

BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN

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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

Nov. 23, 2019

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Ohio State Immediately Shifts Focus To Penn State After Cruising Past Rutgers

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

During a season in which Ohio State has thoroughly dominated its opponents week in and week out, head coach Ryan Day could have viewed his team's 56-21 win over Rutgers on Nov. 16 as both underwhelming and full of correctable mistakes.

After all, the Buckeyes were favored to win by more than 52 points yet failed to convert on fourth-and-goal with the first-team offense on the field early in the game while the backups allowed big play after big play late in the contest.

But Day understands the bigger picture.

"(We're) not going to put too much stock into it," Day said after the game. "We're just going to move right on and obviously make the corrections off of the film. We've got a lot to focus on moving forward."

Ohio State is 10-0 on the season and controls its own destiny in the Big Ten and College Football Playoff races. And with games against Penn State and Michigan on consecutive weekends to close the regular season, he's already shifted his sight to the next task at hand.

"All focus, the minute that game went to zero, is on Penn State and getting ready for the next run," Day said. "We've got to do everything we can to prepare for this game, and it starts right now."

"We really talked very little (in the locker room) about this game. We talked about preparation and what that means for this week. We'll go back tonight, get some rest, get back in there tomorrow, have a meeting and get right to Penn State."

Ohio State has won all 10 games this season by at least 24 points, marking just the second time in the last century (Nebraska in 1971) that a team has accomplished such a feat. But the Buckeyes have also had their hands full with the



ANDREW LIND

DOMINANT EFFORT – Receiver Chris Olave (four catches for 139 yards, above) and running back J.K. Dobbins (89 yards and two touchdowns, below) shone in Ohio State's 35-point win over Rutgers.



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Buckeye Leaves

Ohio State appeared to be ready to win by historic margins coming into the matchup against Rutgers. The Buckeyes came out and won in dominant fashion, but in not quite as dominant fashion as many expected. Still, the BSB staff, as well as subscribers on the BuckeyeSports.com forum, were easily able to give out Buckeye Leaves to a few key contributors to the victory.

Wyatt Crosher, BSB: He once again played just over a half of football, but statistically, this was arguably Justin Fields' best performance this season.

The sophomore quarterback surpassed the 300-yard passing mark for the first time in his collegiate career, doing it on only 19 passes. He completed 15 of those for 305 yards and four scores, while also rushing three times for 30 yards.

It may have been just another impressive showing in a season full of multiple games where he has been impressive, but Fields picked Rutgers apart throughout his time on the field, hitting on multiple deep balls with almost nothing getting in his way.

Joe Dempsey, BSB: Shaun Wade deserves a Buckeye Leaf for his performance against Rutgers. The sophomore cornerback made sure the Scarlet Knights knew they were overmatched early in the game, forcing two turnovers in the first quarter.

On just the second play of the game, Rutgers quarterback Johnny Langan challenged Wade with a deep pass. The Jacksonville,

Fla., native made Langan pay by tipping the ball up to himself with his right hand and hauling in an interception, which set up a Buckeye touchdown.

Then on Rutgers' ensuing possession, Wade stripped the ball from Scarlet Knight freshman wideout Isaiah Washington. The forced fumble also set up an Ohio State score and helped propel the Scarlet and Gray to a 56-21 victory.

Wade finished with three tackles (two solo) with the pick and forced fumble.

Andrew Lind, BSB: Sophomore linebacker K'Vaughan Pope continues to make the most of his opportunities against lesser opponents, recording his second interception in as many games with a pick in the third quarter against Rutgers.

Ohio State took advantage of the excellent field position, as backup quarterback Chris Chugunov hit tight end Jake Hausmann for his first career touchdown six plays later to give the Buckeyes a 49-7 lead.

Besides Pope – who dropped into coverage on the play and tipped the pass to himself – Tuf Borland is the only linebacker to record an interception this season.

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB: Another game, another massive performance from Chris Olave. What's new. It has been easy this season to forget that Olave is just a true sophomore, because there isn't a more complete and consistent receiver on Ohio State's roster and perhaps in the entire country. He showed off his elite talent again in Ohio State's win over Rutgers, reeling in four receptions for 139 yards.

Although he wasn't able to grab a touchdown of his own, Olave's big-play ability consistently put Ohio State into excellent field position. The play of the day may have been his 42-yard reception early in the third quarter that had a called defensive pass interference completely unable to impact Olave, as he pulled in a shoestring catch through the contact.

Earlier in the game, Olave picked up 58 yards on a Justin Fields deep ball that would have gone for a touchdown if the ball had been 2 or 3 yards farther down the field. It was another dominant performance for a player who has fully come into his own this season, just as he was expected to.

BSB Subscribers

I'll go Justin Fields. 300-yard game. Very efficient.

– Tiffin Buckeye

Justin Fields and J.K. Dobbins for coming in ready to play at their All-American levels even in a lopsided contest. Chris Olave for becoming a spectacularly reliable go-to receiver; the Silver Bullet linebackers Pete Werner and Tuf Borland were making plays visibly all afternoon. Malik Harrison for his amazing closing speed at his weight and tackles behind the line and K'Vaughan Pope, who would be a starter anywhere else in the B1G conference! Shaun Wade and Sevyn Banks excelled too!

– AnthonyBuckeye

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Greats Go Back Further

The discussion in a recent BSB about where Chase Young should rank on a list of all-time great Buckeye defenders served to remind me, once again, of the increasing lack of historical knowledge in our society, even regarding sports.

Most of your contributors went back no farther than the Bosas or Chris Spielman. A couple went back to Jack Tatum and Jim Stillwagon. Only one, however, went back to the greatest defender in Buckeye history, the great Bill Willis, who – to this day – remains the only Ohio State defensive player in both the college and professional football halls of fame. Certainly, Young is a great player, but he has a very long way to go to reach the exalted status of Willis. Frankly, at this point, Chase would have a hard time breaking into my top 10 – or maybe even 20. This discussion demonstrates, as if we needed to be reminded of it, that people think history began with them.

Thinking of the long view of things also made me wonder if we Buckeye fans truly appreciate the Golden Age we have been living in for the last 20 years and how very rare it has been in terms of sustained excellence. It is hard to find another two-decade period in our history that can match what we enjoyed under Jim Tressel and Urban Meyer. During the period from 1954 to 1975, Woody Hayes piled up five national championships (by our count) and had some great teams. But even then, there were some lean years. We have been blessed to live during a time of unmatched success. We should be sure to enjoy it while we can because one day this too shall pass.

**Terry Walrath
Hinckley, Ohio**

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. 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 Message Board

Following Ohio State's 56-21 win over Rutgers on Nov. 16, Buckeye Sports Bulletin asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, for their takeaways from the rather one-sided contest.

Here are some of the responses:

"I think OSU could have left 22 starters in Columbus and won vs. Rutgers."

– Terrier Buck

"You could tell the team seemed bored that they even had to play. I'm not saying that's a bad thing, but you could tell especially in the second half with a lot of vanilla play calling, just trying to get through the game with no injuries. Happy for the win obviously, just wish the team executed a little better."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I would like to see Drue Chrisman get back in the groove with his punting. Another underwhelming performance again against Rutgers. Also, Garrett Wilson absolutely cannot be fumbling punts away from here on out."

– mrbigbux

"Kudos to the Rutgers defense, playing before what seemed a stadium devoid of Knights fans. Great to see K'Vaughan Pope make a pick and some of the backups shine."

– PeyoteBuck

"The first takeaway is that this offense comes to play. The way they have all jelled together is amazing, and I don't see them being stopped by anyone, but Justin Fields needs to better protect himself when he runs, even at the cost of a few yards. The defense is

also a shutout defense and excelled and is probably the best defense in the country. They may want to game plan better after any Buckeye turnovers. The special teams unusually had too many errors in this game."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"I don't think there's much to take away from it. Good teams have to win clunkers sometimes, and Ohio State found itself in that position on Saturday. Credit to the Buckeyes for getting the job done. If anything, a game like this is more helpful than a Maryland-esque beatdown, because a slight letdown game gives Ohio State some sloppiness to pick at and clean up as it heads into the toughest patch of the schedule."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"Ohio State gave up 21 points, but that number can be a little bit misleading considering the fact that the only touchdown scored on the starting defense came off a muffed punt. The Buckeye backups struggled more than I expected them to, but the starters were solid and will regain Damon Arnette and Chase Young against Penn State.

"Fields and his receivers excelled against Rutgers, who loaded the box in an attempt to limit J.K. Dobbins and played like an elite passing threat. While the reserves have a lot to clean up, Ohio State's starters played fine and will handle the Nittany Lions at Ohio Stadium."

– Joe Dempsey, BSB

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PUBLISHER
Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
Mark Rea

PRINT PRODUCT COORDINATOR
Andrew Lind

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
Kevin Dye Josh Winslow
Andrew Lind

CONTRIBUTORS
Wyatt Crosher Patrick Mayhorn
Bob Roehm David Breithaupt
Bill Conley Mark Schmetzer
Joe Dempsey Steve Siegfried
Rich Exner Jeff Svoboda
Mike Wachsman Craig Merz

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
Jan Jager Dave Tebay
Ron Friedman

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Ohio State Sleepwalks Through Win At Rutgers

For the past 2½ months, through the Ohio State football team's various mauling, thrashing and flogging of one hapless opponent after another, there has been one thought nagging at my brain: When are the Buckeyes going to have their clunker game?

You know the kind of game I'm talking about – the one where the Buckeyes don't bring their A, B or even C game. Because the game is played by 18- to 22-year-olds who have a tough time keeping focused on what to have for lunch on any given afternoon, it happens to every team in college football no matter how good they are.

Third-ranked Clemson nearly stubbed its toe in late September at North Carolina before escaping with a 21-20 victory. In mid-October, No. 4 Georgia lost a 20-17 decision in two overtimes to a South Carolina team that is currently 4-7. And I don't think I need to remind any OSU fan what happened in Iowa two years ago and at Purdue last season.

It's scary to think there still might be a nasty misstep out there waiting when the Buckeyes are entering the most important phase of the season. But maybe, just maybe, Ohio State has already had its off game, and it came during the 56-21 victory against Rutgers.

I know it's difficult to come away from a five-touchdown win and size it up as anything other than a success. But it didn't feel quite right, especially after just four plays from scrimmage, the Scarlet Knights had already turned the ball over twice. Meanwhile, the Buckeyes tallied four touchdowns after only 19 snaps. So, getting excited about a 35-point victory? It should have been double that.

Michigan took Rutgers to the woodshed courtesy of a 52-0 whipping in late September, and that was while the Wolverines were still struggling to find their identity on offense and defense. Maryland, the same team that absorbed a 73-14 beating from Ohio State, rolled to a 48-7 victory against the Scarlet Knights in early October, and a week later, Indiana pitched a 35-0 shutout during a game in which Rutgers managed only 75 yards in total offense. Over the past 26 seasons, the Hoosiers have shut out exactly two Big Ten opponents – and it was the Scarlet Knights both times.

Therefore, Ohio State taking on Rutgers should have been nothing more than a glorified cat-and-mouse game, except that the cat got bored very early in the proceedings.

Justin Fields completed 15 of 19 passes for a career-high 305 yards and four touchdowns before taking a seat early in the third quarter. Those numbers certainly seem Heisman Trophy-worthy for a quarterback who now has a 31-to-1 touchdown-to-interception ratio. But I didn't think the sophomore QB's performance was all that outstanding.

Fields seemed to revert to some old, sloppy habits during the game – i.e. throwing off his back foot, failing to square his shoulders – and his receivers bailed him out on more than one occasion. Chris Olave, in particular, turned an underthrown ball into a 42-yard completion in the third quarter by making a shoestring reception (almost literally catching the ball off his shoestrings) despite being interfered with by a Rutgers defender.

J.K. Dobbins totaled 89 yards and a couple of touchdowns on 17 carries and then took the second half off for the second week in a row. I don't mind resting Dobbins for the stretch, but I have to admit I thought he'd have more yards than the 179 he accumulated against Maryland and Rutgers – like about 200 or so more. It wasn't exactly his fault, of course, since he got only 29 combined carries in the two games.

Defensively, the Buckeyes gave up chunk

plays to a Rutgers team that entered the game averaging a puny 3.3 yards per play over its previous six Big Ten contests. Yet the Scarlet Knights got a 26-yard touchdown run in the first quarter – a score courtesy of a muffed punt by OSU return man Garrett Wilson – and a pair of pass plays in the second half that went for more than 40 yards. The Buckeyes had surrendered only two pass plays of 40 yards or more in their first nine games combined.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Of course, when you are on the field against a hopelessly outmanned opponent – an opponent you know has zero chance of beating you – the hardest thing in the world to do is maintain your focus. You can criticize the coaching staff for allowing the players to lose that focus, but that would be a fool's errand. Because of the number of blowouts this season, Ohio State's second- and third-stringers have already taken enough snaps that rolling through another hapless opponent has become pretty ho-hum to them, too.

The defense had only one sack, and the Buckeyes turned the ball over twice, committed six penalties for 54 yards (bringing their total to 19 penalties for 195 yards in just the last two games) and made more than their share of mistakes that would indicate the Scarlet Knights did not have their full attention.

Perhaps the argument can be made that the Scarlet Knights did not deserve Ohio State's full attention. That, of course, will not be the case with any opponent the rest of the way. Therefore, if there is to be a clunker game during the 2019 season, it had better have been the one the Buckeyes just played.

Don't Sweat Rankings

Ohio State made some history Nov. 12 with the release of the second College Football Playoff rankings of the season.

Despite a 59-point victory against Maryland, the previously top-ranked Buckeyes were dropped a spot to No. 2, making way for newly minted No. 1 team LSU (fresh off its entertaining (in more ways than one) 46-41 victory against third-ranked Alabama).

In terms of historical note, the Buckeyes became the first team since the CFP era began in 2014 to get dropped out of the top spot without losing. Naturally, that touched the last nerve of Buckeye Nation members already seething over the Chase Young situation.

Most of the complaints centered on a perceived SEC bias by the playoff selection committee in charge of the rankings, and that conference indeed boasted three teams among the top five – LSU at No. 1, Georgia at No. 4 and Alabama at No. 5. Whether or not those teams remain among the top five for the remainder of the season is anyone's guess.

As the 2019 college football season moves into its final weeks, there are few guarantees. But one that is a lead-pipe cinch is that if each of the top three teams – LSU, Ohio State and Clemson – win each of their remaining games, they're in the playoff.

LSU already has an impressive body of work that includes victories against four teams that were ranked in the top 10 when the Tigers played them, and LSU will add a fifth such victory if it can knock off Georgia in the SEC Championship Game.

Ohio State might not have those kind of

signature victories, but the Buckeyes have a whole lot of statement wins. They are the first team since 1971 national champion Nebraska to beat each of their first 10 opponents by 24 points or more, and they are the first team since 1944 national champion Army to average at least 50 points per game while allowing fewer than 10.

Finally, I don't care who Clemson has played and how the Tigers have looked playing them. They are the defending national champions, they have an excellent defense to go along with one of the nation's most prolific offenses, and if they are 13-0 when the final rankings are released, they'll be among the top four teams – and deservedly so.

Who will be the fourth playoff team? That will depend upon what happens with the top three. But if they all win out, that means Georgia will have lost the SEC title game to LSU. But if the Bulldogs somehow pull off the upset, get ready for a four-team playoff that includes two entrants from the SEC.

Historically Bad

I have written on this subject several times, but in the wake of the 56-21 beating Ohio State just administered to Rutgers, I have to wonder again what the State University of New Jersey brings to the competitive balance of Big Ten football.

Heading into their game against the Buckeyes, this year's version of the Scarlet Knights ranked 12th or lower in the 14-team conference in 19 of the 28 major team statistics compiled by the NCAA, including a dead-last 14th in first downs, rush defense, scoring defense, tackles for loss, sacks and turnover margin.

Head coach Chris Ash was dismissed in late September, and the Knights are now coached by 42-year-old Nunzio Campanile, who is less than two years removed from coaching high school football.

Rutgers is now winless in seven conference games with its only two victories this season against independent powerhouses Massachusetts and Liberty, teams with a combined record of 7-14.

Going winless throughout an entire conference season is not exactly an anomaly. Just since the 2010 season, there have been six winless conference seasons recorded, but Rutgers has two of them. And if the Knights put up another zero this season in terms of conference wins, it will mark the third time in four seasons they have had a goose egg in the league victory column. No Big Ten team has experienced that level of futility since Northwestern went a collective 0-35-1 from 1978 through 1981.

The final year of that stretch was especially brutal for the Wildcats. Under first-year head coach Dennis Green, they lost a 21-20 heartbreaker in their opener to Indiana and were then outscored by an average of more than 41 points over their remaining 10 games. That included being shut out by four conference opponents, the most by any Big Ten team in nearly four decades.

Rutgers has already been shut out three times this season, and its 2016 team matched the 1981 Wildcats by getting shut out four times in conference play.

Just so you know, Ohio State has been shut out just once over its last 305 conference games, a 28-0 loss to Michigan in 1993, including a current streak of 210 straight league games since being held off the scoreboard. You would have to go back to 1959 to find a season during which the Buckeyes were shut out twice in conference games – and one of those was a 0-0 tie with Indiana.



Young Set To Return From Two-Game Suspension

Ohio State defensive end Chase Young will return to action against Penn State on Nov. 23 after he was reinstated by the NCAA amid an investigation into a loan he received from a family friend, which is considered to be an impermissible benefit.

Young – a junior from Hyattsville (Md.) DeMatha Catholic – was initially held out of the Buckeyes' 73-14 win over Maryland as the university prepared a formal report. And while the program requested immediate reinstatement given Young had paid back the money over the summer, the NCAA decided to hold him out one additional game (Rutgers).

"I want to thank and express my sincere gratitude to university staff members who worked so diligently and expertly to learn and understand the facts, and then to report these facts to the NCAA as part of our request to have

Chase reinstated," athletic director Gene Smith said on Nov. 13. "This is the example of the culture of compliance we have at Ohio State.

"I also want to commend Chase and let him know how proud we are of him. He took responsibility for his actions, cooperated throughout the process and understood and accepted that there would be consequences. He's a team captain and a leader and most importantly, a Buckeye. He wants nothing more than an opportunity to play again, and we're pleased that he'll get that chance."

Young is second in the country with 13½ sacks on the season and is one shy of breaking Vernon Gholston's single-season school record.

"They'll be fired up to get him back," head coach Ryan Day said after the 56-21 win over the Scarlet Knights on Nov. 16. "I know Chase is fired up to get back. Not that our defense needs any more motivation for this week, but it will be great to have him back."

Buckeyes Focusing On Response To Adversity

Ohio State faced adversity for the first time all season in the week leading up to a 73-14 win over Maryland, though it was through no fault of the play on the field. Instead, after a year filled with domination, it was the off-the-field incident with Young that served as the first test for the Buckeyes.

However, the loss of a star player is still adversity. For a team relatively new to things not going the right way, Ohio State expressed an increased focus on avoiding a letdown during the week headed into the matchup with Rutgers.

"We talked about it all week," Day said on Nov. 12. "The team was aware of the situation, they knew this was the first time we faced some adversity. We know there's more adversity coming along the way. We don't know where, when,

2019 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2019 Record
Aug. 31	FLORIDA ATLANTIC	W, 45-21	FOX	7-3 (5-1 Conference USA)
Sept. 7	CINCINNATI*	W, 42-0	ABC	9-1 (6-0 American Athletic)
Sept. 14	at Indiana	W, 51-10.	FOX	7-3 (4-3 Big Ten)
Sept. 21	MIAMI (OHIO)	W, 76-5	BTN	6-4 (5-1 Mid-American)
Sept. 28	at Nebraska	W, 48-7	ABC	4-6 (2-5 Big Ten)
Oct. 5	MICHIGAN STATE*	W, 34-10	ABC/ESPN	4-6 (2-5 Big Ten)
Oct. 18	at Northwestern*	W, 52-3	BTN	2-8 (0-7 Big Ten)
Oct. 26	WISCONSIN*	W, 38-7	FOX	8-2 (5-2 Big Ten)
Nov. 9	MARYLAND	W, 73-14	TBA	3-7 (1-6 Big Ten)
Nov. 16	at Rutgers	W, 56-21	BTN	2-8 (0-7 Big Ten)
Nov. 23	PENN STATE*	12 p.m.	FOX	9-1 (6-1 Big Ten)
Nov. 30	at Michigan*	12 p.m.	FOX	8-2 (5-2 Big Ten)
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	FOX	

* 2018 bowl team

** at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

"We talked to the team about that early on. We were going to equip ourselves to be ready for any adversity that might hit us.

"Championship teams, they're resilient in times of adversity. It reveals your character. The coaching staff, we relayed to the team that this is a program that our character was at the forefront. The heart of this team is being showcased today to find out what we're really made of. I think they took that to heart. They played hard throughout the game (against Maryland)."

The message from the staff got through to the players, as they showed with their 56-21 win over the Scarlet Knights on Nov. 16, as well as with their statements to the media.

"I think our team has done a really good job of showing resiliency, no matter what happens," junior cornerback Jeff Okudah said. "Being here for three years for me, we've had our fair share of adversity, so just being able to respond, and respond positively to anything we've faced, I think that's just big. We've always stressed that we have to be able to respond to adversity."

McKenzie, LaRoe Lose Black Stripes

Ohio State added two more official members to its team on Nov. 13, as freshman defensive tackle Jaden McKenzie and walk-on freshman quarterback Jagger LaRoe both lost their black stripes, according to Ohio State's official football Twitter account.

McKenzie is the 16th member of Ohio State's 2019 recruiting class to lose his stripe, leaving safety Ronnie Hickman and tight end Cormontae Hamilton as the lone members yet to be officially introduced to the team. Hickman has been struggling with an ACL injury and has yet to practice, while Hamilton has had similar injury issues, though nothing as severe.

McKenzie was the No. 765 player in the

2019 class. A late addition to the class, he was one of three defensive line commitments along with Zach Harrison and Noah Potter, though he was the only defensive tackle.

Joining McKenzie was redshirt freshman quarterback LaRoe, a walk-on transfer from Texas A&M. LaRoe threw for 3,029 yards and 33 touchdowns in his senior season at Colleyville (Texas) Heritage.

Ohio State Awards Roundup

Two more Buckeyes found themselves on award semifinalist lists during the week leading up to their win over Rutgers.

Quarterback Justin Fields was named a semifinalist for the Davey O'Brien Award, given to the nation's best quarterback. Fields is one of 16 players included in the list and the only representative of the Big Ten. His stats are some of the lowest on the list, with just 2,164 yards on 159-of-230 passing, but few quarterbacks have been more efficient than the Buckeye starter this season.

Fields would be just the second Buckeye quarterback to win the award, following Troy Smith in 2006. Seven of the past nine winners have also won the Heisman trophy, with the two exceptions coming in 2015 when Derrick Henry of Alabama won the Heisman and 2016, when the trophy went to Louisville's Lamar Jackson. Clemson's Deshaun Watson was given the award both seasons.

Ohio State co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley was the other Buckeye to find himself listed as a semifinalist, as Hafley was named one of the 41 nominees for the Broyles Award, which goes to the nation's top assistant coach.

Hafley is the lone Buckeye on the list, but he's one of four Big Ten coaches, alongside Indiana offensive coordinator Kalen DeBoer,

Find Big Game News, Recruiting Coverage Online

With Ohio State's big games with Penn State and Michigan finally here, you are going to want to follow the latest news of the Ohio State football team at our electronic BuckeyeSports.com. We will be posting any news from Ryan Day's Tuesday press conference, in addition to other availabilities leading up to each big game. We will also have our popular Staff Predictions on game days with both the Nittany Lions and Wolverines.

And in a print/online publishing note, please remember that due to Buckeye Sports Bulletin's print publishing schedule, football's early recruiting signing period, starting Dec. 18, will be covered online at BuckeyeSports.com, so those readers who are not already enjoying this feature, free with your print subscription, may want to get signed up and comfortable with the site now.

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From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1984

Ohio State blasted Indiana, 50-7, Nov. 3 in Ohio Stadium, leaving former Ohio State assistant and first-year Hoosiers head coach Bill Mallory still searching for his first victory as Indiana head coach after an 0-9 start.

"It was a long afternoon – seemed like seven or eight hours," Mallory said. "We played lousy, and you don't do that against a team like Ohio State. We made umpteen mistakes."

Coach Earle Bruce's Buckeyes made few mistakes and managed to secure Bruce's 100th collegiate-level win as a head coach.

"It's nice to be home and nice to play with enthusiasm," Bruce said after the game. "Basically it was a great effort by our football team today."

The Buckeyes were led by freshman receiver Cris Carter, who reeled in three passes for 57 yards, including a 44-yard touchdown reception that put Ohio State ahead 24-0.

30 Years Ago – 1989

Head coach John Cooper chastised the second-largest Ohio Stadium crowd of the season for not giving the Buckeye defense more of a boost in Ohio State's 28-0 win over Iowa.

"I would like to see our fans get behind our defense a little more," Cooper said. "There are some places, in Iowa City for example, where the defense makes a great play and the fans give it a standing ovation."

"We're hanging on on defense. We've had a ton of injuries. Mike Showalter isn't playing. Andy Gurd isn't playing. John Kacherski isn't playing. Give our defense some credit."

A few hours later, while co-hosting "The John Cooper Show" on Columbus television, the OSU head coach backed off that statement a bit.

"Some of the greatest fans in college football are right here in Columbus," Cooper said.

25 Years Ago – 1994

Following Ohio State's 63-14 loss to Penn State, post-mortems on Ohio State's season and perhaps Cooper's tenure in Columbus flew all around. Fans vented their frustration on radio call-in shows, many of them calling for Cooper to be dismissed.

Even a story published in The Lantern quoted an unnamed source close to the program as saying, among other things, that there was dissension on the team, a lack of leadership and a burgeoning feud between Cooper and his offensive coordinator, Joe Hollis, over play selection.

Cooper responded to such criticisms by calling the

reports "completely off base" and having "absolutely no truth whatsoever." He also closed the team's practices for the remainder of the season and made a conscious effort on his weekly radio call-in show to do some damage control, taking fewer calls from fans while trying to put a positive spin on the rest of the season.

20 Years Ago – 1999

After nearly everything went Ohio State's way in a 41-11 win over Iowa on Oct. 30, many believed the Buckeyes – at long last – had resolved many of their lingering problems. After all, they had reeled off a season-high 534 yards in rolling over the Hawkeyes.

A week later, though, Ohio State barely figured in a 23-7 loss at Michigan State.

The Buckeyes, who fell to 6-4 overall and 3-3 in Big Ten play, managed just 79 yards total offense against the Spartans. That yardage figure was the lowest by an OSU offense in 35 years.

Afterward, Cooper was asked whether he was disappointed in his offense's progress this season.

"Without a doubt. What can I say?" he replied.

15 Years Ago – 2004

Ted Ginn Jr. took control of a ballgame like few players in recent Ohio State memory had done, scoring three times in three different ways and helping the Buckeyes notch an important 32-19 victory over Michigan State.

The victory was the third in a row for OSU on the heels of a three-game losing streak to start the Big Ten schedule. It made the Buckeyes bowl-eligible for the 15th time in 16 seasons.

Ginn found the end zone on a 17-yard rush in the first quarter, a 60-yard punt return just a minute later and a 58-yard reception in the fourth quarter to give the Buckeyes a solid lead.

"I'm just trying to do what I can to help this team win some games," said the soft-spoken Ginn. "When I get the ball, I'm thinking about taking it all the way every time. Today, I had a couple of pretty good lanes and some great blocks. If I can get that far in the open, I'm usually thinking nothing but six (points)."

10 Years Ago – 2009

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith announced Nov. 4 that the Buckeyes would wear throwback uniforms against Michigan, designed to recognize the 1954 Ohio State team that won the national championship under head coach Woody Hayes. The team had been recognized previously, on Oct. 24 for its 55th anniversary during Ohio State's 38-7 win over Minnesota.

"During spring 2009, Ohio State was invited by Nike

to participate in its rivalry uniform program with several other universities from around the nation," Smith said. "They offered us a chance to try a new uniform product featuring cutting-edge fabrics and technology. Participation in the program also offered us a one-time opportunity to salute one of those great championship teams that have built the Ohio State football tradition."

Smith stressed in his announcement that no permanent uniform change was in the works.

"Again, this is a one-time opportunity to honor a great championship team," he said. "We have no plans to make any changes to the traditional Buckeye uniform for the foreseeable future."

Five Years Ago – 2014

Ohio State failed to earn any style points with its 31-24 win over at Minnesota on Nov. 15, but it escaped the unfriendly TCF Bank Stadium unscathed.

The Buckeyes scored 17 consecutive points between the second and fourth quarters to break a 14-14 tie and record their second win over a ranked opponent of the season. Turnovers were a major reason the Golden Gophers were able to keep the game close despite being outgained 489-303. Each of Ohio State's three turnovers led to a Minnesota touchdown.

"A great team win," is how Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer described it afterward. "Not great execution, but a great team win in a tough environment, at 11 a.m., against a very good team that we have a lot of respect for."

One Year Ago – 2018

In late July, former Ohio State wide receiver Brian Hartline took over as the team's interim receivers coach after Urban Meyer fired Zach Smith.

Hartline had been a graduate assistant for a year following a successful NFL career, but he hadn't been a position coach before.

Ten games into the season, Hartline's players were excelling as Ohio State marched toward record numbers in the passing game. The development of those receivers, though, was only part of Hartline's job.

In addition to being a coach on and off the field for the current players, Hartline was also tasked with stepping in for Smith – previously one of the team's top recruiters – in helping to land the top high school prospects in the nation. So far, so good, Meyer said.

"He's done very well," Meyer said, noting that he would make a decision down the line on whether Hartline would keep the job full time.

Iowa defensive coordinator Phil Parker, Michigan defensive coordinator Don Brown and Penn State defensive coordinator Brent Pry. Former Buckeye linebacker Marcus Freeman found himself on the list as Cincinnati's defensive coordinator, as did former safeties coach Alex Grinch, now the DC at Oklahoma.

Hafley's unit may be the nation's best, allowing just 9.8 points per game, the best of any defense.

Buckeyes Remain Second In AP, Coaches Polls

Ohio State stayed steady at No. 2 in both the AP and coaches polls on Nov. 17 following its 56-21 win over Rutgers. The Buckeyes are behind just LSU in both polls, after the Tigers beat Ole Miss, 58-37. The top 10 behind Ohio State are similar in both as well.

In the AP poll, Clemson, Georgia, Alabama, Oregon, Utah, Oklahoma, Penn State and Florida follow the Buckeyes. The only changes are at No. 4 and No. 5, where Alabama and Georgia flipped places, and with Utah and Oklahoma both jumping up two spots, while Florida moved up one spot. Minnesota fell out of the top 10 after a 23-19 loss to Iowa.

The coaches poll has Ohio State followed

Continued On Page 6

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Continued From Page 5

by Clemson, Georgia, Alabama, Oregon, Oklahoma, Utah, Penn State and Florida. The only change between the two is with Oklahoma and Utah swapped.

The Big Ten had six representatives in both polls. Led by the Buckeyes and Nittany Lions in both polls, Minnesota is the consensus No. 11, Michigan and Wisconsin are No. 12 and No. 14 respectively in both polls, while Iowa checks in at No. 19 in the AP poll and No. 20 according to the coaches.

Ohio State Falls One Spot In CFP Poll

Ohio State fell a spot in the College Football Playoff rankings released Nov. 12. After opening the first released rankings as the No. 1 team, the Buckeyes fell behind LSU in the second rendition, despite a 73-14 win over Maryland on Nov. 9. Ohio State's fall was not so much the fault of the Buckeyes as it was a result of LSU's success. The Tigers, led by former Buckeye Joe Burrow, beat Alabama 46-41, giving them their fourth win of the season over a team ranked in the CFP poll.

Heading into the announcement of the poll, Ohio State held firm with its stance that the poll is not yet important.

"Not really," Josh Myers said on if the team cares about the CFP poll. "So much can change, right now all we're focused on is this game, winning this game and moving on from there. We try not to worry about what we can't control."

The Buckeyes were followed in the top 10 by Clemson, Georgia, Alabama, Oregon, Utah, Minnesota, Penn State and Oklahoma. Ohio State had two ranked wins over top-25 teams in the poll, over No. 14 Wisconsin and No. 17 Cincinnati.

The Big Ten had six representatives, with Indiana being left out despite ranking in both the AP and coaches polls in the Nov. 10 release. Ohio State, Minnesota and Penn State all checked in as top-10 teams, followed by Wisconsin, Michigan at No. 15 and Iowa rounding out the group at No. 20.

Ohio State has two ranked foes left on the schedule, and a likely third if it can

win out and secure a bid to the Big Ten Championship Game.

COTA Announces Plan For Express Lane

The Central Ohio Transit Authority and the city of Columbus announced a new plan for a Mobility Innovation Test on Nov. 12 that will have an impact on travel prior to Ohio State's Nov. 23 battle with Penn State. This will be the second such test of the last two years, with the tests being designed to yield data that the city can use to design more efficient traffic patterns.

That first test, which had a lane on Third Street in Columbus turned into a buses, bikes and scooters-only lane, serves as a good example for what the upcoming test will look like, even though it ran only during rush hour for two weeks.

Two hours prior to Ohio State's kickoff against Penn State, the southbound curb lane of High Street will be a bus, bike and scooter-only lane from Dodridge Street to Lane Avenue. At the start of the game and for two hours after the game, the northbound curb lane will become the no-car lane. The program is being called the Game Day Mobility Lane.

"The mobility innovation tests provide critical information to help us understand how to better connect residents to education, jobs, healthcare, and even OSU football," said Columbus City Council President Shannon Hardin. "We know from other cities that dedicated lanes make a transit system more efficient and effective. I'm excited by our partnership with President Joanna Pinkerton and the COTA team to continue innovating to improve our transportation system."

Cris Carter Fired From Fox Sports 1

Former Ohio State receiver Cris Carter was fired from Fox Sports 1 on Nov. 7, following a suspension from the network the week prior.

Carter had been with FS1 since 2016 and was a host of the morning show "First Things First" with Nick Wright and Jenna Wolfe, which had been on the air since September of 2016. The show has continued in Carter's absence with former NFL lineman Chris Canty filling in.

The network released a brief statement shortly after news broke of Carter's departure.

"Cris Carter is no longer with Fox Sports," the network said. "There is no further comment at this time."

According to a report from Michael McCarthy of Front Office Sports, Carter's ouster was a result of a dispute between Carter and the network revolving around Fox's "Thursday Night Football" pregame coverage. Carter reportedly wanted to be included as an analyst but was instead passed up for another NFL Hall of Famer: tight end Tony Gonzalez.

A conflicting report from Andrew

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Marchand of the New York Post insinuated that the "Thursday Night Football" dispute was an issue, but not the deciding issue for the divorce between the network and Carter.

"While there have been reports that Carter was miffed about not being a part of Fox's 'Thursday Night Football' studio show, that is not the reason he was let go," Marchand reported on Nov. 7.

"He may have been upset about not having a role on TNF, but sources said the matter at hand is more serious. The exact nature of the disagreement is unknown at this time."

Carter has yet to release an official comment, and Fox Sports hasn't released anything longer than the statement confirming his firing.

Haskins Named Starter For Remainder Of Season

Former Ohio State quarterback Dwayne Haskins was named the starting quarterback of the Washington Redskins by interim head coach Bill Callahan on Nov. 11. Haskins will be backed up by Case Keenum, who had started seven of Washington's first nine games, putting up a 1-6 record.

"Let's face it, let's give Dwayne an opportunity," Callahan said on Nov. 11. "We're at a juncture where we don't want to be record-wise, so this is a good opportunity for him to take advantage of every rep, practice-wise and game-wise, so we can see growth in his play."

Callahan went on to explain the moment that put Haskins ahead for the job in his mind.

"It was interesting, he came in a few weeks ago and wanted to know what he could do better to win. That was after the Minnesota

game (a 19-9 loss for Washington on Oct. 24).

"He took it to heart. That loss stuck deep into him. He wanted to know exactly what he could do. He came in on a Saturday, on our off day, and we visited for a good hour or so and just talked about what he could do better, how he could perform better, how he could prepare better."

The rookie quarterback has struggled at times during his opening campaign in the NFL, putting up 498 yards on a 58.2 completion percentage while tossing two touchdowns and five interceptions. He had decent stats (15-of-22 passing for 144 yards) in his first start against the Buffalo Bills on Nov. 3, though Washington wasn't able to get the win.

He put up 214 yards and two scores on 19-of-35 passing in his first start after the announcement against the New York Jets on Nov. 17, though Washington fell 34-17.

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Jackson Reunites With Former Teammates At RU

Continued From Page 1

Nittany Lions over the last three seasons, going 2-1 in three games decided by a total of five points.

Those previous matchups would suggest Ohio State could be in for its first real test of the season when Penn State travels to Columbus on Nov. 23.

If the Buckeyes win, they'll clinch the Big Ten East Division title and a berth in the conference championship game on Dec. 7. If the Nittany Lions pull the upset, though, they would need only to beat the Scarlet Knights in the season finale to win the division.

Simply put, a lot is riding on this game.

"The way we look at it is kind of a March Madness-type thing," said Ohio State safety Jordan Fuller, noting how it takes six games for a team to win the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament. "We have to win every game we play."

For all intents and purposes, the Scarlet Knights served as the No. 16 seed for the top-seeded Buckeyes. And when framed like college basketball's postseason, Ohio State's schedule only gets more difficult from here on out.

"We know what we're getting into," fifth-year senior defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton said. "We've got a big game coming up, and that's our big focus. We've got to win."



ANDREW LIND

Jackson Returns To Rutgers

Ohio State offensive guard Jonah

HOMECOMING – Ohio State offensive guard Jonah Jackson (73) returned to Rutgers, where he spent four seasons before pursuing a graduate transfer this offseason.

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Jackson spent the last four seasons at Rutgers before he elected to pursue a graduate transfer this offseason. But one unintended benefit of transferring within the conference was that he got to play one final game at SHI Stadium before his college career comes to a close.

"This is somewhere I put a lot of time into and was here for four years and graduated college from," Jackson said after the game. "That's a pretty big thing (for me)."

The Scarlet Knights went 11-37 during Jackson's time in Piscataway, N.J., including 0-3 in games he played against the

Buckeyes. They were outscored 166-3 in those contests, too. And even though Jackson came away victorious this time around, he was still overcome with emotion when his former teammates greeted him at midfield after the game.

"It was awesome," Jackson said. "I basically grew up here for four years of my adult life. To be able to see the guys I grew up with and the coaches and the staff and everything, it was a great experience."

"Once the season's over and everything, I'm definitely excited to come back here and pay them a visit and see my brothers."

It was the second weekend in a row in which players raced across the field after the game to catch up with an opponent who used to be their teammate, as former Ohio State and current Maryland linebacker Keandre Jones returned to Ohio Stadium on Nov. 9. But Jackson's return was even more significant given the fact that he was a team captain and an honor-

able-mention all-conference performer for the Scarlet Knights last season.

"It was cool seeing him," said senior Rutgers offensive lineman Zach Venesky, who noted he still texts with Jackson regularly. "We experienced a lot of things together, a lot of hardships. I consider him a brother, so it's cool seeing him have success."

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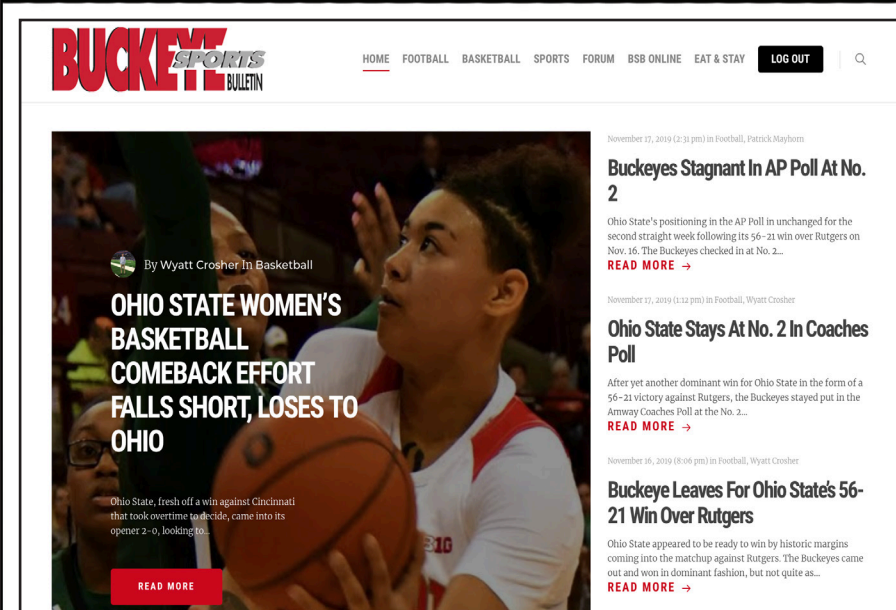
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OHIO STATE VS. RUTGERS

Wade Flips Momentum

Shaun Wade set the tone for Ohio State's dominance over Rutgers just 38 seconds into the game.

Rutgers redshirt freshman quarterback Johnny Langan dropped back to pass on second-and-6 and decided to challenge Wade. The sophomore cornerback turned his hips at the last second and deflected the ball up with his right hand. The athletic Wade was able to locate the ball after he tipped it and reel it in for an Ohio State interception. When the ball was in the air, Wade's playmaking instincts took over.

GAME NOTEBOOK Joe Dempsey

"I saw the ball that was short, so I just tipped it to myself," Wade said. "Just go catch it."

Wade's pick set up sophomore quarterback Justin Fields and Co. at the Buckeye 40-yard line, which ultimately led to a touchdown. The third-year sophomore enjoyed celebrating with his teammates and getting his turn at the "Boom Ball," which is a celebratory prop given to Buckeyes who create turnovers on defense.

"It's very big," Wade said of his early interception. "It's definitely exciting. We got this Boom Ball, so I got the Boom Ball and got to celebrate with that."

On the Scarlet Knights' next possession, Wade made his presence felt again. On second-and-8 at the Scarlet Knights' 27-yard line, Langan hit freshman wideout Isaiah Washington for a 6-yard gain, but Wade flew in and smacked Washington, who is a fellow Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy alum, with his shoulder on the ball. The Florida native forced a fumble, and senior safety Jordan Fuller jumped on it, giving Ohio State the ball at the Rutgers 33, setting up another touchdown.

Fields was grateful for the defense's ability to force turnovers on Rutgers' first two possessions to start the game.

"It definitely gives us momentum in terms of field position and just getting the team going," Fields said.

Sophomore wide receiver Chris Olave echoed his quarterback's sentiment, with high praise for the Ohio State defense.

"It's just flips the momentum," Olave said of the turnovers. "We think we have the best defense in the country, so when they do that, we try to get the opportunity and score. That's what we did, and we capitalized on that."

Passing Game Gashes Knights

Head coach and play caller Ryan Day dialed up some deep passing plays against a vulnerable Rutgers defense, with much success.

Fields completed seven of the Buckeyes' eight passing plays that went for 16 or more yards, including six that gained 22 or more yards. Six of Field's seven large gains in the passing game came on first-and-10, with the other on second-and-6.

Fields' first big play in the passing game came on a first-and-10 from the Rutgers 47 when he found Olave for a 23-yard gain. Fields and Olave reconnected on another first-and-10 from the Ohio State 34, advancing deep into Rutgers territory with a 58-yard reception.

"I always just tell him to just throw the ball and I'm going to make the play," Olave said of Fields. "Early in the season it wasn't working out for us, but we kept working on it and today it showed."

Early in the second quarter, Fields hit fifth-year senior H-back K.J. Hill for a 35-yard touchdown.

On a first-and-10 from the Rutgers 49 in the second quarter, Fields reunited with Olave, who set a career high with 139 yards, for a 16-yard gain and a Buckeye first down. Later in the second quarter, facing second-and-6, Fields tossed a pretty pass to a wide-open Luke Farrell, a junior tight end, for a 22-yard gain down to the Rutgers 24. Fields then fired a first-and-10 pass to senior wideout Binjimen Victor for a 24-yard touchdown, marking Victor's second score of the day.

Fields' final chunk play through the air was on the Buckeyes' first drive of the second half with the sophomore signal caller again looking Olave's way. With a Rutgers defensive back draped all over him, Olave drew a defensive pass interference penalty but battled through the contact to haul in a difficult catch. The ball nearly hit the ground, but Olave pinned it to his leg with his right hand securing the ball as he fell to the ground, gaining 42 yards and leading to another Ohio State score.

Day was impressed by the connection between Fields and Olave, highlighting Olave's ability to reel in passes on deep routes.

"He's really good at tracking the ball down-field," Day said of Olave. "He's got good speed. He can really track a ball well and has great depth perception and timing."

The speedy wideout said he and Fields have been working on their timing and consistency in practice, while foreshadowing potential big plays in the Buckeyes' heavily anticipated matchups with the Nittany Lions and Wolverines.

"Me and Justin, we kind of struggled early in the year with the deep ball," Olave said. "He was kind of overthrowing me, and we finally connected today. I believe we're going to need that in the next couple weeks."

Backup Chris Chugunov completed the other big gain in the passing attack with a 32-yard touchdown pass to redshirt freshman H-back Jaelen Gill, who did most of the work with his legs. The Skillman, N.J., native was asked if he felt nervous playing in front of a lot of family and friends in Piscataway, N.J.

"Early on, it was a little frustrating not being on the same page as our receivers," Chugunov said. "I made a few errant throws today, which I feel like is uncharacteristic for me. More frustrated. Early on, I think it was more the cold than nerves."

Chugunov threw for 61 yards and two scores but completed only 5 of 14 passes, which left him unsatisfied.

"It wasn't our cleanest game," he admitted. "It was a little chilly and we had some miscues and stuff. It happens sometimes, but we're going to work to clean that up this upcoming week, for sure."

Filling In For Young

It's no secret Chase Young is the Buckeyes' leader in sacks and tackles for loss with 13½ sacks and 15½ tackles for loss. In his absence against Rutgers, the Buckeye defense continued to live in its backfield with eight TFL, including one sack.

Senior linebacker Malik Harrison led the way with two TFL out of his six tackles (five solo) along with a pass breakup. Sophomore cornerback Sevyn Banks, sophomore linebacker Dallas Gant, senior linebacker Justin Hilliard, sophomore linebacker Teradja Mitchell and sophomore defensive end Tyreke Smith also recorded a TFL apiece, as well as fifth-year defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton, who sacked Langan. Hamilton has emerged as a pass rusher

Game Analysis

What Worked Well

A lot went well for Ohio State in its 56-21 victory against Rutgers, but the passing attack especially stood out. Ohio State threw for 377 yards and six touchdowns, completing 21 of 34 passes (61.8 percent).

Sophomore quarterback Justin Fields threw the ball accurately and effectively, setting a career high with 305 passing yards on 15-of-19 passing (78.9 percent). The Georgia transfer found the end zone four times, with two touchdown passes to senior wideout Binjimen Victor, and fifth-year senior H-back K.J. Hill and junior tight end Luke Farrell hauling in one apiece.

Backup quarterback Chris Chugunov came in and helped Ohio State continue scoring. The Skillman, N.J., native completed 5 of 14 passes for 61 yards and two scores, finding junior tight end Jake Hausmann and redshirt freshman Jaelen Gill for their first career touchdowns. Third-string signal caller Gunnar Hoak completed his only pass for an 11-yard gain to former walk-on receiver Sam Wiglusz from Brecksville, Ohio.

What Didn't Work

Although the Buckeyes cruised to a comfortable win for the most part against Rutgers, it was not perfect. The Ohio State defense had been very solid all season, particularly in preventing the chunk plays that hurt it so badly a year ago.

On third-and-9 from their own 26 in the first quarter, the Scarlet Knights dialed up a read option, where redshirt freshman Johnny Langan kept the ball and ran for 21 yards and a Rutgers first down. Later in the quarter, Rutgers sophomore running back Isaih Pacheco gashed the Buckeyes for a 26-yard touchdown, following

a muffed punt by Garrett Wilson.

Ohio State went to its reserves on defense in the second half, and Rutgers capitalized with a 45-yard touchdown reception by junior receiver Bo Melton from Langan on third-and-8. The big plays kept coming for the Scarlet Knights, with Langan finding freshman tailback KayRon Adams, a Warren, Ohio native, for a 41-yard reception.

The Scarlet and Gray played a solid game overall, but the big plays they allowed represented a blemish in a victory where the reserves played major roles.

Play Of The Game

Rutgers received the ball to open the game as massive underdogs at home. After Pacheco gained 4 yards on a first-down carry, the Scarlet Knights faced second-and-6, which would result in the play of the game.

Langan elected to throw the ball deep from his own 29-yard line, despite needing just 6 yards on second down. The redshirt freshman quarterback launched the ball to his left toward the far side of the field where Ohio State sophomore cornerback Shaun Wade was in man-to-man coverage.

Langan lofted the ball up and Wade made a play on it at the last second, tipping it up with his right hand and hauling it in for an acrobatic interception. The first-quarter pick gave the Buckeyes the ball at the Ohio State 40-yard line, only 38 seconds into the game. Wade's interception stole the opening possession from Rutgers and led to an Ohio State touchdown. The quick turnover and touchdown helped propel the Buckeyes to a 35-point triumph.

– Joe Dempsey

for the Buckeyes lately, recording four sacks in his past three games after only notching one sack across his first 34 outings.

Although numerous Buckeyes stepped up in the absence of their best player, Rutgers put up 21 points, including seven on the starting defense. Overall, Harrison was proud of how his younger teammates stepped up, acknowledging how they have a lot of tape to learn from and improve upon.

"It's a learning experience for the young guys," Harrison said. "When we watch the film tomorrow, we're going to correct it, so the next time they come in, it won't happen."

Giving up 21 bothered Harrison a little bit, but the 26-yard touchdown by Rutgers sophomore running back Isaih Pacheco against the No. 1 defense stung more. The Columbus native said it will serve as motivation as the Buckeyes advance to a premier showdown with Penn State at Ohio Stadium on Nov. 23.

"That one bothered me," Harrison said. "It's just us not doing what we usually do these past nine games."

Hausmann, Gill Score 1st TDs

Jake Hausmann, a junior tight end, hauled in his first touchdown as a Buckeye on a Chugunov pass on second-and-goal from the 4-yard line in the third quarter. The fourth-year junior from Cincinnati earned his first playing time with the offense this season but had been almost strictly used as a blocker.

Hausmann caught the first reception of his career against Miami (Ohio) on Sept. 21 but had been without a catch since. The touchdown marked the sixth by a Buckeye tight end this season, with sophomore Jeremy Ruckert snagging three and Luke Farrell tallying two.

Gill also crossed the goal line for the first time in his Ohio State career. On third-and-13 from the Rutgers 32, Chugunov tossed a swing pass to the Westerville (Ohio) South product, and he did the rest. After picking up blocks from Hausmann and freshman wideout Jameson Williams, Gill juiced through the Scarlet Knight defense and broke a few tackles on his way to the touchdown.

The touchdown reception marked his first career touchdown and second reception of the game. Gill's first catch of the day came on third-and-5 from the Rutgers 9 in the third quarter. He gained 6 yards and the first down, setting up Hausmann's touchdown. He finished with two receptions for 38 yards and the score after

entering the matchup with just three catches for 18 yards in his career.

Day said he had noticed Gill improving his performance in practice, which gave the young slot back momentum heading into the matchup with Rutgers.

"Jaelen had one of his better weeks of practice this week," Day said. "Lo and behold he makes a big run. There you go. That's typically how it works."

"It's one of those things where, as a player, the more opportunities you have, the more you have a chance to make a play and make a name for yourself. You've got to take those opportunities, especially in games like this."

Wilson Muffs Punt

With Ohio State leading 21-0 and under three minutes left in the first quarter, the Buckeye defense forced Rutgers to punt. The Scarlet and Gray were set to get the ball back and look to

score for the fourth time in four drives.

However, punt returner Garrett Wilson muffed the punt, and the Scarlet Knights pounced on it at the Ohio State 33-yard line.

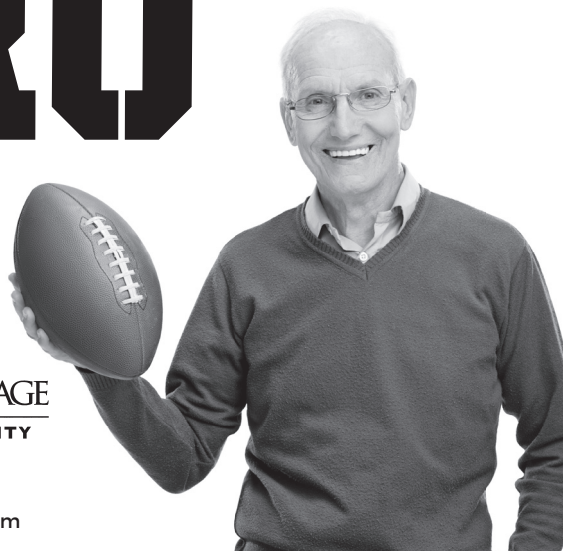
Three plays later, the Buckeyes surrendered their first first-quarter touchdown allowed all season on the 26-yard rushing score by Pacheco.

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Buckeyes Score Early And Often Against Rutgers

By CRAIG MERZ
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The final score was noteworthy in that it was closer than expected when No. 2 Ohio State played at woeful Rutgers on Nov. 16. But the 56-21 result was misleading as well because the Buckeyes were never threatened and 14 of the points allowed came in the second half with the OSU starters out of the game.

The Buckeyes (10-0, 7-0 Big Ten) took advantage of Rutgers (2-8, 0-7) turnovers on its first two drives for a quick 14-0 lead and survived some miscues of their own for a 35-7 halftime advantage on a windy 42-degree late afternoon.

Sophomore quarterback Justin Fields threw for four touchdown passes and a career-high 305 yards in just over two quarters in the rout before a smallish turnout of 33,528 at SHI Stadium in Piscataway, N.J.

Fields was 15 of 19 passing and added 30 yards on three runs.

Junior J.K. Dobbins rushed for 89 yards and two TDs on 17 carries playing the first half only, and sophomore receiver Chris Olave set a career best with 139 yards on four catches while senior Binjimen Victor had two TD receptions thanks to 68 yards and five catches.

Rutgers QB Johnny Langan was 12 for 26 for 121 yards, a TD and two interceptions. He also ran for a score in the final moments to make the margin look more respectable.

OSU for the second straight game was without suspended defensive end Chase Young for violating NCAA regulations by accepting an illegal loan. He was reinstated after the game

and will be eligible to play at home vs. No. 9 Penn State on Nov. 23 and at No. 12 Michigan a week later to end the regular season.

Good Knight, Rutgers

Rutgers' hopes of being competitive – a win was seemingly out the question – evaporated on the second play from scrimmage when third-year sophomore Shaun Wade picked off Langan at the OSU 40. He tipped the ball and caught it falling to the ground.

Four plays, 60 yards and 1:23 later, it was 7-0. Fields ran for 13 then passed 23 yards to the 24 to Olave. Dobbins gained 6 followed by an 18-yard rushing TD at 12:59.

The Scarlet Knights had the ball for two more plays after the kickoff before another turnover. Langan hit Isaiah Washington for 6 but Wade caused a fumble that senior safety Jordan Fuller recovered at the Rutgers 33.

Fields completed a throw of 8 yards to fifth-year senior K.J. Hill and tosses of 14 and 11, the latter for a TD, to Victor for a 14-0 lead at 11:24. That abbreviated drive used 55 seconds.

The Buckeyes had to do some work on their next series after Rutgers decided to punt on fourth-and-4 from the OSU 47. That meant OSU had to go 91 yards, and that they did in 2:28 to make it 21-0 with 6:00 left in the quarter.

A Fields-to-Olave bomb of 58 yards to the 8 set up Dobbins on the next snap for a TD run on the seventh play.

It was the Buckeyes' turn to give away points late in the first quarter to make it a surprising 21-7 at the 1:18 mark of the first quarter.

A 30-yard punt by Adam Korsak was muffed by freshman Garrett Wilson and recovered by



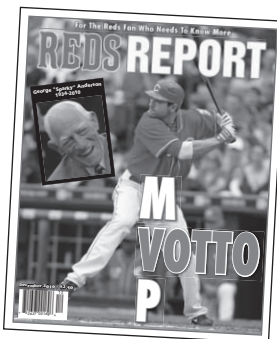
SONNY BROCKWAY

STRONG CONNECTION – Sophomore quarterback Justin Fields and fifth-year senior wide receiver K.J. Hill connected four times for 62 yards and a touchdown against the Scarlet Knights.

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OHIO STATE VS. RUTGERS

Lawrence Stevens at the OSU 33. Two runs netted 7 yards before Isaih Pacheco shredded the defense for a 26-yard rushing score to finish off the tidy three-play, 33-yard, 1:13 possession.

The Buckeyes responded by going 65 yards in a five plays using 1:29. Hill's corner route left him open for an easy TD reception of 35 yards six seconds into the second quarter. Hill and Victor each had catches of 11 yards before that.

Rutgers later showed grit to prevent another Buckeye score, dropping Dobbins for a yard loss on 4th-and-1 from the 1 with 4:15 left before halftime.

An Olave catch for 16 yards had moved the ball to the Rutgers 33 after a punt. Dobbins picked up 13 and Fields added 13 more on the ground to the 7. After Dobbins lost 2, he ran 8 to the 1 but was stuffed for no gain on third down.

The OSU defense stiffened and forced a 41-yard punt to the 50. Fields, who appeared to have injured his hand on the previous drive, nonetheless directed a three-play, 37-second score to make it 35-7 with 1:03 left.

Dobbins carried for 4 then fourth-year junior tight end Luke Farrell pulled in a 22-yard throw to the 24. Victor followed with another touchdown from Fields.

Finish It Off

Fields stayed in the game after the Buckeyes took the second-half kickoff and marched 82 yards in five plays and 1:28 for a 42-7 lead at 13:33.

"At halftime we're up 28. It just felt like that's not enough," OSU coach Ryan Day said of why Fields was out there.

A roughing-the-passer penalty after Victor had an 8-yard catch jump-started the series, putting the ball on the OSU 44. Olave made a brilliant 42-yard reception to the 14 on the ensuing play. The pass was underthrown and Olave was interfered, but he still managed to catch the

ball against his left leg.

"He can really track the ball well and has great depth perception," Day said.

Farrell's 14-yard TD was equally impressive as he made a one-handed catch in the right corner for Fields' 31st touchdown against one interception. That was Fields' last snap before Chris Chugunov replaced him.

At 10:42 of the third, sophomore linebacker K'Vaughan Pope had his second interception in as many games to set the Buckeyes up at the Rutgers 25. Master Teague opened the drive with an 11-yard run.

Five plays later, Chugunov connected with Jake Hausmann for 4 yards and the junior tight end's first career touchdown. The drive was six plays, 25 yards in 2:14.

Langan threw a 45-yard TD pass to Bo Melton with 1:00 to go in the third quarter to make it 49-14 against the backup secondary for an eight-play, 83-yard, 3:31 series.

A second Chugunov TD made it 56-14 with 8:19 left. Freshman Steele Chambers had five carries for 30 yards on the 10-play, 72-yard, 4:29 sequence, but it was a 32-yard catch-and run by second-year freshman Jaelen Gill that resulted in the score and his first Ohio State TD.

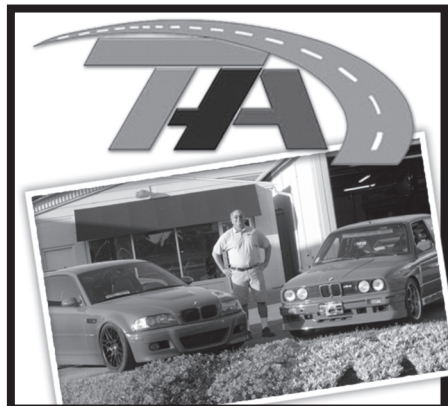
A strip sack of third-string quarterback Gunnar Hoak gave Rutgers a chance at the OSU 20 with 3:29 to go. A pass-interference call against junior cornerback Amir Riep put the Scarlet Knights at the 3. Langan ran in it from the 1 with 1:09 left. Rutgers used 2:20 and five plays to score. The Buckeyes ran two plays to end the game.

Numbers

Ohio State became the second team in the last 100 years to win its first 10 games by 24 or more points. The 1971 Nebraska Cornhuskers were the other team to accomplish that feat. ...

The 21 points allowed matched the season high that Florida Atlantic had in the first game. OSU entered the game giving up the fewest points in the nation (8.6). ... Chugunov was 5 of 14 for 61 yards and two TDs. ... Teague ran 10 times for 45 yards. ... Chambers rushed for 56 yards on nine totes. ... The Buckeyes had 594 total yards (377 passing, 217 rushing). Rutgers gained

231 (121 passing, 110 rushing). ... Senior linebacker Malik Harrison (five solo), Pope (four) and fourth-year junior linebacker Tuf Borland (two) each had six tackles for OSU. ... The Buckeyes had one sack by fifth-year senior DaVon Hamilton and gave up a sack ... Ohio State has outscored its opponents 318-38 in the first half this season.



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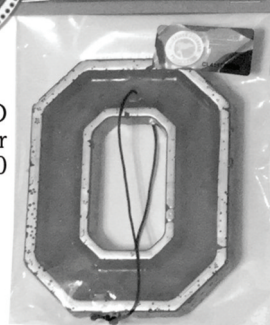
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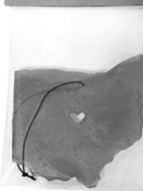
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BSB Quotebook: Ohio State 56, Rutgers 21

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day on sophomore quarterback Justin Fields and junior running back J.K. Dobbins not being in the Heisman race because they haven't played full games: "If he is playing in those games and he's playing for four quarters, they're saying he's right there for the leader of the Heisman, but because of the situation we're in, he's not getting those kind of reps, J.K. the same thing."

Day on the ability to put in bench players on multiple occasions this season: "How rare is it to be in a season like this where those guys get so many reps? I don't know if it's happened ever before, but I can't imagine there's been more second- and third-string guys who have gotten reps like this during a season. It's unique, and I think that our guys have gotten better, you know, some more than others."

Day on junior defensive tackle Haskell Garrett and sophomore defensive back Shaun Wade stopping sophomore defensive end Tyreke Smith and sophomore cornerback Cameron Brown from confrontations: "Awesome. I told Tyreke I was really proud of him there, and same thing with Cam, he was right there. We had some long talks about that after last week with a couple of those things, and we talked about it with those guys. That's not easy to do in the moment, but it's all about creating habits. And if you do it where in practice you walk away from a situation, then you'll do the same thing in a game. And I thought that was really well done by those guys."

Ohio State senior safety Jordan Fuller on

his emotions returning to his home state of New Jersey: "It's great, especially just looking in the stands and seeing some people I noticed from when I was in high school and stuff like that. Just seeing all the support is amazing. I can't thank them enough for coming out here in this cold weather."

Ohio State senior linebacker Malik Harrison on his excitement for the return of junior defensive end Chase Young: "I can't wait for him to come back. He brings a big presence, and you know the other team, they're scared of him."

Ohio State fifth-year senior defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton on what has been the cause of his improvement this season from his previous campaigns: "I feel like the difference this year for me has been consistency. In years past I wasn't as consistent as I could have been, but nowadays I feel like I'm more consistent."

Wade on if it is difficult for him to move between cornerback positions in game: "No, not really, I practiced it this week, so it wasn't a big adjustment."

Hamilton on why it has all come together for him in recent weeks: "I don't know, it's just kind of happening."

Rutgers interim head coach Nunzio Campanile on the outcome against such a difficult opponent in Ohio State: "Obviously a tough game – super opponent, really talented team, very well-coached. But I thought our

kids played really hard. They played really hard throughout. They competed for four quarters, all the things that we're asking them to do, and I think that when you do that, you're just going to get better."

Campanile on becoming the first team to score three touchdowns on Ohio State this season: "What I told the kids was if you see the people in the stands, I think they are really proud. The people that were still there are really proud of the effort that those guys are giving. I guess there was a point where I heard a lot of people saying, 'Oh, these guys have quit.' These guys have not quit at all. They are playing really hard for each other. You just see the forced turnover, pick it up, almost run it back for a touchdown and then to finish the drive. So, from that standpoint, I think the kids feel really good about it. They know what we are talking about in practice and the meetings. They are bringing to the field. Obviously the execution isn't perfect, but I think they are really proud of that to be able to go out there, and as I told them, we haven't put 21 points on a lot of teams, so to put 21 points on them is a good day I guess in some ways."

Wade on moving forward to a Penn State team that has played Ohio State close in recent seasons: "Really we just have to get in the lab, get back in the lab and just prepare. I know they have a good team, they have No. 1 (wide receiver K.J. Hamler), their quarterback (Sean Clifford) is really good, they always have good running backs, so we just have to get back in the lab and prepare for them for next week and just come out and play."



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BSB11119



Freshman Receiver Wilson Seizes Opportunity

By WYATT CROSER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Heading into the season, there was one recruit on the offensive side of the ball who garnered the vast majority of the attention in Ohio State's 2019 class.

That would be Garrett Wilson, a five-star wide receiver out of Austin (Texas) Lake Travis who was the No. 2 receiver in the class and No. 20 prospect overall. Wilson made highlight-reel plays seem like a weekly occurrence in high school, ending his junior season – the last full season he played in high school due to injuries his senior year – with 98 catches for 1,774 yards and 32 total touchdowns.

Many expected Wilson to immediately jump up into a position as a primary receiver for the Buckeyes in his first season, even with three seniors returning, as well as Chris Olave who shone late in his own freshman year last season.

But Wilson did not come in with those expectations for himself.

"To be honest, I didn't really expect any-

thing," Wilson said. "I kind of just came in, big program and we've got a great team, where I fit in, that's where I'm going to be, so I try to look at it that way.

"I didn't really come in with too many expectations. I didn't want to do that to myself. That's unfair to myself, unfair to the receivers ahead of me, behind me, everything like that. So I just came in, put my head down and tried to work, and whenever Coach calls on me, I wanted to be there."

Wilson's stats don't quite match up to the ones he put up in high school, but he has started to find more of a role, with the freshman wide-out tallying 18 catches for 216 yards and four touchdowns.

Many of those catches have come in the second halves of matchups in games that are well in hand, but that has not stopped Wilson from showing the flashes that everyone expected from him.

These flashes include his first collegiate touchdown against Cincinnati on a catch right over the defensive back's head, a 52-yard punt return and 38-yard touchdown against Miami

(Ohio) and a toe-tap score against Nebraska on a throw from Justin Fields.

But following the game against the RedHawks, Fields said there was plenty more Wilson had to show.

"Garrett, that was a good catch, but he's definitely had better catches in practice," Fields said. "That wasn't surprising to see."

Practice is a key area of focus for Wilson, who came into Columbus as a player who was able to get through much of his prior time with talent alone.

This has been something that has also been key for a different Wilson – Ohio State offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson. For Kevin Wilson, this is the largest area Garrett Wilson needs to get better at in order to take that next step and become an elite receiver.

"I think as a young guy, I think he's – like a lot of those talented guys, sometimes it's easy," Kevin Wilson said. "I think a lot of our young freshmen come in, they're so talented they're used to that, and it's getting them to go past the talent, have those great work habits, those great practice and fundamental periods.

"I think guys that work hard become the great players. I think it's one of the foundation principles of our program and why it's been so successful, and guys like Garrett, not that he's a poor worker, but as he becomes an elite worker

with elite talent, the sky is the limit for a guy like him."

Garrett Wilson also understands this. He said that he had to adjust his game from what he had known in Lake Travis throughout practices once he did get to Ohio State.

"You get away with a lot of things that don't penalize you in high school," he explained. "You might get away with it because your ability puts you over. I mean just the attention to detail. I'm going against some of the best corners every day in practice, so I had to learn. I was getting locked up the first couple weeks, so I just had to learn and take in all that, and then once I figured that out, it kind of translated easily to the game."

Wilson also isn't immune to some errors due to inexperience.

And in the game against Maryland, Wilson took a hotly contested punt return catch and, instead of just calling the fair catch, tried to make a big play. He got stuffed, but he risked more negative outcomes such as injury or a turnover.

"Just not to take the risk like that," Wilson said on what head coach Ryan Day told him on the sidelines following the play. "I mean we were up a good amount. Just be smart, play safe. I just have to have some better scoreboard awareness. I mean I'm putting my body on the line when I probably don't need to, so things

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like that, I have to keep that in mind next time I'm out there."

Against Rutgers, the risks caught up to him. Wilson attempted to make a catch on the punt return in a crowded area but wasn't able to control it. The Scarlet Knights recovered the fumble, which eventually led to a score to cut the lead to 21-7 in the first quarter.

First-year errors aside, Wilson has shown what all the heightened expectations have been all about, but he has done so in small glimpses instead of consistently throughout games.

His 274 snaps through nine games ranked No. 4 among Ohio State wideouts, trailing K.J. Hill (395), Olave (314) and Binjimen Victor (305). But the snap counts don't matter to Wilson, who came in without the expectation of being an immediate starter. He said that the amount that he is out there isn't important right now, but instead it is what he does with his snaps that matters.

"I'm just worried about getting better week to week," Wilson said. "That's all I can do. Whenever I'm out there and get called on, I have to make the play, so that's all I'm really worried about right now."

As the Buckeyes move toward the most important games of their season, it would be expected that they would shorten the bench and roll with more experience, potentially leaving Wilson on the sidelines more than he has been. But if last year can be an indicator for anything, that will not be the case.

Olave entered the 2018 Michigan State game – the third-to-last game of Ohio State's regular season – with two catches for 19 yards. He ended up with 10 catches for 178 yards and three touchdowns in the final five games, becoming a major contributor in the offense compared to his production prior.

Wilson has a chance to make that late-season

impact, something he showed in a four-catch, 82-yard performance against the Terrapins.

Day knows the precedent that was set by Olave in 2018. The Ohio State head coach said on Oct. 29 that he thinks Wilson could be in line for a similar surge to end his freshman campaign.

"It's very hard to step in as a true freshman and make an impact right off the bat," the coach said. "It takes a little time. You learn

about the system, you learn about how to practice, you learn about all those things. As the season has gone on, he's gotten better. The second half of the season is going to be good for him."

The door is open for Wilson, the first five-star wideout Ohio State has earned a commitment from since Jalin Marshall in 2013. The star potential has been shown in flashes, but the first year is about patiently waiting for

his opportunity to show more than just a few highlight plays.

He said if that time were to come in the biggest of stages during the College Football Playoff, he'd be ready.

"I have the confidence in myself," he said. "I feel like my coaches do have the confidence in me. If we're there, I get called on and my opportunity is there, I believe in myself. I'm going to make the play."

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No End To Freshman Harrison's Potential

By CRAIG MERZ
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Zach Harrison's wish became a reality quicker than most expected when the true freshman defensive end made his first start for Ohio State under extenuating circumstances on Nov. 9 against Maryland in Ohio Stadium.

Harrison, from nearby Lewis Center Olentangy Orange, was in the lineup because of the first of a two-game suspension to junior Chase Young for taking an improper loan.

Even OSU head coach Ryan Day was a bit surprised, but pleased, that Harrison was able to step in and have a solid game against the overmatched Terrapins in the 73-14 win.

"I didn't know, I wasn't sure," Day said Nov. 14 when asked if he could have foreseen in the preseason that Harrison was ready for the spotlight. "As we've gotten in these lopsided games, he's got a lot of reps in the second half of games."

"He's one of the more improved guys on the team. It's typical you don't give that to a freshman, but he is. He's come a long way, and a lot of that has to do with his guidance but also the fact he's gotten on the field a lot and he's played a lot of football."

Harrison (6-6, 255) had a sack for a 6-yard loss against Maryland, although it turned out to be a teachable moment coaches love to talk about. After the takedown of quarterback Josh Jackson,

Harrison was flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct for taunting after he stood over his victim and flexed in a celebratory manner.

"I didn't even mean to flex on him or anything," Harrison said after the game. "I was just trying to get excited and celebrate with my teammates and everything. In the moment I didn't think anything of it."

Day was in a forgiving mood following the rout of Maryland.

"That was a learning lesson for Zach, and we have to look at some of those penalties (13) because the amount of penalties today was embarrassing," the coach said. "A few of them are learning opportunities. That was one for Zach. We brought him over, and the referee explained to him why he called that. He didn't even realize he did it, he was so excited about getting the sack."

If that turns out to be the worst thing to happen to Harrison, he'll have had a heck of a first season under the guidance of defensive line coach Larry Johnson.

"I think the biggest thing I like about him is he's willing to learn," fifth-year senior defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton said of Harrison. "He's been really fun to be around. He really wants to learn and be a part of the unit. That's probably the best part. Potential-wise, the sky is the limit for him. If he really develops the way Coach Johnson is preparing him to, there's nothing he can't do."

Harrison was the top-rated Ohioan in the 2018 class and the No. 1 defensive end nationally by all the top recruiting services.



ANDREW LIND

FRESHMAN PHENOM – With Chase Young sidelined, Ohio State freshman defensive end Zach Harrison got his first career start against Maryland on Nov. 9. He finished the game with one sack.



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He chose the Buckeyes over Michigan and Penn State.

One of the Michigan recruiters was defensive line coach Greg Mattison, who left Ann Arbor in January to join the Buckeyes as a co-defensive coordinator.

Harrison was an early enrollee who arrived on campus at about the same time and absorbed all he could. Mattison for his part was fortunate to inherit an athlete the size of Harrison who can run a 4.47 in the 40-yard dash and 10.7 for 100 meters on a track.

That quickness enables the coaches to occasionally put Harrison at nose tackle in key situations.

"What that allows us to do is to get speed on the field at positions where we want it," Mattison said. "In other words, you've got a guy like Zach who's very, very fast, can drop (in pass coverage), can do a lot of different things.

"You've got a young man that's got great height, great range. He's as fast

as some running backs at places. He's got great character, he works extremely hard, he's tough, and the technique Coach Johnson is working on with him gets him better and better."

Harrison credits Johnson with developing him into what might soon be the next in a line of recent defensive ends that includes Joey and Nick Bosa and Young, who is projected to be near the top of the 2020 NFL draft board.

"I'm better in all ways," Harrison said. "When I came in I was raw. I still am raw, I still have a bunch of technique I need to work on to get correct, but now I feel like I'm better, making more plays and being more consistent in my technique."

He also credits the tutelage of Young.

"Chase has helped me in a bunch of ways," he said. "Every time I get a rep, I look at Chase. 'What did you see? What could I have done better?'"

"That's really what I'm doing. I'm just following in his footsteps, do what he does."

Young for his part was effusive in his praise of Harrison following his protégé's two tackles and one-half sack during the 34-10 win against Michigan State on Oct. 5.

"He's a freak," Young said. "As you are seeing, as strong as he was, big, fast – I knew it was only a matter of time until he finds out what he is."

With Young suspended for the Nov. 16 game at Rutgers, Harrison was able to get more experience. He had three tackles in the game, and for the season he has 14 (eight solo), four tackles for loss and 2½ sacks in 10 games.

Sophomore defensive end Tyreke Smith said Harrison's potential is unlimited.

"He's a real athletic kid, real fast," Smith said. "Get-off is everything on the D-line, and that's what's so crazy about him is that he's so tall, strong, fast, and he can get off the ball, get off the rock. That's key to getting to the quarterback."

"First, it's the get-off, then it's your hand technique. I feel like he's got that

down pat, and then he's using his hands more and more. In practice, he's learning more and more, and his get-off is getting up to a different level."

Harrison can sense that his game is improving with each passing week, and as much of a negative as the Young suspension was for the Buckeyes, it's turning into a positive for Harrison.

"There's nothing like a game rep," Harrison said. "You can practice, practice, practice, but getting actual game reps in front of fans and a different opponent than people who are wearing your same jersey, it can take your development and shoot it through the roof."

As many games as his OSU career lasts, which on its current trajectory might just entail three seasons, nothing will top getting his first start.

"It was a dream come true," Harrison said. "As a kid you grow up watching the Buckeyes play, and now I'm out there starting. It's a good feeling."

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Versatile Berry Fulfills His Two-Way Dream

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Rashod Berry starred at both tight end and defensive end at Lorain (Ohio) High School and had aspirations to play both ways at Ohio State.

What may have once seemed like a pipe dream came to fruition in the Buckeyes' 73-14 victory against Maryland when Berry became the first Buckeye to line up on offense and defense since Zach Boren played both fullback and linebacker in 2012.

The decision to have Berry line up on both offense and defense did not come out of nowhere, however. The talented fifth-year senior tight end had been pleading with the coaching staff since last season to play him on both sides of the ball.

Berry asked the coaches in the summer to no avail and then again after the Buckeyes' game against Wisconsin, but he stayed persistent. Given the rarity of an FBS player having an impact on both the defensive line and at tight end, Berry was asked if he thought the coaches would actually allow him to take snaps on both sides.

"It's always a 50-50 chance, like when you're asking your mom, 'Can I stay the night at my friend's house?' You don't know, it's a 50-50 chance," Berry said with a laugh. "You never know. So I kept asking."

Although the Buckeyes blew out the Terrapins by 59 points, Berry's two-way experience did not come after the game was out of hand. He was on the field with the No. 1 defense on Maryland's first third down of the game, driving a Terrapin lineman deep into the backfield, which helped lead to an incomplete pass. Berry also worked with the No. 1 offense at tight end, and although he did not haul in a catch, his blocking helped lead to season-high 383 rushing yards for the Buckeyes.

Berry's performance impressed his teammates and coaches, with his ability to handle both the physical and mental challenges of contributing on both offense and defense. Redshirt freshman defensive end Tyler Friday told BSB how impressed he has been with Berry, who has been in both offensive and defensive meetings.

"It's crazy," Friday said of Berry learning

plays on both sides. "In high school that's a real common thing, but to do that in college, that's a big step. For him to accept that challenge with open arms, salute to him."

When asked about Berry, offensive coordinator and tight ends coach Kevin Wilson gave some insight into why it is so difficult and quite rare to play on both sides of the ball.

"As coaches, we think we have to work so hard and be here all day, we come up with a lot of stuff they have to learn," Wilson said. "If we could keep the game simple, they could probably play it both ways. But since we work these inordinate amounts of hours, we come up with all these schemes that take a lot of time to learn. It's hard. The offenses are complicated. Defenses are complicated."

At Lorain, Berry displayed elite athleticism, starting in both football and basketball. He received offers for both sports, but as a football prospect, he was not rated extremely high by Ohio State's standards. Berry was ranked the No. 728 overall prospect and No. 35 weakside defensive end nationally, as well as the No. 33 recruit in Ohio for 2015.

The versatility possessed by Berry made him a rare candidate for playing time on both offense and defense. By stepping up in whatever role the Buckeyes have needed him, the 6-4, 255-pound athlete has proved to put the team first time after time. Wilson explained how Berry has been ready for his No. 13 to be called whenever he might be needed.

"You've got to be smart," Wilson said of playing both ways. "There are a lot of talented players over the years, but here, maybe we had enough depth where maybe you didn't need to."

"Right now, it's a unique situation. Rashod came to offense because we had a dire need at tight end. We had some young tight ends that weren't ready. Marcus Baugh was the only veteran, and we needed Rashod. He has done a tremendous job for us the last two years. We have developed that position: (Jeremy) Ruckert's came on, Jake Hausmann's gotten better; Luke Farrell's very, very solid. And he's very comparable to those guys."

"Defense has always had a bunch of depth at D-end. This year, with some minor injuries, they've gotten a little thin, so the door swung open a little bit for him."

As a redshirt freshman in 2016, Berry was buried on the depth chart at defensive end behind current NFL players Nick Bosa, Jalyn Holmes, Sam Hubbard and Tyquan Lewis. His teammates and defensive line coach Larry Johnson praised him for his performance in practices, but he did not see the field much, which led to his transition to tight end.

Fast-forward to 2019, when Ohio State's depth at defensive end took a hit with senior Jonathon Cooper out with an injury and junior standout Chase Young sitting out while awaiting an NCAA decision on his suspension. Previously, the coaching staff had not taken Berry's pleas to play defense very seriously, but the absences of the starters gave him an opportunity.

"That had been talked about for a year or two," Wilson said. "He's always had the itch to want to go back. You guys remember the video where he slapped me around in practice last winter and made me look like the old guy that I am?" Wilson joked about a video on Twitter where Berry tossed Wilson to the ground like a ragdoll.

"I just felt like last week we had a few nick-up injuries, some guys have been out," Wilson continued. "I went to Coach Johnson, and I said, 'Hey, we've kind of kidded about this. Do you think you need Rashod this week?' He said, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Well, he's doing good enough on offense, when do you want to do it?'"

Berry's return to defense came against Maryland, and he was received with open arms by the Buckeye defensive linemen.

"He never left the family," Friday said of Berry. "They just kind of borrowed him for a little bit."

Head coach Ryan Day, who was co-offensive coordinator with Wilson during Berry's first two years at tight end, had the ultimate say in whether Berry could also help on defense. The leader of the Buckeyes came away impressed with what he saw in practice from the "very talented" Berry.

"He came in at defensive line, so he had a little bit of background there, and then we moved him over to tight end and he's done a really good job for us there and made some big plays for us in big games," Day said. "He asked us a couple weeks ago about going back over there and thinks he can bring something to the table rushing the passer. And so, we said, 'Go ahead.' And obviously, not having Chase here the last couple

weeks, it was an opportunity for him to move into a spot there. There's going to be some reps that are available, so he wanted to do that.

"And he went up against our offensive line last week and did a good job. He came off the edge and showed power and explosiveness, which he's good at. So, he's been doing extra work with Larry Johnson and that group right there, trying to get his pass-rush skills down."

One of the big plays Day was alluding to came in Ohio State's penultimate 2018 regular-season game against Maryland with the season on the line in overtime. Facing fourth-and-1 in the extra frame, Day dialed up an arrow route to Berry from the Maryland 16-yard line. Berry snagged the reception from Dwayne Haskins for an 11-yard gain, setting up an eventual Haskins' rushing touchdown and a Scarlet and Gray victory.

Beyond making clutch plays, Berry brings more than just an athletic body to practices and games and can often be found in Ohio State hype videos busting out a wide array of dance moves. While emerging as a leader, he helps the ultracompetitive Buckeyes stay loose while keeping their eyes on the prize.

"He's just a very energetic guy," fifth-year defensive tackle Davon Hamilton said of Berry. "He enjoys the game of football, and that's going to help you no matter where you go or what position you play. He's willing to learn. He's excited to play defensive end. That always helps when anybody's trying to transition."

The Buckeyes have rolled to a 10-0 start, so they have been doing something right. But with injuries and Young's suspension, the need for an extra pass rusher became apparent, although the coaches do not want to overwhelm Berry.

"We didn't want him to be a two-way player, and that said, he's not really a two-way player," Wilson said of Berry. "He's a situational player, playing on both sides of the ball. And there will be certain situations where I and Coach Johnson will put him in to give him a chance for him to be successful and, more importantly, for our team to be successful."

Berry has accepted the role of an extra pass rusher, particularly when Johnson employs his "Rushmen" package, involving four defensive ends down on the line of scrimmage in passing situations. Friday, who will sometimes sacrifice



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playing time for Berry, expressed excitement at what the tight end/D-end can bring to the table.

"Shod is an athlete, man," Friday said of Berry. "It's great to have him on board. He's quick off the ball, a guy that can move. We can use him for a lot of different things, so it's always good to have another Rushman."

While his selflessness and athleticism are apparent, another element of Berry's game may be underappreciated when considering his two-way feat. He was asked what kind of special

athlete one must be to go both ways, and his response was telling.

"I'm focused throughout the whole week," Berry said. "If you're playing one side of the ball, you can have a little free time. I didn't have any free time going home. I had to watch both films. I had to study both offense and defense over there. So, it was just focus. I took that initiative and ran with it."

While his teammates had the opportunity to go home, relax and visit with their families

during Ohio State's second open date before the Maryland matchup, Berry's time was consumed by his playbooks.

"What I really had to do was go home and really study film and study the plays," Berry said. "Study all third downs, study all the packages for offense, and I think I did a good job of doing that. I just had to do a little extra, but it wasn't anything too hard. It was just what I did, and it worked."

From what Wilson and Day said, it was apparent that Berry had put in a tremendous amount

of work. He goes back and forth between tight end meetings and defensive line meetings, as well as position drills when on the practice field. And after he got his chance to make history, the Lorain product was somewhat awestruck that it actually happened.

"It feels amazing," he said. "Going from high school into college, I always wanted to play both sides. So, for this opportunity to open up like this, it was like, 'Wow, this is real. I'm really about to do it.'"



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Chugunov Makes Strides As Fields' Backup

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Chris Chugunov was sitting on a beach when he received a call in August 2018 from then-Ohio State offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach Ryan Day.

Day – now in his first year leading the program following the retirement of former head coach Urban Meyer – was looking to add one more quarterback to the roster for depth purposes, and Chugunov was brought to his attention by former quality control coach and current New England Patriots assistant Bob Fraser.

“(Fraser) gave a little bit of a character reference there, gave us some information, which kind of allowed us to say, ‘Let’s take this guy in,’” Day said.

Chugunov, who spent the three seasons prior at West Virginia as a backup to eventual third-round draft pick Will Grier, graduated that spring with a bachelor’s degree in finance. And with two years of eligibility remaining and a burning desire to throw the football once again, he accepted Day’s scholarship offer.

Still, there was no guarantee or any real expectation that Chugunov would see the field during his career at Ohio State, especially since he entered 2018 as the fourth-string quarterback behind Dwayne Haskins, Tate Martell and Matthew Baldwin.

But then the unexpected happened.

Haskins left early for the NFL, Martell

transferred to Miami (Fla.) following the arrival of Georgia transfer Justin Fields and Baldwin – citing his desire to be closer to home in Texas – headed to TCU.

Suddenly, the 6-1 and 208-pound Chugunov, affectionately referred to by teammates as “Chugs,” found himself in a battle this fall with Kentucky transfer and Dublin (Ohio) Coffman graduate Gunnar Hoak for the backup spot behind Fields.

It was a battle he won with ease, too, as the oldest and most experienced signal caller in a quarterback room that got completely turned upside down in a hurry.

“He’s a guy that’s been around a lot of football,” Day said. “He’s smart. He’s a guy you can count on. He understands what’s going on. He throws a good ball. He has good touch. He’s very intelligent. He can handle a lot without getting a ton of reps. That’s hard to do.”

“I think the good thing now is he’s played a decent amount of football this year. I don’t know how many attempts he’s had, but when he’s gone in there, he’s competed and done well.”

Despite starting two games in his final season with the Mountaineers when Grier was sidelined with an injury – losses to Texas and Oklahoma in which he completed just 52 percent of his passes for one touchdown and zero interceptions – Chugunov admitted he wasn’t in the greatest shape when he arrived in Columbus. He’s since added 30 pounds of muscle.

“When you walk in here, and you walk



ANDREW LIND

SAFETY NET – Fifth-year senior Chris Chugunov has played well in limited opportunities as sophomore Justin Fields’ backup this season, completing 61.0 percent of his passes for six touchdowns and zero interceptions.



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OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

in the locker room here, everyone's built like a brick house," Chugunov said. "So (strength and conditioning) Coach Mick (Marotti) and I worked through that in season last year and throughout this off-season. It's been a focus of mine to try to be somewhere on the same level as everyone else here."

Ohio State has handily beaten every team on its schedule this season, which has allowed Chugunov to play a significant number of second-half snaps and preserve Fields' health. He has played well in those opportunities, too.

Entering the Buckeyes' game at Rutgers on Nov 16, Chugunov had completed 20 of 27 passes for 214 yards and four touchdowns compared to zero interceptions in eight appearances. That doesn't include a 46-yard score to freshman wide receiver Garrett Wilson against the Terrapins that was called back for holding on the offense.

"I mean, this time of year, my biggest challenge is staying warm on the sidelines,

so you'd usually see me bundled up and whatnot," Chugunov said on Nov. 12. "I've always been pretty confident in my throwing ability, so I'm happy I've been able to sling it around some. Earlier in the season, when I got in the game, I was just trying to kill the clock."

Chugunov also saw significant playing time during the 56-21 win over the Scarlet Knights. Playing in front of what he estimated to be 60-70 family and friends in his home state, Chugunov – who honed his craft at nearby Skillman (N.J.) Montgomery, roughly 20 miles southwest of SHI Stadium – completed 5 of 14 passes for 61 yards and two touchdowns in nearly two quarters of action.

"(They) can't always make it out here to Ohio for games, so I (was) excited to have them there to see me play," Chugunov said.

Throughout the season, the biggest fear for fans has been losing Fields to an injury since his style of play as a mobile quarterback makes him more susceptible to injury than a typical pocket passer.

But if that were to happen, the coaching staff is confident Chugunov could take the reins and lead the Buckeyes to a Big Ten title and berth in the College Football

Playoff.

"I think there's a body of work there that's being built," Day said. "The more he's out there, the better you feel."



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Penn State Looks To Derail Surging Buckeyes

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Ohio State has been, if nothing else this season, the victim of some poor luck. No, not with regard to Ohio State's actual on-the-field play, where the Buckeyes have been one of the best and most balanced teams in the country, having yet to play a moderately close game through 10 tried. There, it has been nothing but good news and good luck.

Instead, Ohio State's streak of bad luck seems to be coming in the form of every team on the schedule, as the Buckeyes are seemingly incapable of facing a team that is up to the task of giving Ohio State the kind of challenge it will certainly face at some point, even if that point isn't anytime before the postseason.

Every marquee matchup Ohio State has taken part in has been ruined by the other team involved in the matchup, either before or after that matchup kicked off. The first game that was supposed to serve as a serious test, against a then 3-1 Nebraska team that entered the season a top-25 team, has since lost its luster as the Cornhuskers have fallen to 4-6. A 34-10 win over a ranked Michigan State team has seen the same fate, with the Spartans also sitting at 4-6.

In other cases, the collapse has come prior to kickoff, taking some of the luster off what were meant to be major tests for Ohio State. Wisconsin fell to Illinois a week before traveling to Columbus. The same can be said of Ohio State's next opponent, Penn State, which

fell to Minnesota on Nov. 9, 31-26, and fell out of a lofty No. 4 spot in the initial College Football Playoff rankings.

Because of that loss, Ohio State enters its Nov. 23 matchup with Penn State in a familiar place. The entire country knows that the Nittany Lions are talented and could still very well be the biggest test to Ohio State in the Big Ten, but the aura and hype around a top-five matchup is gone. Penn State is very good, but it is no longer the contender that Ohio State wanted it to be.

With the recent history of Ohio State and Penn State's rivalry, that doesn't matter for anything other than perception. The Nittany Lions have been the most consistent thorn in Ohio State's side since James Franklin was hired in 2014, playing the Buckeyes to an average margin of just over a touchdown (7.4) in the past five games between the two schools. Take out the blowout in 2015, a 38-10 Ohio State victory, and that margin drops to just 3.0. If anyone on Ohio State's schedule is going to challenge the Buckeyes, it will be the team that has pushed them to the limit in each of the past three seasons.

A lot of that comes from the fact that Penn State may be the second-most talented team in the Big Ten. The Nittany Lions recruit at an elite level and are essentially the only conference team outside of Michigan that can really go toe to toe with the Buckeyes year in and year out. The Buckeyes can't do to Penn State what they can to just about everyone else in the conference, because Penn State has the speed and strength to keep up with Ohio State.

Get To Know ... Penn State

About Penn State

- **2019 record:** 9-1 (6-1).
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-3; Starters Returning – Offense 6, Defense 6, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** James Franklin, 54-22 in six years at Penn State, 78-37 in nine years overall.
- **Series History:** 34th meeting, Ohio State leads 19-14-0.
- **School Facts:** Location – State College, PA; Enrollment – 28,861; Nickname – Nittany Lions; Color – Blue; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Beaver Stadium (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 106,572).

Top Offensive Returners

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Sean Clifford	97	374	3.9	5
Journey Brown	86	521	6.1	6
Noah Cain	68	350	5.1	6

Passing	Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Sean Clifford	168-282	59.6	2450	22-6

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
K.J. Hamler	46	791	17.2	8
Pat Freiermuth	34	424	12.5	7
Jahan Dotson	22	412	18.7	3

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game	– 36.8
Rushing Yards Per Game	– 173.1
Passing Yards Per Game	– 253.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game	– 426.6

2019 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Aug. 31	IDAHO	W, 79-7
Sept. 7	BUFFALO	W, 45-13
Sept. 14	PITTSBURGH	W, 17-10
Sept. 27	at Maryland	W, 59-0
Oct. 5	PURDUE	W, 35-7
Oct. 12	at Iowa	W, 17-12
Oct. 19	MICHIGAN	W, 28-21
Oct. 26	at Michigan State	W, 28-7
Nov. 9	at Minnesota	L, 31-26
Nov. 16	INDIANA	W, 34-27
Nov. 23	at Ohio State	12 p.m.
Nov. 30	RUTGERS	12 p.m.
Dec. 7	Big Ten Championship	8 p.m.

Top Defensive Returners

Def. Leaders	Solo-Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Micah Parsons	37-38	75	8.0-31	2.0-21
Cam Brown	24-32	56	4.0-15	1.0-2
Garrett Taylor	34-21	55	3.5-11	1.0-7

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD	Long
John Reid	2	61	30.5	1	36
Jaquon Brisker	2	33	2.0	0	29
Tariq Castro-Fields	2	8	4.0	0	5

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed	– 13.5
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed	– 75.9
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed	– 240.3
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed	– 316.2

Players To Watch

The best example of that speed and strength is at wide receiver, where sophomore K.J. Hamler has made his name as one of the nation's most electric and unstoppable players. The speedster gave Ohio State fits in 2018, reeling in four receptions for 138 yards and a 93-yard touchdown. This season has served as a breakout year for the former five-star, as he sits at 46 receptions for 791 yards on the season.

Hamler may be Penn State's best overall player, and he's certainly its biggest threat to make a huge play, but tight end Pat Freiermuth isn't far behind. The 6-5, 256-pounder is as deserving of the frequently tossed around Rob Gronkowski comparisons as any player in the country. He's a matchup nightmare and the latest in a long line of game-breaking Penn State tight ends. He has 34 catches on the season for 424 yards and is quarterback Sean Clifford's security blanket anytime he can't find something farther downfield.

Now, the Nittany Lion offense isn't perfect, largely because of Clifford. The sophomore from Cincinnati has been solid for Penn State in his first year starting, tossing 22 touchdowns and 2,450 yards on 59.6 completion percentage, but he's nowhere near the playmaker that Trace McSorley was, and the offense is suffering because of it. Penn State is without the vertical threat that McSorley provided, because Clifford has most of his success underneath at this point, and likely won't change that against the vaunted Buckeye secondary.

Perhaps more detrimental to the Penn State offense is the rushing attack, where Clifford currently leads the team in carries with 97 (374 net yards). Freshman Noah Cain (68 carries, 350 yards) is the most talented back of the bunch, but he's split carries this season with Ricky Slade (36 carries, 120 yards), Journey Brown (86 carries, 521 yards) and Devyn Ford (48 carries, 289 yards). Cain has struggled with injuries, and none of the other backs has shown to be much more than a functional Big Ten runner.

Defensively, Penn State is one of the best teams in the nation, led by an outstanding group of linebackers. Former Buckeye recruiting target Micah Parsons (75 tackles) leads the group

and is one of the nation's best defenders, but Cam Brown (56 tackles) and Jan Johnson (50) are very much elite threats, even if they aren't quite on the level of Parsons.

Those linebackers serve as part of what may be the best front seven Ohio State has faced yet this season, though they're neck and neck with Wisconsin. Defensive end Yetur Gross-Matos is one of the best edge rushers in the Big Ten, racking up 30 tackles and 6½ sacks. Shaka Toney on the other side isn't quite as physically dominant, though he has 31 tackles and 6½ sacks on the year, but he's a crucial part of the run-stuffing component of the defense.

Similar again to Wisconsin, that front seven is tamped down a bit by a defensive backfield that should be far better than it is. Penn State has plenty of experience in the backfield, led by fifth-year seniors at safety (Garrett Taylor) and cornerback (John Reid) and juniors (Lamont Wade and Tariq Castro-Fields) in the other two starting spots. It also has what seems to be a lot of talent, with all four coming out of high school as four-star prospects.

Despite that, the backfield was picked on by Minnesota to the tune of 339 yards in the air on 18 of 20 completions for Minnesota quarterback Tanner Morgan.

A lot of the problems stem from an inability to stop big plays, which is as much on the defensive backfield as it is on a defensive line that, despite its talent, has been unable to get consistent pressure on opposing passers when it needs to.

Morgan was sacked just once, Iowa quarterback Nate Stanley was taken down in the backfield twice, and Michigan's Shea Patterson went down once. That's three big games that saw the defensive line unable to create the kind of pressure generally expected.

Despite some questions about the pass defense, Penn State's greatest strength is still its defense, and that defense should be able to give Ohio State one of its biggest tests of the season. If Hamler and Freiermuth can find space against the Buckeye defense and the Nittany Lion defense is able to create the pressure it hasn't yet shown an ability to in big games, Penn State could be the first team to make Ohio State play four quarters.

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Ohio State vs. Penn State

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Projected Depth Charts

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE VS. PENN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Ryan Day put it out there in the days leading to the expected beatdown of Rutgers on Nov. 16. He challenged the superior Buckeyes to play up to the standards expected of the second-ranked team in the country. To be fair, those marks are high, and in the 56-21 win over the Scarlet Knights, the Buckeyes did not meet them in many categories as will be noted below.

One of those is in the running game. Yes, J.K. Dobbins ran for 89 yards and two touchdowns on 17 carries (5.2 average) while playing only two quarters, and, yes, the Buckeyes totaled 217 ground yards. But there's no escaping that Dobbins had four cracks at the end zone from the 7, including two tries from the 1, and couldn't score. Against Rutgers. The Scarlet Knights. That Rutgers. What in the name of the Cleveland Browns is going on here? The Nittany Lions conceded 91 yards on 31 carries (2.9 average) to Indiana in their most recent game and are ranked in the top four nationally at 75.9 yards allowed per game on a 2.2 yard per carry average. **EDGE: PENN STATE**

PENN STATE RUSH OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Buckeyes have a rush defense that is almost equal to that of PSU but showed some vulnerability against Rutgers. OSU entered the game allowing 88.2 yards a game, but the Scarlet Knights had 87 by halftime, including a 26-yard gashing TD gallop. You can't blame the backups for that. RU finished with 110 yards on 40 tries (2.8). OSU is yielding 90.4 yards per game on a 2.51 average. Penn State played a second straight time without injured true freshman back Noah Cain, and his status for the game in Columbus is unknown. Journey Brown took over and had his second straight 100-yard game. Here's what's noteworthy: When PSU was trying to protect a 27-24 lead against the Hoosiers, they went on an 18-play, 75-yard scoring drive using 9:01. Sixteen of the plays, including the last 11, were runs. This matchup appears equal, but the wild card is the return from a two-game suspension of OSU stud defensive end Chase Young. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. PENN STATE PASS DEFENSE

Justin Fields was magnificent again, throwing for four TDs and a career-best 305 yards in just two quarters and one series in the third against Rutgers. He spread the wealth as Chris Olave had a career-best 139 receiving yards and Binjimen Victor caught two scoring passes. Fields could be in for a big day against the Nittany Lions, who in the past two games vs. Minnesota and Indiana have surrendered a combined 710 yards and an 80.3 percent completion rate. IU's Peyton Ramsey was 31 of 41 for 371 yards. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

PENN STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

PSU quarterback Sean Clifford vs. IU was 11 for 23 for 179 yards and a TD and ran 10 times for 55 yards with a 38-yard score and a 1-yard scoring run. He was hampered by the loss of standout receiver/returner K.J. Hamler, who was injured in the 12th minute but not before he had two catches for 52 yards and three kickoff returns for 60 yards. Last season vs. the Buckeyes in Happy Valley, Hamler had a 93-yard TD reception among his four catches for 138 yards. It's unknown if he will play against OSU. Clifford was sacked three times by the Hoosiers and will have to contend with a very eager Young, who has 13½ sacks, one shy of setting the OSU season record. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Other than Blake Haubeil's recent long-distance field-goal success and a surprise inside kick vs. Maryland, the special teams have been a disappointment lately for the Buckeyes, and the Rutgers game was no different. Garrett Wilson muffed a punt. Drue Chrisman had a subpar 41-yard punt from deep in OSU territory, and there were two illegal-formation penalties on kickoffs in the first half. Meanwhile, PSU recovered a fumbled IU punt return and wasn't fooled by a botched fake-punt attempt by the Hoosiers, and Jake Pinegar made field goals from 47 and 27 yards to improve to 9 of 10 this season. **EDGE: PENN STATE**

INTANGIBLES

Penn State's chances of making the national playoffs are on life support after its loss to Minnesota on Nov. 9. The Nittany Lions are desperate and banking on the Buckeyes not being battle-tested the past two games against Maryland and Rutgers following an open week. That's a long time without a competitive game. OSU is on a mission. The Buckeyes are playing at home for the last time this season, and they'll be inspired by Young's return. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

STAFF PREDICTION

Ohio State has had to rally late the past two seasons to snatch victories from the Nittany Lions, who will want to jump to an early lead again. However, they've allowed two first-quarter TDs in each of the past two games. OSU has outscored opponents 308-38 in the first half. **OHIO STATE, 38-17**

WHEN OHIO STATE HAS THE BALL...

SS
38 LAMONT WADE, 5-9, 199, JR.
7 Jaquan Brisker, 6-1, 210, Jr.

OLB
11 MICAH PARSONS, 6-3, 245, SO.
40 Jesse Luketa, 6-3, 247, So.

ILB
36 JAN JOHNSON, 6-2, 231, 5TH-SR.
13 Ellis Brooks, 6-1, 234, So.

OLB
6 CAM BROWN, 6-5, 233, SR.
12 Brandon Smith, 6-3, 240, Fr.

FS
17 GARRETT TAYLOR, 6-0, 198, 5TH-SR.
26 Jonathan Sutherland, 5-11, 201, So.

CB
29 JOHN REID, 5-10, 181, 5TH-SR.
19 Trent Gordon, 5-11, 188, R-Fr.

DE
18 SHAKA TONEY, 6-3, 243, JR.
28 Jayson Oweh, 6-5, 255, R-Fr.

DT
54 ROBERT WINDSOR, 6-4, 285, 5TH-SR.
53 Fred Hansard, 6-3, 316, So.

DT
55 ANTONIO SHELTON, 6-2, 311, JR.
97 P.J. Mustipher, 6-4, 311, So.

DE
5 TARIQ CASTRO-FIELDS, 6-0, 197, JR.
2 Keaton Ellis, 5-11, 190, Fr.

X
75 THAYER MUNFORD, 6-6, 310, JR.
58 Joshua Alabi, 6-5, 305, 5th-Sr.

LT
9 BINJIMEN VICTOR, 6-4, 199, SR.
5 Garrett Wilson, 6-0, 188, Fr.

LG
73 JONAH JACKSON, 6-4, 305, 5TH-SR.
54 Matthew Jones, 6-4, 305, R-Fr.

C
71 JOSH MYERS, 6-5, 305, SO.
77 Harry Miller, 6-4, 310, Fr.

RG
76 BRANDEN BOWEN, 6-7, 315, 5TH-SR.
78 Nicholas Petit-Frere, 6-5, 295, R-Fr.

RT
52 WYATT DAVIS, 6-4, 313, SO.
61 Gavin Cupp, 6-4, 308, Jr.

Z
11 AUSTIN MACK, 6-2, 215 SR.
17 Chris Olave, 6-1, 185, So.

P
91 DRUE CHRISMAN, 6-3, 220, JR.

RB
2 J.K. DOBBINS, 5-10, 217 JR.
33 Master Teague, 5-11, 220, R-Fr.

QB
1 JUSTIN FIELDS, 6-3, 223, SO.
4 Chris Chugunov, 6-1, 208, 5th-Sr.

H
14 K.J. HILL, 6-0, 195, 5TH-SR.
26 Jaelen Gill, 6-0, 195, R-Fr.

TE
89 LUKE FARRELL, 6-6, 250, JR.
88 Jeremy Ruckert, 6-5, 250, So.

K
95 BLAKE HAUBEIL, 6-4, 225, JR.

WHEN PENN STATE HAS THE BALL...

SS
25 BRENDON WHITE, 6-2, 215, JR.
23 Jahsen Wint, 5-11, 200, Jr.

WLB
39 MALIK HARRISON, 6-3, 240, SR.
7 Teradja Mitchell, 6-2, 242, So.

MLB
20 PETE WERNER, 6-3, 239, JR.
36 K'Vaughan Pope, 6-1, 231, So.

SLB
32 TUF BORLAND, 6-1, 232, JR.
OR 5 BARON BROWNING, 6-3, 248, JR.

FS
4 JORDAN FULLER, 6-2, 205, SR.
41 Josh Proctor, 6-2, 205, So.

CB
1 JEFF OKUDAH, 6-1, 200, JR.
12 Sevyn Banks, 6-1, 200, So.

DE
2 CHASE YOUNG, 6-5, 265, JR.
11 Tyreke Smith, 6-4, 267, So.

DT
9 JASHON CORNELL, 6-3, 285, 5TH-SR.
92 Haskell Garrett, 6-2, 295, Jr.

DE
3 DAMON ARNETTE, 6-0, 195, 5TH-SR.
26 Cameron Brown, 6-0, 188, So.

X
53 RASHEED WALKER, 6-6, 324, R-FR.
75 Des Holmes, 6-5, 315, So.

LT
6 JUSTIN SHORTER, 6-4, 235, R-FR.
OR 11 DANIEL GEORGE, 6-2, 220, R-FR.

LG
74 STEVEN GONZALEZ, 6-4, 341, 5TH-SR.
73 Mike Miranda, 6-3, 295, So.

C
62 MICHAL MENET, 6-4, 313, JR.
73 Mike Miranda, 6-3, 295, So.

RG
71 WILL FRIES, 6-6, 313, JR.
75 Des Holmes, 6-5, 315, So.

RT
69 C.J. THORPE, 6-3, 322, SO.
OR 73 MIKE MIRANDA, 6-3, 295, SO.

Z
1 K.J. HAMLER, 5-9, 176, SO.
12 Mac Hippenhammer, 5-11, 182, So.

P
93 BLAKE GILLIKIN, 6-2, 196, SR.
98 Jordan Stout, 6-3, 205, So.

RB
4 JOURNEY BROWN, 5-11, 206, SO.
OR 21 NOAH CAIN, 5-10, 206, FR.
OR 28 DEVYNN FORD, 5-11, 194, FR.
OR 3 RICKY SLADE, 5-9, 198, SO.

QB
14 SEAN CLIFFORD, 6-2, 216, SO.
7 Will Levis, 6-3, 229, R-Fr.

H
5 JAHAN DOTSON, 5-11, 175, SO.
88 Dan Chisena, 6-3, 202, 5th-Sr.

TE
87 PAT FREIERMUTH, 6-5, 256, SO.
83 Nick Bowers, 6-4, 260, 5th-Sr.

K
92 JAKE PINEGAR, 6-2, 195, SO.
98 Jordan Stout, 6-3, 205, So.

- Depth charts compiled by Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn

OSU Extends Offer To Freshman Quarterback

When it comes to recruiting the nation's best players, it's important for coaches to establish a relationship early in the process. And of all the positions on the field, that's especially true of quarterbacks, who often commit before or during their junior seasons.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

Such was the case for Ohio State with 2020 Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral four-star Jack Miller and 2021 Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep four-star Kyle McCord, who were among the first players in their respective classes to pledge their services to the Buckeyes.

With that, head coach Ryan Day, offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson and passing game coordinator/quarterbacks coach Mike Yurcich have wasted no time in looking even further into the future, with the coaches offering a scholarship on Nov. 11 to 2023 Los Alamitos, Calif., quarterback Malachi Nelson.

The 6-3, 180-pound Nelson is not yet ranked by any major recruiting sites but already holds offers from Alabama, Auburn, Georgia, LSU and Oregon after leading the Griffins to the state playoffs this fall. He actually landed his first offer while he was still in eighth grade, fresh off leading his Pop Warner team to the 14-and-under national championship last fall.

Nelson is notably trained by quarterback guru Danny Hernandez, who runs STARS Sports Training and Rehabilitation Services in nearby Anaheim. His top clients include 2020 Clemson five-star commit D.J. Uigalelei, 2020 Alabama five-star commit Bryce Young, 2021 USC five-star commit Jake Garcia and 2022 Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra four-star Maalik Murphy, all of whom hold an offer from the Buckeyes.

Nelson has never been to Ohio State, but sources within the program told Buckeye Sports Bulletin they're hopeful he will attend the upcoming game against Penn State on Nov. 23.

Day Discusses Recruiting Impact Of Noon Kickoffs

Though it's arguably Ohio State's biggest game of the season, the game against Penn State is set to kick off at 12 p.m. on FOX.

It marks the Buckeyes' sixth noon start of the season thus far, with the Nov. 30 game at Michigan also scheduled for the early time slot. And while former head coach Urban Meyer pushed for more night games during his tenure for recruiting purposes, Day believes start times have had little to no impact on Ohio State's recruiting efforts this fall – particularly as the current staff has placed a renewed emphasis on the state of Ohio.

"If someone doesn't have a bye week or is playing on a Friday night, it's hard to get them in if they live a little farther away for a noon game," Day said during his weekly press conference on Nov. 7. "If it's a night game, it's a little easier. But for local schools and recruits from Ohio that live within a three- or four-hour radius of campus, they can get here for a noon game, which is good."

Of course, there are some who believe that a night game creates a better atmosphere than a noon kickoff. But a majority of Ohio State's premier games in recent seasons started before the sun went down, and the Buckeyes have still recruited at an elite level regardless.

As for those prospects who have a Friday night playoff game and can't make it across the country in short order – such as Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., four-star quarterback C.J. Stroud – Ohio State will host him for an official visit once the season ends.

Interestingly, that actually allows for more interaction with the coaching staff than a typical game day in Columbus would.

If Stroud eventually commits to the Buckeyes as expected, it's worth noting he'd join a handful of pledges who have yet to attend a game in Ohio Stadium. That includes La Habra, Calif., four-star cornerback Clark Phillips; Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic four-star safety Lathan Ransom; Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep four-star linebacker Cody Simon; and Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star athlete Kourt Williams.

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Paris Johnson	OT	6-8	295	★★★★★	Cincinnati Princeton
Jack Miller	QB	6-4	210	★★★★	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Chaparral
Luke Wypler	OC	6-4	285	★★★★	Montvale (N.J.) St. Joseph Regional
Jaxon Smith-Njigba	WR	6-1	188	★★★★	Rockwall, Texas
Gee Scott Jr.	WR	6-3	207	★★★★	Sammamish (Wa.) Eastside Catholic
Jakob James	OG	6-5	275	★★★	Cincinnati Elder
Trey Leroux	OT	6-8	355	★★★	Norwalk, Ohio
Lejond Cavazos	CB	6-1	190	★★★★	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
Julian Fleming	WR	6-2	199	★★★★★	Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia
Jake Seibert	K	6-1	190	★★★	Cincinnati La Salle
Grant Toutant	OT	6-7	320	★★★	Warren (Mich.) De La Salle
Ty Hamilton	DE	6-3	250	★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) Central
Clark Phillips	CB	5-11	178	★★★★	La Habra, Calif.
Cody Simon	OLB	6-1	218	★★★★	Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep
Darrion Henry	DT	6-5	279	★★★★	Cincinnati Princeton
Joe Royer	TE	6-5	225	★★★	Cincinnati Elder
Mitchell Melton	OLB	6-3	235	★★★	Olney (Md.) Good Counsel
Cameron Martinez	ATH	6-0	183	★★★	Muskegon, Mich.
Josh Fryar	OL	6-6	305	★★★	Beech Grove, Ind.
Mookie Cooper	WR	5-9	193	★★★★	St. Louis Trinity Catholic
Lathan Ransom	S	6-1	193	★★★★	Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic
Kourt Williams	ATH	6-1	216	★★★★	Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco
Jacolbe Cowan	DT	6-5	262	★★★★	Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day School
Ryan Watts	CB	6-3	187	★★★★	Little Elm, Texas

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-6	220	★★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	204	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	175	★★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Ben Christman	OT	6-6	299	★★★★	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
Reid Carrico	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Ironton (Ohio)
Marvin Harrison	WR	6-4	184	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's

Day Considers Defensive Assistant Hafley An All-Star

While players such as safety Jordan Fuller (Old Tappan), quarterback Chris Chugunov (Skillman) and defensive ends Tyler Friday (Ramsey) and Javontae Jean-Baptiste (Oradell) received most of the media's attention in the week leading up to Ohio State's 56-21 win over Rutgers on Nov. 16, another New Jersey native made a homecoming that same weekend.

Montvale's own Jeff Hafley – who was the Scarlet Knights' secondary coach under for-

mer head coach Greg Schiano in 2011 – also returned to the Garden State, bringing with him one of the nation's top-rated defenses.

The Buckeyes have seen a significant turnaround in Hafley's first year as the co-defensive coordinator and secondary coach, both on the field and on the recruiting trail. And he's done it all despite having been an assistant in the NFL for the past seven seasons.

Day isn't surprised, though. It's something he saw dating back to their time as assistants

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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago – 1989

Two of Ohio's most prized high school prospects squared off against one another for the fourth time in two years on Nov. 11.

Quarterback Joe Pickens led Cleveland St. Ignatius to a thrilling 31-30 come-from-behind victory over Robert Smith and Euclid in the Division I quarterfinals. The game was played before a crowd of 11,535 in Berea, Ohio.

Pickens completed just 12 of 29 passes and threw four interceptions against the Panthers but also threw for 200 yards and three touchdowns. Smith finished the game with 15 carries for 54 yards.

25 Years Ago – 1994

Ohio State's on-field struggles and speculation about head coach John Cooper's job security, which hit a fever pitch after a 63-14 loss to Penn State, started to threaten recruiting for John Cooper and his staff as the Buckeyes entered the final stretch for the 1996 recruiting class.

If speculation continued to surround Cooper and prospective recruits began to sense a tenuous nature regarding his future, the promise of an excellent class was in danger of evaporating.

Bill Kurelic, editor of The Ohio Football Recruiting News, said that any speculation about Cooper's future could have an adverse effect on the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts.

"If there is a change – and let me say that I am not advocating any change one single bit – but if there is, I think you will have several factors that will determine the kind of class Ohio State will have," he told BSB in November. "If a change is made, I think it is extremely important to make it and then have the next coach on board as quickly as possible."

20 Years Ago – 1999

Ohio State scheduled key official visits with top targets, including New York running back Sam Maldonado, who was considered the top prospect in New York and the nation's 15th-best running back.

"I would say I am a very powerful back," Maldonado told BSB in November. "I think I'm able to run over people. I have to give a lot of credit to my offensive line. They've done a great job for me."

Maldonado scheduled his visit to Ohio State for Dec. 3. He also had hopes to visit Florida State, Colorado, Arizona and Syracuse.

"The coaches from Ohio State seem very nice," he said. "I want to come down and see the campus. Coach (Shawn) Simms seems like a really nice guy."

"Plus, I think I would fit in well with their offense. They like the big power backs and use them well."

15 Years Ago – 2004

During the first week of November, the Buckeyes were awaiting decisions from some of the nation's better ranked prospects. Instead, the Buckeyes exited the week with nothing.

Chino, Calif., safety Shawn Oatis announced his verbal commitment to UCLA on Nov. 3. Oatis officially visited both Notre Dame and Ohio State, but when it came time to make a decision, the lure of a school close to home in a climate he was more accustomed to won out over a pair of traditional Midwest powers.

"(UCLA head coach) Karl Dorrell is bringing the program together," Oatis told BSB. "They're a young team and I see big things ahead."

On top of the loss of Oatis, who was considered the No. 6 safety in the country, Ohio state missed out on Lawrence Wilson, the 12th-best defensive end who chose Notre Dame instead of Ohio State.

"Basically, I just feel more comfortable at Notre Dame," he told BSB. "That's the reason why I chose it. It was just a sense about it, the environment up there."

10 Years Ago – 2009

Ohio State found itself on defensive tackle Sharrif Floyd's final list of top schools. However, if the Buckeyes were anywhere but No. 1, it likely wouldn't have done them a lot of good.

In an interview with Scout.com following a Nov. 6 football game, the athlete from George Washington

High School in Philadelphia said he had narrowed his list to six schools but added that he already knew where he was headed.

Asked to name his top five schools, Floyd named six – Penn State, Florida, Ohio State, USC, North Carolina and South Carolina.

"All of those schools have been playing well," he said. "Everybody's going to have their ups and downs and their wins and losses, but it's not really about that. It's about where I see myself fitting in best."

Five Years Ago – 2014

Commitment No. 4 for Ohio State's class of 2016 was announced Nov. 14 when Gahanna (Ohio) Lincoln four-star defensive end/linebacker Jonathon Cooper pledged to the Buckeyes. It technically had arrived weeks earlier, though, when Cooper silently committed to OSU head coach Urban Meyer.

"I actually committed to Ohio State at the Rutgers game a month earlier but didn't want it public so it wouldn't be a distraction to my team," Cooper told Scout. "I told Coach Meyer before the Rutgers game in person, and he was really excited. He gave me a big hug and welcomed me into the Buckeyes family, so it was a great moment."

"Ohio State was the easy choice because it's right here at home, and I love the coaching staff. I've grown up here, so I see this as a 40-year decision, not a four-year decision."

One Year Ago – 2018

According to reports from multiple scouting services, Ohio State was in Arizona on Nov. 8 as the Buckeyes offered running back Bijan Robinson of Salpointe Catholic in Tucson.

Robinson (6-0, 200), an Arizona legacy after his uncle Paul played for the Wildcats, had already been offered scholarships by Arizona, Alabama and Oklahoma among others in the two years prior to Ohio State's offer. He was ranked the No. 36 prospect in the 247Sports composite rankings and the No. 5 running back.

Continued From Page 26

under Chip Kelly with the San Francisco 49ers in 2016.

"I remember when we were with the 49ers, I told Jeff, 'You have an unbelievable combination of recruiting, an ability to relate to players and an understanding of defensive football,'" Day said during his weekly press conference on Nov. 12. "I think that's what

makes a great college football coach, those three things: relate to players, know what you're doing and you're a good recruiter."

Hafley, coincidentally, took Schiano's job and stepped into his role as the primary recruiter for New Jersey. He's done well with the latter, too, keeping Montvale St. Joseph Regional four-star center Luke Wypler in the fold while also landing a pledge from Simon.

Hafley's not done, either, as Blairstown

Blair Academy four-star defensive end Aaron Armitage and Simon's teammate, four-star defensive tackle George Rooks, are among his top priorities for the class of 2021.

"I think Jeff is an all-star," Day said. "I thought that when he was at Rutgers and at Pitt (from 2006-10). I felt like that when I worked with him in the NFL. I feel like that now. His work in Jersey is going to pay us dividends in the end."

North Carolina Running Back Names Top Schools

Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor celebrated his 17th birthday on Nov. 6 by narrowing down his list of nearly three dozen scholarship offers to 10 schools: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, LSU, North Carolina, Ohio State, Oregon, Penn State, USC

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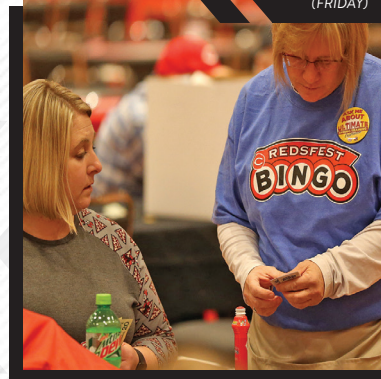
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Buckeyes Among Defensive End's Top Suitors

Continued From Page 28

and Wisconsin.

The 5-10, 190-pound Pryor is considered the fifth-best running back and No. 82 prospect overall in the class of 2021, as he's racked up 2,993 all-purpose yards and 34 total touchdowns in his three-year varsity career with the Huskies.

Pryor – who landed an offer from the Buckeyes and running backs coach Tony Alford back in February – has been to campus just once for a one-day camp in June. He plans to return for another unofficial visit for the game against Penn State, however.

Pryor will make the trip with his good friend 2020 Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day four-star defensive lineman Jacobbe Cowan, who committed to Ohio State on Oct. 4. He plans to make a decision before his senior season, so this trip

will go a long way toward determining if he'll take an official visit with the Buckeyes.

California Defensive End Reveals Top 10

In what appears to be a theme for high school juniors, Corona (Calif.) Centennial five-star defensive end Korey Foreman also celebrated his 17th birthday by revealing his top schools on social media on Nov. 8.

The 6-4, 245-pound Foreman – who is considered the top-rated defensive end and No. 1 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – has never been to Ohio State but listed the Buckeyes alongside Alabama, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oregon, Vanderbilt, USC and Washington.

A big reason for Foreman's interest in Ohio State is junior defensive end Chase Young,

who was one of the coaches at The Opening Finals in Frisco, Texas, this summer – an event where Foreman was named the most valuable defensive lineman despite being one of only a handful of underclassmen in attendance.

Foreman didn't have the same kind of success during his junior season, however, as a sprained meniscus sidelined him for several weeks. It also prevented him from taking any unofficial visits this fall.

Ohio State already has one defensive end committed for next cycle in Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star Jack Sawyer, who – interestingly enough – is the nation's second-best defensive end and No. 2 prospect overall. But there's no doubt defensive line coach Larry Johnson would love to get Foreman on campus sooner rather than later in hopes of securing his pledge, as well.

Offensive Tackle High On Buckeyes

Ohio State has done well at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy in recent years, landing commitments from offensive guard Tyler Gerald and defensive tackle Malik Barrow in 2016; cornerback Marcus Williamson and safety Isaiah Pryor in 2017; defensive tackle Taron Vincent in 2018; and cornerback Lejond Cavazos for 2020.

So it should come as no surprise that another Ascender, four-star offensive tackle J.C. Latham, has high interest in the Buckeyes, as well.

The 6-6, 285-pound Latham – who is considered the 13th-best offensive tackle and No. 77 prospect overall in the 2021 recruiting class – listed Ohio State in his top 10 on Nov. 15 alongside Alabama, Florida State, Georgia, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Michigan, Oklahoma, Penn State and Texas A&M.

Latham is a Mississippi native who actually played high school football in Wisconsin before transferring to IMG, so there are no ties that bind him to a specific school or state. And seeing as the Buckeyes and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa have made him a priority since the summer, there's a good possibility he leaves his unofficial visit for this weekend's game against Penn State as the program's second offensive tackle commit for 2021, joining Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star Ben Christman.

Ohio State Offers In-State Linebacker

Ohio State linebackers coach Al Washington extended a scholarship offer on Nov. 14 to 2022 Marysville, Ohio, linebacker Gabe Powers.

The 6-4, 220-pound Powers is not yet ranked by any major recruiting sites but already holds early offers from programs such as Colorado, Florida State and Michigan. He is just the second in-state prospect from his class to land an offer from Ohio State, joining West Chester Lakota West offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola.

Powers – who lives roughly 30 minutes northwest of campus – took an unofficial visit to watch the Buckeyes practice during fall camp on Aug. 8 and returned for the 34-10 win over Michigan State on Oct. 5. He'll be back soon, too, as he also plans to attend the game against Penn State.

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Grove's Marc Givler

Where does Ohio State stand with 2020 Dalton, Ga., four-star running back Jahmyr Gibbs (5-11, 194) following his unofficial visit for the 73-14 win over Maryland on Nov. 9, and which schools are the biggest threat to the Buckeyes' chances of flipping him from his pledge to Georgia Tech?

"Ohio State is hoping to get Gibbs to return for an official visit – which probably wouldn't happen until December – but the Buckeyes remain right in the mix along with Alabama and Florida as the teams with the best chance of flipping him at this point.

"That being said, the best bet might be on him just staying with Georgia Tech because pulling him away from home could prove difficult. Where the Crimson Tide stand with Houston North Shore five-star running back Zachary Evans could go a long way in seeing how they push for him. Georgia is also lurking but has not made a move yet with Clovis (Calif.) Buchanan five-star running back Kendall Milton already in the fold."

Though he's been committed to Ohio State

since the spring, 2020 Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia five-star wide receiver Julian Fleming continually has to shoot down rumors on social media about a potential flip to Penn State. Do you believe him when he says he's 100 percent in his pledge to the Buckeyes, or will head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline have to recruit him down the stretch to keep him in the class?

"In today's recruiting landscape, you always have to recruit your commits all the way until they sign. That said, there is no reason beyond some very far-fetched rumors out there to believe Fleming is wavering. In fact, people I've spoken with continue to tell me that Fleming and his family are all about his move to Ohio State in January and have been constantly keeping in touch with the staff about that."

One of the nation's top-rated defensive ends, 2020 Knoxville (Tenn.) Catholic four-star defensive end Tyler Baron (6-4, 252), recently announced

on social media that he's made a decision on his future. While the home-state Volunteers are the odds-on favorite to land his pledge, do you believe the Buckeyes have a chance to make him the final piece of the defensive line puzzle? If not, where does defensive line coach Larry Johnson turn next?

"Until a kid makes a public announcement – and Tyler seems to be waiting to do that – all three of his finalists would seem to still have a chance. Right now, I find it unlikely he ends up at Ohio State because it looks like Tennessee and Kentucky are ahead of the Buckeyes.

"I also do not think it's definite that Ohio State adds another defensive end in this class, though I'm sure they would like to if they could find one that they feel really good about. In the meantime, Hilliard (Ohio) Davidson three-star Gage Keys (6-5, 255), a Minnesota commit, and Draper (Utah) Juan Diego Catholic four-star Xavier Carlton (6-7, 262) are two that they have continued to keep in touch with."

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Avoiding Highs And Lows Keys To OSU's Season

During the Villanova-Ohio State game of Nov. 13, FS1 announcers Tim Brando and former Buckeye great Jim Jackson discussed what the inevitable blowout defeat would mean to the Wildcats.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

Jackson mentioned that the key for Villanova and coach Jay Wright was not to let the loss lead to more losses as had happened almost exactly a year earlier.

On Nov. 14, 2018, the No. 8 Wildcats lost 73-46 at home to No. 18 Michigan then followed that by being upset by Furman 76-68 in overtime.

The good news for Villanova was that the Wildcats regrouped and finished 26-10 after a second-round loss in the NCAA Tournament.

What does that have to do with the No. 16 Buckeyes' surprisingly easy 76-51 win over the 10th-ranked Wildcats at Value City Arena?

Well, Ohio State coach Chris Holtmann had the same philosophy, though from the winning side. Don't let one victory, no matter how notable, be the high point and don't let a loss keep you down.

The Buckeyes put the game away with a 19-3 start before some of the fans had been seated, and the Wildcats never seriously threatened.

"Very rarely do you have games like that," Holtmann said afterward. "The players made plays, but we were in a really good rhythm. How do we continue to grow is our biggest challenge for us moving forward, and how do we respond when things don't always go our way?"

He was firing a warning shot to his players to not get overly excited about the result.

Two days later at his press conference previewing the Nov. 18 game against Stetson, Holtmann doubled down.

"Perspective is really important this time

of the year," he said. "We can rattle off a number of teams that have had wins early in the season then hit the skids in league play or at various times when they really, really struggled.

"Your season is never defined by one particular game unless it's in March or April, really. This time of the year, whether you lose or you win, it's just about what is your response after that and reminding yourself, 'OK, listen, this is why we play well and this why we always have games where you look at OK, or, this is why we struggled.'"

Senior guard Danny Hummer noted that Evansville shocked No. 1 Kentucky 67-64 at Rupp Arena on Nov. 12 as a precursor to his belief that the Buckeyes must maintain an even disposition, especially against supposed underdogs.

"If we're to have success as a team, if we come every day with the same approach, anything can happen," he said. "As long as we maintain that day-to-day, win-the-next-day attitude, it should help us in the long run."

Holtmann repeatedly says that he felt the Buckeyes' 12-1 start to the 2018-19 season was a mirage because of the weakness of the pre-season slate. When the Big Ten schedule got into full swing, Ohio State suffered through a five-game losing streak and finished 8-12 in the conference.

Still, it was good enough to earn a second straight NCAA bid, and like Villanova, the Buckeyes bowed out in the second round.

"I think we had some slippage in some of our habits, but I don't know if that team necessarily had an arrogance that you could point to and say this is the reason for our struggles in January, or a lack of maturity," Holtmann said. "We had some young guys put in positions that they were surprised by the grind and how good the Big Ten was. That factored in."

OSU has a young team again with three sophomores (Justin Ahrens, Luther Muhammad and Duane Washington Jr.) and a trio of freshmen (Alonzo Gaffney, D.J. Carton and E.J. Liddell) expected to provide significant minutes.

Holtmann said two things will keep the Buckeyes on the right track: "Maturity and

OSU Men's Basketball Verbal Commits

Players in the class of 2020 who have signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Eugene Brown	SG	6-6	185	★★★★	Decatur (Ga.) Southwest DeKalb
Zed Key	PF	6-7	215	★★★	Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran

Players in the class of 2021 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Kalen Etzler	PF	6-8	195	★★★★	Convoy (Ohio) Crestview
Meechie Johnson	CG	5-11	160	★★★★	Willoughby (Ohio) Andrew Osborne

great leadership are required for handling success the right way."

That's where his upperclassmen need to step up.

"That's why I said we'll go as far as those guys will take us," Holtmann said. "People take that as on the floor, but it's really about the leadership between Andre (Wesson), Kaleb (Wesson), Kyle (Young) and C.J. (Walker)."

"They have a perspective that freshmen just can't have, even sophomores, because they've been through it now."

Not Again

Andre Wesson, a senior guard, sustained a right eye socket injury when he was inadvertently elbowed by Walker during the season-opening 64-56 win against Cincinnati on Nov. 6.

Wesson did not play vs. Massachusetts Lowell on Nov. 10 or against Villanova, and Holtmann said Nov. 15 he wasn't sure when he would return.

"Andre Wesson is not able to do contact, but he is in the process of working his way back," the coach said. "When that's going to happen, I can't give you a definitive answer because he's not practiced any."

"I told him before the (Villanova) game I was disappointed he had to miss any games. I'm sure he'll be anxious to get back, but we'll be cautious."

Wesson lost two front teeth on Dec. 15, 2018, against Bucknell when he went to the floor and had an opponent land on him.

Ahrens also missed the Villanova game because of recurring back problems that plagued him over the summer, although he played a total of 25 minutes in the first two games. Holtmann was unsure of his status going forward.

Welcome Aboard

As BSB basketball maven Joe Dempsey noted online, the Buckeyes added two members to the class of 2020 in Zed Key and Eugene Brown III during the early signing period.

Key (6-7, 215) is a three-star power forward from Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island

Lutheran. He is the No. 160 prospect nationally, No. 31 at power forward, and the No. 5 prospect in his state, according to 247Sports.

Brown (6-6, 190) signed his National Letter of Intent on Nov. 15, two days after Key. He is a four-star shooting guard from Decatur (Ga.) Southwest DeKalb. He is No. 111 overall, 25th at his position and the sixth-best prospect in Georgia.

"Both guys fit our needs, how we want to play, the kind of people they are, the culture of our program, the kind of families they come from," Holtmann said Nov. 15. "Just like the previous people we recruited in the previous class, we feel strongly about that. We felt like we needed an additional wing/guard and interior guy and potentially a back-to-the-basket scorer. Obviously, we're going to lose Kaleb at some point. So they just really fit our needs and what we were looking for."

The pair committed within six days of each other beginning with Brown on Sept. 16.

"Eugene, with his versatility and ability to play kind of multiple positions on the perimeter in that bigger wing that we've been looking for, is going to really be important," Holtmann said. "And Zed with his physicality, his length, his frame. I think he's just scratching the surface on his ability to continue to get better. And he has ability to score with his back to the basket, which is always unique in our game today."

They will be the only two pledges for the class because they put the Buckeyes over the scholarship limit of 13 by one for the 2020-21 season.

That is unless, of course, there are transfers or players turning pro early, such as could be the case for Kaleb Wesson, a junior forward.

"It was a factor, for sure, because you're always trying to prepare for the unknown," Holtmann said. "We didn't do it just because of that reason by any stretch, because Kaleb's certainly going to have options at the end of the year, and he and his family will sit down and determine what's best for him and his future and his career."

"That's months away. And obviously he's a huge part of our program. I think it's something you consider, but by no means was that exclusively the reason."

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Ohio State Rolls Villanova Thanks To Hot Start

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State did not get off to its best start in its first two wins against Cincinnati and UMass Lowell, so there was cause for concern with No. 10 Villanova coming to town on Nov. 13. The Buckeyes emphatically answered those doubts, though, with a red-hot start against the Wildcats that led to a convincing 76-51 victory in front of 16,419 fans at Value City Arena.

"We really came out and stuck with the game plan," freshman guard D.J. Carton said after the game. "We knew we had to have a big start because we've been starting games off slow. Us young guys just relied on the leaders, and they did their thing. And I feel like we did a good job of coming off the bench and keeping that energy up."

Leading the Scarlet and Gray were the guard trio of sophomore Duane Washington, junior C.J. Walker and Carton, as well as junior big man Kaleb Wesson. Washington posted 14 points with four three-pointers; Walker scored 10 points and had seven assists; Carton contributed 11 points, five boards and five assists; and Wesson notched 10 points, 11 rebounds and four blocks.

Washington and Walker pushed the Buckeyes to a commanding first-half lead, with 11 points and 10 points at intermission, respectively. Washington hit back-to-back three-pointers to start the game before Walker nailed a pull-up triple to send the home crowd into a frenzy and give Ohio State a 9-0 lead.

"I was just taking what the defense was

giving me," Washington said, "trusting in my teammates to find me in the right spots and just trusting my shot and knocking them down."

The Buckeyes rolled to a 19-3 start, which they pushed to a 40-13 advantage with just 2:26 until halftime. The Wildcats showed the most life they displayed all night with a 9-0 run heading into the break, leaving the score 40-22 at the intermission.

Through the first 5:20 of the second half, the Buckeyes and Wildcats went back and forth with neither side gaining a clear edge and the score at 49-30.

Then Ohio State ignited, firing off a 13-2 rally, pushing its lead to 30 and dimming any hopes of a comeback for visiting Villanova with the score 62-32 with 8:34 to play. The Buckeyes' run was highlighted by six points from Carton, including an emphatic slam dunk on an excellent bounce pass from junior forward Kyle Young that brought the Ohio State fans to their feet.

"I just knew we needed a big play, and it was a good play call by (assistant coach Ryan Pedon) first of all, great pass by my boy Kyle, and he just put me in a great situation to make a play," Carton said. "I didn't really know how to react from that. It was fun celebrating with my teammates and being able to play the game I love."

With senior wing Andre Wesson missing another game due to a fractured eye socket and sophomore wing Justin Ahrens sitting out with a sore back, sophomore guard Luther Muhammad played nearly 35 minutes and Washington started in Andre Wesson's

place, leading the Buckeyes in scoring in 26:27 played. Muhammad's solid performance was highlighted by lockdown defense and 11 points on 4-of-5 shooting, including 2 for 2 from beyond the arc.

"I thought they've been good these last two games," head coach Chris Holtmann said of Muhammad and Washington. "I thought they would come and try to post those guys, and they did. I don't think they would have done that as much with Andre, but I thought we were able to limit them from getting there enough. And those guys making shots and spreading the floor really helped our offense."

Overall, Ohio State shot 60.0 percent from the field (30 of 50) and 56.3 percent from three-point range (9 of 16), but only 58.3 percent from the line (7 of 12).

The Buckeyes clamped down on defense, holding Villanova to 30.6 percent from the floor (19 of 62), 33.3 percent from distance (10 for 30). The Wildcats shot just 26.7 percent from the floor (8 of 30), including only a 25.0 (3 of 12) mark from beyond the arc as the Buckeyes posted their 18-point halftime lead.

Following the Buckeyes' first win against a top-10 opponent since knocking off Purdue on Feb. 7, 2018, Carton was asked what he learned about the team.

"We found out we're very hungry," Carton said. "We've been very hungry all season long, and we have things to prove. We've got a lot of things to learn, a lot of things to build upon, but I feel like we're playing pretty good basketball right now and we're playing well as a unit."

"I'm having a great time on the floor with

Ohio State 76, Villanova 51

Nov. 13, 2019 Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio												
		1	2	F								
Villanova (1-1)		22	29	51								
Ohio State (3-0)		40	36	76								
Villanova		Total	FG	FT	Reb.	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.						
Samuels	29	5-11	2-3	0-5	0	3	14					
Robinson-Earl	37	3-11	0-0	2-4	1	1	8					
Bey	35	1-8	0-2	0-5	2	1	2					
Gillespie	28	4-11	1-2	1-0	5	2	10					
Moore	24	2-6	0-0	0-1	1	3	6					
Slater	10	0-6	0-0	2-0	0	1	0					
Arcidiacono	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
Swider	26	4-7	0-0	1-3	1	1	11					
Cosby-Roundtree	10	0-2	0-0	2-0	0	3	0					
Totals	200	19-62	3-13	22	10	16	51					
Percentages:	FG:	30.6%	FT:	42.9%	3-point							
goals:	10-30 (Samuels 2-5, Robinson-Earl 2-4, Bey 0-2, Gillespie 1-5, Moore 2-3, Slater 0-5, Swider 3-6).											
Team rebounds:	9. Blocked Shots:	4 (Samuels 3, Slater).										
Turnovers:	12 (Samuels 3, Robinson-Earl 3, Bey, Gillespie, Moore, Slater 2, Cosby-Roundtree).											
Ohio State		Total	FG	FT	Reb.	O-D	A	PF	Pts.			
Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.						
Young	22	4-5	0-0	0-7	1	1	8					
Wesson	35	4-9	2-2	1-10	3	0	10					
Muhammad	35	4-5	1-3	0-1	1	0	11					
Washington	27	5-8	0-0	0-5	0	1	14					
Walker	31	4-8	1-1	0-3	7	2	10					
Gaffney	11	2-2	0-0	0-1	0	2	4					
Carton	26	4-10	3-5	1-4	5	2	11					
Liddell	12	3-3	0-1	0-1	1	3	8					
Hummer	1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0	0					
Totals	200	30-50	7-12	2-33	18	11	76					
Percentages:	FG:	60%	FT:	58.3%	3-point							
goals:	9-16 (Wesson 0-1, Muhammad 2-2, Washington 4-6, Walker 1-3, Carton 0-2, Liddell 2-2).											
Team rebounds:	1. Blocked Shots:	6 (Young, Wesson 4, Liddell).										
Turnovers:	10 (Wesson 2, Muhammad, Washington 4, Walker, Carton 2).											
Steals:	6 (Young, Wesson, Muhammad, Walker 2, Carton).											
Officials:	Stephens, O'Connell, Groover											
Attendance:	16,419.											

my teammates, and as long as that keeps going forward, we'll continue to learn and progress from there."

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Miller Joins Buckeyes As Key Veteran Presence

At the start of Nov. 8, just two days before this season was ready to kick off, Ohio State still didn't know the fate of Oklahoma State transfer Braxtin Miller.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

The junior guard left the Cowgirls after averaging 14.7 points per game last season and with the ninth-most made three-pointers in program history, and she would give the Buckeyes an upperclassman with loads of big-game experience, something the team is significantly lacking.

But Ohio State still hadn't heard, that is, until head coach Kevin McGuff received a call. "We were cautiously optimistic," McGuff said, "but until it happens you just never know."

That call came from compliance, and they gave him the good news. He then called a team meeting with the players that night.

"They made us think that we were in trouble, they tricked us kind of, so I was really scared," Miller said. "And then they said my name, so I was even more scared because I thought I did something."

She didn't do anything, but the NCAA did, accepting Ohio State's waiver request and giving Miller immediate eligibility.

Just two days after she was deemed eligible

for the season, Miller started for the Buckeyes against Valparaiso. Her opening performance wasn't anything that blew away expectations – Miller hit 2 of 5 attempts for five points and added four rebounds and two assists in 20 minutes of game time.

Her shooting will be a key for Ohio State this season, but McGuff said there is more that comes with Miller's eligibility this season than just her pure skills.

"We need her experience as much as anything," McGuff said. "She's been through two seasons at Oklahoma State where they were playing at the highest level, and so we just need her experience."

Miller, a Centerville, Ohio native who went to Kettering Archbishop Alter High School, said that coming home was only a small part of why she decided to come to Columbus for her final two years of eligibility.

"I think it was something that was important to me, but it wasn't the thing that decided my decision. I think there was a lot of things that made me want to transfer, but Ohio State being closer to home was definitely a plus," she said. "It wasn't necessarily the right fit (at Oklahoma State), and there were just a lot of things that went into it of why I needed to just be back."

Miller is a two-time All-Big 12 honorable mention, was a unanimous member of the Big 12 All-Freshman Team and was among the tops in the conference in assists per game (3.5), free-throw percentage (75.4 percent) and three-point percentage (32.7 percent) last season, areas that Ohio State struggled in a season ago.

Freshman guard Madison Greene brought up what Miller brings both on and off the court when asked the importance of having the Oklahoma State transfer eligible to play this season.

"She's a great leader, communicator, she's a great shooter, she takes care of the ball well and she's also a really good defender," Greene said.

The junior guard is one of three upperclassmen on the team, and the only one that has played a significant amount of game time. Miller will be a key piece moving forward for a team with loads of talent, almost all of which is inexperienced.

But when Miller signed up for coming back to her home state, she didn't even know that was part of the deal.

"In all honesty, I didn't even realize how many freshmen we had or how many people coming in we had until I had committed," Miller said. "I mean it worked out for me, because I came onto a mostly new team, so we all got to know each other instead of just maybe one person like me coming in and everybody else already knows each other and having to fit into that."

"It worked out really well for me, and I think for everybody as well, but I actually didn't know that it was that big of a (freshman) class when I came here."

Miller will be asked to become a leader on this team, something that both Greene and McGuff already have noted as a strength in the former three-star guard. But for Miller, after two seasons stepping up for the Cowgirls, leadership is not something she stresses.

"I feel like I kind of always just stay true to myself and what I am, and if that turns into being a leader, then that's what it is, and if it turns into being led, then that's what it is as well," Miller said. "I just definitely think that I try to just stay true to what I know what to do and then let it go from there."

Ohio State Secures Trio Of Commits For 2020

After a 2019 recruiting class that ranked No. 4 in the nation and featured seven freshmen, Ohio State has already got to work on its 2020 class, and by Nov. 15, it officially signed all three of its verbal commits for next season.

The first came on Nov. 13, with a pair of commits in Anyssa Jones and Gabby Hutcherson announcing their signings. Both Jones and Hutcherson are three-star prospects according to ESPN, and both are from local Westerville South High School.

Jones was the first commitment for the Buckeyes in the class, verbally selecting Ohio State on Oct. 1, 2018, when the team had only three commits for its 2019 class. The 5-9 guard is a three-star and ranked No. 29 among guards in the class but is not ranked in the top 100 overall players.

This May, ESPN's Dan Olson described

Jones at the Ohio Midwest Showdown as a "crafty, athletic lefty combo-guard" who "manufactures, knocks down jumpers to the arc; handles in transition game," and can finish plays coast to coast.

Her teammate, Hutcherson, committed to the Buckeyes just a week after Jones did and gives Ohio State depth at the forward position. Hutcherson is 6-2 and ranked the No. 20 forward in the 2020 class, and according to Olson's scouting report from July 2017 at the Michigan vs. Ohio Border Battle, she possesses loads of talent.

Olson calls Hutcherson an "athletic stretch-four" who "rebounds, handles in transition; pulls the defense to the arc," and who is "a mismatch creator" who plays "taller than advertised" while also being a versatile defender.

It took until Friday, Nov. 15, for the Buckeyes to get a signing from their third and final verbal commit.

Kateri Poole is the lone five-star in the group and is ranked by ESPN as the No. 6 point guard and No. 20 player overall in the 2020 class. She is from South Shore High School in Bronx, New York, and verbally committed to Ohio State on July 26, 2019.

At the John Lucas Enterprises Top 160 Invitational Camp, Poole was described as a "strong, deceptively athletic combo-guard with explosive offensive attack; 1 on 1 creator yields results behind the arc; tough to contain, gets to the rim with savvy half-court game; interior passer, playmaker with court awareness; an impact back court performer in the class of 2020," according to Olson.

Poole will look for minutes running the point along with Janai Crooms and Greene, who appear to be Ohio State's main facilitators early on.

Ohio State now has 14 players on its roster heading into the 2020-21 season, with only Savitha Jayaraman and Jensen Caretti, two players who see only limited minutes, departing as seniors.

The Buckeyes have the option to look for a 15th player to add to the young core, but that spot may not be utilized as players already battle for minutes within the roster.

Jayaraman Is Senior With Junior Eligibility

In last week's women's basketball season preview, we listed forward Savitha Jayaraman as a senior, which did not go with Ohio State's website that listed her as a junior.

Jayaraman joined the team as a walk-on in her sophomore year academically, meaning she was on the team as a freshman but was actually in her second year.

That means this year she is a senior academically with junior eligibility, and an Ohio State spokesman confirmed to BSB that Jayaraman will go as a senior this year and will not return to the Buckeyes in the 2020-21 season.

Young Buckeyes Searching For Breakout Stars

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

It's been quite some time since Ohio State wrestling found itself entering a season with more questions than answers. Head coach Tom Ryan has built one of the nation's most consistent title contenders on senior leadership, experienced teams and the occasional breakout freshman. In 2019, Ryan's team has flipped the script.

The Buckeyes have just three seniors as they embark on one of the nation's most challenging schedules, which could make for some growing pains. Luke Pletcher and Kollin Moore are co-captains, while Ke-Shawn Hayes rounds out the Buckeyes expected to exhaust their eligibility following the season. Outside of those three, Ohio State has a whopping 23 underclassmen, with just seven non-senior upperclassmen.

Ryan's group is still expected to contend for a Big Ten and national title, but this is among the youngest teams he will have coached in his 14 years in Columbus. Because of that inexperience, the goals and the pressure on this team are a bit harder to quantify than usual.

"We're excited," said head coach Tom Ryan. "There's quite a few new faces in the lineup. It's a young team. We're excited about the new facility, being in the Covelli Center for the first time on (Nov. 10)."

The youth is not by design so much as it is a result of top talent being churned through the program. Ohio State loses senior starters at 141 pounds (Joey McKenna), 149 (Micah Jordan), 165 (Te'Shan Campbell) and 184 (Myles Martin), leaving open spaces in all four spots that will have to be filled in 2019 by wrestlers who are either young, in the case of 149-pounder Sammy Sasso and 184-pounder Zach Steiner, or moving weights, like now-141-pound Pletcher or Kaleb Romero, up to 174 after starting last season at 165.

All in all, the Buckeyes opened the season against Stanford on Nov. 10 with six underclassmen in the starting lineup and six new starters. The young Bucks impressed against Stanford and Pitt, landing a 29-6 victory and losing just one bout against the Cardinal and notching a 23-12 win over the No. 15 Panthers, but Ryan has frequently expressed the need for leadership with such a fresh group and the need for improvement.

"We have to get way better, this team has to get way better," Ryan said after the win over Stanford. "Tonight, it was good enough to go 9-1. I think a couple of those matches could have gone the other way, but you're always assessing mind-set: Who is competing at a level where they're constantly looking to score points? We have to grow there. There were quite a few instances where we just didn't apply the pressure that we needed to apply."

As Ohio State opens its 100th season in the brand-new Covelli Center, BSB breaks down OSU's season with a look at the starting lineup by weight class.

Weight-By-Weight Preview

125 pounds – Malik Heinselman isn't new to the lineup, as he did compete in seven duals in 2018, putting up a 3-4 record. However, the sophomore at 125 is very much part of the new wave of wrestlers in Columbus and could be big for the Buckeyes as the schedule begins to heat up entering winter.

An NCAA qualifier and Junior Freestyle Champion already, Heinselman is one of the most obviously talented wrestlers on the team, which played a large role in Ryan's decision to hold his redshirt as a freshman, instead letting the wrestler serve in a depth role. He shared time in 2018 with Brakan Mead, though with Mead no longer on the team, the spot is now Heinselman's.

For Heinselman, the question is not so much about talent as it is about the ability to handle pressure and significant moments. Last season, Ryan raved about his talent but questioned his ability to contribute as a true freshman.

"Everything about Malik – he has every box checked that he'll be a great one here," Ryan told BSB prior to Heinselman's freshman season. "The question is, is he going to be great enough in the next 90 days, 120 days to make a decision to pull him? I don't know that right now."

Ryan would, of course, go on to use the then-freshman frequently to mixed results. Now, with a year under his belt, the expectations are raised for the Castle Rock (Colo.) Castle View product.

Heinselman won his first bout of the dual season against Stanford's Jackson DiSario, 6-3. A 12-7 win over Pitt's Louis Newell in the second match of the season seems to indicate that Heinselman will be able to handle the raised expectations. Still, his head coach has questions.

"We wanted to learn about (125)," Ryan said after that first win of the season. "I don't think we learned that much tonight about it. He was up early, just stopped wrestling. You can't stop wrestling."

133 pounds – The Buckeyes have a new face at 133 this season as Pletcher has moved up to 141. In his place is redshirt freshman Quinn Kinner.

Kinner, originally a 141-pounder, decided to drop to 133 after he lost the wrestle-off to Pletcher at 141. As Ryan tells it, the decision was easy and immediate for the New Jersey native.

"He decided to go down to 133 after he lost his wrestle-off at 141 to Luke," Ryan said. "He did a great job; he was disciplined, making the weight and had a ton of energy. At Michigan State he had six matches, and to cut that kind of weight and have that kind of energy was a good sign."

A former top-20 recruit according to FloWrestling, Kinner was excellent during his freshman season, notching 16 wins and dropping just two matches all season. He was a champion at both the Ohio Intercollegiate and the Michigan Open while placing second at the Edinboro Open

and third at the Lindenwood Open.

Because of those showings last season and the lofty expectations with which he came to Ohio State, Kinner found himself ranked No. 20 in the 133 class, despite the change in weight class that required him to cut weight quickly.

So far, that change has shown little impact on Kinner's ability to get results. The redshirt freshman defeated Stanford's Brandon Kier in his first bout of the season, 7-1. He couldn't quite get the job done against one of the best wrestlers in 133 against Pitt, losing to No. 4 Micky Phillippi, 4-2.

Freshman Jordan Decatur could also see at least some time at 133, though it seems likely that Kinner will be leaned on for much of the season. Both are talented, as Decatur showed with as decorated a high school career as you'll ever find, putting together a 133-7 record in four years at Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy in Akron.

141 pounds – On a team filled with unknowns, Pletcher's presence serves as a comforting one for the Buckeyes. The Pennsylvania native is one of the most experienced wrestlers in the country, and his preseason ranking supported that, as he entered the bout against Stanford's Real Woods (No. 15) as the top wrestler in his weight class.

That kind of pedigree is well deserved for Pletcher. He's been an NCAA qualifier each of his first three years in school, an All-American as a sophomore and junior, and a Big Ten championship finalist each of the last two years.

While Pletcher's affinity for close finishes may create some stress this season for the Buckeyes, he'll be an anchor for the team as it attempts to brave a schedule that has many of the nation's top-ranked teams on it, and not just as a winner on the mat, but as a leader.

"Luke looks really good at 141," Ryan said. "We saw him this summer at U23s. He looked really good at 143. so we felt pretty confident that he'd wrestle well there."

The move up to 141 has only seemed to help Pletcher, who already looks more comfortable than he did at 133 in 2018-2019. Because of his relative lack of height, Pletcher is able to generate excellent leverage against taller wrestlers and wears his weight well, often looking like one of the strongest athletes at every match. His energy and quickness make him a serious threat not just for a Big Ten title, but for a national title.

Pletcher's senior season kicked off with a bang. He went 5-0 at the Michigan State Open, securing a 2-1 victory over then No. 1-ranked Dom Demas of Oklahoma in the 141-title bout. Then, against Stanford's Real Woods, Pletcher eked out a 3-1 sudden victory out of an outstanding scramble.

"I've been there too many times," Pletcher said Nov. 13 on his sudden victory. "I don't like to be there. I was a little nervous in that situation. I wasn't in a good spot there, but I was able to pull it out."

Pletcher's win against Pitt's No. 17 Cole Matthews was less close, with Pletcher landing a surprising 23-9 major-decision victory.

149 pounds – While Sasso may be in just his redshirt freshman season, making his first varsity starting lineup appearances of his young career, it's unfair to lump him in as being inexperienced. Sasso is already considered to be a leader on Ohio State's roster, as shown by his recognition as one of the three members on the team allowed to wear black around the Jennings Wrestling Facility, along with co-captains Pletcher and Moore.

"The black shirt is just an outward appearance of an inward lifestyle," Ryan told BSB. "A clean lifestyle across the board. The two captains (Pletcher and Moore) got the black shirts initially. We've seen them for four or five years, so we know who they are. In Sammy's case, he's a redshirt freshman. We saw him all last year, and he was an easy one for us to move from gray to black."

Sasso's value is not just in his leadership as such a young wrestler. The Pennsylvania native is one of the best wrestlers, pound-for-pound, in the entire country, and his coach has described him as a savage on the mat.

"He loves the sport," Ryan said. "He deeply loves wrestling. You can be the most wonderful, hardworking, warm, loving, caring human being, straight-A student, but if you're not – on match day – a savage competitor, you have a problem."

"Sammy is a savage. Sammy is a competitor, so that is absolutely something that we have seen from day one. He loves the sport, he's a savage competitor, he's a consummate learner, so he has so much knowledge of the sport."

Sasso is ranked No. 5 at 149 despite no prior duals experience. He went 19-2 during his redshirt season, winning the Michigan State Open and the Edinboro Open, while also earning a spot at the World team trials after winning a UWW junior championship at 70kg.

His talent, according to Ryan, comes not just from his natural athletic ability and strength, but from his knowledge of the game.

"He corrects mistakes," Ryan said of his 149-pound starter. "If he does something wrong, he assesses it and he moves forward from it with a plan. He's pretty unique, Sammy."

Like Pletcher, Sasso's season could not have started much better. He went 5-0 at the Michigan State Open, winning the 149 division with a 19-4 tech fall against Michigan's Kanen Storr. The bout against Stanford's No. 19 Requir van der Merwe was another Sasso win, 3-1. He pinned Pitt's Luke Kemerer in 5:25.

157 pounds – One of the few unranked Buckeyes entering the season, redshirt junior Elijah Cleary has plenty to prove and is one of the true question marks on the roster. In fact, Cleary's spot may not even be his own fully, despite an entry into the starting lineup against Stanford that has Cleary claim a 10-8 sudden victory against Tyler Eischens.

There's some fuzziness at the position



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because of the presence of Hayes. He entered the season at 149 and is currently at 149, but a nagging knee injury has kept him out through much of the early stages of the schedule. He has experience wrestling anywhere from 141 to 157 and took up the mantle at 157 last year, going 12-3 in duals and 21-11 overall. He entered the NCAA tournament as the No. 11 seed after a seventh-place finish in the Big Ten.

If Hayes can get healthy and move back up to 157, he would likely challenge Cleary for the spot and would be the presumed starter, given Cleary's inability to pull away and truly claim the spot.

Despite the questions, Cleary performed admirably in his first bout of the season. He showed the kind of starting-lineup ability that Ohio State needs him to have if Hayes is unable to fill that spot. Still, Cleary knows he has work to do.

"I'm kind of already analyzing (the win against Stanford)," Cleary said on Nov. 10. "There were a lot of things to work on, little things, little errors. Definitely coming out of my warmup a little cold, but I was mostly just proud. That's one of the first times I've really broke through and had to finally get my offense going. I'm happy with that, but there's still definitely things to work on."

The second match of the season was less encouraging for Cleary. He looked overmatched against No. 10 Taleb Rahmani, losing 6-1.

165 pounds – Ethan Smith struggled in 2018-2019 as a redshirt freshman. He put up just a 6-5 duals record and went 20-13 overall. He was an NCAA qualifier, but at Ohio State, the expectations are far higher than NCAA qualification. That's why 2019 is either going to have to be a big year for Smith or a breakout year for someone ready to take his place.

Although freshman Carson Kharchla challenged for the spot in wrestle-offs and won a 3-2 decision over the redshirt sophomore, Ryan has shot down the possibility of burning that redshirt, meaning the challenge would have to come from elsewhere.

"Carson had a great weekend," Ryan said after the Michigan State Open, where Kharchla went 5-0. "We knew how good he was coming in. He's lived up to that, from the timeless principles standpoint. He lives clean, he trains hard, but we're still going to keep him in a redshirt."

For Smith, this season is all about being more comfortable. He's struggled with the cut to 165 and told BSB that he feels much better entering this season.

"I would say the biggest takeaway I had from last year was to not make these matches life or death. At the end of the day it's just a wrestling match, and win or lose, I'm going to wake up the next day, I'm going to have a class to study for and I'm going to call my parents. I'm just trying to have more fun with it, enjoy the experience. That's something I've struggled with. I always put too much emphasis on the outcome, when it really shouldn't bother me so much. I just need to go out there and have fun."

Despite his new outlook on the game, Smith's season has not started the way he was likely hoping. He finished third at the Michigan State Open, sparking a quote from his head coach about the need to improve.

"Ethan had a disappointing first match," Ryan said. "He didn't feel great, his first time down to weight at 165, so that cut was a little challenge for him. He didn't wrestle well in the first but came back and took third. We're happy with the way he came back, so he'll be at '65 and Carson will be a redshirt."

Smith was the only Buckeye unable to win against Stanford, losing his bout with No. 8 Shane Griffith by way of a pin. It was a similar story for Smith against Pitt on Nov. 15, when he fell to No. 15 Jake Wentzel, 3-2.

174 pounds – Similar to Smith, Kaleb Romero isn't necessarily an unknown, but what

the Ohio State world knows about the red-shirt sophomore shows room for improvement. Romero went 3-5 in duals in 2018-19 and 11-6 overall. After a redshirt season that saw Romero go 11-1, it was a definite step in the wrong direction. Prior to last season, Ryan heaped praise on his young wrestler, then at 165 pounds.

"He's a great athlete," Ryan told BSB in 2018. "He was one of the top recruits in the country. He's someone that can compete, that can compete at a super-high level and we need him to, so we expect a lot out of him as we should. He expects a lot out of himself. He's hard on himself. He's a disciplined guy."

Even with some struggles last season, Romero entered the season seen as a plus contributor for the Buckeyes. He was No. 21 in his weight class entering the match with Stanford and did nothing to dispel that, beating Foster Karmon 16-7. His second bout of the season against Pitt's Gregg Harvey continued the positive momentum for Romero, as he won 7-2.

The ability to string together victories and continue momentum will be big for Romero, who struggled at times last season with the highs and lows of college wrestling. If he's more prepared for things to go wrong on occasion, he could be a Big Ten championship contender. If not, Ohio State may need to find a new answer at 174 quickly, turning perhaps to redshirt freshman Rocky Jordan, who beat Romero in the 174 wrestle-off, 2-1. Look for the Buckeyes to let their youngster loose strategically this season.

184 pounds – More than any other weight on the team save for perhaps heavyweight, 184 is going to be a team effort for the Buckeyes this season. The loss of Myles Martin may hurt more than any other this season, because his replacements, Gavin Hoffman and Zach Steiner, have yet to prove much early in their careers.

Starting with Hoffman, the redshirt freshman is yet another all-world recruit for the Buckeyes. He showed that talent as a freshman, going 22-3, but there were always some questions about his readiness to jump into the starting lineup in his second year. Those concerns were validated when he lost the wrestle-off to a relative unknown in redshirt sophomore Steiner.

Steiner is probably the less talented wrestler, but to this point, there's little separation between the two, because as Ryan puts it, Steiner is a grinder and a hard worker. The decision seems as though it will be made on a match-by-match basis.

"184 is a big match, and we're going to go with Hoffman," Ryan said prior to Ohio State's match with Pitt. "We wrestled Steiner against Stanford and he had a nice win. Steiner is a die-hard Buckeye, and to get his first win against Stanford was awesome. But we're going to go with Hoffman against Pitt."

That hard work paid off for Steiner when he earned the start over Hoffman – who was still recovering from a heavy workload of open tournaments over the past month – and landed a 9-6 win over Stanford's Nick Addison. Hoffman was the man at 184 for the Buckeyes against Pitt and found less success, losing 10-5 to No. 11 Nino Bonaccorsi in the closing bout of the match.

This is a battle that could wage on through the season.

"These past few weeks have been really frustrating for me," Hoffman said on Nov. 13. "I've been going through a lot with my wrestling, both on the wrestling side and on the mental side of how I've been approaching my matches. I've been working on that a lot, getting back to my old ways of wrestling, implementing my defense more, my scrambling, just my overall slickness. It's been working really well, so I've been working every day in the wrestling room on it."

While he acclimates to the college game, the older Steiner could find himself wrestling his way into a starting role that few thought he would fill, let alone in the place of a former top-15 recruit.

2019-20 Ohio State Wrestling Roster/Schedule

Name	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown/Previous School
Elijah Cleary	157	Jr.	Winter Park, Fla./Lakeland Highland Prep
Dylan D'Emilio	141	Fr.	Curtis, Ohio/Genoa
Jacob Decatur	125	Fr.	Akron/Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy
Jordan Decatur	133	Fr.	Akron/Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy
Trey Grenier	149	So.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
Ke-Shawn Hayes	149	5th-Sr.	Kansas City, Mo./Park Hill
Malik Heinselman	125	So.	Castle Rock, Colo./Castle View
Cade Hepner	165	So.	Lakewood, Ohio/St.Edward
Gavin Hoffman	184	R-Fr.	Montoursville, Pa./Montoursville
Rocky Jordan	174	R-Fr.	St. Paris, Ohio/St. Paris Graham
Kris Ketchum	149	Fr.	Mastic, N.Y./Rocky Point
Carson Kharchla	165	Fr.	Powell, Ohio/Olentangy Liberty
Quinn Kinner	141	R-Fr.	Mullica Hill, N.J./Kingsway Regional
Dylan Koontz	133	So.	Plover, Wis./Stevens Point Area Senior
Brady Koontz	125	So.	Plover, Wis./Stevens Point Area Senior
Hunter Lucas	125	Jr.	Cridersville, Ohio/Lima Central Catholic
Jaden Mattox	157	R-Fr.	Grove Ctiy, Ohio/Central Crossing
Kollin Moore	197	5th-Sr.	Burbank, Ohio/Norwayne
Nick Oldham	133	Fr.	West Des Moines, Iowa/Valley
Luke Pletcher	141	Sr.	Latrobe, Pa./Greater Latrobe
Clay Ragon	149	Jr.	Williamston, Mich./Dansville
Klay Reeves	141	Fr.	Alexandria, Ohio/Northridge
Aaron Rehfeldt	157	Jr.	Brighton, Mich./Detroit Central Catholic
Kaleb Romero	174	So.	Mechanicsburg, Ohio/Mechanicsburg
Sammy Sasso	149	R-Fr.	Nazareth, Pa./Nazareth
Fritz Schierl	174	Jr.	Plover, Wis./Stevens Point Area Senior
Chase Singletary	HWT	So.	Naples, Fla./Blair Academy
Ethan Smith	165	So.	Latrobe, Pa./Sparrows Point
Kevin Snyder	197	Jr.	Woodbine, Md./Our Lady of Good Counsel
Tyler Stein	197	Fr.	Canfield, Ohio/Canfield
Zach Steiner	184	So.	Creston, Ohio/Norwayne
J.D. Stickley	141	R-Fr.	Urbana, Ohio/St. Paris Graham
Gary Traub	HWT	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio/Sycamore

Head Coach – Tom Ryan (Iowa, 1993). **Associate Head Coach** – J Jagers (Ohio State, 2009). **Assistant Coach** – Tervel Dlagnev (Nebraska-Kearney). **Director of Recruiting and Operations** – Anthony Ralph (Kent State, 2002). **Volunteer Assistant Coach** – Bo Jordan (Ohio State, 2018). **Director of Wrestling Sport Science and Development** – Riley Ross (Nebraska-Kearney). **Assistant Director of Operations** – Ryan Mantel (Ball State).

Schedule:

Nov. 2 Michigan State, NTS; **10** STANFORD, W 29-6; **15** Pittsburgh, W 23-12; **17** VIRGINIA TECH, L 21-15.

Dec. 1 CORNELL, 2 p.m.; **6-7** C.K. Invitational at Las Vegas.

Jan 3-5 ARIZONA STATE, 7 p.m.; **10** RUTGERS, 7 p.m.; **17** Wisconsin, 9 p.m.; **19** ILLINOIS, 1 p.m.; **24** Iowa, 9 p.m.; **26** Minnesota, 8:30 p.m.; **31** MARYLAND, 7 p.m.

Feb. 2 Nebraska; **9** NORTHWESTERN, 2 p.m.; **15** Penn State, 7:30 p.m.

March 7-8 Big Ten Championship; **19-21** NCAA Championship.

197 pounds – Pletcher at 141, Moore at 197. Those are the two constants on this young team, with Sasso sneaking in as a wild-card, potential title contender at 149. Even if Sasso can't quite get there, Ohio State knows that it will have its captains no matter what, and there may not be a more stable and consistent wrestler in the country than Moore.

The four-year starter has been almost unbeatable in Columbus. He's gone 36-5 in his career in duals and 89-11 overall. He's a two time Big Ten champion in 2017 and 2018, a third-place finalist at the NCAA tournament in 2017, and a three-time All-American.

Because of that lofty résumé, Moore enters the season as the top wrestler at 197. There's no stronger title contender on the roster.

"Seniors matter so much and these are two great ones," Ryan said of Pletcher and Moore. "They are multiple-time All-Americans, great people, the team loves them. Having those two show the way for freshmen is big, because it should be a place where you come in and it's clear how to go from here to there. There should not be too much gray area, where 'this is my current state of wrestling and I want to get to here, what do I do?' Well a big piece of that is just following (seniors). He did it, so it's great to have those guys."

As Ohio State needs him to be, Moore has been as solid as ever through the early season. He took a sudden victory against Oklahoma's No. 16 Jake Woodley at the Michigan State Open and has been on a warpath in the first two

duals, beating Stanford's No. 12 Nathan Traxler 19-8 and Pitt's No. 23 Kellan Stout as the opening bout in Pittsburgh, 12-3.

Heavyweight – As it does with 184, Ohio State will likely deploy a bit of a rotation at heavyweight, which has still yet to rebound from the departure of Kyle Snyder after 2017. Similar to 184, the battle for heavyweight is between a former top recruit and a more unheralded but more experienced wrestler. In this case, the top recruit is Chase Singletary, while Gary Traub serves as the main competition.

Unlike at 184, the battle here isn't a close as a split lineup choice in the first two matches might indicate. Singletary has underperformed at times during his young career, but he still went 8-3 in duals in 2018-19 as the primary starter, while Traub went just 1-2. Despite that, it was Traub getting the start against Stanford and winning his bout against David Showunmi 4-3.

Don't expect that to be the case throughout the season. The two will split time as Singletary battles with some weight issues, but the former top recruit will still see the majority of the starts, as he did against Pitt when he knocked off No. 9 Demetrius Thomas 8-3, setting the tone of the match in the second bout and giving Ohio State a 7-0 lead from which it would never look back.

That's the kind of talent that Ohio State knows it can get out of Singletary and the reason that so many around Columbus are so excited about the young heavyweight. He may not wrestle every match, but when he does, good things usually happen for the Buckeyes.

MSU Star Shines While Mourning Loss Of Brother

Less than 24 hours after his younger brother Zachary died after being struck by a train, Michigan State star point guard Cassius Winston decided to play against Binghamton.

BIG TEN NOTES

Joe Dempsey

The reigning Big Ten Player of the Year didn't just play, he put on a show with 17 points and 11 assists in a 100-47 Spartan victory. Winston performed up to his extremely high standard, which was exceedingly impressive just the day after Zachary had been killed by an Amtrak train in Albion, Mich.

Zachary Winston, who played basketball at Albion, intentionally stepped in front of the train according to police.

"My message to the team tonight was, 'Play with a broken heart,'" said Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo. "These guys hearts were broken. I've coached a lot of games in my career, but this was, by far, the most difficult day."

Late in the second half, the Spartans had a big lead, and when Izzo pulled Cassius Winston from the game, he stopped in front of his coach and they embraced.

"He was spectacular," Izzo said. "The intestinal fortitude that he showed, to be able to do, at the level he did it at, is truthfully unbelievable."

Zachary had been just about as close to a member of the team as possible, hanging out with the players during the summer and going on road trips during March Madness last season.

"Zachary grew up around the team," Izzo said. "He grew close to all of the guys."

When Izzo heard the news the night of Nov. 9, he rushed to the team hotel and spent four or five hours with Cassius and

his family.

"There was nothing we could say or do that would make anything better," he said.

Izzo, who is known for his superb coaching and ability to adapt to any situation with a plan of attack, felt helpless dealing with such a traumatic and somber tragedy.

"I just couldn't give them any answers," he said. "I told them, 'You can play with a broken heart. There is nothing wrong with admitting that.'"

The coach was stunned when Cassius showed up for the team's pregame shootaround before the matchup with Binghamton. The 6-1 point guard from Detroit then warmed up with his brother Khy and father Reggie.

"Cash stayed out there and shot with Khy and Reggie," Izzo said. "I've seen that so many times, the three of them in the gym, whether it be back at Jesuit, whether it be at Michigan State. Reggie runs a rec center. That's how they grew up. That's what they do."

Izzo went over to the Winston family on the floor: "This is probably where you are supposed to be, even though I don't know if I could do it," Izzo told them.

What happened at the Breslin Center was nothing short of inspirational.

"There was a lot of love in that locker room and a lot of love in that arena," Izzo said. "But I think it's probably going to have to double, because I think the road gets tougher for him, as things wear off."

"I promise you my staff will spend a lot of time with them and with Cash. There will be some lonely nights and some questions. I just have to be there to support them."

Later that night, Izzo tried to put everything into perspective, incredibly impressed by the fortitude of his senior captain.

"You always talk about how fragile life is," Izzo said. "I've been told, for 60 years, every day you wake up you are blessed, you are lucky."

The Hall of Fame coach's voice swelled with emotion.

"When you leave here tonight," Izzo said to members of the media. "Whoever it is, son, daughter, older mother, father, wife or

husband, tell them you love them. And you say it and you say it. Because one day, you wake up and everything is one way. By 9 o'clock that night, everything is another way. Then, you don't get a chance to say it."

Huskers Invest In Frost With Contract Extension

Nebraska's season has not gone as many expected after starting the year in the preseason top 25 and being picked among the top contenders in the Big Ten West Division. Despite the disappointing campaign, the university still expressed confidence in the direction of the program under Scott Frost by extending his current contract by two years.

The school announced the deal on the morning of Nov. 16, before the Huskers' matchup with No. 14 Wisconsin at Memorial Stadium in Lincoln, where they fell, 37-21.

"Coach Frost has shown tremendous leadership in beginning to rebuild our football program," university chancellor Ronnie Green and athletic director Bill Moos wrote in a joint statement. "We appreciate that a change of this nature will not happen overnight. We are committed to Scott and the direction he is taking this program. Scott is the right coach at the right time for this program. We are excited for the heights to which he will take Nebraska football and the tremendous impact he will have in the development of our student athletes."

Frost initially signed a seven-year, \$35 million contract which was set to run through the 2024 season. The financial terms of the first deal remain the same, but the length of the contract now runs through Dec. 31, 2026, according to the school.

Although the Huskers have not quite seen the return on their investment they anticipated, they want to establish continuity at the top of the coaching staff. An extension can help Frost on the recruiting trail with his staff preparing for the madness that is the early signing period beginning on Dec. 18.

College football programs are generally

BIG 2019 Standings

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Ohio State	7	0	1.000	10	0	1.000
Penn State	6	1	.857	9	1	.900
Michigan	5	2	.714	8	2	.800
Indiana	4	3	.571	7	3	.700
Michigan State	2	5	.286	4	6	.400
Maryland	1	6	.143	3	7	.300
Rutgers	0	7	.000	2	8	.200

	Conf.			All		
	W	L	Pct.	W	L	Pct.
Minnesota	6	1	.857	9	1	.900
Wisconsin	5	2	.714	8	2	.800
Iowa	4	3	.571	7	3	.700
Illinois	4	3	.571	6	4	.600
Purdue	3	4	.429	4	6	.400
Nebraska	2	5	.286	4	6	.400
Northwestern	0	7	.000	2	8	.200

Nov. 16 Scores

Northwestern 45, UMass 6
Michigan 44, Michigan State 10
Wisconsin 37, Nebraska 21
Penn State 34, Indiana 27
Ohio State 56, Rutgers 21
Iowa 23, Minnesota 19

Nov. 23 Games

Minnesota at Northwestern, 12 p.m.
Michigan State at Rutgers, 12 p.m.
Illinois at Iowa, 12 p.m.
Penn State at Ohio State, 12 p.m.
Nebraska at Maryland, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan at Indiana, 3:30 p.m.
Purdue at Wisconsin, 4 p.m.

not turned around overnight, and extending a coach's contract shows faith Frost will recruit at a high level, with prospects able to trust he won't be jumping ship. Also, Frost's extension gives him a sense of security in the ever-tenuous world of coaching.

Frost earned a lot of respect after his turnaround of UCF, which went from a rather unknown program to a 13-0 Peach Bowl winner in 2017.

Frost is 4-6 in 2019 and 8-14 since taking over as the head coach of the Huskers.

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Tate Taught Himself To Play Above His Size

To Ohio State freshman forward Tate Singleton, it seemed he was the smallest player in the game, even in the backyard games growing up in West Lebanon, N.H.

"I was always the little guy that was getting picked on," he said. "That only helped me to motivate myself to play a big role and play bigger than I look."

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

So, does Singleton (5-9, 177) have the proverbial chip on his shoulder?

"My whole life, man. It's really nice," he recently told BSB.

Niceties aren't usually associated with Singleton as he plays his way through his first college season for the No. 11 Buckeyes (6-3-1, 2-2-0 Big Ten) with a combination of skill, grit and, some might say, annoyance.

"It's his work rate and relentlessness that grabs you," said Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik. "Every time we watched him in (junior hockey) it was the same energy you saw here. I mean every time he was on the ice, something's happening."

"Most times it's on the good side of things. That's what draws you to him right away. He's confident. He's relentless and he wants the puck. Are you going to make mistakes?"

Absolutely, but he's not afraid to, and that's the key."

There are several names that come to mind to describe Singleton such as the 1991 movie "Little Man Tate" or, more directly relating to hockey, former NHL player Pat Verbeek (5-9, 192), who was known as the "Little Ball of Hate."

Verbeek accumulated 2,905 penalty minutes in 1,424 games in a different, more violent era of the sport. OSU's "Little Ball of Tate" has five minor penalties in 10 games, but the in-your-face attitude of a bygone time is there.

Singleton likes to chirp at opponents to get under their skin.

"Uh, maybe in the heat of the moment," he said. "I'm not too sure sometimes what I say, but I really get into the games, pretty competitive. My words go out, but I try to stay focused on what we're doing."

Rohlik is fine, to an extent, with how Singleton goes about his business.

"As long as it's in jest and part of the game, you're OK with that, just as long as it doesn't cross the line," the coach said.

Being the Northeasterner that he is, Singleton is pro-Boston sports, including the Bruins. No surprise here but his favorite player is one of the NHL's biggest pests, Brad Marchand.

It was Marchand who stepped on and broke the stick of the Columbus Blue Jackets forward Cam Atkinson during a faceoff – and got away with it – during last season's Stanley Cup playoffs. Marchand in the past for a brief period would lick combatants during scuffles.

"He's so skilled with the puck," Singleton

said. "He's the guy no one likes to play against but everyone loves on the team. I've tried to model my game after his."

Marchand, it should be noted, has scored at least 30 goals in each of the past four seasons and is on pace to do so again.

That brings it back to Singleton and a name that Ohio State hockey followers know well – Mason Jobst.

Although he is only 5-8, 180, by the time Jobst graduated after last season, he was a two-time All-American and his 164 points (69 goals, 95 assists) tied him for 13th on the program career list, the most points for an Ohio State player since 1989.

"I watched a few of his games online," Singleton said. "I wish I could play like him. That guy was unbelievable what he did here."

While Singleton may not possess Jobst's talent, at least yet, his dogged pursuit of the puck is not unlike him. Singleton, through 10 games, has six points (three goals, three assists) and is plus-four.

Because of his play and injuries to other forwards, he's taken on more responsibility than might be expected from a rookie by playing on the top line.

"He can play anywhere in the lineup," Rohlik said. "He's proven that and taken advantage of it."

Singleton has responded. In the second game of the season he scored a late insurance goal in the win over Rochester Institute of Technology. He had two assists vs. Mercyhurst on Oct. 25 but was even better the following weekend.

In the first game vs. Michigan his goal sparked a rally from a 2-0 deficit for a 3-2 win. The next night vs. the Wolverines, he had the winner, breaking a 1-1 tie with 1:31 remaining.

"Of course, it was pretty special," he said after the second game. "That team is such a rivalry we've got here. I'll always remember that goal, but I've always got to focus on the next weekend and the games ahead of us."

Singleton played with the Central Illinois Flying Aces of the United States Hockey League last season and had 37 points (22 goals, 15 assists) in 53 games.

Maybe he wasn't born to be an athlete, but his lineage certainly got him where he is today. His mother, Monique, played field hockey in

high school. His father, Jonathan, was a soccer player in high school.

"My dad was really good," Singleton said. "He could have gone to a lot of colleges but ended up going into the Navy."

Singleton's brother, Tanner, played soccer, ran track and swam in high school before playing rugby at Keene State College.

Although Singleton started hockey at age 3, he played soccer and lacrosse in high school. Those sports have helped him now.

"Lacrosse, you take the skill work and the defense," he said. "Soccer, I just ran. I wasn't much of a skill guy. I ran and I've always been a physical player, so I took those aspects and brought them to hockey."

In turn, he brought his hockey to Columbus.

"It's weird since I'm from New Hampshire," he said. "You don't see many people from back east out here, but I really saw something in the coaches that they were going to help develop me to the next level."

"When I came on campus, I was blown away by everything they have here. I made the right decision, and it's worked out pretty well so far."

Numbers

Junior goalie Tommy Nappier, who's played all 10 games, has a 1.79 goals-against average and a .935 save percentage. He has allowed more than two goals only once, a 3-2 overtime loss at Notre Dame on Nov. 8. ... Senior Tanner Laczynski leads the team with eight assists and 10 points. Sophomore Gustaf Westlund has a team-high five goals.

Ahead

The Buckeyes had an open weekend Nov. 15-16. They play at Penn State Nov. 22-23 before finishing the first half with two more Big Ten series.

Michigan State visits Value City Arena Nov. 30 at 5 p.m. followed the next day by a rare Sunday matinee (2:30 p.m.) vs. the Spartans. OSU hosts Minnesota at 8 p.m. on Dec. 6 and 7.

For a complete recap of Ohio State's series against Michigan and Notre Dame go to BSB's BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers.

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Injury Drives Nichols

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

For some, Abby Nichols' fifth place finish at the Nov. 3 Big Ten Cross Country Championships came as a surprise. After all, she had missed all of the previous cross-country season with a foot injury, and as a sophomore in 2017 she finished just 36th at the same event.

For Nichols and her coaches, the personal best-setting 20:24.3 finish in the 6K was expected.

"Abby has been developing and getting better and better every year," Ohio State cross-country head coach Khadevis Robinson told BSB. "Last year she ended up winning the Big Ten outdoor 5K conference championship (for track and field). She's essentially the first to do that in school history.

"When you really think about it, I think that's a performance she's supposed to have. When you're the Big Ten 5K outdoor champion you should be one of the top ladies in the conference."

As Robinson alluded to, this wasn't exactly out of the blue. Nichols bounced back from her injury in the spring season earlier this year as a member of Ohio State's track and field team. She won the Big Ten Outdoor Championship for 5000 meters back in May, but that's a different story than cross-country success. The top-five finish in the sport Nichols was unable to participate in a year prior felt like a major accomplishment, and for good reason.

"I felt really good," Nichols said. "It is my junior season this year, and I had never been All-Big Ten before in the past."

However, just as her coach said, this was no surprise for the Kettering (Ohio) Alter product.

"I redshirted last year, so I knew I would be making pretty big jumps this year."

The natural improvement that comes with experience and increased training time isn't the sole explanation for Nichols' success. As associate head coach Sara Vergote puts it, the Buckeye captain has found a new edge, due in part to her injury.

"If anything, her getting hurt put a chip on her shoulder, that she had something to prove," the coach said. "Being hurt sometimes, I think you have that chip on your shoulder where you have to improve every time you race, and I think that the rest of the Big Ten was surprised when she won the Big Ten championships, but if you ask Abby, if you ask me, if you ask the rest of the coaches, we weren't surprised at all. She's definitely been slowly putting together the parts to be one of the best distance runners in the conference."

Nichols was named a captain prior to the season, along with Julia Rizk and Lainey Studebaker, due in large part to her ability to lead not through words, but through action. With Nichols finding success, the team has followed, finishing fourth at the NCAA regionals on Nov. 16 and qualifying for the NCAA championships.

"I think there's different ways that we all lead," Robinson said. "Some of us lead through more of a communicative type of leading, and some of us lead through our actions. Abby is more of an action type of leader. She doesn't do a whole bunch of 'hoorah' or those type of things. That's not her personality, but she just does all the right things consistently, over and over and over again."

As the season continues on, Nichols just keeps doing things the right way. For the first time in her cross-country career, however the

fruits of that labor are starting to show up at every meet, instead of just occasionally, or just outside of running, where Nichols is an Academic All-Big Ten member and Big Ten Distinguished Scholar. Following that fifth-place finish at the Big Ten championships, Nichols finished ninth at the NCAA regionals, leading the Buckeyes once again and being named to the All-Regional team.

With the success starting to stack up, Nichols is growing more confident.

"Every week I think she's gotten more and more confident in racing with the best women in the country, to where it's not a matter of hoping to do it but now expecting to do it," Vergote said. "She's now expecting to race with those women.

"I think the biggest change in Abby over the past year is really just her consistency in training and her confidence in being able to race with anybody."

That will be put to the test when the Buckeyes head to the NCAA championships on Nov. 23 in Terre Haute, Ind. Nichols will be expected to compete at the highest level against some of the best runners in America, and Ohio State will need an excellent performance from her to stay competitive among the nation's top teams. The big stage, however, should be no issue. Nichols has been building to it for years.

"Every season I have a bit of a progression. The first races I try to just get my feet under me and then each race just work on little things from the last race. I can't let the stage get to me."

Regardless of the results at the NCAA championships, Nichols' success and the success of the team as a whole are a sign of changing times in Columbus. This qualification is just the third in the history of a program that has really been competitive only in recent years. Having three All-Regional runners in Nichols, Rizk and Studebaker was also a first. This is a green program, and a program that is relying on the leadership of its more experienced runners as it enters relatively uncharted territory.

It also calls for a culture of support, which Nichols says the Buckeyes have made a focus during her years on campus.

"Everyone on the team is pretty supportive of each other, and everyone is pretty involved in each other's success. We build each other up, I feel like, and I've definitely been supported a lot by my teammates and my coaches, and I think that's helped me find success here."

There are more experienced, more talented, more entrenched programs out there, and these early years of program development are most about growth in Columbus. That doesn't matter to the team, and it doesn't matter to Nichols. She knows exactly what she wants out of her time at Ohio State.

"Distance running at Ohio State hasn't always been a huge emphasis, and I think we're beginning to start a legacy," she explained. "The girls before me actually set it and not really my time being here, but I just want to keep that going. I want Ohio State to grow amazing runners because I love the sport, and I want other people to love it too."

In order to better introduce BSB readers to Ohio State's Olympic sports teams and athletes, we have shifted to more featured-oriented coverage of the various squads. Buckeye Sports Bulletin will provide a roundup of all games, matches and meets involving OSU's teams each Monday on our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all print subscribers.



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Scarlet Knights Fall And Nittany Lions Await

It was Nov. 6, 1869, that Rutgers played in the first official college football game against nearby Princeton. That game, held 150 years ago, barely resembles college football of today. There were 25 players on each team, there were no uniforms, there were no coaching staffs, carrying or passing the football was not allowed, batting and kicking the ball were the only ways to advance and score points. Rutgers would carry the day and win by a score of 6-4 that crisp fall day in New Brunswick, N.J.

COACH'S CORNER Bill Conley

The Rutgers players wore red handkerchiefs or red turbans around their heads to distinguish themselves from the lads from Princeton. It was estimated that around 100 people were in attendance to watch this athletic contest that resembled a combination of rugby and soccer more than the modern-day game of football. It wouldn't be until 1900 that Rutgers would officially make "red" the official school color and till 1955 to make the Scarlet Knights the official team name. Rutgers has a proud football heritage but a program that has been very mediocre in terms of success on the football field throughout that last 150 years.

This Rutgers football team had to take on a Buckeye football team that many regard as the very best in all of college football this year. The Scarlet Knights have tried to fight through a nightmare of a season in 2019. Head coach

Chris Ash was fired earlier in the year, youth and injuries have limited offensive and defensive production on the field, some of the Scarlet Knights' very best players have decided not to finish the season in order to save their eligibility for transfer purposes, and the fan base has practically disappeared with just barely over 20,000 in attendance at the last home game against Liberty. It was going to take a Herculean effort and an absolute miracle for Rutgers to compete against an Ohio State team that was favored by over 50 points.

The Buckeyes were in a precarious spot themselves going into the game. They were expected to play at the high level they have displayed all season against a much inferior team. Teams that are huge favorites must be careful not to play down to their competition and to keep focused on the task at hand. The Buckeyes wanted not only to win the game, but win it with no letdown in intensity, concentration and execution. At the same time, the Ohio State coaching staff had to understand there is a fine line between dominating an opponent and embarrassing them.

Fast Start

The best thing that can happen when you play on the road is to come out fast, put a couple of quick scores on the board, and don't give the home team anything to cheer about. In terms of that part of the mission, the Buckeyes were perfect in Piscataway, N.J., Nov. 16. Sophomore Shaun Wade intercepted a Rutgers pass on the first series of the game and caused a fumble on the second.

Both of these turnovers by the intimidating Ohio State defense led to two quick touchdowns for the high-powered Buckeye offense in less than five minutes of play. When the visiting Buckeyes put another touchdown on the score-

board, tallying 21 first-quarter points, the game was all but over. As Buckeye fans have been accustomed to all season, the first-teamers would have to play only a little more than half.

Quarterback Justin Fields had another phenomenal performance, throwing four touchdowns and for a career-high 305 yards in that timespan. Fields is only a sophomore, but he has the poise and confidence of a seasoned veteran. He has a great supporting cast around him, especially a physical and athletic offensive line that gives him plenty of time to execute the passing game, and he consistently delivers knockout punches to opposing defenses.

The 35 first-half points put up by the Buckeyes meant that the first-teamers were pretty much done for the day except for a couple of series in the third quarter. Ryan Day and staff would then put them on the shelf, saving them for the big game against Penn State next week.

Not Perfect

As good as the first-team offense and defense were at SHI stadium Saturday, there were plenty of things to be critical of regarding the second- and third-teamers. Two fumbles, one a muffed punt return by freshman Garrett Wilson and one caused by a blind-side sack of quarterback Gunnar Hoak, would lead to two short-field Rutgers touchdowns. An offense that hadn't put up a touchdown against the Buckeyes in three years would end up scoring 21 points and three total touchdowns for the day.

As bad as that sounds, it is easily acceptable in order to accomplish the coaching staff's goal of getting a lot of players game experience. The backups are recording a record number of minutes of playing time, which not only is great for team morale but also for the much-needed repetitions in order to improve their skills. The Ohio State football team will go into the game against Penn State much healthier than most teams in the country at this late date in the season. Nearly full-strength starting units, Chase Young back from suspension and a ton of experienced backups sounds like the right formula for a Big Ten and playoff run for the Buckeyes.

Nittany Lions Next

Penn State will give the Buckeyes its best shot in Ohio Stadium, and the Buckeyes know it. The Nittany Lions, along with Minnesota, are the surprises of the Big Ten this season. Penn State and Ohio State are similar in several ways. Both teams have offenses that are led by first-year starting quarterbacks in Sean Clifford and Justin Fields. Both quarterbacks can hurt opposing defenses with both their arms and their legs. Clifford has thrown 22 touchdown passes and run for five, Fields has 31 touchdown strikes passing and another 10 rushing the football. Fields holds the edge in terms of accuracy with only one interception for the season compared to six for his counterpart.

Penn State, like the Buckeyes, is a fast starting team that puts a lot of points up in the first half. Ohio State, however, has outscored its opponents by so much, the Buckeyes really haven't had to finish a game with their front-liners. On the other hand, Penn State has had to play all four quarters with varying success, especially the last few weeks. In its last five games, only Michigan State has been a breather. During that stretch the Nittany Lions lost to Minnesota and struggled to survive against Iowa, Michigan and Indiana. In the last two games, the normally stingy Penn State defense gave up 400 yards or more to its opponents.

The only thing the stout Ohio State defense must prove is that it can play for four quarters; it simply hasn't had to so far this season. Saturday's game should be physical and all-out warfare between the two Big Ten powers, but look for the Buckeyes to win the day in front of a loud and rowdy home crowd.

Known as one of the top recruiters in college football, Bill Conley was a national championship-winning coach and player at Ohio State who suited up for Woody Hayes and spent 17 years on the staffs of Earle Bruce, John Cooper and Jim Tressel. His column will appear throughout the season in BSB.

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"Your Head to Toe Buckeye Source"

No Offense But Defense Wins Championships

It's been 20 years since a team finished the season leading the country in both points scored and fewest points allowed, as Ohio State is doing through 10 games this year.

But for as potent as the Ohio State offense has been, recent history tells us that it is the defense that is best positioning the Buckeyes for a serious shot at the national championship.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Five of the last eight national champions ranked first in the country for fewest points allowed. That not only includes Clemson last season and Alabama the year before, but also Florida State in 2013, Alabama in 2012 and Alabama in 2011.

What about offense?

You have to go back to 2005 to find a national champion that led the country in scoring. That was the Vince Young Texas team, which like Ohio State this year averaged more than 50 points a game (50.2 for Texas). But the Longhorns also had a pretty good defense, ranked ninth in the country (16.4 points allowed per game).

This, to me, is why Ohio State would be a solid favorite against LSU. And it's also why I believe LSU has little chance to win a

game against Ohio State in the mold of its 46-41 victory over Alabama.

Ohio State's defense would never allow an opponent – no matter how good – to score 46 points. It's hard to imagine anyone reaching even 30 against OSU, the performance to date suggests.

LSU's best chance to beat Ohio State would be something closer to a 21-17 game, much like what Auburn did to high-scoring Oregon nine years ago.

Old football coaches will tell you that defense wins, and as the recent list of national champions reveals, even in today's high-scoring world of college football, most football minds would agree that's still the case.

Over the last 10 years, the big outlier is the 2010 Auburn team, which ranked 53rd in the country for points allowed.

But here's what is interesting about that 2010 national championship Auburn team. Despite giving up a lot of points during the regular season, it was able to put the brakes on Oregon's high-flying offense (first in the country at 49.3 ppg going into the game) to win the championship, 21-19.

Auburn and Ohio State in 2014 (when OSU became a really better team in the postseason) are the only two of the last 10 champions to have a defense ranked lower than their offense: Here's the rundown:

- 2018 – Clemson – first for defense (13.1 ppg); fourth for offense (44.3).
- 2017 – Alabama – first for defense (11.9); 15th for offense (37.1).
- 2016 – Clemson – 10th for defense

(18.0); 14th for offense (39.2).

- 2015 – Alabama – third for defense (15.1); 30th for offense (35.1).
- 2014 – Ohio State – 26th for defense (22.0); fifth for offense (44.8).
- 2013 – Florida State – first for defense (12.1); second for offense (51.6).
- 2012 – Alabama – first for defense (10.9); 12th for offense (38.7).
- 2011 – Alabama – first for defense (8.2); 20th for offense (34.8).
- 2010 – Auburn – 53rd for defense (24.1); seventh for offense (41.2).
- 2009 – Alabama – second for defense (11.7); 22nd for offense (32.1).

So that brings us to 2019. The numbers likely will change some down the stretch, but not drastically with 10 games already in the books.

The top five nationally for scoring are all in the playoff discussion: Ohio State (51.5 ppg), LSU (47.8), Oklahoma (47.0), Alabama (46.8) and Clemson (45.9).

Likewise, on defense, many of the playoff contenders are near the top, led by Ohio State (9.8 ppg), Georgia (10.5), Clemson (10.7) and Utah (11.3).

But you have to go all the way down to 44th in the country to find LSU (23.8 allowed) after the Tigers gave up five touchdowns in a 58-37 win over 4-7 Mississippi. LSU has given up 37, 38, 38 and 41 points in separate games this season.

Outliers can win, as Auburn did in 2010, but the odds certainly are with the premier defenses.

Pick Your Pairings

Let's assume for a minute that Ohio State will make the playoffs. Where do you want the Buckeyes seeded? Is No. 1 really the best spot?

The No. 1 seed never has won the playoff title and often lost the old BCS title games as well. Remember OSU-Florida in the 2006 season, OSU-LSU in 2007 and OSU-Miami in 2002?

I think it's no coincidence. Underdogs have bigger motivating factors. And the favorite is less likely to change up "what got them there," as opposed to teams looking for something different to create an upset.

But you also want the best matchup possible. If Ohio State, LSU and Clemson finish undefeated, they will be the top three seeds in some order. That means that if Ohio State is the top seed, LSU and Clemson would face each other in the other semifinal.

That would be the best scenario for Ohio State, likely pitting OSU in a semifinal against Utah, Oregon, Oklahoma or Baylor – all teams Ohio State should beat as the favorite or not. In this scenario, Georgia wouldn't be an option because it would have two losses by then.

A potentially worse matchup for OSU would be if Alabama recovers from the loss of Tua Tagovailoa and works its way into the playoffs as the fourth seed.

Here's a different scenario. Say LSU loses to Georgia in the SEC title game but gets chosen as the fourth seed over the Big 12 and Pac-12 champions.

That would likely mean semifinals of Clemson-Georgia and OSU-LSU. Again, a good pairing for OSU over playing defensive-minded Clemson or Georgia.

There's another way Ohio State could play LSU in the semis: LSU wins the SEC, and Ohio State beats Penn State, loses to Michigan and wins the Big Ten title.

The Top 10

Here's my top 10 this week:

1. Ohio State (10-0) – First nationally in scoring offense and defense; can't do better than that.
2. LSU (9-0) – Nice team with a great quarterback but not No. 1 material after giving up 37, 38, 38 and 41 points in separate games. (Remember Oklahoma last year?)
3. Clemson (11-0) – Easiest schedule in the country for any playoff contender, but doesn't change the fact that this team is good.
4. Oregon (9-1) – Gets tough to separate teams 4, 5 and 6, but I'll go with the school with the longest win streak – nine straight after dropping the opener by six points to Auburn.
5. Utah (9-1) – Giving Utah the edge over Georgia under the worse loss test. Utah lost to 7-4 USC. Georgia lost to 4-7 South Carolina.
6. Georgia (9-1) – Despite the SEC publicity machine on CBS, read comments for Oregon and Utah above.
7. Oklahoma (9-1) – Among this next grouping, Oklahoma has the best win, against previously unbeaten Baylor.
8. Alabama (9-1) – Not penalizing Alabama yet for the loss of Tagovailoa, but that could happen soon, and the other teams below have better opportunities for better wins ahead.
9. Minnesota (9-1) – Solid win against Penn State, close loss on the road at Iowa. Way better than thought a couple of weeks ago.
10. (tie) Penn State (8-1) and Baylor (9-1) – There are arguments against both these teams in the top 10, but every other major-conference team has at least two losses. And no, Cincinnati fans, your Bearcats are not top-10 quality.

Quoting Myself On Burrow

Digging into the Exner Point archives, I dug up my evaluation published after a couple of spring games when LSU sensation Joe Burrow was still a Buckeye.

From 2017 – entering J.T. Barrett's final year:

"My spring game MVP is Joe Burrow. Poise. Accuracy. Touch. He does it all.

"Ohio's 2014 Mr. Football from Athens looks ready to play quarterback in real games for the Buckeyes. He completed 14 of 22 passes for 262 yards and three touchdowns. Most importantly, he made good decisions and threw with accuracy most of the day.

"For the second spring game in a row, I thought he was the best quarterback on the field. ... (Dwayne) Haskins took snaps for both the Red and Gray teams. His combined totals: 26 of 37 for 293 yards and three touchdowns. Like Burrow, he showed accuracy and touch."

From 2018 – after which Haskins won the job and Burrow transferred out:

"The spring game provided clarity. Ohio State is set at quarterback.

"The Buckeyes have a quarterback who can lead them to a national championship. In fact, they have two – eventually maybe even three.

"The question of ability is settled. But there lingers another question: Just who will that quarterback be?

"My vote goes to Joe Burrow. I understand others would say Dwayne Haskins. I wouldn't dispute that too strongly. ... I don't recall a time when Ohio State has had so much game-ready talent at quarterback. ... Burrow and Haskins both offer something Ohio State has been missing – accurate arms. ... Burrow is the better runner. Haskins probably has a stronger arm."



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Buckeyes Ready For Season-Defining Stretch

When I first saw Ohio State's 2019 football schedule, I worried about the windup of the season. Closing out with Penn State and archrival Michigan on back-to-back weekends seemed quite a challenge. However, as I have watched this Buckeye team evolve over the first 10 games of the season, I have come to embrace the challenge the final two games present.

If you are truly a championship team, why not head to the postseason proving it by conquering big challenges, rather than backing into a crown by hoping another team does your dirty work by winning – or losing – in the final weeks or by beating also-rans like Maryland and Rutgers to land a berth in the conference championship game.

In the other bracket, Minnesota faces a similar situation. After having their doubters as the Gophers racked up an 8-0 record against less-than-stellar competition, P.J. Fleck and Co. faced a stretch drive that was going to determine if they were contenders or pretenders with Penn State, Iowa and Wisconsin on the slate among the last four games. The jury is still out on the Gophers, after they split with the Nittany Lions and Hawkeyes with the Badgers on the horizon following a modest test at Northwestern on Nov. 23.

Similarly, the jury is still out on Ohio State. All the impressive things we have seen out of this Buckeye squad will have gone for naught if the team stumbles in its final two tests.

The Buckeyes know that.

As focused as this team has been in 2019, fueled in my mind by memories of their recent games with Iowa and Purdue, you can almost excuse the team for looking uninterested at times in the still easy 56-21 victory over lowly Rutgers. The staff can motivate the team all season, as it has done, and the team can self-motivate all season, as it has done. But the reality is that Ohio State's second team could have handled the Scarlet Knights (though the reserves certainly should have looked better), and the ante will be upped immensely against Penn State and Michigan, and the team had to have that on its mind.

I'll give them the "lackluster" 35-point victory because it's pretty much the first time the Buckeyes have slipped up since they fell behind 5-0 to Miami (Ohio) in the fourth game of the season before snapping out of their funk and knocking off the RedHawks, 76-5. Against the Knights, it was more important to get out of New Jersey with no injuries than it was to run up the score as wildly as predicted. (Our Fearless Forecasters in our BuckeyeSports.com's Staff Predictions had the score, on average, at 74-3.)

As an aside, let me give credit to Rutgers. The overmatched Scarlet Knights battled to the end, putting up a much stronger fight than the supposedly stronger Maryland had the week before in a 73-14 loss to the Buckeyes. There is a reason there seemed to be some elation on the Rutgers sideline at the end of the game, even though they had just lost by 35. The Knights knew they had fought and bested expectations against the Buckeyes.

While I am not big on making predictions, which is why you don't see me joining the others in Staff Predictions, I am going to go out on a limb and say I will be very surprised if the Buckeyes stumble against the Lions and I look for them to continue their dominance over their rivals to the north.

It is very rare that you see the type of player talent, coaching talent and laser-focus come together at one time for a team that seems to have chemistry to boot, as we have witnessed so far in 2019.

Let's sit back and enjoy it.

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Chase And Me

I feel like I am the only one within Buckeye Nation who believes that Chase Young should have been punished for his taking a loan from a "family friend." First of all, I have never been completely comfortable with who the "family friend" might be and why, by Young's own admission, he only became a "family friend" when Young was about to head off to Ohio State. And the fact that Young paid the loan back seems unimportant to me. If you rob a bank, they are not going to let you off if you return the money.

I know this is hardly robbing a bank. But the most important thing to me is that whether the rule about taking a loan seems unfair to most, it is the rule and I am very doubtful that, with Ohio State's obsession with compliance, Young didn't know that.

One thing that everyone, including me, appears to agree on is that two games seems the fair punishment, and Young has served his sentence. It's time for him to come back and have huge games against Penn State, Michigan and beyond.

Other Ohio State Violators

Young is not the first high-profile Buckeye to run afoul of the NCAA over impermissible benefits.

As part of our Reprint Thursday feature on the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, we ran reprints of real-time BSB stories about the trials and tribulations of Ohio State greats Cris Carter, Joey Galloway and Troy Smith, who had NCAA problems of their own. The reprints ran on Nov. 14 and are archived for your information and convenience.

Unlike the situation with Young, which was resolved in a matter of days, the cases of Carter and Smith evolved over a period of time and over several issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

Carter's saga started in the early spring of 1987, when it was learned that agent Norby Walters had given money to several undergraduate football players as a lure to sign them to representation contracts, with one of the names mentioned being that of Carter.

As it turns out, Carter was apparently not initially forthcoming about the allegations.

"At this point, based on what he said," then OSU athletic director Rick Bay explained of Carter, "there would be no reason to think he wouldn't be eligible. I have no evidence of any wrongdoing, and Cris assured me there hasn't been any."

"I asked him all the pointed questions. I asked him if he had heard of the guy (Walters). Yes. I asked him if he had taken any money. No. I asked him if he had signed a contract. No."

Ironically, this initial reporting of Carter's situation appeared in the April 1987 issue of BSB that also chronicled the death of the legendary Woody Hayes.

By the May issue of BSB, Carter had been suspended from the team for "violating team rules."

Despite the swirling rumors, coach Earle Bruce refused to say why his star receiver had been suspended.

"It's between Cris Carter and me," Bruce said. "If Cris Carter wants to announce it, that's up to him. But what we announce for everybody is the same thing: violation of team rules and suspension from the football team. I'm not giving (the reason) to anybody."

It was suggested to Bruce that his silence on the matter would lead to speculation that the suspension involved drug use.

"That's the price Cris Carter is going to have to pay for now," said Bruce. "I can't help that. I'm going to be a true friend to Cris Carter."

Carter's brother Butch was more forthcoming, saying it might have something to do with Cris' relationship with Walters.

"It's got something to do with that," Butch Carter said. "We have a brother (George) who might have been involved with Walters in some way."

Reports at the time suggested that George recruited clients for Walters and that he had accepted money, intended for Cris, and "possibly passed it along."

Bruce stood firm.

"There's never been anything proven about an agent or about his brother," Bruce said. "That story is ridiculous."

Meanwhile, The Columbus Dispatch reported that a source close to the football team said that Carter was suspended for using marijuana. That same source said the "suspension has nothing to do with any NCAA investigation. It involves a social thing."

But on July 15, Bay addressed the assembled media.

"It is my disappointing, depressing, disheartening task this afternoon to announce to you that Cris Carter is ineligible for the 1987 season and anytime thereafter."

He went on to explain how Carter had admitted to signing a representation contract and promissory note for a \$5,000 loan from Walters and his associate, Lloyd Bloom, and also accepted \$150 a month for nearly a year after signing with Walters and Bloom on May 1, 1986.

"He obviously wasn't a Buckeye off the field," Bruce said of his record-setting receiver upon hearing of the news. "Anyone who did what he did could not have any feelings toward our program. He knew what he was doing when he accepted money. There is no excuse for that."

"I gave him so many opportunities to tell me, and he lied about it. He just outright lied."

Allegations involving Smith first came to light as Ohio State prepared for the 2004 Alamo Bowl vs. Oklahoma State. Ohio State reported on Dec. 20, 2004, two days before the team's departure to San Antonio, that Smith had been suspended for allegedly taking an unspecified amount of money from booster Robert Q. Baker. Smith was not only suspended for the game with the Cowboys but was expected to miss a game in the upcoming season as well.

The announcement came not long after former OSU star running back Maurice Clarett made allegations to ESPN The Magazine of payments and improper academic help, allegations Ohio State AD Andy Geiger vehemently denied. After the Smith allegations, Geiger softened his denial.

"I'm not sure that I think everything that Maurice said lacked credence," Geiger said. "But what wasn't there is what is there now – we have an example of something that has happened. Do I think it's systemic or widespread? I have no evidence of that."

Ironically, in today's era of "whistle-blowers," Smith's situation came to light when employees of Baker's former company, Columbus-based

Poly-Care Services, "described an envelope being given to an Ohio State player who doesn't work for the company and telling how Baker later boasted, 'Now I own him.'"

An attorney for the company reported the incident to the university.

Smith's saga took an interesting turn when it was reported on Jan. 12 in The (Cleveland) Plain Dealer that Smith used the money accepted from Baker, speculated to be about \$900, to pay for a cell phone his mother had obtained for Claret.

By Feb. 22, Smith was back with the team as it kicked off winter conditioning drills.

"First and foremost I'd like to apologize to my team, the fans of Ohio State, my family, my community back home, for the poor decision that I made," Smith told the gathered media. "Just being back out here with the guys is what it's all about."

Smith avoided answering the myriad questions that followed. He would ultimately miss the 2005 opener against Miami (Ohio) in addition to the Alamo Bowl.

The case with Galloway, a Buckeye receiver being touted for the Heisman Trophy in 1994, went more along the lines of Young's case in terms of the time it took to determine his punishment. It was learned that he had accepted money from a financial planner while considering leaving early for the NFL after his junior season and did not repay the money when he decided to return for his senior year.

"The situation was disclosed during a normal investigative procedure by the NCAA," Geiger said. "We declared Joey ineligible, then appealed to have his eligibility restored."

The NCAA handed down a suspension for the first two games of the 1994 season, it was announced on Sept. 7. On that same day, Galloway addressed the media.

"When I took the money, I considered myself as 100 percent leaving college football," he said. "I took the money at that time. Later on, I went home, changed my mind about the decision to leave, and I just did not repay the money."

"That is definitely my mistake. I'm a grown man and I have to accept the responsibility for that."

Galloway said he received \$200. He returned the money, with \$18 in interest, but not before he was confronted by an NCAA investigator.

If you look at Young's penalty, and then that of Smith and Galloway, it appears that, at least in Ohio State's case, two games seems the typical penalty. The outlier is Carter. Who knows what might have happened with the Buckeye great if he had just come clean from the beginning?

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'The Game' After Thanksgiving

The Ohio State-Michigan game once again falls after the Thanksgiving postal holiday, making it very difficult for us to get Buckeye Sports Bulletin to many of our readers before The Game. Readers can upgrade their service to first-class mail in an envelope for the Michigan Preview issue, with its popular Michigan Memories, and the Michigan Wrap-Up for just \$5 total.

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