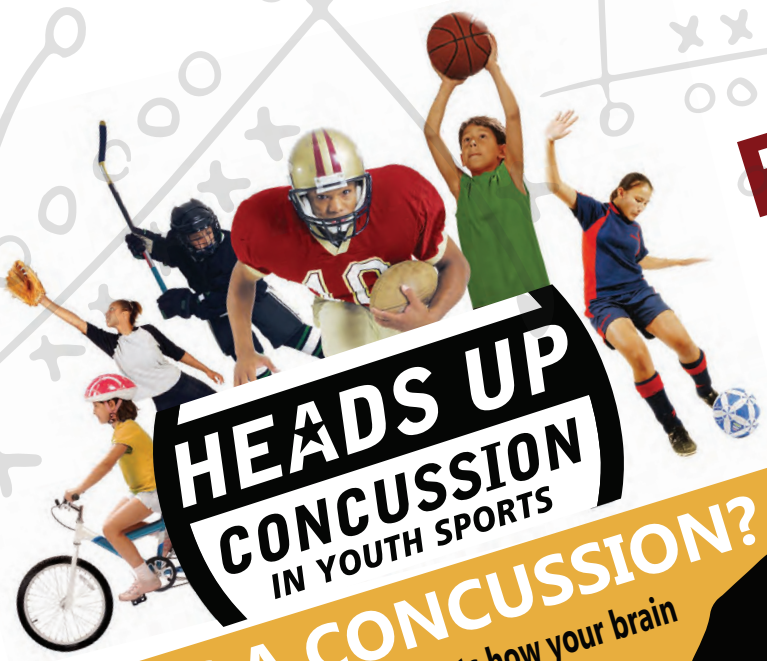
"The most underutilized resource on a staff is each other, and I'm not going to let that happen," Meyer said. "I'm going to use everybody. There are a lot of good coaches on this staff. They've been a lot of good places with a lot of great ideas. Let's use them."

None of the assistants lasted the full seven years with Meyer, though Hinton is still on staff in an administrative capacity.

Interestingly, Mark Rea takes a look at Bruce's first staff, that included such notables as Pete Carroll and Nick Saban, in his Editor's Notebook on page 3 of this issue.

All the reprints referenced here and others are archived for your enjoyment at BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers. The next Reprint Thursday, on April 4, will feature Tressel's first spring game in 2001.

If you are not already enjoying BuckeyeSports.com, see the simple signup instructions on page 5 or give us a call at (614) 486-2202 with any questions. Don't forget to join in on the conversation with other readers and the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff on BuckeyeSports.com's Forum.



HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

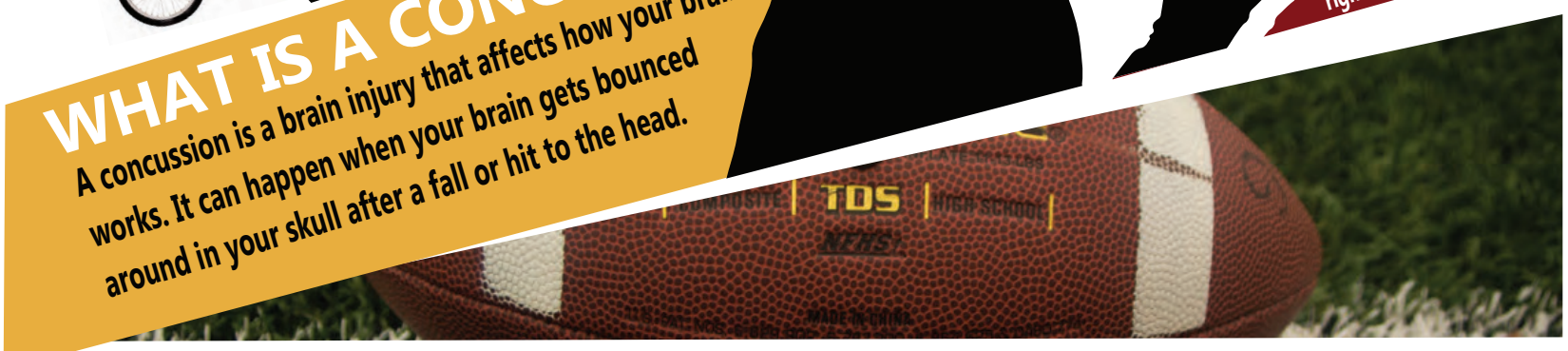
FOR ATHLETES

• CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS •

Headache • Nausea • Vomiting • Balance problems • Dizziness • Double or Blurred vision • Sensitivity to light or noise • Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy • Memory problems • Confusion • Just not "feeling right" or "feeling down"

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen when your brain gets bounced around in your skull after a fall or hit to the head.



WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?

REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a health care provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make everyday activities, such as going to school, harder. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH & PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain and can even be fatal.

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

http://www.healthy.ohio.gov/concussion

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