



ANDREW LIND

PLAYING THE WAITING GAME – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith remains optimistic there will be a 2020 football season despite the worldwide coronavirus outbreak that led to the cancellation of all spring sports, including the Buckeyes' annual spring game.

OSU AD Gene Smith Believes It's Too Early To Speculate On Football Season

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

While fans are undoubtedly eager for sports to resume, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith believes it's still too early to speculate on whether there will be a college football season this fall.

After all, there's still plenty of uncertainty surrounding the worldwide coronavirus outbreak that led to the postponement of several professional sports leagues and the cancellation of all spring college sports – including the Buckeyes' annual spring game, which was scheduled for April 11.

"We've been busy, frankly, trying to adjust to our new normal," Smith said during an interview with Columbus radio station 610 WTVN on April 10.

That same day, the NCAA established a working group to assess how much preseason conditioning would be needed before the season can begin, adding in a statement it is still "premature to establish a timeline for when these scenarios may

be put in place." Meanwhile, Smith and the athletic directors at the 13 other Big Ten institutions had been discussing return-to-play protocols during their daily conference calls for a little over a week.

"We really have to understand that the players did not have their spring football, so that's physical activities lost," Smith said during a teleconference with reporters that afternoon. "And, remember, there is training that typically occurs in the summertime. At the end of the day, we need to develop a return-to-play model for those players that's frankly practice-oriented so that we avoid soft-tissue injuries that occur in muscles, tendons and ligaments and end up with sprains, strains and contusions.

"All of us are collaborating to determine what's the best return to play for the players, and then, ultimately, the conversation will shift to what the season will be."

During a guest appearance on ESPN's "Get Up" on April 10, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day mentioned a six-week timeline as a good starting point for those discussions.

"Whether it's more or less, I think that's what we have to work through," Day said. "What do those six weeks look like? When are we allowed to put pads on? How much time do we need leading up to putting pads on and actually practicing? So I think six weeks is a good starting point to start the conversation, and then as time goes on, we need to clean that up."

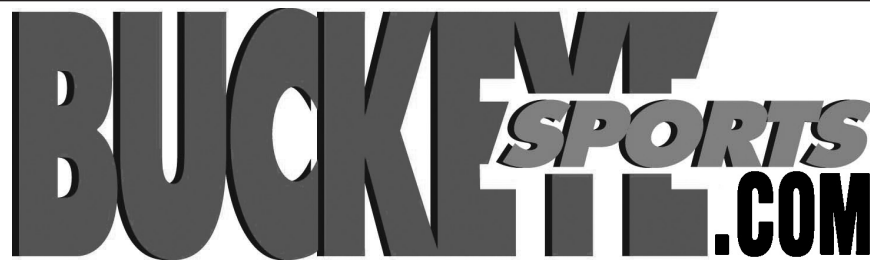
Day garnered praise from Smith for his leadership during these unprecedented times, particularly when it comes to keeping the team ready for the season, even though the players returned home when Ohio State canceled all in-person classes for the remainder of spring semester.

"Ryan is doing a great job," Smith said. "He's worked with our doctors and our strength staff, and he verbalized some things he's doing with the rest of the coaches on the call. I really appreciate his leadership in that space."

The Big Ten recently extended the suspension of all team-related activities through at least May

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From The Message Board

The NCAA announced on March 30 that it will offer an extra season of eligibility to all spring-sports seniors, though it would not offer the same opportunity to winter athletes. Following the decision, Buckeye Sports Bulletin asked our readers, as well as staff members, for their input on the move from the NCAA.

Here are some of their responses:

"Fair offer. Will be interesting to see how many actually return to take advantage of it. Or graduate and start their working careers."

– mrbigbux

"Fair offer to me. Baseball barely played 10 games."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"I think it was a fair call. I am wondering about winter athletes now. Too soon to tell."

– PeyoteBuck

"Personally, I wouldn't mind seeing some sort of solution for the winter seniors like wrestlers Luke Pletcher and Kollin Moore that had their seasons cut short, but I really don't know what that would be. Coach Tom Ryan has supported All-American honors still being given out, which would be a small

consolation but one that would be pretty easy to do."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"I think it was the move the NCAA had to make. Spring athletes had barely started, so it makes sense to give them that extra season if they want it and to give programs leeway with those scholarships. And, as tough as it is for winter athletes, I just don't think there's a way to give them back eligibility in a feasible way."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"I think it was the right move. After all, those athletes barely got into their seasons. I understand why some people would want to see it extended to winter sports, as well, but they played most of their schedule and only missed out in the championships. Hard to justify giving them an extra year."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1985

Earle Bruce was looking for improvement from his star halfback entering spring practice. Keith Byars had rushed for 1,764 yards as a junior, setting a school record while leading the nation in rushing, scoring and all-purpose yards. Still, Bruce wanted more from the 6-2, 235-pound back from Dayton.

"I think the challenge that Keith has is to try and have a better year than he did last year," Bruce said. "Obviously, that would be a great year for him. You always want your best year as a senior.

"What it takes to be able to do that is a lot of hard work and dedication – something he had last year at this time. If you want to be better than you were last year, you have to work harder.

"I think he'll accept the challenge of being better and leading this football team."

30 Years Ago – 1990

Offensive coordinator Jim Colletto had not yet fulfilled the hopes of Buckeye fans that he would bring a wide-open offense to Columbus as he entered his third spring with OSU.

The Buckeyes averaged 28.3 points per game in 1989 on the way to an 8-4 season, while picking up more rushing yards than passing, gaining 2,717 yards on the ground and 2,180 in the air in the previous campaign. It wasn't as conservative as head coach John Cooper had once been, but it wasn't the stark contrast that fans were expecting.

Colletto said that those waiting would have to get a little impatient, as he had no plans to switch things up.

"We are going to go with what got us to this point," Colletto said. "Spring is the time when you look at how people kept themselves in shape and just reacquaint them with the basics of our philosophy. There won't be anything earth-shaking worked on this spring, because we want to concentrate on the players rather than the plays."

25 Years Ago – 1995

At least four Ohio State football players were working at new positions to open spring practice.

Junior linebacker Greg Bellisari was moved from his starting spot at boundary linebacker to inside. That move was precipitated by the early departure of inside starter Lorenzo Styles to the NFL draft.

Offensive lineman Eric Gohlstein, a backup at center in 1994 as a true freshman, made the move outside to tackle to compete with sophomore Larry Waldon for the spot vacated by Corey Stringer's early departure for the NFL.

Junior Bob Houser was moved from tight end to fullback

on the first day of spring practice, with the Buckeyes already having DJ. Jones, Rickey Dudley, John Lumpkin and Max Langenkamp working at tight end.

Finally, redshirt freshman Kevin Griffin came to OSU as a running back but was moved to defensive back.

20 Years Ago – 2000

Cooper took some time as he entered his 13th spring in Columbus to reflect on what had been his toughest season in Columbus the year prior. The Buckeyes had gone 6-6, a disappointing follow-up to an 11-1 campaign in 1998.

"We didn't play good enough and we didn't coach good enough last year," Cooper told BSB. "And sometimes, people forget you are compared to the people you play against.

"The six teams that beat us last year were pretty good teams. The six teams that beat us last year, if I'm not mistaken, went on to bowl games. We played a tough schedule."

15 Years Ago – 2005

Passing game coordinator Joe Daniels had no plans to call his quarterback situation a controversy or imply that having three viable options at quarterback was anything but a good thing.

Justin Zwick and Troy Smith served as the experienced options. Zwick had bested Smith in a quarterback competition in 2004 but was sidelined after six games following a separation of his throwing shoulder.

Smith took over and led Ohio State to four wins in its final five regular-season games. However, a suspension prior to the bowl game against Oklahoma State sent Smith to the bench and Zwick back into the starting job.

With redshirt freshman Todd Boeckman also in the fold, Daniels had a three-man race for the job in 2005 on his hands.

"I like it," he said. "The fact of the matter is I love it. I love the competition aspect of it because I think it's going to bring out the best in all three of them. I've always liked that. Now, some years you're not going to have that. When I was at Pitt and we had Dan Marino, you knew that wasn't going to happen."

10 Years Ago – 2010

Star guard Evan Turner announced that he was declaring for the NBA draft and would be forgoing his final season at Ohio State during an April 7 press conference.

"The past few weeks have been really hard for me," Turner said. "I've been agonizing over my decision due to the simple fact of how much I love the Ohio State University. I love being a Buckeye. I love my coaches, my coaching staff and being a kid.

"Ever since I've been in college, I've grown day by day from a kid closer to a man. I think I've matured really well on and off the court. On the court, I've matured to the fact where I think I'm going to forgo my senior season and go to the NBA."

Turner's choice came on the heels of a Sweet 16 loss to Tennessee that ended Ohio State's season. He was projected as a top-three pick.

Five Years Ago – 2015

Class of 2015 Ohio State early enrollee Jamel Dean was thrust into uncertainty surrounding his future in football April 8, following the Ohio State decision that he would not be medically cleared to play.

Although the information had just recently been made public, John Wilkinson, Dean's head coach at Cocoa, Fla., said that Dean had been informed he wouldn't be cleared within a week of arriving on campus for spring semester in January.

"I was shocked," Wilkinson said. "Completely shocked. He just got there – just literally got there. It was a big thing that went on and on and on. I've known about it for three months. I've been working hard trying to make sure my kid is taken care of."

Dean tore his ACL in November 2013 but recovered in time to play his senior season. A setback came when Dean suffered a more minor injury in a high school playoff game in November 2014, and he missed the Under Armour All-American Game as a result.

Wilkinson told BSB that he and Dean were still considering options regarding Dean's future and that they both felt he was capable of playing football again.

One Year Ago – 2019

Unlike the previous spring, when former head coach Urban Meyer had named Dwayne Haskins the starting quarterback shortly after the conclusion of spring practice, the competition between Ohio State sophomore Justin Fields and redshirt freshman Matthew Baldwin was going to drag into fall camp.

"I don't think, right now, that we're going to make a decision on that," head coach Ryan Day said following the Gray's 35-17 win over the Scarlet in the Buckeyes' annual spring game on April 13. "I think it will continue through the preseason."

Neither quarterback was exceptional in the contest. Fields completed just 4 of 13 passes for 131 yards and a touchdown for the Gray team – with most of those yards coming on a 98-yard strike to senior wideout Binjimen Victor. Baldwin split his time between the two teams and finished the day 20 of 36 for 246 yards and two touchdowns compared to two interceptions.

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Comparing 1968 Champs To 2019 Juggernaut

When you're sitting around, sequestered inside your own house after binge-watching everything from all 73 episodes of "Game of Thrones" to the premiere season of "Star Trek: Picard," you realize just how much you miss live sports.

But since there are no live sports to see, and none scheduled in the foreseeable future, it's not too much of a stretch – especially after hours and hours of fantastic voyages between the fictional continents of Westeros and Essos to far-flung planets and galaxies in the 24th century – to conjure up a mythical matchup between Ohio State football teams that took the field more than 50 years apart.

The matchup is between the 1968 national championship team and the 2019 version of the Buckeyes that rolled undefeated through 13 opponents until a heartbreaking loss to Clemson in the national semifinal game.

Comparisons of such a nature are commonplace throughout the world of sports. Baseball fans argue about whether the 1927 New York Yankees were better than the 1976 Cincinnati Reds and vice versa. Meanwhile, some NFL fans might talk about the 1950 Cleveland Browns when others insist upon the 1985 Chicago Bears, and followers of the NBA can talk for hours about the 1961 Boston Celtics or the 1996 Chicago Bulls.

There is no clear consensus, of course, because it is so difficult to compare eras – especially eras so many years apart.

The genesis of the question regarding the 1968 and 2019 Ohio State football teams is rooted in a recent discussion on the BuckeyeSports.com website concerning a December 2019 story from USA Today ranking the top 150 college football teams of all time.

Six OSU teams made the list, but somewhat curiously, nowhere to be found among the top 150 teams of all time was the 1968 team that capped its title season with a 50-14 beatdown of fourth-ranked Michigan and a 27-16 Rose Bowl win against defending national champion USC.

Somewhere in the website thread began a discussion of just how talented that 1968 team might have been, and what might have been an outcome had they gone against a modern-day team – such as the 2019 Buckeyes, for example.

Posters of a certain younger vintage cited examples of a handful of Ohio State teams during the past quarter-century that were "better" than the 1968 team. The reasons they posited were valid ones, but ones typically used by those who simply can't believe the players and coaches of yesteryear could possibly measure favorably to those of today.

Granted, it is difficult to compare teams from different eras. Like life itself, the games evolve over time with new strategies employed each year to either combat or take advantage of what did or didn't work the year before. Philosophies have changed along with technical advancements in everything from equipment and training to medicine and nutrition.

Weight training was a primitive exercise for much of the 20th century – the first Nautilus machine wasn't even invented until 1968 – but facilities for such training have gone from small, sweaty locker rooms to sprawling mini-cities such as the two-story fortress at the University of Alabama featuring 21,000 square feet on the lower level and another 16,000 square feet on the upper floor.

Invariably, the argument from today is that because of all the aforementioned advancements, how could a team from more than 50 years ago possibly hope to keep pace with a team from 2019?

The argument is a valid one, but also unfair. One would have to assume that if today's

advancements were available to any team from a bygone era, that team would naturally be made better.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Despite his reputation for being stubborn, does anyone truly believe Woody Hayes would have lasted anywhere for 28 seasons had he not been able to change with the times? Likewise, is anyone suggesting that Urban Meyer would not have been the coach he was had he been denied use of a computer and cellphone, all the while being forced to watch game film on an 8-mm projector?

I would like to think that talent transcends eras, so with that in mind, here are my thoughts on which team is better – the 1968 Buckeyes or the 2019 Buckeyes.

Several No-Brainers

If you stipulate that both teams featured the dominant Big Ten offenses of their respective eras and grant that each had its share of individual star power on the defensive side of the ball, perhaps the only way to determine the better team is to match the individual players to one another by position.

Despite the fact the 1968 team featured a potent offense that controlled the line of scrimmage, and therefore the tempo of most games, it's still pretty much a fool's errand to try to favorably compare many of that team's offensive players to the ones who took the field in 2019.

The only clear choices in the 1968 team's favor would likely be offensive tackles Dave Foley and Rufus Mayes, each of whom won first-team All-America accolades that season before embarking upon lengthy NFL careers.

Another easy choice, albeit not as much of a slam dunk, is Jan White at tight end. White was a blocking machine who exhibited textbook technique at his position and added 21 catches for 283 yards despite OSU's 1968 run-heavy attack. As a point of reference, tight ends Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert combined for 21 receptions and 261 yards in 2019.

I'll concede the rest of the offensive line belongs to the 2019 team. Josh Myers earned second-team All-Big Ten honors at center, left guard Jonah Jackson was first-team all-conference according to the coaches, and right guard Wyatt Davis was named to a couple of All-America first teams.

Likewise, it's a no-brainer to pick 2019's talented receiving corps led by K.J. Hill, Austin Mack, Binjimen Victor, Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson, a fivesome that combined for 198 catches, 2,851 yards and 36 touchdowns. The entire '68 team totaled 104 catches for 1,384 yards and 10 TDs.

Defensively, the 2019 team was led by defensive end Chase Young and cornerback Jeff Okudah, both of whom were consensus first-team All-Americans. But the 1968 defense featured some of the best players in the history of the Ohio State program, including Jim Stillwagon and Jack Tatum.

Up front, I'd take a trio of 1968 players – Stillwagon at middle guard/nose tackle, Paul Schmidlin at defensive tackle, and the vastly underrated Mark Debevc at defensive end. Young gets the other defensive end spot.

Under defensive coordinator Lou McCullough in 1968, the Buckeyes utilized a 52-alignment meaning they normally featured

only two linebackers. It was a modified 52, though, because Tatum often vacated his safety position to line up as a linebacker. But for the purposes of this argument, we'll stay with two just linebackers, giving the edge again to 1968 and the combo of Doug Adams and Mark Stier. If you any doubts about Stier, you might like to know he was voted by his fellow Buckeyes as team MVP in 1968.

Okudah would seem an easy choice at one of the cornerback spots, but that means you're giving him the nod over Tim Anderson and/or Ted Provost. Anderson eventually became a first-round NFL draft choice, and Provost earned the nickname "Teddy the Tree" for winning multiple Buckeye leaves for his helmet when earning those decals was much harder than it is today. Provost also had 16 career interceptions, tied for third on OSU's all-time list.

I'll concede one cornerback spot to Okudah, but with all due respect to the way Damon Arnette upped his game last season, the other has to go to either Anderson or Provost.

Tatum was in a class by himself, and although some believe he wouldn't be the same player under today's rules, I'm here to tell you that Tatum was good enough that he could have adjusted his game and still been every bit as fearsome now as he was then.

That leaves Jordan Fuller or Mike Sensibaugh at safety. Fuller was the third-leading tackler on the team in 2019, was a consensus first-team All-Big Ten pick, and was voted second-team All-America by CBS Sports.

But Sensibaugh totaled five interceptions as a sophomore in 1968 – Fuller had only five during his entire OSU career – and Sensibaugh went on to become the all-time leader in interceptions for the Buckeyes. His 22 picks in three seasons is a career record that has never been seriously challenged.

I'll go with Sensibaugh.

Much Tougher Calls

Picking the quarterback is more difficult than you might think.

Rex Kern and Justin Fields were each first-year starters, and both sophomores were tasked with running different kinds of Ohio State offenses. But Kern was asked to do more – much more – on the field, including call his own plays throughout the season.

The passing yardage and number of touchdown passes would suggest a substantial gap in favor of Fields, but for all that Kern did for the 1968 team, and what he meant to the national championship run, I'd offer that the gap is not that cavernous.

Still, I'm willing to give Fields the edge if only for the fact he was running a much more intricate offense.

With regard to the running back position, it's hard to go against J.K. Dobbins, who became the first OSU player in program history to break the 2,000-yard mark in a single season. But the fullback was the focal point of the 1968 offense, and Jim Otis was the guy who more often than not had the ball in his hands with the game on the line. It's no coincidence that Otis carried a combined 64 times for 244 yards and five touchdowns in those season-ending wins against Michigan and USC.

I give the edge to Dobbins over Otis, but as with the quarterback position, that edge is ever so slight.

So, which was the better team? Because of the varying alignments, I matched only 20 positions and gave the edge at 11 to the 1968 national champs and nine to the 2019 team.

Does that mean the 1968 team was better? I guess in my mind it does, but even after all of that analysis, I'm not really sure.

What do you think?



Big Ten Suspends Team Activities Through May 4

Ohio State's spring football practice, which was scheduled to run through April 10, culminating with the annual spring game on April 11, has almost certainly ended. The Big Ten announced on March 27 that all team activity would be suspended until at least May 4.

The new date serves as an extension of the previous announcement, made on March 13, that suspended activity through April 6. With new stay-at-home orders in place, the extension was all but inevitable.

"This is an additional measure to the previously announced cancellation of all conference and nonconference competitions through the end of the academic year, including spring sports that compete beyond the academic year," the Big Ten statement reads. "The Conference also has previously announced a moratorium on all on- and off-campus recruiting activities for the foreseeable future."

"The Big Ten Conference will continue to use this time to work with the appropriate medical experts and institutional leadership to determine next steps relative to the COVID-19 pandemic."

"The main priority of the Big Ten Conference is to ensure the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes, coaches, administrators, faculty, fans and media as we continue to monitor all developing and relevant information on the COVID-19 virus."

Ohio State was able to run three practices this spring before the Big Ten and NCAA

stepped in, halting spring practice everywhere and putting the feasibility of playing the upcoming season into some question.

The NCAA has not put forth any sort of timeline for when team activity can be expected to resume, nor has it announced a plan to replace the lost practice time.

All Ohio State Events Off Until July 6

Along with the suspension of team activities, Ohio State is canceling all in-person events through at least July 6, according to a release from university president Michael Drake on April 3.

The news comes shortly after an April 1 announcement from the school that all summer semester classes will be held online and that the May 3 commencement ceremony will be done virtually.

"This is a very difficult and challenging time for the world," Drake said in his statement. "Many are suffering from the disease or have lost loved ones, and all of us are affected by the many changes this pandemic has brought. At the same time, we are coming together and responding in ways that are inspiring."

On the move to online classes through the summer, Executive Vice President and Provost Bruce A. McPheron released a statement with the school's reasoning.

"We have made this decision in consultation with college and regional campus leadership to provide certainty for Ohio State students, faculty and staff about plans for the summer term," McPheron said. "We cannot yet predict when current restrictions on our campuses will ease, so we are moving forward to provide a consistent academic experience for the summer term."

Lastly, for the commencement, Ohio State announced that Apple CEO Tim Cook would be serving as the keynote speaker, and Drake took the chance in an announcement video to thank Ohio State's students and staff.

"We are so proud of everything you have accomplished – and how you have stepped up and remained strong during this time of uncertainty," Drake said. "Just as you were headed into the homestretch and looking forward to walking across the field in Ohio Stadium on May 3, the world changed for you and for all of us. But you adapted and persevered."

"While we will not be able to link arms in Ohio Stadium right now, we will recognize your achievements virtually with your families and friends as we confer your degrees."

Ohio State has said that it will do a physical recognition event at a later date.

Anunike Named Defensive Line Coach At Fordham

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson's star pupil, Kenny Anunike, is leaving the nest after joining the program in 2017 as a graduate assistant. Fordham head coach Joe Conlin announced on April 3 that Anunike would be taking over as the defensive line coach with the Rams for the 2020 season.

This will serve as the first full-time position coaching job for Anunike, a former Duke defensive lineman from 2009-13 who came to Ohio State after a brief stint in the NFL with Denver and the New York Jets. With Duke, Anunike set a school record in career sacks with 15 while playing on the defensive line. He played his high school ball at Olentangy High School in Lewis Center, Ohio.

Anunike was a fast riser under Johnson and looked primed for a promotion to quality control assistant this offseason had he not accepted the position with Fordham. There had even been chatter that he could eventually be the man to replace Johnson, 68, when he

2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time (ET)	TV	2019 Record
Sept. 5	BOWLING GREEN	TBA	TBA	3-9 (2-6 Mid-American)
Sept. 12	at Oregon*	TBA	TBA	12-2 (8-1 Pac-12)
Sept. 19	BUFFALO*	TBA	TBA	8-5 (5-3 Mid-American)
Sept. 26	RUTGERS	TBA	TBA	2-10 (0-9 Big Ten)
Oct. 10	IOWA*	TBA	TBA	10-3 (6-3 Big Ten)
Oct. 17	at Michigan State*	TBA	TBA	7-6 (4-5 Big Ten)
Oct. 24	at Penn State*	TBA	TBA	11-2 (7-2 Big Ten)
Oct. 31	NEBRASKA	TBA	TBA	5-7 (3-6 Big Ten)
Nov. 7	INDIANA*	TBA	TBA	8-5 (5-4 Big Ten)
Nov. 14	at Maryland	TBA	TBA	3-9 (1-8 Big Ten)
Nov. 21	at Illinois*	TBA	TBA	6-7 (4-5 Big Ten)
Nov. 28	MICHIGAN*	TBA	TBA	9-4 (6-3 Big Ten)
Dec. 5	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	TBA	

* 2019 bowl team

** at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

BSB's May Issue Slated For May 19 Mailing Date

The next print issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, the May issue, is scheduled to be mailed on May 19. We are planning many interesting feature stories, as well as any updates on the Ohio State sports schedule.

We suggest you keep up with any Buckeye activity at our website, BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers. The BSB staff will continue its electronic recruiting coverage and also coming up with interesting and entertaining story ideas, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives to fill the Buckeye information void.

Additionally, staff members will be manning the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, interacting with subscribers as we all get through this situation together.

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If you have any questions about BuckeyeSports.com, the upcoming print schedule or your mail service, feel free to call us at the above number.

decides to retire.

Prior to Ohio State's playoff matchup with Clemson in December, Anunike spoke at length about that possibility.

"I would absolutely love that," Anunike said. "I'm from Ohio. I was born in Ohio. Scarlet and gray bleeds through my veins. I would love that. If that is in store for me – which is what I pray to God for – then that's what it is. But if it's not, then I'll deal with it wherever I end up. I'm just excited to be where I am right now, with this amazing team and this amazing group of athletes, amazing group of players and amazing group of coaches. This is a place unlike anywhere I've ever been before. The brotherhood is truly, truly real on this team."

Anunike also spoke in that interview about his time in Columbus and reflected on his decision to join the program.

"This is probably one of the best decisions I could have ever made to come to Ohio State and to become literally Larry Johnson's understudy," Anunike said. "That's basically what my position is, and I'm blessed by the best, to be in a position to learn from arguably the greatest D-line coach to ever coach the game."

Several Ohio State defensive linemen, including junior Tyler Friday and former Buckeye Chase Young, spoke highly of Anunike as well.

"With the path he's on right now, I think he could take over any D-line in the country," Friday said of Anunike. "I feel like, in a year or so, whenever Coach J wants to be done with this, Coach Kenny's been built to take over and take us in the right path."

"If he really takes the teaching from Coach J – 'cause Coach J's going to give him everything that he has – if he takes it and runs with it, I think he'll be very good," Young said. "He went to Duke. He had a 3.8 GPA. He can do whatever he wants in life if he wanted to, but

if he chooses to come here and coach us we can't ask for a better coach. Kenny, he can be the best that he wants to be."

Ohio State Paying Nearly \$2 Million To Play Ball State, UConn

It was announced on March 3 that Ohio State would be adding Ball State and UConn to its future schedules, with the Cardinals coming to Columbus in 2026 and the Huskies coming to town in 2025. Those dates have price tags attached, thanks to the release of the contract signed by both sides.

For the Sep. 5 matchup with Ball State, Ohio State will pay out \$1.9 million, a slight increase from the usual \$1.8 million going rate for future nonconference buy games. That would be the highest total in school history, were it not for the UConn contract.

To host the Huskies, Ohio State will pay \$1.95 million, the new highest payout in school history.

The prices for these types of games, frequently referred to as "revenue games" or "buy games," have jumped recently, moving to as high as \$2 million in 2019 when Florida hosted Colorado State. Iowa athletic director Gary Barta spoke about the market prior to the 2019 season.

"The market just continues to go up," Barta said. "I'm hearing stories of other schools paying \$2 million for games (in the future). You continue to wonder where the market is going to stop."

Former Buckeyes In NFL On The Move

NFL free agency has been in full swing since March 16 when the player contact period began, and several former Ohio State stars have locked up new contracts, including four with new teams and a fifth that looks to be on the move but hasn't found a new home yet.

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The first Buckeye to secure a new contract wasn't one of those four however, when the Houston Texans came to terms with cornerback Bradley Roby on a new contract.

The contract will keep him in Houston for three more years and is worth \$36 million. Roby played in Houston in 2019 on a one-year, \$10 million contract after five years in Denver. He racked up 38 total tackles (35 solo), eight pass deflections, two interceptions, a sack and a forced fumble in 10 games.

Running back Carlos Hyde and fellow cornerback Gareon Conley are also on the Texans, though Hyde is an unrestricted free agent and turned down Houston's extension offer.

On March 18, cornerback Malcolm Jenkins made his move after being released by the Philadelphia Eagles, signing with the team that drafted him back in 2009, the New Orleans Saints.

Jenkins played 96 consecutive games for the Eagles at safety during his six years there, qualifying for three Pro Bowls in the process, in 2015, 2017 and 2018. Jenkins took a slight step back in 2019, going without an interception for the first time since 2011, but he still had 81 tackles, fourth best in his 11-year career. He's expected to start at safety for the Saints.

A day later, former Buckeye walk-on and special teams star Nate Ebner signed with the New York Giants. The Giants hired New England special teams coach Joe Judge to be their head coach this offseason, and Judge served as Ebner's coach with the Patriots from 2012-2019. Ebner's deal is reportedly for one year.

Tight end Nick Vannett inked a two-year, \$5.7 million deal with the Denver Broncos on March 21, ending his tenure with Pittsburgh after just one season. Vannett will be rejoining OSU teammates Jeff Heurman and Tyvis Powell in Denver, along with Dre'Mont Jones, though this move could spell the end of Heurman's time in Denver.

The most recent Buckeye to find a new home was safety Vonn Bell, who signed with Cincinnati on March 26, landing a three-year, \$18 million deal. He should fill a starting safety spot with the Bengals as he returns to Ohio. Bell played for the Saints in 2019, putting up 89 tackles (66 solo), four TFL and 1½ sacks along with his first career interception, two fumbles forced and five fumble recoveries with one scoop and score, but the signing of Jenkins pushed him out of New Orleans.

It looked as though cornerback Eli Apple had found a new team when it was reported on March 18 that he was signing a one-year deal with the Las Vegas Raiders. The deal fell through after the two sides couldn't come to an agreement, and Apple, who spent the last two seasons with New Orleans as a starting corner re-entered the free-agent market on April 2.

This offseason also likely marked the end of Ryan Shazier's NFL career, three years after he sustained a spinal injury against Cincinnati that temporarily paralyzed him.

On March 17, Pittsburgh announced that it was moving Shazier to the reserve/retired list, meaning that he'll no longer be under contract with the team, though he will still have opportunities within the organization.

"Ryan's placement on the Reserve/Retired List serves as a matter of protocol to ensure his continued inclusion within our organization moving forward in his professional career," general manager Kevin Colbert said.

The Steelers paid Shazier his entire salary in 2018 and tolled his contract in 2019, meaning that he would be "paid a salary commensurate with his years of service in the NFL," according to the team.

Shazier has said that he doesn't plan to retire and still wants to return to the field, and

while this move will likely mean a shift into a front-office role, this does not end the possibility of Shazier returning to the field. Still, the team has said that there's no timeline for that.

Spielman Raising Money For COVID-19 Relief

Former Ohio State star linebacker Chris Spielman got creative to raise money for those impacted by COVID-19, taking to eBay to auction off some of his gear and memorabilia from his time as a player, both at Ohio State and in the NFL.

Headlining the auction was Spielman's 1984 Big Ten championship ring, which went for \$12,000, 30 percent of Spielman's \$40,000 goal for the auction. He said that he hopes to give away \$1,000 a week for the next 40 weeks if he can hit the goal.

Along with the ring, Spielman sold a 1994 All-Madden team leather jacket for \$2,565 and a game-worn Buffalo Bills jersey for \$1,125.

While the early sales went smoothly, Spielman had to deal with an unexpected account suspension on April 5, after eBay told him it was "not comfortable with (his) selling practices or business model, and we feel they don't help to promote a positive buying or selling environment."

A conversation between Spielman and the company that night led to an eventual reversal of the decision, and Spielman was able to relist an auction of a Detroit Lions package that includes a game-worn jersey and Pro Bowl watch. The package sold for \$6,900 on April 9. Shortly after, eBay released a statement in support of Spielman.

"COVID-19 is affecting each and every one of us, and eBay supports our community who want to do their part and give back. Unfortunately, the listing in question was suspended due to several listing and risk violations that are prohibited under eBay's policies. Since we've reinstated the seller's account and provided the necessary information to relist within our policies, eBay for Charity has also offered to make a donation to Spielman's relief effort of choice."

As of print, Spielman has raised over \$20,000, all of which will be donated to COVID-19 relief efforts.

Day, Smith, Holtmann Chip In \$175,000

Spielman isn't the only Buckeye getting involved with giving back to help support those impacted by COVID-19. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, athletic director Gene Smith and head basketball coach Chris Holtmann are teaming up to donate \$35,000 per month between April and August to the Mid-Ohio Foodbank's COVID-19 Emergency Fund.

"So many people in our community are struggling to feed their families right now," Smith said. "Our families wanted to do something to support those who need help. By contributing to the Mid-Ohio Foodbank, we know we can make a significant impact."

"We keep reading about the thousands of central Ohioans who are losing their jobs, and it's just devastating," Nina Day said. "Ryan and I hope that our family can help ease the burden a bit for other families in our community. We hope, too, that by our example other members of Buckeye Nation might join us in making donations to feed others."

"Our families want to support the thousands of Ohio families who are struggling to make ends meet because of the coronavirus," Chris Holtmann said. "The last thing they need to worry about is how they'll put food on the table."

Mid-Ohio Foodbank CEO Matt Habash released a statement thanking the three for their generosity.

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With the \$50 Brutus VIP upgrade, Buckeye Sports Bulletin subscribers will have their names and cities listed in the annual Football Preview issue and the Michigan issue as supporters of BSB. Those who add \$100 to their subscription will have their names and cities listed in all 24 issues each year as BSB Scarlet patrons. Those who donate \$125 or more will be designated as Elite patrons in each issue.

To upgrade your existing subscription to VIP status, with all the benefits that come with that designation, go to buckeyesports.com/vip-memberships to pay by credit card, or call us at (614) 486-2202 during regular business hours. If readers have questions on this program, they can call the same number.

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Green Banana Savings Continue

Many Buckeye Sports Bulletin readers have already taken advantage of the Reverse Green Bananas Special, aimed at attracting a younger audience. However, the Reverse Green Bananas Special, based on last year's wildly popular Green Bananas Special but with a twist, offers savings for virtually every reader.

With the Reverse Green Bananas Special, readers pay an annual price based on their age. A readers who is 50 will pay \$50 a year, a \$49.95 savings over the regular rate. A reader who is 35 will pay \$35 a year. If you are 21, you pay just \$21. Whatever your age, that's your price.

And there is a bonus especially directed at parents and grandparents. Buy a gift for any Buckeye or future Buckeye under the age of 21 and pay just \$14.95.

"That's not even enough to pay for the annual postage to mail BSB," Buckeye Sports Bulletin publisher Frank Moskowitz said of the \$14.95 price, "but it is an investment in the future of Buckeye Sports Bulletin and of newspapers. Many young people have never experienced the joy of reading newspapers, nor the excitement of receiving something in the mail each week. We call on our loyal readers to introduce the experience of reading BSB to children, grandchildren or any young Buckeye fan you know."

"But this special offers savings for almost every reader," Moskowitz pointed out. "If you are 80, you still save almost \$20 per year."

"In fact, you would have to be 100 to not save on this promotion, and I have a very special offer to those Buckeye fans who are 100 or older. If you have been a Buckeye fan that long, send me your name, address, birthday and all-time favorite Buckeye and I will give you a year of BSB absolutely free. You've earned it! I will also publish your name and favorite Buckeye in BSB. We are proud to have you as a subscriber!"

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To take advantage of the Reverse Green Bananas Special, just take your age or the age of the person you are giving a gift to (just \$14.95 for those under 21), multiply it by the number of years you wish (up to three years) and send a check or credit card information in that amount to Buckeye Sports Bulletin at P.O. Box 12453, Columbus, Ohio, 43212. If you are giving a gift, be sure to send the name and complete address. For even easier service, simply call (800) 760-2862 or (614) 486-2202 and order with your credit card during regular business hours.

not a sprint, and that it will take months for many of our struggling neighbors to recover," Habash said. "We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of these amazing families to be on this journey with us."

Habash also said that food distribution since March 23 is up 14 percent from the same period last year and that the numbers are only

going to climb higher in the coming weeks.

Ohio State encouraged Buckeye fans to chip in for the foodbank if possible, directing donations to www.midohiofoodbank.org/buckeyenation. The Mid-Ohio Foodbank also accepts food donations, with specifications of what can be donated on the website under the "donate food" tab.

Player Safety Among Smith's Chief Concerns

Continued From Page 1

4, and all other major-college football conferences have made similar decisions. The plan is to re-evaluate the situation at that time.

Ohio State is scheduled to begin the 2020 season on Sept. 5 against Bowling Green, which means the Buckeyes would need to begin fall camp in late July to follow the six-week timeline. But with several states under indefinite stay-at-home orders, that start could be in jeopardy.

"This needs to be a collective decision around the country," Smith said. "There has to be a national resolve for this. Many of these decisions will be based on where the states are. As you look across the country, there are different dates (projected) as to when gatherings can continue. In Ohio, we've been blessed with the good decisions

of our governor (Mike DeWine), who really made some tough decisions early in the process and got out ahead of this, so maybe we can return earlier than others."

Smith, of course, understands how important the Ohio State football program is to the athletic department's budget, as well as the local economy.

"It is the driver of our budget, so from that point of view, it's significant," Smith said, estimating a potential financial hit of \$35-50 million to the school's athletic budget. "It is significant to the financing of all of our sports and supporting our student-athletes. It is also important to our community. Every contest has a significant impact in central Ohio.

"At the end of the day, it contributes to our overall morale, the visibility of Columbus and everything we do here because, if we're not the most televised team in the country,

we're at least near the top of the list. We're blessed to have the opportunities we have due to football."

The financial aspect is one reason that Smith added he's unsure how viable it is to play in an empty stadium, as some involved in college athletics have suggested. The other is how the guidelines on social distancing from the Centers for Disease Control impact the players, coaches and other essential personnel on the field.

"I struggle with that concept," Smith said. "It seems inconsistent to me that we could say it's unsafe for the fans to be in the stands, but it's safe for the players to be in that gathering environment. My focus, first and foremost right now, is if we're going to do something, how do we make sure the players are safe first?

"You have 100 football players. It's hard to social distance in a locker room or a training room. At the end of the day, we've got to get to a point where we can relax our social distancing and get to a place where we can say it's OK for those dynamics to occur."

Smith acknowledged most of the decision making will be out of his hands, as the NCAA and its members will be forced to abide by any federal and state orders that place restrictions on large gatherings. He also expects those in power to enforce new

public health measures moving forward as a result of the pandemic, similar to the way measures were implemented after the attacks on the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, 2001.

"After that, all of us who were going to the airport, we had a lot of interesting comments about our challenge at security and the TSA operations," Smith said. "Now, it's normal. So, will you now take your temperature before you leave the house? Will we have temperature devices at certain places? I don't know that.

"I never knew that 20 seconds of washing your hands was so long. I don't know if I've ever truly washed my hands for 20 seconds, so our hygiene habits are going to change, and our monitoring habits are going to change."

Smith remains hopeful there will be football this fall in some form or fashion. And though he admitted it may be naive on his part, he also advocated for patience during these unusual circumstances.

"We're not going to rush this," Smith said. "We've got a major societal issue. Football is important, I know that. But at the end of the day, we've got people dying. We have doctors out there guiding us in this pace, and we need to pay attention to them.

"I know I will."

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OSU Lands Another Cornerback, Running Back

Ohio State landed its fourth commitment in three days on March 17 when Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth four-star defensive back Andre Turrentine pledged his services to the Buckeyes over finalists Alabama, LSU and Tennessee.

The 6-0, 175-pound Turrentine is considered the sixth-best safety and No. 136 prospect overall in the class of 2021, though Ohio State views him as someone who could potentially play in the slot at the next level. He recorded 73 total tackles to lead the Tigers to the state semifinals last fall.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

Running backs coach/area recruiter Tony Alford extended a scholarship offer to Turrentine last August, and the prospect made his first and only trip to Columbus for the Buckeyes' 28-17 win over Penn State on Nov. 23. That visit lasted two days, which gave Turrentine and his family the chance to spend time with Alford, head coach Ryan Day, then-co-defensive coordinator/secondary coach Jeff Hafley, director of player personnel Mark Pantoni and several players in a more intimate setting.

Though Hafley's departure for Boston

College in mid-December could have halted Ohio State's momentum, new defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs picked up right where Hafley left off and visited Turrentine's school in late January. The two immediately hit it off, so Turrentine set up an unofficial visit to Columbus for April 3.

That was canceled amid the coronavirus outbreak, which made the previously mentioned string of commitments – which included St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin Johnson on March 15 as well as Cincinnati La Salle three-star cornerback Devonta Smith and Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor on March 16 – even more impressive. With that visit off the table, expect Turrentine to return to campus whenever the recruiting ban is lifted and to take an official visit in the fall.

Turrentine became the 14th member of Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class, joining Johnson and Smith at the cornerback position. The staff hopes to add at least one more player to that defensive secondary haul, with other notable names to keep in mind including Virginia Beach (Va.) Princess Anne five-star Tony Grimes; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star Kamar Wilcoxson; Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star Jantzen Dunn; and Katy, Texas, four-star Hunter Washington.

Buckeyes Land Five-Star Running Back From Virginia

After missing out on several top-rated running backs in the last recruiting cycle, Alford has rebounded in a big way this year by securing commitments from two of the nation's

OSU Football Verbal Commitments

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
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	175	★★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Reid Carrico	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Ironton, Ohio
Ben Christman	OT	6-6	299	★★★★	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
Michael Hall	DT	6-3	290	★★★★	Streetsboro, Ohio
Marvin Harrison	WR	6-4	184	★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Sam Hart	TE	6-5	225	★★★	Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail
TreVeyon Henderson	RB	5-11	195	★★★★★	Hopewell, Va.
Donovan Jackson	OG	6-4	308	★★★★	Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal
Jakailin Johnson	CB	6-0	168	★★★★	St. Louis De Smet Jesuit
Jaylen Johnson	S	6-1	205	★★★★	Cincinnati La Salle
Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	204	★★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	190	★★★★	Cornelius (N.C.) W.A. Hough
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	220	★★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Devonta Smith	CB	6-0	185	★★★★	Cincinnati La Salle
Andre Turrentine	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth

top six players at the position. That includes Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson, who announced his pledge to the Buckeyes on March 27.

The 5-11, 195-pound Henderson is considered the second-best running back and No. 17 prospect overall in the class of 2021, rushing for 2,424 yards and 45 touchdowns to lead the Blue Devils to the state championship last season. He picked Ohio State over finalists Georgia, Michigan, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas, Virginia and Virginia Tech.

Henderson – the commonwealth's Gatorade Player of the Year – landed an offer from Alford last September, though it's worth noting his

relationship with the staff actually dates back to when linebackers coach/area recruiter Al Washington was with the Wolverines. Ohio State made Henderson one of its top priorities from the get-go, and that's a big reason that he committed to the Buckeyes without ever stepping foot on campus.

Henderson was actually supposed to take an unofficial visit sometime in April but, again, that was canceled amid the worldwide coronavirus outbreak. He isn't the first running back to pledge his services to Ohio State sight unseen, as school single-season rushing record holder J.K. Dobbins did the same thing in February 2016.

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ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Grove's Marc Givler

What do you believe to be the biggest challenge facing Ohio State's staff as it navigates the NCAA-mandated dead period, which will run through at least May 31?

"The biggest challenge right now is that there are some key out-of-state recruits the Buckeyes need to get on campus but are unable to do so. Guys like Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive tackle J.T. Tuimolau; Virginia Beach (Va.) Princess Anne five-star cornerback Tony Grimes; and Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Jaylin Davies are all top-100 prospects from outside of the Midwest who have been eyeing visits to Columbus this spring or early summer. Grimes is someone Ohio State needs to get on campus again to be able to make the big move, while a good first visit could propel the Buckeyes into the driver's seat for West Coast guys like Tuimolau and Davies."

Ohio State seemingly addressed its biggest needs with several commitments at the running back and defensive back positions in the last

month. With that, what do you believe is now the biggest remaining need in the class and where do the Buckeyes stand with their top targets at that position?

"There is still some work to be done in the secondary, particularly at safety, but right now adding to the defensive line has to be the top priority. Ohio State is off to a great start with Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer and Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star defensive tackle Mike Hall, but this is a defensive line class that could include five or six players. There are still plenty of spots available and a lot of big-time targets in play."

With one linebacker already in the fold in Ironton, Ohio, four-star Reid Carrico and plenty of depth on the current roster, it appears Ohio State is set at the position unless it can land Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star Barrett Carter. What are the chances the Buckeyes can pull him away from the home-state Bulldogs?

"I tend to think Carter is staying in the South. Ohio

State has made a good impression on him and is kind of on its own as a non-Southeast school on Carter's list, which also includes Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Duke, Florida, Florida State, Georgia, Georgia Tech, LSU and Oklahoma. Carter has been to Ohio State, but like mentioned above, things opening up so he can visit would be a big help to the Buckeyes this summer."

Ohio State has yet to land its first commitment in the class of 2022 but notably has offers out to in-state players such as Marysville four-star linebacker Gabe Powers, Kettering Alter four-star athlete C.J. Hicks and West Chester Lakota West four-star offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola. Of those players, which one is most likely to become the Buckeyes' first pledge?

"I would probably say Powers. I think Ohio State is the team to beat for all three, but none of the three have indicated they are particularly close to making a decision. Right now, Powers looks like the one who could be closest, perhaps doing so during or shortly after his junior season."

Henderson's pledge seemingly ends the Buckeyes' pursuit of any other running backs this cycle, though they were at one time this spring considered the odds-on favorite to land West Bloomfield, Mich., four-star Donovan Edwards.

It's unclear if the staff could make the numbers work to fit three running backs in one class or if Edwards would even want to join a group that already includes two of the nation's best. If not, the home-state Wolverines are likely to be the biggest beneficiaries of Henderson's decision.

Buckeyes' Staff Leads National Recruiter Rankings

Turrentine and Henderson's commitments not only extended Ohio State's lead over Clemson for the nation's top-rated recruiting class (280.61 points to 220.98), they also helped Alford skyrocket to the No. 1 spot in the 247Sports recruiter rankings.

Alford, who will soon enter his sixth season as the Buckeyes' running backs coach and assistant head coach for offense, also played a significant role in the program landing pledges from Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star offensive tackle Ben Christman and Aurora (Colo.) Cherokee Trail three-star tight end Sam Hart.

Third-year wide receivers coach Brian Hartline currently sits second in those same rankings thanks to his role in Ohio State landing Johnson; Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord and four-star wide receiver Marvin Harrison; and Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard.

Coombs, Washington and defensive line coach Larry Johnson round out the Ohio State contingent in the top 10, sitting fourth, sixth and 10th, respectively.

Recruiting Operations Strong Despite Shutdown

The Ohio State football program has found unprecedented success on the recruiting trail in the face of the pandemic, landing six commitments since the beginning of March – including Oklahoma graduate transfer running back Trey Sermon.

On a teleconference with reporters on April 3, Pantoni, who leads the Buckeyes' recruiting efforts, credited the coaching staff for their dedication. He also added that the loss to Clemson in the College Football Playoff semifinal continues to motivate them in everything they do.

"Our staff right now is so strong," Pantoni said. "They're very motivated and hungry. Maybe that's from losing that Clemson game. It kind of sparked us all. We have great staff cohesion. We have a great group of guys that work really hard and work great together."

"They've done a phenomenal job building relationships up to this point. We were hoping spring practice would give us time to get these kids back on campus, where we felt like we would ideally close the deal with some of them. But with the limitations, I think a lot of the kids kind of had their minds made up and coming on campus again would finalize their thoughts. So just because of the way things have turned out, they decided to publicly commit to us to hold their spots in classes."

Ohio State was expected to host dozens of prospects during the months of March and April, which coincides with spring practice and culminates in the annual spring game. But with no in-person meetings allowed until at least June 1, the coaching staff has had to get creative with their recruiting efforts.

"Obviously, since we can't see them face to face, we've gone way more on the FaceTime calls – and I don't know if that's good that they

have to see our ugly grills way more often," Pantoni said. "Hopefully we don't scare them away by doing that. It's just constant communication. It's pretty much business as usual, but we have a lot more free time on our hands and they have a lot more free time on their hands, so there is more communication. But we're using the electronic means to keep the communication lines open and answering any questions they might have."

As mentioned, that string of commitments gave the Buckeyes the nation's top-rated recruiting class. But while Pantoni agreed it looks great on paper early in the process, he noted there's a long way to go before the Early Signing Period.

"It's only the beginning of April," Pantoni said. "We're not trying to win any recruiting wars in April, so we've got a long way to go. We've got to hold onto all these kids until December, so we treat all our commitments like they're not committed and make sure they continue to feel loved and remind them why they chose here."

Pantoni also acknowledged there are concerns about how the pandemic will impact the Buckeyes' summer recruiting calendar, which typically includes multiple one-day camps and featured the program's first-ever recruiting barbecue last year. The former, in particular, are an integral part of the evaluation process, and their cancellation could deny players on the fence a chance to earn an offer from Ohio State.

"If camps disappear, that's a significant loss," Pantoni said. "It's another check mark in the process, so we're going to have to really trust our eyes on the film. Some of these 2021 kids that we were hoping to make final decisions on, either by watching them practice live or having them in camp, that may be in jeopardy now. The film is going to take a lot of weight now, and

hopefully we can get these kids on campus once it opens up to spend more time around them."

Top Cornerback Target Decommits From Florida

IMG's Wilcoxson made headlines on March 26 when he decommitted from Florida for the second time in less than a year.

The 6-1, 190-pound Wilcoxson – who is considered the 16th-best athlete and No. 263 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – initially pledged his services to the Gators in November 2018, reopened his recruitment in April 2019 and committed again in July 2019, only to then back off that decision last month.

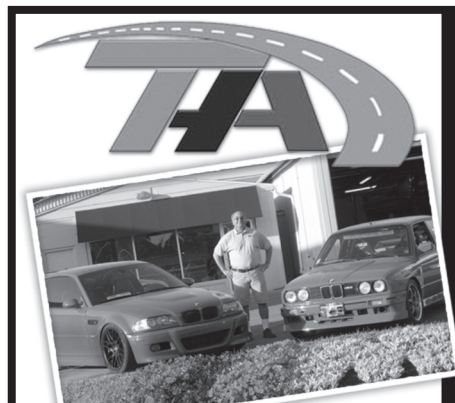
Ohio State now appears to be in the driver's seat in Wilcoxson's recruitment. The Buckeyes picked up several 247Sports crystal ball predictions in the hours after his announcement. It's unlikely he makes a decision in the near future after releasing a list of his top eight schools on April 8, listing Ohio State alongside Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Tennessee and USC.

A native of Stone Mountain, Ga., Wilcoxson landed an offer from Day during the January contact period. And although he's never been to campus, he's formed a strong bond with Coombs from afar in the meantime.

Wilcoxson was hoping to make it to campus for a spring practice or the annual spring game. With that on hold, he'll instead take an official visit with the Buckeyes over the weekend of June 12-14 – provided things return to normal by then.

Ohio State has had plenty of success in recent years pulling top prospects from IMG, including four-star offensive guard Tyler Gerald and four-star defensive tackle Malik Barrow in

Continued On Page 10



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Targets Include Buckeyes Among Top Options

Continued From Page 9

2016; four-star cornerback Marcus Williamson and four-star safety Isaiah Pryor in 2017; five-star defensive tackle Taron Vincent in 2018; and four-star cornerback Lejond Cavazos in 2020. Wilcoxson isn't the only Ascender they're after this cycle, either, as four-star offensive tackle J.C. Latham and four-star defensive tackle Tunmise Adeleye are among the staff's top targets at their respective positions.

Colorado Tight End Puts OSU In Top 10

Ohio State already holds one commitment at the tight end position (Hart) and plans to add one more to the fold this cycle.

The staff could very well accomplish that goal by focusing its efforts on another Denver suburb, as Littleton Heritage four-star tight end Terrance Ferguson included the Buckeyes in his top 10 on March 25 alongside Arizona State, Auburn, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M, USC, Washington and Wisconsin.

The 6-5, 220-pound Ferguson is considered the 12th-best tight end and No. 296 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after hauling in 123 receptions for 1,901 yards to lead the Eagles to the state playoffs in each of the last two seasons.

Ferguson landed an offer from Ohio State last May, and though he's never been to campus, he has a strong relationship with Alford – the Buckeyes' area recruiter – and offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson.

In addition to Ferguson, Ohio State has been keeping tabs on Savannah (Tenn.) Hardin County four-star Hudson Wolfe; Bowling

Green, Ky., three-star Jordan Dingle; and Hilliard (Ohio) Bradley three-star Jack Pugh, who hopes to land an offer with a strong showing at a camp this summer.

The Buckeyes have not signed more than one tight end in a cycle since 2016, when they landed Perry, Ohio, four-star Luke Farrell; Cincinnati Moeller four-star Jake Hausmann; and Maple Heights, Ohio, four-star Kierre Hawkins.

Ohio State Among Tennessee Tight End's Finalist Schools

Speaking of Wolfe, he included Ohio State in his top five on March 28 alongside Alabama, Georgia, Ole Miss and Tennessee.

The 6-6, 245-pound Wolfe is considered the ninth-best tight end and No. 214 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He caught 25 passes for 391 yards and nine touchdowns to help the Tigers to the state quarterfinals last season.

Wolfe landed an offer from the Buckeyes last September then made his first and only visit to campus a few weeks later for the 34-10 win over Michigan State. He's been in constant contact with Day and Wilson ever since, with both coaches stopping by his school on numerous occasions during the January contact period.

Though Wolfe had to cancel his planned trip to Ohio State on March 25 due to the spread of coronavirus, the Buckeyes notably picked up a crystal ball prediction from 247Sports director of recruiting Steve Wilfong.

Farrell and Hausmann are entering their final seasons of eligibility and Jeremy Ruckert could opt to forgo his senior season to enter the 2021 NFL draft, so a wide-open depth chart

could be a deciding factor for Wolfe.

Elite Defensive Tackle Down To Five Schools

In preparation for making his college decision on Aug. 1, Adeleye named his final five schools on March 27, listing Ohio State alongside Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma and Texas A&M.

The 6-3, 240-pound Adeleye is considered the third-best strongside defensive end and No. 43 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after recording 53 tackles, four sacks and one forced fumble at Katy (Texas) Tompkins last fall. He transferred to IMG Academy in January in order to display his talents as an edge rusher rather than be an interior lineman as he was often asked to do with the Falcons.

Adeleye – who pronounces his name too-ME-shay ahh-DAY-lay-YAY – landed an offer from Ohio State last May and took an unofficial visit just a few weeks later for the program's inaugural Buckeye Bash and Barbecue. He was set to return to Columbus in order to attend a practice this spring, but that is also obviously on hold.

To nobody's surprise, defensive line coach Larry Johnson has played an instrumental role in Adeleye's recruitment thus far, stopping by his high school during the January contact period. Several Ohio State commits have been very vocal on social media about their desire to play alongside Adeleye, as well.

The Sooners are considered the leader in Adeleye's recruitment at this point in time, holding 43 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions compared to the Buckeyes' 14 percent.

But he plans to take all five official visits before making his decision, and that will give Day and Johnson at least one more shot to turn the tide in his recruitment.

Ohio State already holds two commitments along the defensive line in Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star end Jack Sawyer and Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star tackle Michael Hall, and the Buckeyes hope to add three more in the trenches this cycle. Other names to keep in mind include Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star tackle J.T. Tuimolalo; Belleville, Mich., five-star tackle Damon Payne; Gaithersburg (Md.) Quince Orchard four-star tackle Marcus Bradley; Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star tackle Tywone Malone; Brooklyn (N.Y.) Erasmus Hall four-star end Jahzion Harris; and Solon, Ohio, four-star end Najee Story.

Kentucky Corner Unveils Top Schools Following Visit

Kentucky cornerback Dunn was among just a handful of recruits who actually made it to Columbus this spring, as he and his family attended Ohio State's practice on March 4.

The 6-2, 178-pound Dunn – who is considered the 22nd-best athlete and No. 318 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – has been in contact with special teams/assistant secondary coach Matt Barnes since he attended the Penn State game last November, and he finally landed an offer from the Buckeyes when he met Coombs during his recent visit.

Ohio State immediately picked up a pair of 247Sports crystal ball predictions, though Dunn doesn't appear to be close to making a decision on his future after he included the Buckeyes



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A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

25 Years Ago – 1995

The extension of John Cooper's contract following the 1994 season paid off quickly with the Buckeyes signing one of the top linebacker prospects in Texas.

Darren Hester, a 6-2, 230-pound linebacker out of Dallas Hillcrest High School, was prepared to cancel his visit to Ohio State when he heard that Cooper was considering leaving for LSU and defensive coordinator Bill Young was eyeing Oklahoma State.

Hester had offers from Colorado and Texas Tech and had scheduled trips to Baylor and Texas, so he was prepared to drop a scheduled visit to Columbus until he learned Cooper's contract had been extended.

"I almost canceled my visit because of the situation with the defensive coordinator leaving, so I wasn't sure I should take a chance on Ohio State," Hester told BSB in April. "After everything was settled, they called me and set up a date to visit, and I ended up committing when I visited."

20 Years Ago – 2000

The Ohio Football Recruiting News and Ohio's Future Stars both came out with spring rankings on the top Ohio seniors-to-be. Those publications agreed on one thing: Cleveland St. Ignatius defensive end Pat Massey was the state's No. 2 player.

TOFRN listed OSU commitment Redgie Arden, a linebacker from Ironton, as the state's 12th-ranked junior. OFS, meanwhile, gave the nod to Upper Arlington defensive end Simon Fraser.

But both had Massey (6-8, 240, 4.7) in their top two. He was considered a top-priority recruit for Ohio State, where his brother Jim was set to begin his junior season in 2000.

"It helps out a lot having Jim down there," Pat Massey told BSB. "I know what a great program they have, and I know how serious they are about winning. I know Jim loves it down there and he likes the coaches.

"I've been down there to visit him, so I know a lot about it as well."

15 Years Ago – 2005

Ohio State was hosting as many spring visits as it could, looking to get every top prospect in Columbus before the workload for the

upcoming season picked up in the fall.

During the first days of spring practice, numerous top recruits were spotted on the sidelines, including several Ohio stars, led by 2005 offensive line signee Alex Boone, offensive lineman Chad Schofield of Strongsville and running back Anthony Elzy of Warren Kennedy.

Ohio State played host to out-of-state targets too, including Greenwood, Ind., linebacker A.J. Edds and Pinconning, Mich., offensive lineman Garrett Whaley.

Edds took in Ohio State on April 9, checking out a practice, working through some film with the coaches and getting to know defensive coordinator Mark Snyder.

"They strapped it up and went after it in some live short-yardage situations," Edds said of the practice. "It was pretty neat to see what a lot of people consider the best corps of linebackers in the country going at it."

Whaley had made his trip a day earlier, but his day was a bit shorter because he was stretched on time. Still, he got the chance to watch practice.

"We were kind of stretched on time because we didn't want to get back too late," Whaley said. "We stopped in and that was about it. I didn't get a chance to diagram stuff or anything."

10 Years Ago – 2010

Tommy Brown knew that an Ohio State offer was coming, but he didn't know when. The offer finally came for the Akron Firestone offensive tackle on April 3 following a trip to Columbus for the 6-5, 300-pounder and his family.

After the trip, Brown returned home as the eighth member of Ohio State's 2011 class.

"I was sitting in the lounge (at OSU) with (Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary cornerback) Doran Grant," Brown told BSB. "My parents were touring the indoor facility and when they were done (head coach Jim) Tressel called me into his office and started talking to me and my parents. He had us looking at his championship rings and signed footballs from previous players.

"Then he sat me down and told me about life, and he said Ohio State definitely has a scholarship waiting for me."

Brown committed on the spot, after already having told his parents that he would immediately accept an OSU offer whenever it was extended."

Five Years Ago – 2015

Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star quarterback Jarrett Guarantano (6-4, 195) was expected to announce his school decision on April 15. He was down to Ohio State, Rutgers and Tennessee, with the Vols appearing to have the lead entering the final stretch.

Scout.com recruiting analyst Brian Dohn said the relationship between Guarantano's father, James, a former star receiver at Rutgers, and Tennessee head coach Butch Jones helped the Vols get a foot in the door, and then the visit down to Knoxville demonstrated to Guarantano that he could have success playing for Tennessee.

Still, Dohn wasn't ready to rule out Ohio State, especially given the quarterback's potential fit in head coach Urban Meyer's offense.

"Sometimes you're comfortable at other spots and have built-in relationships," Dohn said. "But he had a great visit to Ohio State, and I'm not ready to rule Ohio State out at this point.

"He's a perfect fit. He's Joey Burrow but with a more accurate arm. He's a 6-4 kid that can run really well and throw on the run with good accuracy. I think of what they want to do at Ohio State with the read option and stuff, and he's a kid who can get between the tackles and get up the field in a hurry, and he's a lot faster than people think."

One Year Ago – 2019

A little over four months after he reopened his recruitment Dec. 4, Lejond Cavazos found his way home April 12 when he committed to Ohio State. The 6-1, 190-pounder also considered Florida, Georgia, Louisiana State, Miami (Fla.) and Oregon.

The four-star defensive back from Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy recommitted to head coach Ryan Day and the Buckeyes after an offseason of re-evaluation. In the wake of former head coach Urban Meyer's retirement, the Cavazos family stressed its desire to step back and see everything through.

After some reflection, and the hire of defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley, Cavazos ended up right where he always thought he would be.

among his top seven schools March 28 alongside Alabama, Georgia Tech, Louisville, Miami (Fla.), Tennessee and USC.

The Cardinals are perceived to be the biggest threat to Ohio State's chances, though it's also worth noting Dunn's father, Mitchell, played for the Hurricanes' basketball team in the mid-1990s.

The Buckeyes have not signed a player from the Bluegrass State since Louisville Trinity three-star cornerback Rodjay Burns in 2016. He played in seven games as a true freshman, returning an interception for a touchdown in the season-opening win over Bowling Green, but transferred to Louisville the following offseason.

Ohio State is among the favorites to land Lexington (Ky.) Frederick Douglass four-star offensive guard Jager Burton, as well, so there's a good chance that dry spell comes to an end this cycle.

Maryland Defensive Tackle Reveals Top Six Schools

The previously-mentioned Bradley – one of the staff's top-remaining targets at the defensive tackle position – also included Ohio State on his list of top schools on April 5 alongside LSU, Maryland, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC.

The 6-3, 270-pound Bradley is considered the 11th-best defensive tackle and No. 184 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He recorded 41 tackles, five tackles for loss and one sack while leading the Cougars to the state playoffs last fall.

The Buckeyes were among the first programs to extend a scholarship offer to Bradley last September, and he attended a pair of home games in November. That gave him and his family a chance to bond with Johnson, and the two have maintained constant contact ever since.

Bradley does not have a timeline when it comes to making a decision on his future, though rumors of a potential commitment sur-

faced after his teammate, four-star defensive end Demeioun Robinson, pledged his services to the home-state Terrapins on March 27.

That said, he hopes to take all five official visits this summer and then announce his school of choice before the start of his senior season.

Virginia Cornerback Remains High On OSU

As part of his 18th birthday celebration, IMG's Grimes included Ohio State in his top eight on April 8 alongside Clemson, Georgia, North Carolina, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M and Virginia.

The 6-0, 180-pound Grimes – the cousin of Buckeye linebacker Teradja Mitchell – is considered the top-rated cornerback and No. 7 prospect overall in the class of 2021, as he recorded 48 tackles and four interceptions to lead the Cavaliers to the state playoffs last fall.

Grimes landed an offer from Ohio State in May 2019, though it's worth noting his relationship with Washington dates back more than a year to the coach's time as an assistant at Michigan. He attended the annual spring game last year, after which he spent a considerable amount of time with Hafley.

The two had an instant connection, and that coupled with the noticeable improvement of the defensive backs under Hafley's direction last season seemingly put the Buckeyes at the forefront of Grimes' recruitment. But then Hafley's decision in mid-December to become the next head coach at Boston College, as well as the time between his departure and Coombs' arrival in late January, allowed other programs to make their own push – most notably the Bulldogs.

Grimes visited Georgia for the first time in mid-January, and the program received several 247Sports crystal ball predictions in the days thereafter. Ohio State has been facing an uphill battle ever since, though Coombs started chipping away at that lead when he dropped

by Grimes' high school a few days after he was hired.

During that visit, Coombs invited Grimes to return to campus for the annual spring game on April 11. Although that was canceled, Grimes should – at the very minimum – take an official visit with the Buckeyes before making his college decision on Dec. 1.

Recruiting Notes From Around The Country

- Latham was planning to attend Ohio State's spring game and then announce his college decision on April 18. That decision has been pushed back indefinitely, though the Buckeyes hold 100 percent of the 11 crystal ball predictions and will receive an official visit the weekend of June 12-14.

- Despite the pause in on- and off-campus recruiting, Ohio State's coaching staff has been analyzing film and handed out several new scholarship offers in recent weeks. That includes 2021 Orlando (Fla.) Edgewater four-star wide receiver Christian Leary, 2021 Clemmons (N.C.) West Forsyth three-star offensive guard Jared Wilson and 2022 Del Valle (Texas) four-star wide receiver Caleb Burton

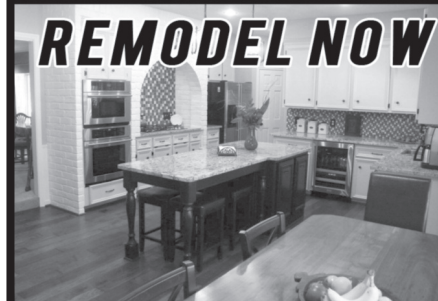
on March 24; 2021 Chicago Maris three-star offensive tackle Pat Coogan on March 30; 2021 Manassas (Va.) Stonewall Jackson four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams and 2022 Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Pace five-star defensive end Shemar Stewart on April 2; 2022 Tiger (Ga.) Rabun County four-star quarterback Gunner Stockton on April 4; 2022 Duncanville, Texas, four-star offensive tackle Jaylen Early on April 5; 2022 Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star athlete C.J. Hicks on April 7; and 2022 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star wide receiver C.J. Williams on April 8.

- Livonia (Mich.) Detroit Country Day three-star offensive tackle Caleb Tiernan committed to Northwestern on March 28, a little over one week after he listed Ohio State among his final four schools. The Buckeyes had several players at the position ahead of Tiernan, and his offer was not committable at the time of his decision.

- IMG Academy four-star running back Lovasea Carroll committed to Georgia on April 9. He included Ohio State in his top five back in January, but Henderson and Pryor's commitments ended chances of him landing in Columbus.

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Sermon Comes To OSU With Final Shot At Stardom

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

On Sept. 9, 2017, No. 2 Ohio State fell to No. 5 Oklahoma 31-16 in its second game of the season. Sooners quarterback Baker Mayfield was the key reason why, throwing for 386 yards and three touchdowns.

But there was another key member of Oklahoma's offense, one who came as more of a surprise. A true freshman running back by the name of Trey Sermon took 17 of the Sooners' 37 carries and finished with 62 yards on the ground, while also adding three receptions for 23 yards and a score.

That receiving touchdown – a 10-yard score with 11:11 to play in the fourth quarter – put Oklahoma up 24-13 and ultimately sealed the road win and flag planting for the Sooners.

"It was the Ohio State game, I remember he kind of had a breakout game," George Stoia, enterprise editor for the OU Daily who covered the Sooners for three seasons, told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "He came in there in the second half and played quite a bit. He caught a big touchdown pass there toward the end, and so that was kind of his coming-out party."

Almost three years later, on March 22, that same running back who broke Ohio State's back in Ohio Stadium announced he will be joining the Buckeyes, filling a key need in the backfield for a team hoping to return to the College Football Playoff.

But how did Sermon – who is set to graduate in May and have one year of immediate eligibility remaining – go from a breakout performance on the biggest stage in just the second game of his college career to leaving Oklahoma altogether?

That freshman season continued to show Sermon's high potential. He rushed for 744 yards on 6.1 yards per carry with five scores on the ground. He also tallied two touchdown grabs on 16 receptions for



COURTESY OF TREY SERMON

RUNNING BACK REINFORCEMENT – Former Oklahoma running back Trey Sermon announced his decision to transfer to Ohio State on March 22, just a few weeks after presumed starter Master Teague suffered an undisclosed injury in practice. He's on track to graduate in May, which means he'll have one year of immediate eligibility remaining.

139 yards.

His most impressive performance of the 2017 season came two games after the win over Ohio State, when Sermon ran 12 times for 148 yards and two touchdowns in a 49-41 win over Baylor, scoring from

34 and 9 yards out on back-to-back possessions in the fourth quarter.

"It was the Baylor game that he kind of took over the starting role," Stoia said. "He came in in that fourth quarter, and I remember he scored two late touchdowns to seal the game. That was the fourth game of the season. So he started the next few games, and then Rodney Anderson kind of came in and took over that spot and, of course, had a spectacular second half of the season."

Anderson would have been the surefire starter for the Sooners if it were not for an injury history that included a fractured fibula in 2015 and a fractured vertebra in his neck in 2016, which led him to minimal reps to begin the 2017 campaign.

The injury opened the door for Sermon, who had 81 carries in the team's first six games of the season to Anderson's 22. But in that sixth game, a 29-24 win over Texas, Anderson hit double-digit carries for the first time that season, rushing 10 times for 48 yards and a touchdown. And, despite Sermon rushing 20 times for 96 yards and even completing a pass to Marquise Brown for 42 yards, he was relegated to backup duty for the remainder of the season.

In Oklahoma's final eight games in the 2017 season, Sermon rushed the ball 40 times, including just twice in the CFP semifinal against Georgia, though those two carries gained a total of 34 yards. Anderson totaled 166 carries in those eight games and finished the season with

1,161 yards and 13 touchdowns on the ground.

Anderson came into 2018 as the clear starter following his breakout year, but again, injuries sidelined him for an extended period after he suffered a torn ACL just two games into the season.

Sermon again seemed primed to take the starting job, rushing 31 times in the next two games, including an 18-carry, 119-yard performance against Army. But the following matchup against Baylor, a team Sermon had lit up the season prior, gave way to a new running back in the Oklahoma backfield.

Sermon rushed eight times for 19 yards against the Bears, while freshman running back Kennedy Brooks, playing for just the second time that year, ran the ball eight times for 107 yards and a pair of touchdowns in the victory.

Brooks didn't immediately take the job, but the backfield began to split. Sermon still had 109 carries in the final nine games, but Brooks had 107, and the two continued to be used more in tandem the rest of the year.

"They're two different styles of runners," Stoia said. "I think Kennedy obviously has a lot better speed, he has kind of breakaway speed. But he's not the most physical running back, whereas Trey was a lot more physical. I mean, he has one of the best stiff-arms in college football that I've seen."

Despite the differences in styles, both Sermon and Brooks had strong cam-

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paigns in 2018, with Sermon finishing with 947 rushing yards and 13 scores, including a 206-yard, three-touchdown performance against Texas Tech on Nov. 3 to help earn a 51-46 win.

"I remember the Texas Tech game in 2018 on the road, he came in and he was unbelievable," Stoia said. "I think that's the best game of his career. He was incredible that game."

But Brooks outgained Sermon with 1,056 yards on the ground and 12 touchdowns, finishing with an impressive 8.9 yards per carry.

Still, in 2019 Sermon began the season as the starter and earned more carries than Brooks in each of the first two games, which was helped by Brooks missing the entire offseason due to a pending Title IX investigation. But there was a new, added threat to the amount of rushes that the then-junior running back would be receiving.

"A widely discussed and debated topic among the OU beat this last year was Trey not getting the ball as much, and a lot of that was pinpointed on that Jalen Hurts really ran the ball a ton," Stoia said. "I mean, it was almost like he was stealing carries from both him and Kennedy."

Hurts, a graduate transfer out of Alabama, joined the Sooners following a Heisman-winning season by Kyler Murray, who ran the ball 140 times for 1,001 yards. But Hurts took the dual-threat aspect of his game even further, rushing 233 times in his lone season at Oklahoma, more than Brooks' (155) and Sermon's (54) carries combined.

Sermon continued to get rushes throughout his first five games, getting a total of 45 carries for 345 yards and four scores, but his workload almost completely dried up from there.

Brooks became the primary back, and Sermon was passed by a different power runner in Rhamondre Stevenson, and he rushed the ball just nine times for 40 yards in his final four games of action before a torn ACL ended his campaign for good.

After rushing the ball 11 times for 71 yards and a touchdown while also bringing in a receiving touchdown against Kansas in game No. 5, Sermon did not

receive a single carry in the game against Texas.

"The OU-Texas game, the biggest game of the year, he didn't even touch the ball," Stoia said. "I remember that was a huge topic was why didn't Trey Sermon get in the game? And then from there, it was just downhill."

"I remember it was a discussion every week at Lincoln Riley's press conferences like, 'What's going on with Trey Sermon?' And no one really had an answer. And it wasn't like they needed him, necessarily, but it was just weird to not see Trey Sermon because he'd been such a big part of the offense the last two years."

Despite finishing with the fourth-most carries in his final season at Oklahoma, Sermon ended the year with 7.1 yards per carry, a career best and a mark that was No. 2 on the team among players with more than three rushes.

Sermon will still need to recover from the injury that forced him to miss the rest of the 2019 season, but Stoia said if his appearance at Oklahoma's Pro Day was any hint at what's to come, Sermon's recovery from the ACL tear will be mostly solved by the time Ohio State is ready to take the field.

"I think anytime that somebody goes through an ACL injury, it's going to be difficult to return. But, you know, Trey's a good-looking running back," Stoia said. "I saw him actually at Pro Day and this was before he even entered the transfer portal, and he looked great. And so I think he will be fine."

"He's probably pretty far along in the process because at Pro Day he was walking around, nothing, no brace, no crutches, no anything. And of course, I think he tore it in November, so I would expect him to be fully healthy come fall. Of course, I don't know if the season will start in the fall, but I think he'll be fine."

Sermon comes to Ohio State as the expected starter after Master Teague suffered a reported Achilles injury that would have forced him to miss the remainder of spring practice. Now Sermon brings a bevy of experience, including a pair of College Football Playoff games, to a backfield that already featured a Heisman Trophy finalist in quarterback Justin Fields.

"I think, going into an offense like Ohio State's, he's going to be great," Stoia said. "With Justin Fields back there, just look what he did with Kyler Murray. And I think Justin Fields and Kyler Murray are very comparable in a lot of ways, and so you put Trey back there with a guy like that, I think there are going to be a lot of opportunities for him."

Sermon produced in the majority of the moments he was placed in during his time at Oklahoma. But every season, there

was another running back, or a run-heavy quarterback, who took a percentage of his carries away.

The same possibility awaits him at Ohio State, where a healthy Teague could battle for a major role, as well as second-year players Marcus Crowley and Steele Chambers. But Sermon comes in with more experience than all of those players combined and has a golden opportunity to earn that star role he was hoping to gain with the Sooners.

"I think he'll excel," Stoia said. "Buckeye fans are really going to fall in love with him because he just plays. He doesn't complain a whole lot about things, and he just goes out there and lays it all on the field."

After three seasons of flashing potential, Sermon has the chance to be a star in the stadium where he first truly showed that potential all the way back in 2017.

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Virus Not First Disaster To Impact Ohio State Football

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

There is a looming threat that college football may not be the same as it has been, or that it may not happen at all due to the pandemic that is the coronavirus (COVID-19), which has infected hundreds of thousands worldwide.

Currently, COVID-19 has canceled all spring sports for collegiate athletes and put the NBA and NHL seasons on hold, with their respective postseasons in question. If these concerns move into July, and then into August, there's no telling what the NCAA will do about the football season, and if games are lost or delayed, it will be just the fourth time that non-football circumstances have led to a change in Ohio State's football schedule.

Of the three other instances, only one is similar to what is currently going on, but all three were major events that permanently changed the United States and that put college football, as well as sporting events of any kind, on the back burner.

Sept. 11 Attacks

The Buckeyes were ready to host San Diego State on Sept. 15, 2001, for the first time in the two programs' histories, but on the Tuesday before it, everything even close to resembling football was put to the side as planes crashed into the World Trade Center, Pentagon and a field near Shanksville, Pa.

Those Sept. 11 attacks, that killed nearly 3,000 and injured 25,000 more, led to the cancellation of major sports across the country, including that week's slate of college football games.

"We were having our meetings when Dave Kennedy, our strength coach, walked in and told us what had happened," Bill Conley, a coach on Ohio State's staff at the time, told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "Then, of course, they had it all on and we put it on in the team room. It was on all day long and, you know, go in there and look at it and stuff like that, it was a really scary moment."

Instead of the game that was to take place in Ohio Stadium, Ohio State held a memorial service that Saturday, the "Show You Care" rally that helped raise over \$650,000 for families of people lost to this national tragedy.

"There was a memorial service held at the stadium that afternoon" Ohio State football historian Jack Park told BSB. "And I suppose there was 15,000-20,000 people there. It was very, very somber."

For instance, if you went to the stadium, the concessions or nothing like that was open. They weren't selling hot dogs. They weren't doing things like that. It was just people there to remember what had happened."

The game against the Aztecs was scheduled to be the second for newly named Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel, who instead followed up his debut win against Akron with a trip across the country against UCLA on Sept. 22, which ended in a 13-6 loss for the Buckeyes.

"The atmosphere at that game was a little different," Conley said. "We flew out there. And it wasn't a packed stadium or anything. It was right after that situation. It just felt more like a scrimmage than a game."

Park said that the tragic events the week prior led to an overall fear of travel, and that was the cause of many Ohio State fans not making that trip to Pasadena, Calif.

"That was Jim Tressel's first road game," Park recalled. "We lost a game out there. There were a lot of people planning to go to that game. And it was a big trip – you know, go out and play UCLA, and many of the people did not go because they didn't want to fly."

Even though Tressel was just in his second game as Ohio State's head coach, he came into the job with 26 prior seasons of coaching experience, including 15 as a head coach at Youngstown State.

All that experience became evident during a time of tragedy and the unknown, as Conley said Tressel continued to display his best qualities, even at the worst of times.

"We didn't practice for a couple days,



FILE PHOTO

UNUSUAL ROAD TRIP – Former head coach Jim Tressel led Ohio State across the country to take on UCLA in the program's first game following the Sept. 11 attacks. The Buckeyes lost to the Bruins, 13-6.

obviously, but he handled it, like he always does, business as usual pretty much," Conley said. "He was very good at presenting the situation in a very, both, I guess you'd say patriotic and also in a caring fashion. That's just his style, and he's first-class all the way."

As for that San Diego State game, once football became important again, the Buckeyes and Aztecs had a matching idle week later in the 2001 season and moved the meeting to that week, on Oct. 20. Ohio State won that game 27-12, scoring 21 unanswered points in the second half and forcing five turnovers.

Over a month had passed since that fateful day in September at that point, and life began to return to normal. But just a week later, Park recounted a story of just how different everything was following 9/11.

"I can remember sometime that week, maybe around Wednesday of that week or something like that, I had a speaking engagement in Phoenix for the Arizona Society of CPAs. And they went ahead and held it. So I flew out maybe on Tuesday, and there were about six people on that airplane," Park said. "I remember getting into the Phoenix Airport and going down to get my luggage and there was just nobody there. I mean, it was just like you had your own private airport. It was scary, it was really scary."

"It took people a while to get back into wanting to fly. And it may be that way now after we get through this virus, although it looks like it's going to be quite a while yet."

Conley remembers that week as the time "college football shut down for a week."

"Nothing like that ever happens," Conley said. "We played them later on in the year. But everybody at first, the first 24 hours, nobody knew what was going to happen."

JFK Assassination

Much like the Sept. 11 attacks, the sports world took a pause in many instances following the death of President John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963.

Kennedy, who was shot and killed in a motorcade in Dallas, along with police officer J.D. Tippit, was just 46 years old. Texas Governor John Connally was shot but survived the incident.

That tragic event occurred at 12:30 p.m. on a Friday, and by Saturday morning, much of the college football world had postponed their games.

"The whole country had everything pretty well shut down," Park said. "The Ohio State team was actually in Ann Arbor. And I can't remember exactly if they were at the stadium doing their practice. They always do a Friday run-through at the stadium. And I think they may have been at the hotel going to the practice or maybe they were at the practice, but Ohio State was up there."

"There were a lot of big college football games. That's a big rivalry weekend. Some of them were played, some of them are canceled and never played. And some of them were postponed."

But not every game was delayed, and some, including Ohio State's, which was up in Ann Arbor as the Buckeyes were set to take on rival Michigan, did not get moved until just a few hours before it was set to begin.

"As people went to bed Friday night, the game was on," Park said. "It was rumored, and this is just a rumor and probably some stuff I read in the paper back at that time, but it was rumored that maybe the governor of Michigan called the University of Michigan, probably called the president, and suggested Saturday morning that 'Hey, you shouldn't be playing this game.' So,



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the Ohio State-Michigan game was not postponed until roughly three to four hours before kickoff."

So, Ohio State's football team left Ann Arbor without a game being played. But Ohio State's band, which was already traveling up into the rival state to be in attendance for the game, had not received the memo that the game was off.

Because of this, there had to be some extra measures in order to intercept the band en route, according to Park.

"Ohio State had plans to take its band, so they had buses lined up there out in front of St. John Arena, and the band showed up and they took off for Ann Arbor because the game is on," Park said. "Well, when word came down that the game had been postponed and would not be played that day, at that time you didn't have cell phones, didn't have Internet.

"All of a sudden, the Ohio State athletic department here says, 'Hey, we have to get ahold of the band and let them know that the game's been postponed till next week,' and they didn't have a way to get ahold of them. They called the Michigan Highway Patrol, and they told them the circumstances and said, 'As far as we could estimate, from the time that we know the band left here in Columbus, and we would estimate that the band by this time they're probably into Michigan, not too far above the Ohio-Michigan border.'

"Sure enough, the Michigan State Patrol sent out a car or two, it probably wouldn't have taken them too long to locate those buses, and they pulled them over and explained what had happened. And that's how the band found out about it."

The game was moved back a week to Nov. 30, and on Thanksgiving weekend, the Buckeyes won 14-10, scoring the game's final 14 points, capped off by a 5-yard touchdown run by Don Unverferth with 7:20 to go in the fourth quarter. It was a strong win to end a mediocre season for Ohio State in front of a road attendance of just 36,424.

"We finished that year 5-3-1," Park said, "and I think Michigan may have finished 4-5. It was not a game that meant anything in the Big Ten standings, much like it would in a few years. It's just a game between Ohio State and Michigan, but it probably would have drawn 70 or 80,000 had it been played

on the scheduled date.

"A lot was made over the fact that since it was over Thanksgiving weekend and the game didn't really mean anything, many of the Michigan students who would have gone to the game that day went home for Thanksgiving and didn't come back for the game. So, it was a low crowd."

Spanish Flu

The closest parallel to the current pandemic under way is the Spanish flu that killed 50 million people in 1918 and infected 500 million, approximately a quarter of the world's population.

Football was a relatively new sport during this time and was not nearly as organized as it is today. Because of that, as a deadly infection continued to grow all over the globe, football was played, at least initially.

"Ohio State ended up only playing six games that year," Park said. "We won three nonconference games, and we lost all three of our conference games. Ohio State went (several weeks) in between games there. Like after, maybe the third game of the season, but I think it was four weeks before they played again."

Ohio State defeated nonconference opponents Ohio Wesleyan (41-0), Denison (34-0) and Case (56-0) before falling to conference foes Illinois (13-0), Wisconsin (14-3) and Michigan (14-0).

As Park stated, between the Denison and Case matchups, Ohio State took nearly a month hiatus, not playing football between Oct. 12 and Nov. 9.

"It was kind of a week-to-week thing," Park said. "I don't know who had the jurisdiction. There was one Saturday there in October, that about – there were like maybe 30 games to be played in the Midwest – about 20 of them got canceled."

Because of all the inconsistencies and cancellations, the Big Ten standings were all over the board in 1918.

Michigan was atop the conference with just five wins in as many games and winning just a pair of Big Ten matchups. Illinois went 4-0 in the conference but lost two out of three outside of it. Indiana went winless in the Big Ten due to not being able to play a single conference matchup the entire season. The Hoosiers went 2-2 in the non-conference.

There was no Big Ten champion named that season, and there was no consensus national champion, with the NCAA record book listing both the Wolverines and Pittsburgh as the two champs.

Will There Be A Season?

There are still more than four months until the 2020 college football season is set to begin, but will that be enough time for the COVID-19 pandemic to slow down and allow teams to not only play but be able to practice and train long enough to be ready to play?

Conley was confident in that, especially with all the restrictions that have been put in place this early in the spread of the virus.

"The way things have been going the last few weeks, it looks like everything's going to be OK," Conley said. "I think it will affect people's habits and attitudes a little bit. Like everybody's talking about, there will probably be a lot less flu next year because people will be washing their hands more and things like that, watching the social distancing, more conscious of it, not as much shaking hands, probably more fists and stuff like that.

"But I would think by then everybody will be ready for something like that. They'll be ready for it, to get back to a normal situation."

Park was less certain. The Ohio State historian said that he had watched interviews with Texas head coach Tom Herman and former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit, both of whom voiced potential doubts on a season happening.

He also said that Miami of Ohio's statements on if its academic year will begin as scheduled just added to his doubts.

"The stay-at-home time has now been extended in Ohio to April 30. My guess is it will go beyond that," Park said. "And there's an article in the paper today that Miami of Ohio is now wondering if they'll be able to start school next fall. Here you have Miami of Ohio looking at will we even be able to start up school in the fall and they don't mention anything about football because I think that's unimportant compared to starting up the schools."

And if football is shortened or canceled altogether, Park said he is worried about the domino effect that may cause in the city of Columbus.

"If Ohio State didn't have a football season, just think of the economic impact on central Ohio," Park said. "I mean, the hotels, the restaurants, just the food that gets sold for tailgate parties. And if there's no football season, what happens to all these big contracts with FOX and ESPN and everybody? I don't think they could be required to pay the schools if there's no game to be televised.

"And if you think of an athletic budget the size of Ohio State's, there's just so many things that never have been thought of before. I mean, don't we have a lot of assistants that make a million dollars or more? I mean, how can you keep all those guys on? It's something you don't even like to think about.

"Do I think there's a possibility there will be no football season? I really do. I really do. I mean, you think today we're wanting to keep everybody so separated, and to put 108,000 people shoulder to shoulder in Ohio Stadium in just a little bit over four months, it's something that it's hard to know. It's just really hard to know."

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The Rise And Fall Of The Glenville Football Pipeline

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State signed at least one player from Cleveland Glenville in every recruiting cycle from 2002 to 2014, making the public high school one of the most notable college football pipelines in the country for a period of time.

It all started with quarterback Troy Smith – who was the final member of the Buckeyes' 2002 recruiting class – and included notable players such as safety Donte Whitner in 2003, Ted Ginn Jr. in 2004, linebacker Jermae Hines in 2007, offensive tackle Marcus Hall in 2009, safety Christian Bryant in 2010, quarterback Cardale Jones in 2011, linebacker Chris Worley in 2013 and cornerback Marshon Lattimore in 2014.

In all, 22 Tarblooders made their way to Columbus during that 13-year span. And while they all reached varying levels of success at Ohio State, the fact that they even made it to college was a big win for Glenville head coach Ted Ginn Sr., who long ago realized that the impact he could have on his players' lives extended far beyond the playing field.

"Teddy's motivation all along was to just get his kids college-educated," 247Sports recruiting analyst Bill Greene told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "If you look back over the years, he had probably 100 kids play college ball at different schools across the country and at different levels. His thing was getting

his kids college degrees."

Ginn's plan was put into motion in the summer of 2000, when he piled eight of his players into a rented van and took them to college camps across the Midwest. He eventually invited rival high schools and those from less-fortunate backgrounds to participate, and the tour became so large after a few years that they had to rent a bus to fit all of the kids.

"He was the first person I ever knew to take a busload of kids and take them to a bunch of different schools," Greene said.

Interestingly, Michigan was the first program to benefit from Ginn's camp tours, when linebacker Pierre Woods landed a scholarship offer following a strong camp performance that first summer and eventually committed to the Wolverines.

"I don't know that (former Ohio State head coach John) Cooper ever offered him," Greene said, noting how things quickly changed when Jim Tressel was hired in 2001.

Whereas Cooper had a national recruiting approach, Tressel focused most of his attention on the state of Ohio. That led him to establish a strong relationship with Ginn Sr. – and the rest is history.

Smith went on to win the 2006 Heisman Trophy and led the Buckeyes to three victories against Michigan, two Big Ten titles and an appearance in the BCS National Championship Game, while Whitner and Ginn Jr. became first-round NFL draft picks.

Now that's not to say Ohio State didn't have its share of misses from Glenville,



JOSH WINSLOW

FAMILIAR FACES – Glenville head coach Ted Ginn Sr., left, chats with former Ohio State head coach John Cooper ahead of the Buckeyes' 55-14 win over Illinois on Nov. 1, 2014.

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either, as players such as Dareus Hiley (2003), Freddie Lenix (2005) and Shawntel Rowell (2008) struggled to maintain their academic eligibility or transferred to another program. But more often than not, Ginn Sr. led Tressel in the right direction when it came to his players.

"There was so much trust between them that Tressel took some guys that – if they weren't at Glenville – I don't think he would have taken them," Greene said.

Tressel's resignation in 2011 amid the tattoo-for-memorabilia scandal could have brought an end to the Glenville pipeline. The same could be said of Urban Meyer's arrival one year later, especially given his own national recruiting approach. But the Buckeyes still continued to target the Tarblooders, as evidenced by the 2014 class that included Lattimore, safety Erick Smith and offensive lineman Marcelys Jones, which tied the 2006 haul of offensive lineman Bryant Browning, wide receiver Ray Small and defensive end Robert Rose for the most players from Glenville in one cycle.

Things were a bit different from Ginn Sr.'s perspective, however.

In the fall of 2012, he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at age 57 and missed most of the next two seasons of coaching as a result. Ginn ultimately overcame 5 percent survival odds and is now cancer free, but there's no doubt his personal battle impacted his coaching abilities.

"Urban coming to Ohio State really coincided with Ted Sr. getting very sick," Greene said. "Then you kind of combine that with the northern part of the state not getting the type of talent and the type of kids they were before, and everything just kind of dried out."

"There used to be a time when I would drive up to Glenville, and there would be eight to 10 Division-I kids. Then I would shoot over to Cleveland St. Ignatius, and they would have seven or eight Division-I kids. Then I would bop over to Lakewood St. Edward, and they would have seven or eight Division-I kids. Those days are gone."

That's not an exaggeration, either, as only two Glenville players have signed with a Power Five program in the last six recruiting cycles combined. That includes 2015 three-star wide receiver Frank Sumpter and 2020 three-star safety William Anglen, who landed with Illinois and Colorado, respectively.

"It wasn't like Urban didn't want to take Glenville kids," Greene said. "They just don't have the talent they used to have. And it's not like the kids were going to Notre Dame, Michigan, Michigan State or Purdue, either. They weren't. The interesting thing would be to see how Tressel would have handled it if he was still at Ohio State. Would he have kept taking Glenville kids that weren't Ohio State material just because of his relationship and respect for Ted Sr.? You can't take a guy if you don't think he can play."

"But again, that fell hand-in-hand with Ted Sr. being near death, and I think his priorities really changed at that point. He's older now, and I don't think he has the fire that he had when he was younger."

Greene recalled the time Glenville lost the state championship to Hilliard Davidson in 2009, which was Cardale Jones' junior season. The Wildcats scored a touchdown and converted the two-point try with just over a minute remaining to win the game, 16-15.

"It was a crushing defeat, and I remember telling him I felt terrible because they had that game won," Greene said. "He was like, 'Don't feel bad for me. Feel bad for my kids. I don't care. Even if we won this game, I've got two kids that are not going to have anywhere to live come next week."

One kid's dad is going to jail. I've got eight kids that need winter coats.' He listed all of the problems he had to take care of that were all secondary to what coaches at other schools were going through. They don't have to deal with that. He was more than a football coach, and I think that wore him down a little bit."

To this day, Ginn continues to coach the Glenville football and track and field programs. He also runs the Ginn Academy, which is in its 13th year providing education and structure to at-risk boys, which spreads him pretty thin.

"He's far more than just a guy that teaches and happens to coach football," Greene said. "He put so much into those kids, even those who didn't play football. He's just an amazing man."

Switching Gears

When the Glenville pipeline dried up, Ohio State immediately latched on to some notable high school football powerhouses in other states, including Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas, which has produced six Buckeyes since the turn of the century. That includes safety Nate Salley in 2002, wide receiver Duron Carter in 2009, defensive end Joey Bosa in 2013, cornerback Damon Arnette in 2015, defensive end Nick Bosa in 2016 and wide receiver Trevon Grimes in 2017.

Cornerback Jordan Battle committed to Ohio State during the 2019 recruiting cycle, as well, but flipped to Alabama on the first day of the Early Signing Period, showing just how difficult it can be for the Buckeyes to land and hold on to prospects from south Florida.

Ohio State also made significant inroads at Detroit Cass Tech in recent years thanks to then-cornerbacks coach and area recruiter Kerry Coombs, whose energetic efforts helped secure commitments from safety Damon Webb in 2014 and running back Mike Weber and offensive lineman Joshua Alabi in 2015.

The Wolverines turned the tide back in their favor in 2017, however, landing five-star wide receiver Donovan Peoples-Jones and safety Jaylen Kelly-Powell – though it's worth noting the Buckeyes haven't offered a single Technician since.

A similar but more recent run occurred at Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian Academy, as Ohio State signed cornerback Shaun Wade in 2017, cornerback Tyreke Johnson in 2018 and running back Marcus Crowley in 2019.

The Buckeyes were also among the early favorites to land cornerbacks Fred Davis and Miles Brooks in 2020 but ultimately focused their attention elsewhere. The Conquerors, meanwhile, finished last season with a 5-6 record and their highest-ranked 2021 prospect is a wide receiver ranked outside of the nation's top-300 prospects.

Of all the pipeline possibilities, Ohio State has found the most success at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, a college-prep boarding school that attracts some of the nation's best high-school athletes. The Buckeyes have landed six Ascenders since the program was established in 2013, including 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 in 2020.

That run will likely continue in the current recruiting cycle, too, with Ohio State considered the favorite for offensive tackle J.C. Latham and among the top suitors for defensive tackle Tunmise Adeleye and

cornerback Kamar Wilcoxson. But with other elite programs vying for those same signatures, landing a prospect from IMG Academy will never be an easy task for the Buckeyes.

"Glenville's an in-state program, and the friendship between Tressel and Ted Sr. was just so strong," Greene said. "It was automatic back then. If you look at the percentage of guys that Ohio State offered from Glenville, they got almost everyone they wanted. The only guy I can think of that had an offer and didn't end up at Ohio State was (2008 four-star wide receiver) Cordale Scott, who went to Illinois."

"You're not going to see that at another school, and I don't think (Ohio State head coach Ryan Day) can form a relationship like that at a school like IMG when those guys know (Clemson head coach) Dabo Swinney, they know (Alabama head coach) Nick Saban and they know (Florida head coach) Dan Mullen. You're not going to have that extra favoritism."

The story is much different back home, though.

Walk a high school hallway in Ohio and you're bound to find more kids wearing scarlet and gray than any other colors, and

that's why Ohio State rarely has any trouble getting any in-state player it wants.

But even the best programs in the state – whether it's Cincinnati powerhouses Colerain, Elder, La Salle or St. Xavier; Massillon Washington; Mentor; or Pickerington Central, just to name a few – struggle to produce more than one or two prospects worthy of an offer from the Buckeyes, and that's what makes it difficult to establish any sort of local pipeline.

Instead, Ohio State's staff simply targets the best players in the state, regardless of location. If they happen to play at a program that has produced a Buckeye or two in the past, it's merely a coincidence.

"When you look at the overall nature of when Ohio State offers an in-state guy, the odds are really good that they're going to get him," Greene said. "They've got such an advantage being that they're Ohio State. A lot of these kids grew up wanting to be a Buckeye, so the staff should hit on an extremely high percentage whether they're from the same school or from all corners of the state."

"Really, the whole state is a pipeline, and that's why I just don't think that we'll ever see something like Glenville ever again."

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Haas Played Few Minutes But Has Good Memories

By JEFF RAPP
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

While sequestered in his home in the sleepy town of Smith Center, Kan., during the coronavirus epidemic, Mitch Haas is taking a stroll down memory lane and looking back on his event-filled youth.

About mid-interview, the reporter asks Haas – seldom-used yet still beloved in his time in the Ohio State men's basketball program in the early 1980s – if he is able to look back at his college years with fondness. That's when the 58-year-old philosopher, coach and true lover of life emerges.

"Sport and physical education is as valuable as any other discipline," Haas told BSB, his voice rising. "You're using your whole body, you're using your soul, your emotions, your mind. Everything has to be perfect in every way. It's real education. It's the secret to health. "So there's no regrets."

Haas arrived to Ohio State in 1979 a highly rated 6-7 shooting forward from Moraga, Calif. In fact, he was named the Northern California Player of the Year. He played virtually every position at some point in his storied high school career, and reports were that he had shooting range out to 30 feet.

His on-court contribution at Ohio State wasn't what he or many others expected, however, as he sported modest career averages of 1.6 points and 4.8 minutes per game. In his 63 appearances for the Buckeyes, he started just once. If his career had occurred just a few years later, when the three-point arc was

installed, perhaps its trajectory would have been different.

There were some noteworthy moments on the court, though, especially in his second season of 1980-81. He scored 65 points as a sophomore including a career-high 18 against Wisconsin on 8-of-13 shooting. For the season, he drained 28 of 50 shots (56.0 percent), several of them from long range.

That begot a junior year during which he scored just eight points and was glued to the bench behind superstar forward Tony Campbell.

"The success I encountered my sophomore year might have made me a little lazy," Haas admitted to BSB in 1982 following that forgotten season.

He redeemed himself a bit as a senior by more than doubling his playing time and contributing senior leadership. Still, his career ended abruptly with a 64-51 loss to Michael Jordan-led North Carolina in the 1983 NCAA tourney.

"We had just beaten Syracuse and were playing pretty well," Haas recalled. "I thought we had a chance."

Weeks after that postseason, he again opened up to BSB, saying, "All the experiences I've had – the relationships with my teammates, the coaching staff, the pressures we've been under, the pressures I've put on myself to do well have all been worthwhile. I feel I've had a very worthwhile basketball career."

Indeed, Haas got to play in one of the best eras of Big Ten basketball and joined the Buckeyes on a preseason trip to Spain and in an exhibition against the Yugoslav Nationals

among other memorable encounters. He also earned a degree in marketing.

To even his surprise, Haas gravitated to a career in coaching, specializing in varsity high school basketball. While living and coaching in Iowa, he'd often visit Eldon Miller, his college mentor, while Miller was at the University of Northern Iowa.

Haas was sometimes critical of Miller's tactics but quickly developed an appreciation for his style and no-nonsense instruction.

"He really harped on being ready to play," he said of Miller. "When you practice, be ready. Each thing you do, be ready, more than ready. That was his biggest thing: full value."

Born in Washington Court House, Ohio, exactly one year after brief OSU teammate Art Schlichter, Haas lived in Hillsboro in southern Ohio until he was 9 then resided in Framingham, Mass., and Plymouth, Mich. (Jim Ellinghausen's hometown) until moving to California. His father was a member of the sales fleet division of Lincoln Mercury and excelled as a manager. The senior Haas ended up buying his own dealership and entrenched the family there.

Coaching took Mitch Haas to several other places including stints at three Ohio high schools: Wilmington, Nelsonville-York and Clermont Northeastern in Owensville. After living in parts of Iowa, Haas finally settled in Smith Center – tucked in rural, north-central Kansas – where he has been for 10 years. An only child, Haas also spends a good amount of his time back in northern California to check in on his parents and to harvest the grapes at their vineyard.

Returning there sometimes reminds him of how bright-eyed he was as a teenager and what it was like to be part of one of the nation's highest-ranking incoming classes, a group led by Ohio phenom Clark Kellogg.

"When Clark was coming in there, this was a big deal," he said. "This was Magic Johnson who could rebound, for crying out loud. This guy, when he got a rebound, it was like a windshield wiper going across your windshield."

"Everyone was jacked up. I mean, we were intoxicated with talent."

With Kellogg immediately inserted into a loaded starting lineup, the 1979-80 Buckeyes went 21-8 vs. a brutal schedule, finished second in the Big Ten and advanced to the Sweet 16 of the NCAA Tournament before losing to eventual runner-up UCLA. Five members of that team went on to careers in the NBA – Herb Williams, Kelvin Ransey, Jim Smith, Granville Waiters and Kellogg.

"It was pretty tough to get in the starting lineup when you had teammates like that," Haas said with a chuckle. "I really had to work just to get in there."

"I took it very serious, though. I really obsessed with it. I did everything I could possibly do. I was very hard on myself, and Coach Miller was a demanding guy."

Haas not only practiced against highly talented teammates, he also arrived at a time when the Big Ten showcased stars such as Joe Barry Carroll, Kevin McHale, Isiah Thomas, Mike McGee, Jay Vincent and Mike Woodson. Playing in a premier conference, Haas sometimes found he was a step slow and struggled to defend. Even so, he endeared himself to

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OHIO STATE BASKETBALL

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"I think it was that I was able to shoot and make some perimeter shots," he said. "It was something that I think people thought that we needed because we were so big inside. I caught fire in a game at home, and it seemed like things were taking off for a moment. But those were some hard times, I'll admit."

Haas occasionally allowed his self-criticism to engulf him, but that evaporated over time.

"I definitely look at it differently now," he said. "Eventually you have to live in the real world. For some people that realization comes when you're 35, 40 years old. For me, it was pretty soon. I played one year in Europe and then I had a hard adjustment to getting back to real life, because you miss that intensity – running the floor, going after the ball spontaneously and banging around, and having the thrill of being on your game. You're like a musician and you know it, and you can't be without it."

"Well, when you get older, there's not that intensity. You're at the YMCA."

One way Haas has learned to accept his metamorphosis has been through regular meditation sessions.

"I think there are a lot of athletes who have a hard time no longer being in their chosen sport since their youth when you're fresh and vibrant and artistic," he said. "Being able to replicate that feeling of bliss inside when you get older, it's tough."

That depth of understanding was the main motivation for a free-spirited deep shooter to become a coach.

"Some of these communities are very rural and maybe don't have the economic development," said Haas, who still plays roundball recreationally. "You start to develop compassion for kids and just what sport is in the big picture and how it can be healthy for you."

"I realized that I had to coach and I had to help each kid feel that he was successful. It was my responsibility that he got right to the edge of that and that he knew what principles we went by to duplicate that in anything you do in the future. I kind of broke it down into a science of life."

Reflecting On Former Teammates

Haas treasures his time in the OSU men's basketball program (1979-83) and tries to stay in touch with some of his former teammates, including Williams and Kellogg. He is still

good friends with Joe Concheck and Larry Huggins. Recently, he had a chance reunion with Dave Jones in California.

BSB asked Haas to supply us with a special memory of some of his most talented Ohio State teammates. They follow:

Herb Williams – "Herb had the softest baby hook you'd ever see. It was like he was dropping a cotton ball into a basket. His hands were so soft, and he would just barely turn his body and drop it in."

Kelvin Ransey – "My best memory of Kelvin is when I was a freshman down there and before or after practice there were guys lining up to watch him dunk."

Clark Kellogg – "His fingers and hands were unbelievable. The best moment I remember came at home against Indiana in 1980. Clark stole the ball and went down and took off from the dotted (line) and threw down a nice windmill dunk, and the place went crazy. That was a moment."

Tony Campbell – "He was a tremendous athlete. When he first got to Ohio State, he really wasn't the most disciplined player. He was tremendously talented, but he was still making his adjustment from the playgrounds of New York to Eldon Miller's laboratory. Once he figured it out ... man."

Ron Stokes/Troy Taylor – "It was like these guys were psychic. One would take one side of the floor and the other would take the other side, and somehow the ball went from side to side. It's like they were on walkie-talkies."

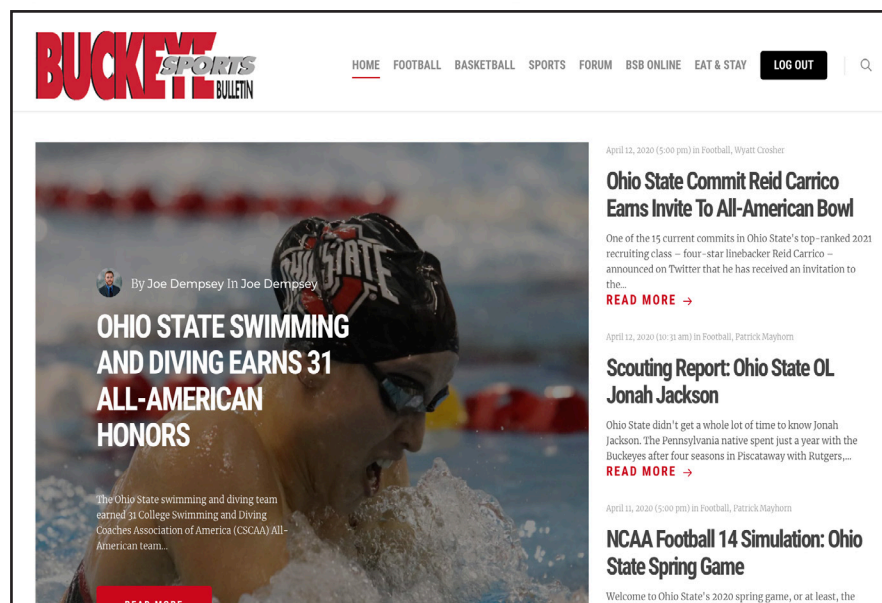
Haas said he has followed OSU basketball in the years and decades since he left campus. He struck up a bond with Lawrence Funderburke and became a huge fan of the 1991-92 Buckeyes that won the Big Ten title. He also enjoyed the Thad Matta era and was caught up in the memorable 2006-07 and 2010-11 seasons that also netted league titles and thrilling postseason games.

Haas, who once considered painting his house in Smith Center, Kan., scarlet and gray, also enjoyed Chris Holtmann's latest team.

"Oh yeah, big fan," he said. "It was amazing how this team peaked at Christmas. What a well-oiled machine. It was like they played so well that they had to wait two months to accomplish anything else. So I enjoyed this year's team, and it was real heartening to see them enjoying themselves and winning again."

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Season Over But Transfers Happen At Dizzying Pace

What in the heck do Howard Stern and Tom Brady have to do with the Ohio State men's basketball team?

Nothing directly, but during a two-hour interview on Stern's April 8 SiriusXM show, Brady commented on how as a sophomore quarterback he was unhappy with his situation and considered transferring closer to home to play for the California Golden Bears. His remarks are pertinent to collegiate sports in general and specifically to the Ohio State men's basketball team, where the Buckeyes have been victimized by and benefited from the wave of transfers that have become the norm.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

To recap:

Freshman guard D.J. Carton, freshman forward Alonzo Gaffney and sophomore guard Luther Muhammad entered their names in the transfer portal after the 2019-20 season abruptly ended March 12, when NCAA athletics were stopped due to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Forward Micah Potter's transfer to Wisconsin days before the start of the 2018-19 season and Jaedon LeDee leaving a year ago at this time for TCU makes five players who have exited the program of coach Chris Holtmann in less than two years.

Other subtractions to the roster after this season are forwards Andre Wesson and Danny Hummer each exhausting their eligibility and junior forward Kaleb Wesson most likely entering the 2020 NBA draft.

The Buckeyes compensated for the three transfers out by bringing in three transfers. The most recent came April 11 when Utah State graduate Abel Porter said he will become a Buckeye.

Porter had 55 career starts out of his 94 games for the Aggies. This past season, he averaged 5.6 points and 3.2 assists per game. He has one season of eligibility left and is expected to

back up point guard C.J. Walker, who transferred from Florida State before the 2018-19 season, which he had to sit out per NCAA transfer rules.

Also entering the program this year via transfers are junior guard Jimmy Sotos from Bucknell, who will sit a season and have a year of eligibility in 2021-22, and forward Seth Towns, a Columbus Northland product and Harvard graduate who will play his final two seasons as a Buckeye.

Ohio State last year added former California forward Justice Sueing, who, while sitting out the 2019-20 season because of transfer rules, underwent surgery on his left foot. He has two seasons remaining.

Also, incoming freshmen Eugene Brown, a four-star shooting guard from Decatur (Ga.) Southwest DeKalb, and three-star forward Zed Key out of Glen Head (N.Y.) Long Island Lutheran will add depth.

That's quite a roster makeover. Assuming Kaleb Wesson does not return, the Buckeyes will be at the maximum 13 scholarships for the 2020-21 season.

That's if there are no more players leaving.

Some transfer departures are personal – Carton is in that category after he revealed in late January that he was dealing with mental health issues – while others may be more about competition and finding the right system. Transferring to another school is not an Ohio State problem but a national trend. For example, Purdue's 7-3 center Matt Haarms entered the transfer portal April 6.

No one can begrudge a player wanting more playing time, and sometimes a coaching change prompts a player to look elsewhere. But more and more it seems that players would rather bolt than face adversity through competition. Hence, the words of Brady, who decided to stick it out with the Wolverines rather than start anew.

"I was thinking maybe I should go (to California) because I'd get more of an opportunity to play there," he told Stern. "I went and I talked to Lloyd Carr, who was the (Michigan) head coach, and said, 'I don't think I'm going to get my chance here. I think I should leave.' He said, 'Tom, I want you to stay and I believe in you. You can be a good player, but you have to start worrying about the things you can control.'"

"When he said he wanted me there, I woke up the next day and figured you know what ...

OSU Men's Basketball Signees & 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

in a team sport, you have to sacrifice what you want individually for what's best for the team. If I'm going to be the best, I have to beat the best. If the best competition is at Michigan, then I've got to beat those guys out if I'm going to play. I just committed to being the best."

All In Or Some Out?

The three most recent players to leave Ohio State had their reasons although it's unlikely outsiders will get the full story.

Carton announced his leave of absence on Jan. 30. Holtmann and the university seemed to say and do the right things to support him, and Carton's mother, Jennifer, said in a Feb. 1 Twitter post that, "He will be back stronger than ever in a Buckeye uniform. I guarantee that."

Carton went home to Bettendorf, Iowa, before returning to campus but not the team about a month later. He played 20 games and averaged 10.4 points and 2.8 rebounds per game.

Via Twitter on March 19 he thanked the university, the team's players and staff and the fans who supported him "during the difficult times I went through this year. ... I have decided to make a fresh start and enter the transfer portal. I wish Coach (Chris) Holtmann and my teammates the best of luck next year. Please respect my decision."

Gaffney's clock to departure may have started ticking after the first game of the season when he did not play vs. Cincinnati, the alma mater of his father, Kevin. That had to be a bitter pill for the entire family.

The 6-9 Gaffney averaged 6.7 minutes while

playing 17 of 31 games and did not dress the final four games for undisclosed reasons.

Muhammad appeared in 30 games, 28 starts, and averaged 7.0 points and 2.3 rebounds. He and sophomore guard Duane Washington were suspended for the home game vs. Nebraska on Jan. 14 for "failure to meet team expectations."

Muhammad is reported to be seeking a transfer because he wasn't happy with a diminished role in the offense.

The Buckeyes finished 21-10 during the abbreviated season amid expectations of making a long run in the NCAA Tournament. Fans must wonder, though, if they were like a duck that glides serenely above the water but is furiously paddling unseen underneath.

What's Next?

Kaleb Wesson shouldn't be listed among those who had a foot out the door before the season ended. Sure, he had an exit strategy, but it was known all season he might declare for the draft. He did so last year as well and went through the process of getting feedback from NBA teams before ultimately deciding to return to school. Those recommendations helped spur him to lose about 40 pounds.

Wesson played and acted more mature, and some draft experts have him as a second-round pick after he averaged 14.0 points and 9.3 rebounds while playing 29.5 minutes this season.

He said in an April 1 release that he plans to hire an agent, which he can do while maintaining his eligibility if he elects to return. Wesson must decide to stay or go by June 3 for the June 25 draft, but those dates are fluid because of the coronavirus. With Porter's incoming transfer, there doesn't appear to be a spot for Wesson. If he does not come back, senior forward Kyle Young will take his place in the middle.

Former Captain Passes Away

Ron Sepic, a former captain of the Ohio State men's basketball team, died March 28 at age 75 in Pennsylvania after a battle with cancer. Though he could not play during his freshman season due to NCAA regulations, Sepic started three seasons for the Buckeyes from 1965-67.

The former Uniontown, Pa., standout scored 1,107 career points, averaging 15.4 points per game. He posted 19 double-doubles during his 72-game career and averaged 7.5 rebounds.

After graduating from Ohio State, Sepic was drafted by the NFL's Washington Redskins and the Cincinnati Royals of the NBA. For more on the life and career of Sepic, see the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers.

O-pener

Jon Rothstein of CBS Sports reported on April 6 that Ohio State would begin the 2020-21 season vs. Oakland. Tony Paul of The Detroit News added the Golden Grizzlies will receive \$95,000 to play in Columbus on Nov. 10 or 11.

The Buckeyes opened against Cincinnati the past two seasons.

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Bell's Transfer A Blow To Maturing Buckeyes

On March 25, Ohio State lost one of the most highly touted prospects in the program's history.

Freshman guard Kierstan Bell, a five-star commit and three-time Ms. Ohio Basketball winner, announced through Twitter that she will be leaving the Buckeyes after just one season and entering the transfer portal.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

"I want to thank my coaching staff, professors, university and most importantly my teammates for being supportive and riding with me throughout this year," Bell wrote. "I appreciate you all for respecting my decision and supporting it."

Bell finished her first campaign at the collegiate level as a Big Ten All-Freshman team member and an honorable-mention All-Big Ten recipient, while ranking second on the Buckeyes with 10.9 points per game.

She also was third with 4.4 rebounds per game, ranked fourth with 1.6 assists per game and hit the most shots from three (56) of anyone on the team.

"She's a good kid," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I wish her nothing but the best, and I hope she finds what she's looking for in her next spot. Probably just keep it at that. I just think she's trying to find a place where she can kind of be content and happy in all phases of her life on and off the court."

The loss goes further than Bell's stats, which were already strong in just one season despite her still having clear areas to improve with her efficiency (39.4 percent shooting overall, 31.8 percent from three) and decision making (60 turnovers, No. 2 on the team).

When Bell was on the court, she had an immediate ability to add energy and excitement on both sides of the floor.

"When she's bringing that energy, it's contagious," McGuff said in February. "It's really important for us that she does that consistently."

It was a role that Bell seemed to take pride in, even when she was moved to the bench after starting in the first 10 games of the season for Ohio State.

"It feels pretty good, it bleeds off on all my teammates, but they have great energy as well," Bell told BSB at the Big Ten tournament. "When you have good energy, when you have it all together, then you have a full package."

Bell was not yet the full package, but she had three seasons in Columbus to make herself that package and showed in various spurts throughout the season that she had one of the highest ceilings of any player to don the scarlet and gray.

Now, that potential will be moving elsewhere, and it leaves a larger void than expected in a roster that was hoping to return almost all of its production next season.

"Certainly, her best years are way ahead of her," McGuff said during the season, "but she's showing what she's capable of doing."

Bell was the highest-rated commit in Ohio State's 2019 recruiting class that finished with a top-five ranking in the country. She was one of three five-star commits for the Buckeyes, along with guards Jacy Sheldon and Rikki Harris, the second of whom redshirted the season due to a shoulder injury.

She is the second member of that class to leave, with guard Kaelynn Satterfield transferring out in the middle of the season. But even with those unexpected departures, OSU still appears to be one of the deepest teams in the Big Ten.

Bell and Satterfield are the only two point-scorers to be leaving from this past season, with forward Savitha Jayaraman, who played just one minute all season, being the only senior gone through graduation.

The Buckeyes will have everyone else back and are also bringing in three more freshmen: a pair of three-stars from Westerville (Ohio) South in guard Anyssa Jones and Gabby Hutcherson, as well as five-star point guard Kateri Poole, who was named the player of the year in New York.

"We'll certainly play a similar style, and we've got good players," McGuff said. "We're just kind of keeping it moving, wish her the best and keep it moving."

Sheldon and Madison Greene, both freshmen last season, were the starters for the final 21 games of the season for Ohio State and seem likely to continue to be the starters alongside guard Braxtin Miller and forwards Aaliyah Patty and Dorka Juhasz, all of whom will be upperclassmen in 2020.

And with Bell's spark gone, more pressure will be on guard Janai Crooms, who will be a junior in the fall, to continue to bring the energy off the bench.

"Janai and I have to worry about our energy," Bell said this past season. "If we're not energized, they're looking at us like, 'Oh they're not energized.' We just have to stay consistent with our energy and make sure that everybody is ready to go."

Banks Leaves Buckeyes For First Head-Coaching Gig

A key member of the Ohio State women's basketball coaching staff will be departing for an opportunity to lead a new team.

Assistant coach and recruiting director Carrie Banks is ending her tenure with the Buckeyes after four seasons to become head coach at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, the team announced April 7.

"This is a terrific hire for the University of Omaha Nebraska," McGuff said in a statement. "She has been an intricate part of our program,

OSU Women's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2020 who have signed letters of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPNW rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School
Gabby Hutcherson	F	6-2	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South
Anyssa Jones	G	5-9	★★★	Westerville (Ohio) South
Kateri Poole	G	5-8	★★★★★	Bronx (N.Y.) South Shore

and we will undoubtedly miss her. I have no doubt Coach Banks will have the Mavericks competing for a Summit League championship in due time."

Banks is taking over an Omaha roster that went 7-23 last season and whose 2-14 in-conference record was second worst in the league.

Like the Buckeyes' roster, the Mavericks' is filled with youth, losing just two seniors while having five freshmen on the 2019-20 team. They also return their leading scorer and rebounder, 6-3 sophomore center Mariah Murdle (11.1 points per game, 6.0 rebounds per game).

In her four years with Ohio State, Banks helped the program win 91 games and worked primarily with forwards, helping to develop Stephanie Mavunga and Juhasz into first-team All-Big Ten selections. She also helped to build a top-five class in 2019 with the trio of five-star prospects and seven overall commits.

Before arriving at Ohio State, Banks was an assistant at Northwestern under head coach Joe McKeown, who was just named the Big Ten Coach of the Year this past season. The Wildcats won 58 games in Banks' three seasons in Evanston, and she helped Northwestern earn its first NCAA tournament berth in 18 seasons.

This will be the second straight offseason in which Ohio State will have to add a new assistant

coach after Patrick Klein stepped down last season amid allegations of violations of NCAA rules and university policy. Klein was replaced by Carla Morrow, who was an assistant coach for the WNBA's Chicago Sky for three seasons prior to being hired.

Sheldon Shines In Postseason Play

With just the Big Ten tournament to work with, there could be a lot of answers to which Ohio State player was deserving of Plank's Lady Buck of the Month, including Dorka Juhasz, whose tournament efforts earned her a spot on the Big Ten All-Tournament Team.

But instead, Sheldon will earn the nod, with the freshman guard playing her best basketball at the end of the season. Sheldon averaged 12.8 points per game in the four Big Ten tournament games, tying Juhasz for the highest on the team, while shooting 52.6 percent (20 of 38) overall and 36.8 percent (7 of 19) from three.


Sheldon also pitched in 3.8 rebounds, 1.5 assists and 1.5 steals per game and was the most consistent part of the Buckeyes' offense. She was the only player to score in double figures in each of the four tournament games, and she did so often by getting out in transition and hitting fastbreak layups.

Plank's Cafe



Jacy Sheldon
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NCAA Approves Extra Year For Spring Athletes

While the decision from the NCAA on March 12 to cancel all spring sports served as a sudden and shocking end to the season for thousands of spring athletes, it will not serve as the end of the road for seniors.

On March 30, the NCAA announced that it would be extending eligibility for athletes impacted by the premature end of the spring season.

"The Division I Council ... voted to allow schools to provide spring-sport student-athletes an additional season of competition and an extension of their period of eligibility," the NCAA's statement reads.

The NCAA also addressed roster size and scholarship limits, which will be waived for the 2021 season because of the impact of any returning seniors who weren't previously accounted for.

"Members also adjusted financial aid rules to allow teams to carry more members on scholarship to account for incoming recruits and student-athletes who had been in their last year of eligibility who decide to stay," the statement continues.

For schools that don't have the budget to finance extra scholarships, the NCAA has extended an offer to dip into a student assistance fund.

"Schools also will have the ability to use the NCAA's Student Assistance Fund to pay for scholarships for students who take advantage of the additional eligibility flexibility in 2020-21."

Council chair M. Grace Calhoun explained the specifics behind the decision as part of the statement.

"The Council's decision gives individual schools the flexibility to make decisions at a campus level," said Calhoun. "The Board of Governors encouraged conferences and schools to take action in the best interest of student-athletes and their communities, and now schools have the opportunity to do that."

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith spoke in support of extending eligibility for spring athletes during a teleconference on March 13, saying that he was "definitely in support of an extra year or semester for eligibility for our spring sport athletes," though he did note that the financial aid would need to be considered for schools that could not absorb the extra costs.

For the Buckeyes, there are no plans to dip into that fund. Men's lacrosse coach Nick Myers said on March 31 that Smith assured all spring coaches that the university would honor all spring scholarships.

This ruling means that 12 teams at Ohio State will be allowed to return seniors: baseball, softball, rowing, men's and women's out-

door track and field, men's and women's golf, men's and women's lacrosse, men's and women's tennis and men's volleyball.

Lacrosse Trio Returning For Final Season

While not all seniors will take advantage of the opportunity to return, three key members of the men's lacrosse team have announced their intentions to return to Columbus for one last ride.

Attacker Tre Leclair, midfielder Ryan Terefenko and defender Jeff Henrick all announced via a school statement on April 2 that they will take the field as Buckeyes one last time in 2021.

Head coach Myers kept his celebration of the announcement simple, posting a less-than-subtle Tweet on April 1.

"Boom. Boom. Boom. #UnfinishedBusiness #YouWinWithPeople #Grateful," the Tweet reads.

Leclair was on the way to shattering Ohio State's all-time goals record, as his 135 goals in 54 games is just 11 short of Logan Schuss' 146, set from 2010-2013. Leclair found the back of the net 26 times through just seven games to open the 2020 season. His 3.71 goals per game was 13th in the nation, and his ability to score made him a three-time U.S. Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association All-American entering the season.

"I am extremely grateful to be given the opportunity to continue my education and pursue my dream alongside my brothers one last time," Leclair said. "I'd like to thank Mr. Gene Smith, the athletics department and Coach Myers for their unwavering loyalty and display of support towards their student-athletes."

Terefenko is also a three-time USILA All-American and entered the season as a pre-season first-team All-American as a short-stick defensive midfielder. After the season ended, he was included as a first-team All-American on a list from Inside Lacrosse.

A two-time captain, Terefenko's leadership serves as another contribution to the team, along with his faceoff ability (.547 in faceoff win percentage, No. 29 nationally) and defense (.889 clearing percentage, No. 11 nationally).

"I'm incredibly grateful to Gene Smith and the entire Ohio State Department of Athletics for their unwavering support," Terefenko said. "They've always put the best interest of student-athletes first, and this is just another example of that. I can't wait to get back to work as we chase our goals in 2021."

Also a two-time captain, Henrick has played 55 straight games for the Buckeyes in the back line and will serve as a long-stick midfielder in 2021, the position he moved to at the beginning of the season to great success.

"I'm so thankful to be a part of the best university in the land," Henrick said. "I want to thank Gene Smith and the leadership of Ohio State for offering me the chance to come back. Words cannot express how excited I am to give it another go."

Ryan Feels Winter Athletes Deserve More

Ohio State spring athletes may be getting an extra season, but winter athletes were not extended the same opportunity. The NCAA included in its announcement of extended eligibility for spring athletes that winter athletes who had their seasons cut short before championship competition would not be allowed to return for another season.

"Council members declined to extend eligibility for student-athletes in sports where all or much of their regular seasons were completed," the NCAA statement read.

The decision drew the ire of many winter coaches and athletes, including Ohio State wrestling head coach Tom Ryan as well as

Penn State head coach Cael Sanderson, two of the most well-known coaches in the sport.

Sanderson took to Twitter, stating that he feels the eligibility extension should be granted to winter athletes.

"Winter sport student-athletes who lost the opportunity to compete at the NCAA championships need to be given the option of another year of eligibility," Sanderson said. "Although complicated, details can be worked out and it's the right thing to do in the long run."

Ryan told media on a conference call that he knows that extended eligibility or a new date for the NCAA tournament is unlikely but feels that more should be done for the athletes than has been to this point.

"Let's end the NCAA winter season with the best option we can for these student-athletes," Ryan said in a Tweet. "I hear heart-breaking stories of businesses lost after years of hard work. My guys and others have spent 12-15 years of their life tirelessly working on their craft. Equally hard to imagine."

On that conference call, Ryan laid out some of the plans that winter coaches have put forth to the NCAA, including just wrestling the NCAA tournament at a later date, which he referred to as the "best option." Ryan also mentioned another year of eligibility as a top option but stated that what the winter coaches are pushing to the NCAA is closer to the 10th-best option.

"The 11th option is to do nothing, which is, right now, what the (NCAA has) chosen, but I do believe there's still talk about the 10th option," Ryan explained. "The No. 11 option is 'you know what? Hey, nice work. You got to wrestle, be thankful you got to wrestle in 17 of 18 events. You had a great season, and farewell, fellas.'"

"That's option No. 11. Option No. 10 is based on data. There's a lot of data that shows that if you were ranked No. 1 to No. 4, you're considered a first-team All-American. If you're ranked from No. 5 to No. 8, you're second-team, and No. 9 to No. 12, you're third-team."

"(In this) reality, the record books don't say coronavirus in 2020, they say the first-team, second-team, third-team, All-Americans. That's what we've asked for."

"We don't have a no on that yet."

For Ohio State, this change to naming All-Americans without a tournament would yield five All-Americans, including three first-team members: No. 1 seed Luke Pletcher (141 pounds), No. 1 seed Kollin Moore (197 pounds) and No. 3 seed Sammy Sasso (141 pounds); one second-team member: No. 6 seed Kaleb Romero (174 pounds); and one third-team selection: No. 12 seed Ethan Smith (165 pounds).

On an April 1 conference call, Moore said that he felt that he was positioned to be one of three national champions for Ohio State.

"I was wrestling the best I've ever been wrestling up to that point," Moore said. "I feel like I was the mentally toughest I've ever been. Just felt really good, really calm, just felt really prepared for nationals. So I'm very, very confident that I think me and Pletcher and Sasso would have won, and the whole team, I just think we were ready to make a splash at nationals."

Pletcher echoed those sentiments.

"I felt like I was getting better each time that I wrestled," Pletcher said. "Going into the tournament, I was as confident as I could have been. There was no doubt in my mind that Saturday night, my hand was going to get raised."

While the two wrestlers were frustrated with the way that their careers ended, both said that they were rolling with the news and continuing to look forward.

"Getting your hand raised is a big part

of the sport, but I feel like that's not why we wrestle. It's not why we love wrestling," Moore said. "So, in a way, I think Luke and a lot of guys on our team accomplished what we wanted to do this year. I know we didn't get that ultimate goal of getting your hand raised on Saturday night, but I don't have any regrets of what I did this season or how I trained."

"Going into this year, I made peace with no matter what happened," Pletcher said. "But I think now that we've had some time to let it sit in, I think the only way you can cope with it is knowing that you did everything possible. I made all the right decisions, I lived the right lifestyle, I worked as hard as I possibly could, and it stinks that you don't get that chance but there's a lot of people who didn't get the chance either, and it's just sometimes, life stinks. And you've kind of got to move on with it."

Moore has not yet announced his future intentions, but Pletcher found a new home just days after the end of his college career, as it was announced on April 8 that he would be joining Pittsburgh's wrestling staff as a volunteer assistant coach.

"We couldn't be more excited about Luke joining our staff," said head coach Keith Gavin. "He is obviously a very skilled and accomplished wrestler, but on top of that, I have always respected him for his approach to the sport, the way he competes and his character. Luke is from western Pennsylvania and is a great overall fit for us. He will have an immediate impact here."

Pletcher said he's excited about the new opportunity. He'll also be joining the Pittsburgh Wrestling Club Training Center.

"I'm really excited to join the team and start working with the guys," Pletcher said. "Getting a chance to come back home to chase my Olympic dreams and help the guys on the team attain their goals was something that I couldn't pass up."

Ryan said that he plans to continue fighting to get his wrestlers recognized.

"I'm going to be really outspoken about my opinion on this, and I have been really outspoken about it, and that's because I think there's a right and there's a wrong," Ryan said.

OSU Adds Utah Valley Heavyweight Via Transfer

While it appears Ohio State isn't going to get the chance to prove itself on the mat at the NCAA championships this year, it is already starting to eye a run at a title next season and took a step toward that goal on April 3.

Former Utah Valley heavyweight Tate Orndorff announced on his Instagram that he would be transferring to Ohio State, where he will have two more years of eligibility, along with an ability to wrestle immediately if he gets a release from Utah Valley, as expected.

"I'm so excited to be a Buckeye and for this opportunity in front of me," Orndorff said. "I'm grateful for Utah Valley and all the experiences that I've had."

Orndorff is a two-time NCAA qualifier and finished fifth at the Big 12 championships (Utah Valley is a wrestling affiliate) this past season, putting together an 18-4 record on the year. He earned the No. 8 pre-seed for the NCAA championships, ahead of Ohio State heavyweight Gary Traub, who checked in at No. 19.

The competition at heavyweight between Orndorff and Traub will likely carry into wrestle-offs in the fall, with Orndorff looking like the favorite but Traub riding in on the momentum of an outstanding 2019-2020 season.

This move also likely confirms what had been rumored for months: Chase Singletary is the presumed favorite to take over for Moore at 197 pounds and will be dropping down from heavyweight to make that move.

Singletary could face a challenge from Gavin Hoffman, who wrestled at 184 pounds in the past season but struggled with the cut, though Hoffman may eye a jump all the way up to heavyweight. Ohio State is losing starters from this season's lineup only at 141 pounds (Pletcher) and 197 pounds (Moore).

Olympic Sports Awards Roundup

With the end of the season for so many athletes came a litany of awards for Buckeyes across the spring and winter sports.

Women's hockey standouts Jincy Dunne and Emma Maltais were named first-team All-Western Collegiate Hockey Association members on March 19.

Dunne is a fifth-year senior defender for the Buckeyes and racked up 31 points on seven goals and 24 assists while serving as one of the most dangerous defenders in the country. With this, Dunne will finish her Ohio State career as a three-time first-team All-WCHA performer.

"She's just such a phenomenal hockey player," Ohio State head coach Nadine Muzerall said of Dunne. "I don't know what else the U.S. hockey team is looking for, but she's got all the elements to be such an elite player and Olympian."

Maltais is a junior forward who smashed Ohio State's single season points record in 2020 with 59 points on 19 goals and 40 assists in 38 games and will look to top the career record (she is 18 points shy of the 160 points scored by Laura McIntosh, who set the record from 2008-12) as she concludes her time at Ohio State in 2021. This is also her third appearance on the all-conference team.

A pair of sophomores won third-team All-WCHA accolades, as goaltender Andrea Braendli and defender Sophie Jaques were

both recognized. Braendli posted the third-best save percentage in the league at .928 while registering a 1.89 goals against average in 31 starts in net.

Jaques totaled 24 points, second best for a defender on Ohio State's roster.

Dunne and Maltais were also named American Hockey Coaches Association All-Americans, the first time a duo has made the list in school history. Dunne was listed on the first team, with Maltais included among the second group.

This is Dunne's second straight appearance on the first team and third overall after being named to the second team as a sophomore.

"It just really is an honor," Dunne said. "I'm just so grateful because, especially in our league, it's so competitive. There are so many great players out there, players that are very deserving of it, and I'm just really fortunate to have been at Ohio State and to have had the coaches and the support that I've had that really push me on and off the ice."

"It's just impeccable," Muzerall said of Dunne's third All-America honor. "Jincy is just so deserving of it. And the best part about Jincy, which not everyone sees, is the behind-the-scenes things and how she contributes to our program. She's such a role model and a leader. I hope that USA Hockey recognizes this accomplishment because she's in a very selective class."

"I'm so honored to be named an All-American," Maltais said. "I never even dreamed I would get this honor and it's so amazing to be listed alongside the other names in this group. To have a teammate that's on the first team is even better."

"Jincy deserves this more than anyone. She works so hard and she's such an amazing player. I'm so lucky to be on her team and I'm

proud of her as well, and I'm also just truly honored to be there."

Dunne, Maltais and Braendli were all included on the All-USCHO Women's Division I teams by United States College Hockey Online as well.

Lastly for the women's hockey team, Dunne was honored individually, winning the WCHA Defensive Player of the Year for the second straight season, while Muzerall was named WCHA Coach of the Year for the second time, thanks to Ohio State's 20-8-6 regular-season mark and WCHA tournament title.

"It's a huge honor. I'm very humbled," Muzerall said. "When the commissioner called to tell me, I was taken aback."

Elsewhere, Rhiann Travis, a senior on the Ohio State rifle team, earned NRA All-America honors for the third time in her career. Travis was also named a Scholastic All-American, along with Jacob Buchanan, Ariel Hall, Mica Harr, Joel Potts, Annabelle Stanec, Annie Tomb and Megan Wilcoxson.

"A huge congratulations goes out to Rhiann and our eight Scholastic All-Americans," head coach Ryan Tanoue said. "Being recognized as an All-American is something very special, and for Rhiann to be honored for the third time in her career is a truly fantastic accomplishment."

"Additionally, for eight members of our team to be named Scholastic All-Americans is a great reward for our team's hard work in the classroom. I am very proud of the effort our team has put in on and off the range this season."

For the men's volleyball team, Reese Devilbiss, Martin Lallemand and Samuel Clark earned all-conference honors from the Midwestern Intercollegiate Volleyball Association. Devilbiss and Lallemand made the first team, while Clark earned a spot on the

second team.

Devilbiss averaged 3.22 kills per set for seventh in the conference, scored 3.68 points per set (eighth) while attacking at a .309 clip (seventh).

"Reese is the kind of guy you naturally look up to," Lallemand said of Devilbiss. "His hard work and ethic made him someone you'd always want on your side of the court and in your gym. He would always find ways to push you beyond your limits and motivate you to excel in what you're doing."

Lallemand swung .301 (eighth) with 3.32 kills per set (fifth), .27 aces (eighth) and 3.97 points per set (fifth).

Clark, a middle blocker from Baltimore, ranked in the top 10 in blocks per set (.89, seventh).

While not a current Buckeye, two-time national champion Nicolas Szerszen was also honored on April 7 when Off the Block, a national leader in men's collegiate volleyball coverage, announced its International Player of the Year honor will be named the Nicolas Szerszen Award moving forward. Szerszen is a native Parisian and was the first winner of the award in 2017.

Lastly, Sasso represented the wrestling team as he was named InterMat's National Freshman of the Year, earning 60 points and three first-place votes, as determined by a 10-person voting panel. He edged out Stanford's Shane Griffith, who grabbed three first-place votes and 53 total points.

Sasso ended the season with a 24-3 record and finished second at 149 pounds at the Big Ten championships.

His teammate, Moore, was named runner-up for the Dan Hodge Trophy, given to the nation's best wrestler. Iowa's Spencer Lee earned that honor.



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Icers Left Thinking About What Might Have Been

In a sports world full of uncertainty where no one knows when the next free throw will be shot, baseball pitched, putt sank or puck dropped, there is one thing that Ohio State men's hockey coach Steve Rohlik has learned through the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Forced along with his wife, Julie, into home schooling Erin, Annie and Grady, the 2018 and '19 Big Ten Coach of the Year is of little help to the kids in their makeshift classroom.

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

"They're self-sufficient, which is good for me because I'm finding out I'm not very good at seventh grade math right now," he said. "They're computer savvy, everything. They teach things in a different way than when we learned it.

"I can get to the answer but they're looking at me like, 'What did you just do because I don't get it.'"

The irony is Rohlik has also spent an inordinate amount of time on the computer in what is now his office in a corner of the basement.

He has Zoom calls with the rest of the staff and pores over video of not only games between the Buckeyes and their opponents this past season, but targeted recruits as well since there are no live games for evaluation in the foreseeable future.

"It's very different," he said. "Everything is canceled out there. There's nothing to see."

He spoke to Buckeye Sports Bulletin by phone on April 8, a day before the semifinals of the Frozen Four at Little Caesars Arena in Detroit had been scheduled with the championship game slated for April 11.

The NCAA canceled all winter and spring sports on March 12 as the impact of the

virus worsened.

"I do think about it," sophomore forward Quinn Preston told Buckeye Sports Bulletin on April 9. "It's literally in my back yard, about 20 minutes from where I live. It would have been nice to have family and friends there. It would have been really cool."

Two things about that statement. First, Preston is from Trenton, Mich., just outside Detroit. Second, it shows the confidence the Buckeyes (20-11-5) had that they could make their second Frozen Four in three seasons.

They were coming off a series sweep of Wisconsin (9-1, 2-1 in overtime) March 6 and 7 in the Big Ten quarterfinals and were ready to face Michigan in a semifinal March 15 at Nationwide Arena. Then, it all came to a sudden halt.

"The strange thing is all the what-ifs," junior forward Austin Pooley said in a phone interview from his parents' home in the Columbus suburb of Dublin. "One minute we're getting ready to play Michigan at Nationwide Arena. After the big weekend we went through against a good Wisconsin team we kind of found our game through that and we were at a high level, and the next day we're done."

Go to the NCAA.com tournament brackets and they are as empty as arenas and stadiums around the world.

"It's just unfortunate we didn't get to play in the NCAA tournament," Pooley said. "Those are such fun games and meaningful games. That's why you put in all the work you do over those nine months prior to that point. They're different types of games. Your season's on the line. It's a different environment. Everything's enhanced."

The Buckeyes had every reason to believe they were going to make their fourth straight NCAA tournament, which would have been a first for the program. Going into the Michigan game, they were 10th in the PairWise at USCHO.com, which mimics the selection of the 16-team tournament field.

According to the probability matrix on collegehockeynews.com, Ohio State was one of nine teams with a 100 percent chance of earning a tournament bid by either qualifying automatically as the Big Ten tourney

winner (29 percent) or through an at-large bid (71 percent).

Pooley feels this season's team should be recognized in the record books as an NCAA entrant to set the school record.

"I don't think there's an asterisk because we were in the tournament," he said.

Preston agrees.

"We did make the NCAA tournament," he said. "We had a good group, especially our seniors who made it all four years. That's a great accomplishment for our program. I don't think it should go unnoticed at all."

Rohlik is also convinced OSU would have made the NCAA tourney even with a loss to Michigan, which was 14th in the PairWise.

"We're in the national tournament," he said. "There'll be some asterisk attached to it across the board in college hockey. To me, we were one of those 16 teams. There's no doubt in my mind that these guys can walk away with their heads held high knowing they put themselves in four national tournaments."

The seniors became the second OSU class (2001-05) to win 20-plus games each season.

Big Ten Network's Rick Pizzo recently gave a shout-out to seniors Wyatt Ege, Miguel Fidler, Ronnie Hein, Tanner Laczynski, Sam McCormick, Carson Meyer, Matt Miller and Gordi Myer:

"I can count you as four-time participants in the NCAA tournament. I say you're the first senior class to do that, and anyone who follows Big Ten hockey, anyone who follows Ohio State hockey, anyone who follows college hockey knows you deserve that and so much more."

Rohlik constantly wonders what it would have been like to reach the Frozen Four after losing in the 2018 national semifinal to eventual champion Minnesota Duluth.

"It's only natural to think that way," Rohlik said. "We had a chance. Anytime you get your toes in the water and be one of those 16 teams, any one of those teams has a chance. It will always be there, but at some point you've got to move on."

He worries about his players staying fit and healthy because most have been mandated to stay at home and quarantine. None has access to an ice rink but it's not a major concern yet since this is usually the time of the year players take a break from skating.

Strength coach Jeremy Hoy sends them tailored two-week fitness programs.

"He's been a good resource through all this," Pooley said. "He's been able to modify a lot of stuff based on people's needs and

what they have."

Another concern for Rohlik is making sure his team finishes their online classes this semester since the university is shut down indefinitely.

"I've had some before but not this many," Preston said. "Usually one or two a semester, never five. Some guys have six classes."

He sees the positives and negatives of having so much free time at home for the online studies.

"You've got a lot of extra time," Preston said. "But it's also the fact you have all this extra time to actually sit down and do what you should do rather than wait for the last moment. It's kind of a challenge, but you have to take it in stride."

Flyer For Hire

Laczynski, a sixth-round selection (169th overall) of Philadelphia in the 2016 NHL draft, signed an entry-level contract with the Flyers on March 23.

He led the Buckeyes with 23 assists and 34 points this season and finished his OSU career with 143 points (48 goals, 95 assists). He was a second-team All-American and first-team All-Big Ten in 2018 and an honorable-mention All-Big Ten selection in 2019.

He had opportunities to turn pro beginning after his freshman season but opted to stay in school, and he became a two-time Academic All-Big Ten selection and three-time Ohio State Scholar-Athlete. He is on track to earn a sports industry degree.

"I can't tell you how happy I am for him," Rohlik said. "He took a leap of faith three years in a row to turn down contracts to come back, No. 1, to get his degree, which he will have, and to have the opportunity to play in national tournaments and do something that's never been done here."

"For him to graduate and get a piece of paper and to get a pro contract, it's a coach's dream, right?"

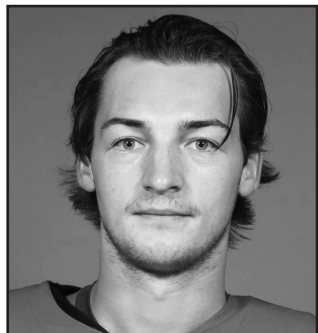
Meyer On Fire

Meyer's five goals and an assist in two playoff games vs. Wisconsin made the Powell, Ohio, native an easy choice for the Varsity Club Icer of the Month for March.

His four goals in Game 1 were an Ohio State postseason record. He also had an assist for the first five-point game for a Buckeye in exactly 10 years, joining Hunter Bishop, who had a hat trick and two assists in a Central Collegiate Hockey Association tournament win, 8-2, against Notre Dame in the OSU Ice Rink on March 6, 2010.

Meyer scored the Buckeyes' first goal in Game 2.

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National Title Hopes Crushed By Coronavirus

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Ohio State women's hockey team had just knocked off the No. 3 and No. 2 teams in the country on its way to the first Western Collegiate Hockey Association championship in program history, with its eyes on one thing – a national title.

"When you're trying to push for a national championship, timing is essential. And we were the hottest team in the country," head coach Nadine Muzerall told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "We had nine signature wins against top-eight teams, and seven of them were teams in the top three in the country. So, nobody else really has that ground to stand on. We had the toughest schedule in the country, and we proved to be the best."

After defeating WCHA rivals Minnesota and Wisconsin in back-to-back overtime games, the Buckeyes were ready to prove they were the team to beat in women's college hockey. Then, the unexpected happened, and the best team in program history had its dreams crushed abruptly when the NCAA tournament was canceled due to the increasing spread of the coronavirus.

Muzerall said her heart broke when she found out her team would not be able to pursue the program's first national championship in 2020. While the Buckeyes expect to be back in contention next season, the fourth-year head coach particularly sympathizes with the graduating seniors such as Jincy Dunne, who had given so much to the program.

"Awful, it's just so awful and heartbreaking," Muzerall said. "You can't do anything for them. Somebody like Jincy, for example, she has 99 (career) points. Are you kidding me, 99 points? She has all these records she's broken, and she was leading us to the promised land."

"We really, really had the shot of all years to win the whole thing and we were on a roll, no one could stop us, and we were just doing the right things."

Dunne was a three-time All-American and two-time WCHA Defensive Player of the Year, in addition to serving as a two-time captain and two-time assistant captain for the Buckeyes.

She took a redshirt in 2015-16 during a 10-25-1 season, which was the last before Muzerall inherited the struggling program. The Buckeyes improved to 14-18-5 in Muzerall's first season, with Dunne acting as an assistant captain and earning All-WCHA honors as a redshirt freshman.

The next season set the tone for the drastic turnaround of the program, with Ohio State making a Frozen Four appearance in Muzerall's second season. The Buckeyes posted a 68-32-12 combined record from the 2017-18 season through the 2019-20 campaign but lost their previous best chance at a title in the 2018 Frozen Four semifinal to eventual champion Clarkson.

"For myself personally, five years investing in something and looking forward toward the goal and to just not even get the chance, it's hard and it stings," Dunne told BSB. "But that's life, and sometimes you've just got to learn to roll with the punches. It's disappointing, but you've just got to move forward because I know there are a lot of teams and a lot of players that have worked toward things, whether it's sports or business, and there are a lot of disappointed people right now."

While the decorated defender puts the canceled tourney into perspective in comparison to the pandemic, she also sees the positives in going out on top.

"We were going into the tournament; we were going in hot. And as a senior, I can say

that my last moment on ice as a Buckeye was probably one of the best moments of my life," Dunne said. "Being able to do what we did to win our conference championship for the first time in history, to beat both Minnesota and Wisconsin in overtime, both of which are great teams. To be able to say that was my last game I played with the group of girls that I did, for me, that's very special."

Had the NCAA tourney been played, Ohio State would have played against Minnesota again in the first round, with three other teams the Buckeyes had beaten in the eight-team tournament, including No. 1 Cornell, No. 2 Wisconsin and Princeton.

Emma Maltais, a junior forward who set a school record with 59 points on the season, did not fear a talented Minnesota team, despite how difficult it is to play the same team six times, because of how well the Buckeyes were playing.

"I was really confident in us because of the way we had bounced back in that conference tournament and before against teams like that," Maltais said. "We almost had their number. We weren't a team that they wanted to play. And after that game, it's hard to say, because in a game of hockey anything can happen. But with how we were playing at that time with our confidence and with how close our team is, I had nothing but excitement and hope."

If Maltais had gone to Ohio State during a different era, maybe she would not have been as confident in her team to take down the nation's best. But under Muzerall, the Buckeyes have become a national force themselves.

"It's extremely strong," Maltais said of the team's bond. "And by what we've accomplished and, not necessarily, do you look at a roster and be like, they're going to win as much as we have. You would never really believe someone who said that. That just shows you the bond we have, because that's what makes us successful. We understand each other. We're willing to go the extra mile for each other. And that shows in the way we play a lot."

"And that culture started with Nadine coming in and taking it seriously and wanting us to be the best. And that trust built from there. Ever since that, we've developed it over the course of the four years she's been here."

Muzerall came to Columbus via Minnesota, where she became one of the most accom-

plished Gophers ever. She set Minnesota's all-time record with 139 career goals in a career that ended in 2001 before becoming an assistant coach with the team 10 years later. In that role, Muzerall helped lead the Gophers to five straight national championship appearances, including four titles.

Muzerall came to Columbus to build her own program, taking what she learned as a player and coach at her perennial powerhouse alma mater and enhancing it.

"It's our style, too, that makes us difficult, because we're very hard to play against," Muzerall said. "On paper, Minnesota, Wisconsin – they have the names, they have the roster size. The girls all represented the U.S. or Canada. And so, we just find a way that fits our style to beat those guys. It's relentless. It's passion. It's just that determination, no quit. Fitness is a big component for us. And we just find a way to win."

"We did a very good job defensively of keeping people to the outside, so they might have had shots, but quality shots, not so much. It also shows the character of who our team is to come back from behind against Minnesota two different times within that game, at Minnesota too."

What is the "true character" of the Buckeyes? "It's hard to put into words," Dunne said. "You really have to be a part of it and be around it to really see it, because there's nothing like it. I've been on many teams, and this year's team was just incredibly special. To have 22 girls that genuinely all like each other, genuinely all get along, want the best for one another, cheer each other on, love each other, no drama. How often do you find that? Probably never."

As a five-year player, Dunne had more experience in college hockey than most, but her perspective is limited to one university. Muzerall, who won two national titles at Minnesota before winning a national championship professionally in Switzerland, has been a part of many more teams, including as an assistant coach for four straight national title teams. So, just exactly how rare is the bond of the Buckeyes?

"I've got to be completely honest with you, I've played on many teams and I coached many teams, and I've never seen a program such as this that truly, genuinely cares for one another," Muzerall said. "I mean, different people are sitting next to each other at lunch or on the bus or at the breakfast table. It's not cliques."

She admitted to being surprised by how close her players have become, adding that it can't be fully understood unless one is a part of it.

"It shows, especially when you've got Emma representing her country on the senior national team for the first time ever, and we all take a bus to Pittsburgh. And you've got Americans, you've got Finns, you've got Swiss wearing a Hockey Canada jersey, cheering her on and making signs. They don't care who has the success. They just want to win, and they just want everybody to be successful. It's actually a beautiful thing."

The players' bond makes the highlights more memorable, but it also causes the disappointments to hurt more. Maltais was distraught that her senior teammates would not get a final chance to go for gold, but the culture they had helped build and the winning of the program's first conference championship provided a silver lining.

"It was heartbreaking for all of them," Maltais said. "They've all poured so much into this program, and they've developed the culture that we had and the success we've had these last three, four years. They were the backbone of the program, and to see it end for them before they could realize it's over was really sad."

"They're going to go down in history. They were the seniors of that team, the first team ever to do that. So that's really comforting for them and comforting for all of us who see them sad and know how much it hurt. Knowing that they know that is really comforting."

While Dunne and fellow seniors Rebecca Freiburger, Elise Riemenschneider and Olivia Soares will not suit up in the scarlet and gray again, their impact on Ohio State women's hockey will live on.

Once the coronavirus clears, Maltais and her teammates will be back to work, carrying on the seniors' legacy in pursuit of women's hockey supremacy.

"I'm expecting big things," Maltais said. "Obviously, graduating our seniors, they were amazing leaders, all of them. That will be a big challenge for my class to try to step into, but we're ready for it. We're all ready for that challenge to be seniors, and the momentum from last season is really going to help us grow even more."



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Two-Sport Illinois Star Mitchell Passes Away

Bobby Mitchell, a two-sport standout at Illinois, died at age 84 on April 5.

Mitchell began his Hall of Fame pro career in Cleveland before becoming Washington's first African-American player in 1962. He was inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1983.

"The game lost a true legend today," David Baker, the Hall of Fame president and CEO, said in a statement. "Bobby was an incredible player, a talented executive and a real gentleman to everyone with whom he worked or competed against."

BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

Growing up in Hot Springs, Ark., Mitchell excelled in baseball as well as football and track in high school, even receiving a baseball contract offer from the St. Louis Cardinals.

Instead of pursuing an MLB career, he chose to play football and run track at Illinois, where he became the starting halfback seven games into his sophomore season in 1955.

After rushing for more than 100 yards in each of the final three games, Mitchell earned first-team All-Big Ten honors. He also earned second-team all-conference as a senior in 1957, when he also caught two touchdown passes in the College All-Stars' 35-19 victory over the NFL champion Detroit Lions.

On the track, Mitchell may have been even better, setting an indoor world record in the 70-yard low hurdles in 1958, in addition to helping the Fighting Illini win the Big Ten title.

Following four seasons with the Browns, Mitchell joined Washington in 1962, making it the last NFL team to integrate. He spent seven seasons with Washington and retired with 14,078 all-purpose yards, which was the

second most in NFL history at the time.

Mitchell played halfback for the Browns from 1958-61 but then moved to flanker with Washington, leading the NFL in receiving yards from 1962-63. He earned All-NFL honors three times and played in four Pro Bowls.

Upon the conclusion of his playing career, Mitchell became a scout for Washington and later became the assistant general manager.

"His passion for the game of football was unmatched by anyone I have ever met," said Washington owner Daniel Snyder. "Not only was he one of the most influential individuals in franchise history, but he was also one of the greatest men I have ever known. He was a true class act and will be sorely missed."

Former NFL running back Brian Mitchell, who was no relation to Bobby but became friends with him, said he learned a lot from the Hall of Famer.

"Tough times don't remain, tough people do, and you don't let what you go through change who you are unless it's for the better," Brian Mitchell said. "I'm sure there were people saying stuff to him and doing things that pissed him off, but he wasn't bitter. When he was working for the Redskins early on, many people felt Bobby should have been the general manager. He didn't get bitter. He kept doing the things he can do."

In an interview on "60 Minutes Sports," Bobby Mitchell said that he realized not long after joining Washington that "there was no one in this town used to having a black star."

Friend and fellow Hall of Famer Jim Brown took it one step further.

"Bobby was an individual that was thrown into the arena of being a victim for no reason," Brown said. "He had to suffer for being black more than any person I know that played football at the time I played. With that kind of ability, if he were white, everybody on this Earth would know who he was."

Mitchell came together with some of the top African-American athletes from various sports in support of Muhammad Ali



ILLINOIS FOOTBALL/TWITTER

LASTING LEGACY – Former Illinois two-sport standout Bobby Mitchell, who passed away at age 84 on April 5, was inducted into the Illini Athletics Hall of Fame last year.

rejecting the draft during the Vietnam War at the Negro Industrial Economic Union in Cleveland on June 4, 1967. The group was led by Ali, Brown, Bill Russell and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, then known as Lew Alcindor.

After retiring from the NFL, Mitchell became even more active in the community, holding an annual golf tournament to raise funds for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society since 1980.

"You look at Bobby, his career was a Hall-of-Fame career, but I know for African-American people, he was a social activist as well," Brian Mitchell said. "Not only was he a great football player and a guy who would go out there and fight for the rights of his people, but he was also a philanthropist, a guy doing everything that you're supposed to do."

Big Ten Talent To Test Waters Of NBA Draft

Maryland forward Jalen Smith and Minnesota forward Daniel Oturu decided to enroll early in the 2020 NBA draft, foregoing their remaining college eligibility. Numerous other standouts from across the conference elected to test the waters of the draft process, with the possibility of returning to their respective programs.

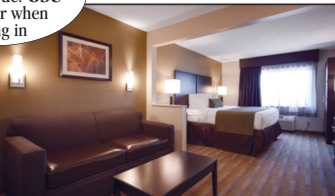
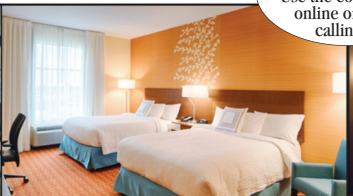
Marcus Carr, a standout guard for Minnesota, will undergo draft evaluations while contemplating an early exit for the pros or a return to the Gophers. Illinois center Kofi Cockburn, a 7-2 freshman, will also test his draft value.

Michigan, Michigan State and Nebraska each have one player going through the NBA draft process in Isaiah Livers, Xavier

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Tillman and Cam Mack, respectively.

Ohio State big man Kaleb Wesson is testing the draft market for the second time, while former Buckeyes D.J. Funderburk, who played at NC State, and Alonzo Gaffney, who is in the transfer portal, will also undergo evaluation.

The biggest name who is testing the draft market while maintaining his eligibility is Iowa's Luka Garza, who won Big Ten Player of the Year for the 2019-20 season.

"The NBA has been my dream since I started playing basketball as a kid, and I'm going to do everything I can to pursue that," Garza posted on Twitter. "If it ends up not being the right time to make the move to the NBA, I'm excited about the potential of what my senior season as a Hawkeye could have in store."

When BSB went to press, Illinois' Ayo Dosunmu and Michigan State's Aaron Henry had yet to announce any decision regarding the draft.

Gophers Add Shot-Blocking Liam Robbins From Drake

Liam Robbins decided to transfer from Drake to Minnesota, joining his uncle Ed Conroy, who is Rick Pitino's associate head coach, and his cousin Hunt Conroy on the Gophers.

As a sophomore at Drake, Robbins averaged 14.1 points, 7.1 rebounds and 2.9 blocks to earn second-team All-Missouri Valley Conference honors. The big man ranked third in the nation with 99 blocks on the season.

Purdue Center Haarms Enters Transfer Portal

Matt Haarms, a 7-3 center for Purdue, has entered the transfer portal. The Boilermaker big man enjoyed a solid season before it was cut short due to the coronavirus.

Purdue head men's basketball coach Matt Painter announced the move in a press release and was reportedly stunned by Haarms' decision to leave the program.

"Been told that Purdue was blindsided by Matt Haarms' decision to transfer," Jeff Goodman of Stadium tweeted.

As a junior in 2019-20, Haarms averaged 8.6 points, 4.6 rebounds and 2.0 blocks, while shooting 52.4 percent from the field, 31.3 percent from three-point range and 63.4 percent from the free-throw line. The long-limbed big man moved up to fourth in Purdue history with 210 career blocks.

As a sophomore, Haarms was an integral part of Purdue's Elite Eight run. He averaged 9.4 points and 5.4 rebounds per contest, along with blocking 2.1 shots per game during the 2018-19 season.

As a grad transfer, Haarms will be immediately eligible for his last season of college basketball. Haarms told Jon Rothstein of CBS Sports his top-10 list of possible suitors, which features some of the nation's premier programs and places with more offensive opportunities including Arizona, Arkansas, Boston College, BYU, Gonzaga, Kentucky, Memphis, Minnesota, North Carolina at Greensboro and Texas Tech.

Griffin Transfers From Illinois To Syracuse

Illinois wing Alan Griffin has decided to transfer from Illinois to Syracuse following a solid sophomore season. The 6-5 wing was Illinois' most reliable three-point shooting threat during the 2019-20 season, connecting on 41.6 percent of his attempts from beyond the arc.

Griffin averaged 8.9 points and 4.5 rebounds in just 18.1 minutes per game while shooting 48.3 percent from the field.

"Illini nation, I first want to start off by saying thank you for welcoming me with open arms and supporting me through the years," Griffin said on Twitter. "I also want to thank the university, my teammates, the coaching staff, and all of the staff. After careful thought and consideration, I have decided to enter my name in the transfer portal. I wish all of the upcoming and current players and the coaching staff best of luck next season. Please respect my decision."

The highlight of Griffin's Illini tenure came in a 74-66 win against Northwestern on Feb. 27, when he hit nine of his first 10 shots and finished with a career-high 24 points off the Illini bench.

Griffin chose to join Syracuse, selecting the Orange despite interest from Arizona, Dayton, Iowa State, Miami (Fla.) and Texas.

"The main reason was that their plan matched mine," Griffin said. "They were straightforward with what needed to be done."

Griffin will have to sit out the 2020-21 season unless he receives a waiver from the NCAA to play immediately.

Iowa's Pemsil Draws Interest In Portal

Since entering the transfer portal, Iowa forward Cordell Pemsil has drawn strong interest from a variety of schools

The 6-8 forward reportedly attracted the attention of Akron, Albany, Boston College, Central Michigan, Cincinnati, Drake, Eastern Tennessee State, Illinois State, New Mexico State, San Diego, Seattle, South Florida, Toledo, Virginia Tech and Western Michigan.

In 96 career games for the Hawkeyes, the Dubuque, Iowa, native averaged 5.9 points, 4.3 rebounds and 1.2 assists per game while shooting 58.2 percent from the floor.

In Iowa's home victory against Ohio State, Pemsil provided a huge boost off the bench with nine points and eight rebounds in 18 minutes.

Pemsil, who was a fourth-year junior in 2019-20, has overcome multiple injuries in his career, including a separated shoulder and a torn meniscus in consecutive high-school seasons. He also underwent a knee osteotomy in May 2015.

The injury-plagued forward expressed

his gratitude toward Iowa fans for supporting him through the tough times he endured as a Hawkeye.

"I would like to thank my teammates, coaches, and fans for a memorable four years at the University of Iowa," Pemsil said. "I am grateful for the support Hawkeye Nation has shown me through many difficult times. With that being said, I am going to finish my degree and plan on completing my final year of eligibility at another school next season."

Maryland's Lindo Enters Transfer Portal

Ricky Lindo, a sophomore forward for Maryland, entered the transfer portal after struggling to earn more minutes with the Terrapins.

Lindo played in 29 games, including two starts, for Maryland, which won its first share of the Big Ten regular-season title since joining the conference in 2014.

He averaged 1.7 points and 1.9 rebounds in 7.0 minutes per game as a sophomore, while shooting 65.5 percent from the field (19 for 29) and 80.0 percent from three (4 of 5).

"I can't thank Ricky enough for his commitment over the past two seasons and for helping our team win the Big Ten championship this year," Maryland head coach Mark Turgeon said in a joint statement. "Ricky was a great teammate and did everything I ever asked of him. He's a fantastic person, and I wish him and his family all the best moving forward."

"I want to thank the University of Maryland and Coach Turgeon for everything over the last two years," Lindo said. "I had a chance to be a part of some amazing moments that I will never forget, including winning a conference title. I'm appreciative of my coaches and teammates for all their support. After much discussion with my family, I have decided it is best to seek a new opportunity as I continue my college career."

Maryland's Mitchell Twins Take Portal Route

Maryland freshman forwards Makhi and Makhel Mitchell entered the transfer portal together. The 6-10 twins both contributed to the Terrapin rotation throughout the first two months of the season before seeing their roles reduced.

Makhi started five games and averaged 9.3 minutes, which was the eighth most on the team, scoring 3.0 points and grabbing 3.3 rebounds per contest. Meanwhile, Makhel appeared in 10 games, averaging just 6.8 minutes and 2.3 rebounds.

"We want to thank Coach Turgeon for the opportunity to attend the University of Maryland," the Mitchell twins said in a joint statement. "We are extremely appreciative of our time in College Park but decided it was best to seek a new opportunity."

Turgeon thanked the twins from Washington, D.C., in the statement.

"This was a decision we felt was best for both sides," he said, "and we wish them and their family the very best moving forward."


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Ohio State Coaches Manage COVID-19 Fallout

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

The sudden end of the season for every spring team and several winter teams didn't come as much of a shock to Ohio State's coaches. With cancellations of major professional sports leagues such as the NBA already on the table, and with several conferences pushing to avoid playing winter championship events, it would have been difficult for coaches not to see the writing on the wall.

On March 12, the other shoe dropped, and the NCAA officially confirmed a cancellation of all sports for the remainder of the academic year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although there was little suspense, the official end of the season still stung for athletes and coaches impacted. For some, it even forced rapid travel plans, like men's volleyball coach Kevin Burch, who was in New Jersey with his team.

"I just knew it wasn't going to be good news," Burch said in an interview with The Lantern. "I was told that our season had been canceled due to the coronavirus and that we needed to get home right away. It was a very sad and hard situation for me, and I just remember trying so hard to keep it together while on the phone."

While the cancellations had a more significant impact on the seasons of teams that were just getting started, winter sports such as wrestling, which had its title hopes dashed with the cancellation of the national meet, still felt the blow.

"We saw things happening pretty abruptly," said head wrestling coach Tom Ryan. "It was a tsunami, just storming across the country. We saw various sports events getting canceled, some were moving to family and friends only, and then we saw that the (Ohio high school) state championship was going to cancel."

"I think, as a group of individuals, we saw some things that were very alarming for us knowing that we were one week out (from the championships). We were just hoping to get it in, and then the NCAA announced

it (was over)."

It didn't take long, however, for those coaches and players to shift their focus. With thousands of senior athletes suddenly staring down the end of the line sooner than expected, the new discussion revolved not around the end of the season, but around finding a way to do right by those athletes.

On March 30, those efforts bore fruit for the spring teams, as the NCAA announced that it would be extending eligibility for all spring seniors, providing an opportunity for anyone who wants the chance to return to take it and play one more season. It also overrode roster limits for baseball and announced a plan to provide financial aid for schools that can't afford to cover the extra scholarships.

"Last night (when the announcement came down), in a lot of ways, was a massive positive because it brought some closure to the unknown," men's lacrosse head coach Nick Myers said in a March 31 conference call. "When (athletic director) Gene (Smith) reassured that he was going to support us and these athletes, I think that we all just paused and took the time to be thankful and grateful for what this means for these young men and women. I know me personally, I had the chance to make some exciting phone calls last night, and we're in the process right now of trying to support some men's dreams of coming back and chasing higher education and an opportunity to compete for Buckeye Nation."

Other coaches were quick to express gratitude for the quick decision from the NCAA and the support that Ohio State has offered to impacted teams.

"It is clear that Ohio State athletics and our leadership is about these student-athletes," said women's lacrosse coach Amy Bokker. "And the welfare, the well-being, the education of our student-athletes first, and just giving them the option to have this amazing experience is something I'm really proud of."

While the freedom to return has been universally lauded by Ohio State's coaches and coaches across the country, they still understand that a difficult decision has to

be made by seniors who may not be able to afford to return or who had jobs lined up. Because of scholarship limitations, most spring athletes are paying their own way.

"I think there's a lot that goes into it, it's very personal to each young man and family, and I think as coaches, we're working really hard to make sure that we're putting their best interest first," Myers said.

"If their best interest is going and taking a full-time job, we're encouraging that, even if that means a competitive loss for us. We can't in good faith tell a young man to come back and take on more debt, as much as he'd love to suit up one more year for the Buckeyes, in times like this."

That dynamic has created a need for honest and challenging conversations between coaches and their seniors. Bokker explained that she sees those conversations as crucial for coaches to facilitate.

"I did have a conversation with all of my seniors," Bokker said. "Some are pursuing graduate school. They have been admitted to grad schools, and that's their dream. Two others have great jobs lined up actually in Columbus, and they're ready to get out into the professional world. So we talked through all of that and what was best for each of them individually. (What's) important to understand too is what are their individual aspirations or individual dreams, and how can we help them get there as Ohio State coaches, and I consider that a hefty part of my job and responsibility."

For some athletes, the decision has come easily. The men's lacrosse team has confirmed that seniors Tre Leclair, Ryan Terefenko and Jeff Henrick will be returning to Columbus. Attackers Liza Hernandez and goalie Jill Rizzo made the same choice for the women's lacrosse team, though they may be the only seniors of a group of nine back in 2021.

"As soon as I knew it was official that I had the opportunity to wear scarlet and gray for one more year, I knew I had to do it," Hernandez said.

For others, the decision went in the other direction. A school spokesman confirmed to Buckeye Sports Bulletin that none of the five

men's volleyball seniors will return.

While the majority of seniors are unlikely to take up the NCAA on its offer, increased roster size for most spring teams in 2021 is going to bring with it a bit of an unintended consequence: increased complexity in roster and lineup management. While roster sizes can increase, the number of players on the field or court cannot.

"While the roster is thick and strong, my lineup card still only has nine slots on it," said head baseball coach Greg Beals. "So that's where coach and player just need to make sure we're communicating very well together and that we're helping make this mutual decision. It will be a mutual decision at how we move forward in a lot of scenarios with individual players."

Increased aid will also lead to an advantage for smaller teams, such as men's tennis, which could suddenly be fielding more scholarship athletes than usual. One extra scholarship athlete on a small-roster team can be significant. For Ohio State, there will be no significant increase however, as the Buckeyes have just one senior.

"Our seniors are the ones that we're really hoping to come through a little more," said men's tennis coach Ty Tucker. "Essentially if you have 4½ scholarships, you could have some teams next year with 7½ scholarships and some with five."

Above all else, Ohio State's coaches are just glad that their players have options.

"I'm just glad they have the choice," Bokker said.

Beals echoed the sentiment.

"I'm really happy that we have clarity now, that my seniors are going to have the opportunity to have closure and make their decision and not have it ended by the coronavirus."

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 news involving OSU's teams each Monday on our BuckeyeSports.com website, free to all print subscribers.



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Desire To Return To Sports Normalcy Must Wait

So, you know that old saying about truth being stranger than fiction?
We're living it.

If someone had told you a year ago that 2020 would be full of cancellations – sports, schools, weddings, etc. – due to a pandemic, you would have thought it something they read in a novel about a dystopian society. Cancel sports for the foreseeable future? Is it something anyone could have guessed?

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsmann

This is the time of year when the crack of the bat and the smell of the grass ushers in baseball season. When college football teams are finishing up spring drills and rabid fans are convening in huge stadiums for glorified practices, because they care that much. When hockey and basketball would be in the homestretch of their seasons and looking forward to the playoffs.

And now it's all gone. And who knows when it might return.

There's something soothing knowing that the Boys of Summer will be getting grass stains on their jerseys and coming up with ninth-inning heroics as they win their opener. Knowing that once spring practices finish up, the college football season is just around the corner. But it may not be, and that's jarring. It's a new kind of reality, one that definitely takes some getting used to.

It's all fine and good that fans can dial up old games with the touch of the mouse or a swipe of their phone – heck, the Big Ten Network devoted 18 hours to the Ohio State-Michigan rivalry over the April 11 weekend. Reliving history is a nice break, but it's not something that can satisfy fans long term. Knowing sports is there is a reaffirmation of order, of a routine that so many live on a week-to-week, month-to-month, year-to-year basis. And now it's gone. And who knows when it's coming back.

Sports stopped briefly after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, though the NFL famously played that weekend. Former commissioner Pete Rozelle later said it was one of his biggest regrets, even though the league had spoken with people in the administration for guidance and how to proceed in such a grave situation. College football went on hold for a week, including OSU-Michigan – all of the big rivalries, really.

But things eventually got back to normal. They stopped again after the horrific attacks of 9/11, but even then, there was an almost immediate light at the end of the tunnel. Most schools delayed things by a week, and many rescheduled the lost game for later in the year. No one forgot the atrocity, but sports went on as usual. It was a real comfort, a return to normalcy. Ohio State postponed its home date with San Diego State scheduled for Sept. 15 to Oct. 20 but traveled west to face UCLA the following week. Even though many fans were afraid to fly in the aftermath of the attacks, the games continued. And eventually a calm, a normalcy, returned.

So, when does our normal come back this year?

Right now, there is a real question about whether there will be a football season – NFL or college. Athletic directors have said there

will be financial hardships if the season is lost. OSU's Gene Smith mentioned in a recent interview that the school makes between \$5-7 million per home game. Multiply that by seven and you see that's almost \$50 million Ohio State could conceivably miss out on.

There have been all kinds of scenarios tossed out – cancellation of the season altogether, delaying the start and reducing the number of games, to starting on time but playing without fans in the stadium. It's all a guess – maybe a hope – that there can be some sense of normalcy sooner rather than later, because if time has taught us anything about America it's that football is king. An autumn without the gridiron seems unfathomable, but it is a real possibility. So much would need to go into making sure the players and coaches and support staff were healthy that schools might burn through any money they make from a home date just on testing and safety/well-being alone. Would it be worth it?

Some fans out there will grouse about a season being delayed or canceled altogether, looking at 2020 as Ohio State's best shot to win a national title. With Justin Fields among the Heisman Trophy favorites, an almost criminally talented receiving corps and a defense teeming with athleticism, the Buckeyes will certainly be thought of highly by most pundits. Should the season not be played, many in Buckeye Nation will feel the team was "robbed" by not having a chance to show it could win it all. They will look at it from a football standpoint rather than from a health standpoint.

On one hand I get it – I love college football as much as anyone and watch at least parts of pretty much every televised game on Saturdays. It's what I do, it's what I enjoy. If that is gone, there will definitely be a void – but is it enough of a void to offset people dying, to complain about how much of an upheaval this has been to my life? It's not about me, just as it's not about you. It's about everyone, and until there is a way to combat this intrusion into our routine, I don't believe that leadership is wrong in implementing what it has already.

Whether that's good long term, into the summer, I am not as sure about. But I am not a doctor nor scientist nor epidemiologist, so I will defer to the folks who are, the folks who can speak from experience when making these decisions. For once I'm glad something is above my pay grade.

Eventually we will get back to normal, and pigskins will be flying around stadiums and fans will be cheering and teams will be battling to see who is best. Trophies will be hoisted.

Whether or not that should be now, or anytime soon, is anyone's guess.

For now, the reality is that coaches conduct Zoom meetings to stay in touch with their staff, that recruits may have a little less information before making a decision as visits have been scuttled for the time being. FaceTime has been around for a while, but I'm pretty sure it hasn't been utilized as much before as it is now. Technology can often be a hindrance, but in this time of worry it has actually been a pretty big help, especially at keeping people connected to one another.

And that's one of the great things about sports – the connection it provides.

The guy from Buffalo can have his eyes light up when he hears the guy from Tulsa talking about the latest Ohio State victory. Fans from Los Angeles to Miami can all live in different places, have no relationship what-

soever, yet share a camaraderie that only sports can provide.

That's probably one of the biggest aspects of this pandemic – that it has frayed the connection strangers have with each other, at least temporarily. People want to be part of a group, want to enjoy success together. Sports provides that. People want to be part of a gripping drama, of last-second heroics that can change an outcome. Sports provide that.

In the big picture there are plenty of things out there more important than the sporting world. That's not really up for debate.

But in the smaller, more immediate picture, sports is a big loss. It's a loss of companionship, of renewing routines and acquaintances, of being able to share in something that will live on for years and years.

Part of me wishes this was a novel, that all of this was just the work of some talented writer putting pen to paper.

The advantage to it being that is that we would be able to peek at the ending.

If only that could be done now.

Loose Ends

- With all of the worry about COVID-19, a lot of news items slipped through the cracks.

Ohio State fans knew about the arrival of running back Trey Sermon from Oklahoma, but others may have missed it. It's funny how the rich usually get richer, and how a position of worry for Ohio State suddenly became one of strength.

Sermon was offered out of high school by the Buckeyes but ultimately selected Oklahoma.

Sermon – nicknamed Preacher, for obvious reasons, and sporting a tattoo that reads "Trust God" spreading across both arms – brings a power and speed component similar to what J.K. Dobbins provided the last three years. While not as lethal with his jump cuts or as shifty in the open field, Sermon explodes through the hole and has proved to be tough to bring down. He led the Big 12 in yards after contact as a freshman (4.13 per attempt) and entered 2019 fourth nationally in forced missed tackles since 2017 (96), according to Pro Football Focus. The website was quick to note that three players above him all had at least 100 carries more than Sermon in that span.

OSU fans are going to like this guy.

- The OSU men's basketball program will look a bit different next year after losing D.J. Carton, Alonzo Gaffney and Luther Muhammad to transfer. Carton missed a good portion of the year dealing with mental health issues, but the team was always in his corner, and he was a team player by rooting them on on social media while sitting out. He ultimately chose to leave, likely to be closer to his family. Don't be surprised if he ends up somewhere in the state of Iowa, where he played high school hoops and where there are some family ties at the University of Iowa.

Reports in the Des Moines Register noted that he may be a better bet to end up at Iowa State rather than with the Hawkeyes, however. The Cyclones got involved in his recruiting late in the game but reached out to him almost immediately after he entered the transfer portal.

Gaffney was bothered by injury during the season and didn't make the impact many expected, and has entered the transfer portal. Considering he averaged less than two points and two rebounds per contest in his lone season in Columbus, his options wouldn't appear to be plentiful. Given his lack of playing time, it probably shouldn't have been a huge sur-

prise for Gaffney to leave.

Muhammad leaving is surprising, however, as he was a regular part of the rotation and showed a nice shooting stroke from deep. He would have been in line for big minutes in 2020-21 but instead decided to bolt Columbus. Reports over the Easter weekend had him down to Seton Hall, Arizona State, UCLA, West Virginia and New Mexico, with a decision imminent.

But not all of the news is bad.

OSU gained the services of local boy and Harvard grad transfer Seth Towns, a 6-7 combo player who possesses a solid mid-range game and can also do damage from deep (over 40 percent from three-point range across two full seasons with the Crimson). Towns averaged 16 points and shot 44.1 percent from deep on the way to earning Ivy League Player of the Year honors in 2018. He missed the last two seasons battling knee injuries but should be good to go for the Buckeyes.

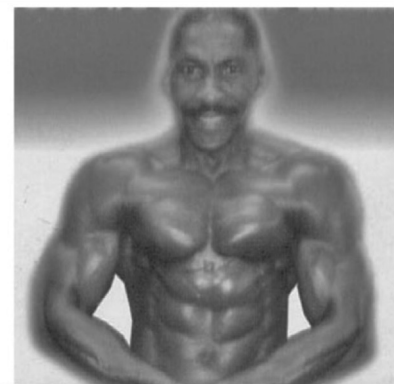
The Buckeyes also received word that Bucknell wing forward Jimmy Sotos will join the team and be eligible to play in the 2021-22 campaign. Sotos, who could possibly gain immediately eligibility via NCAA waiver, averaged 11.5 points and 3.9 assists this past season and led the team in scoring, assists, steals and minutes played. Sotos tallied 12 points, seven boards and five assists in Bucknell's 73-71 loss to the Buckeyes in December 2018.

Utah State guard Abel Porter will also join the Buckeyes and be eligible immediately. A 6-3, 200-pounder, Porter was one of just two Aggies to appear and start in every game last season, averaging 5.6 points, 3.2 assists and 2.4 rebounds.

Some are worried about the seemingly high attrition rate at OSU under Chris Holtmann, but yours truly is not one of them.

Attitude could have played a role in the Buckeyes' inconsistent season, so maybe changing some faces will be a boost for the program.

Towns is a great addition, and with what Ohio State has returning next year, it isn't a stretch to say that it can once again contend for a 20-win season and NCAA Tournament berth.



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Spielman's Debut Still Memorable Years Later

Writing about Keith Byars' induction into the College Football Hall of Fame for the last issue got me thinking about one of my other favorite Buckeyes from the 1980s – and perhaps No. 1 on my list all-time: Chris Spielman.

Spielman of course has maintained a public presence, between his work on TV and his charitable work in the Columbus area. But it's worth a flashback to 1984 when Spielman made his debut as a freshman linebacker for the Buckeyes.

EXNER POINT Rich Exner

Why? It's been 36 years now. Anyone under the age of about 42 or so isn't old enough to remember. And those of us in the 50-plus crowd still appreciate him for being more than a guy who made a lot of tackles.

You see, Spielman was a legend of sorts before he ever arrived on campus at The Ohio State University. (Yes, they did call it The Ohio State University then, but the "the" wasn't nearly the emphasis as it is nowadays.)

Spielman came from Ohio's most famed

high school program. He had already been featured on a Wheaties box, wearing his number 33 Massillon Tiger jersey, hair parted in the middle in typical 1980s style and sporting a mustache. Wheaties box covers were a big deal back then, usually reserved for people like Olympian Bruce Jenner.

The point is, Spielman was a well-known recruit. But as the 1984 season approached, Pepper Johnson and Larry Kolic were projected as the starting inside linebackers.

So when the opener against Oregon State arrived, Spielman watched from the sideline, an unfamiliar spot for a guy used to being at the center of things, saying later, "I've never not started a football game in my life."

He got on the field for only two plays in the first half. But Spielman wasn't watching quietly, we would learn after the game. Coach Earle Bruce said he kept hearing someone say, "Put Spielman in," as he walked up and down the sideline. That someone was Spielman.

Bruce listened in the second half. And, wow, what a debut.

Spielman made 10 tackles, including one behind the line of scrimmage, and forced a fumble.

That's the Spielman we would come to appreciate as a player for the rest of his career. But what really sticks in my mind to this day is how Spielman – sitting at a desk crowded by reporters after that first game

in a classroom used back then for a media room after games – handled questions with the same directness and passion as he handled his play.

Were you nervous in front of 80,000-plus fans? "It's like playing at Massillon here – little Massillon," the 18-year-old responded.

Still recovering from an ankle injury sustained in the mid-July Ohio high school all-star game, he had sat out a lot of practice time before the season.

What was that like? "I felt like a siss," Spielman said, adding that missing practice "kind of made me feel bad. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I take that stuff personally."

How about wearing No. 36, the same number worn by star Buckeye linebackers before him?

"I'm not Marcus Marek or Tom Cousineau. I'm Chris Spielman. A number is a number. I'm just happy to be a linebacker like those two. Hopefully, I'm going to work and try to be better than those two."

Ohio State trailed Oregon State, 14-3, at the half. Enter Spielman in the second half and the Buckeyes went on to win 22-14.

"I'm a freshman. The guys were looking at me like I was crazy. When I started running around patting everyone on the back – 'What's wrong with this kid?' I think I added a spark and when I got that first sack, they started to respond," he said.

Oh, and what did he have for his pregame meal? "They wouldn't let me have Wheaties. I had to have a pregame meal like everyone else," Spielman laughed, breaking from his matter-of-fact tone.

A memorable debut on the field, and a memorable conversation afterwards. There was plenty more to come, as Spielman predicted.

Parade Magazine had called Spielman "the top high school linebacker in the nation." He was Armour-Dial's male high school athlete of the year. He was a consensus high school All-American.

"There's nothing older than yesterday's headlines. It's time to make new ones," Spielman said during his very first OSU postgame interview with the media.

Spielman helped lead the Buckeyes to the

Rose Bowl that year, and before he would be done at Ohio State, he would become a two-time All-American, a Lombardi Award winner as the nation's best linebacker and a team MVP.

It was almost comical to watch the 1988 NFL draft unfold. It was the early years of pro scouts paying too much attention to the stopwatch and not enough attention to game film. The common knock was that Spielman's 40 time was too slow.

Spielman wasn't picked until the second round, the 29th choice overall. He was the sixth linebacker taken in that draft. One of those taken earlier was OSU outside linebacker Eric Kumerow.

The five linebackers taken ahead of Spielman – Aundray Bruce (first overall), Ken Harvey (12th), Kumerow (16th), Clifford Charlton (21st) and Marcus Cotton (28th) – combined to make 113 NFL starts during their careers, more than half of those by Harvey. None ever were named AP All-Pro.

Spielman went on to start 148 games during a 10-year career with the Detroit Lions and Buffalo Bills, and he was named AP All-Pro three times.

The pro scouts got it wrong.

Spielman took 1998 off to care for his wife, Stephanie, after she was first diagnosed with cancer. (She died in 2009 after five bouts with cancer.) He returned to the field in 1999, signing to be part of the Cleveland Browns' return to the NFL. But Spielman's career came to an end because of a dangerous neck injury during the fourth preseason game, leading doctors to advise that he retire.

I was fortunate to see Spielman's first game at Ohio State and last game as a pro.

He spoke at his retirement much like he did after his first game at Ohio State – directly and with passion.

"We're all football warriors," Spielman said during the retirement news conference. "Being that, you have to accept your mortality as a player. It is important for me to let everyone know I'm not quitting. I would never quit. I've never quit at anything in my life."

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Okudah's Letter To Mom Tugs At The Heart

Having no spring game or practice to recap leaves me time and space to go back and look at things I have not gotten to because of lack of time and space.

One of the things that has been on my mind is the letter that soon-to-be high NFL draft choice Jeff Okudah wrote to his deceased mother, which was published in The Players' Tribune in early January. This is one of the most intelligent, compassionate, genuine pieces I've seen from a writer of any age.

"I am 20 years old, if you can believe it – which means it's been almost three full years since the two most important things in my life happened," he writes in the letter. "First, in January of 2017, I enrolled early at the Ohio State University. And then second, later that same month, you lost your long battle with lymphoma.

"You passed away.

"It's hard to put into words everything that's happened since then. But certain memories have a way of standing out."

What stands out through much of Okudah's letter is a picture of the family atmosphere within the Ohio State program, and you get a feel for the obvious camaraderie that all of us could feel with last year's team, camaraderie that I believe helped make the team as successful as it was and made these Buckeyes enjoyable to watch and root for, regardless of the season's outcome.

But I wanted to focus on two people mentioned prominently in the letter, guys who are regular whipping boys on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum – former defensive coordinator and current Rutgers head coach Greg Schiano and former Ohio State and current – at least for the time being – Miami (Fla.) quarterback Tate Martell. I'll come back to why Schiano and Martell are frequent targets on the Forum. But right now, Okudah has the floor.

"I remember when Coach Schiano brought me into his office and told me you'd passed away. And I could tell right away from that meeting – how he spoke to me, how he comforted me – that he wasn't just doing his job. Coach was there for me, really there for me, as a father figure. He knew I was a long way from home in Texas ... and he did everything he could to let me know that while Ohio State might not feel like home yet, it was a place that I could count on. It was a place where I could show my emotions, and that would be OK. It was a place where I could grieve, however I needed to, and no one would judge me. It was a place where everyone would have my back."

Okudah goes on to mention three players when discussing guys who "came through in a special way" – J.K. Dobbins and Okudah's freshman roommates, Baron Browning and Martell.

"Tate, you know ... I think you really would have liked Tate. You raised me to trust my own compass and judge people for myself – and I think Tate is one of these guys where there's this perception of him that just isn't true. He was always reaching out to me after you passed, and not in a way where it felt like some obligation on his part. It was like my pain was his pain, and he wanted me to know that. He made me feel like I was a part of his family – his mom would even check up on me. And little stuff like that means everything when you've lost your own mom. Tate was always there for whatever I needed."

Certainly not the Martell that I think many picture, but again, I'll come back to Schiano and Martell.

Okudah's letter is quite lengthy, and I recommend reading it. It's easy enough to find. Just Google "Okudah Letter to Mom" and it will

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

come up quickly.

I'll let Okudah sum up the letter, as on this day at least, I think him to be the better writer than I.

"As I get going on this next journey of mine, and say goodbye to Ohio State and start the process leading up to April's NFL draft – I know you're going to be here with me then, too.

"I'm sure teams will ask me about you.

"They'll ask me about my upbringing. They'll ask me about my mom, Marie, who passed away. They'll try to figure me out, by trying to figure you out. And honestly I can't wait.

"Because I'll just tell them the truth.

"I'll tell them that we never had the most money, in terms of our financial situation. And that we didn't have the most time, in terms of our years we got to spend together. But we had the most love – that's for sure. We had more love than anyone could ever imagine.

"I'll tell them that I was raised by a mother who believed in me and who supported me, and who always made me feel like my dreams were worth dreaming about – and then fighting for. I'll tell them that, simply put, I was raised by the best."

Why Pick On These Guys?

So why are Martell and Schiano the targets of such wrath on our Forum?

I think Martell brought quite a bit of the firestorm on himself. His cockiness when the Buckeyes were courting Justin Fields from Georgia was consistent with Martell's persona. But it made him look a bit foolish in some fans' eyes when he proceeded to split to Miami rather than battle with the quarterback newcomer.

Martell's complete failure in the Sunshine State while frolicking with model Kiki Passo has added to the ridicule by amused Buckeye fans, many on our message board who believe that he is not, nor ever was, a Power Five level quarterback.

A couple of thoughts from me.

First, I don't think the final chapter has been written on Martell, who was a must-have recruit for Buckeye fans just a few years ago. In listening to Okudah talk about the Ohio State program and Martell, I wonder if the quarterback wouldn't have been better off in Columbus, rather than heading down to the freewheeling Hurricane program. Martell nurtured Okudah. Maybe he would have been nurtured back.

I'm not suggesting he would have beaten out Fields, but life is obviously not fantastic right now for the brash QB from Las Vegas.

As for whether he can play quarterback at the major-college level, there is nothing I saw during his brief time in Columbus that indicated he couldn't. His line in his one season with the Buckeyes was 23 of 28 passing for 269 yards and an 82.1 completion percentage with a TD and no interceptions. He added another 128 yards on the ground on 22 carries with two more scores.

Perhaps more importantly, as I have said before, he had that "it" factor, as Fields does, and that's something you can't teach.

That was on display when he was 10-for-10 passing in a 52-3 victory over Rutgers in 2018, with a 51-yard touchdown pass among his 121 yards, and he added another 95 yards on eight carries including a 47-yard scoring run. And it didn't all come in mop-up duty. The 51-yard strike to Terry McLaurin came early in the sec-

ond quarter, with the Buckeyes leading only 21-0, so he would have been playing against the Scarlet Knights' first team, be that as it may.

Here's a wild scenario for you. And I am completely throwing this out there based on nothing so don't go starting rumors.

Martell gets tired of the world of nightlife, scantily clad models and the beach and decides to get back to the basics, back to business. He's obviously not coming back to Ohio State, but he needs that nurturing environment that he left behind in Columbus, the type of caring that Okudah claims Schiano offered.

So, Martell goes to Rutgers.

For those of you who think Martell needs to drop down to a school like UNLV, you can't tell me that the former prep phenom – if he gets his head on straight – can't beat out a guy like Johnny Langan, who started the final eight games for the Scarlet Knights last season. Langan was 80 of 159 passing as a redshirt freshman for just a 50.3 completion percentage, 840 yards and four TDs against nine interceptions.

In the case of Martell, I truly believe good quarterbacks don't become bad quarterbacks overnight. Nor do good coaches suddenly become bad ones.

Many of our Forum posters would disagree about a coach turning in the case of Schiano. They blame Schiano for the collapse of the Buckeye defense in 2018. I tend to disagree.

After assistant coaching stints at Penn State and in the pros with the Bears, Schiano became defensive coordinator at Miami and had the Hurricanes ranked 12th and seventh in scoring defense in his two years there. That led to his first stint as head coach at Rutgers, where he led the Scarlet Knights to some of their greatest success, which led to two seasons as head coach of the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers.

His fling in the NFL failed, and he was eventually lured to Columbus in 2016 by Urban Meyer.

In his first two seasons as safeties coach and co-defensive coordinator with Luke Fickell, the Buckeyes were in the top 10 in the country in total defense and in the top 15 in scoring defense, including third in 2016, yielding just 15.5 points per game. Along the way, Schiano took Malik Hooker from a relative unknown to one of the best safeties in Ohio State history.

Exit Fickell and Schiano finds himself after one year as co-defensive coordinator with Alex Grinch in 2018. To me there was clearly a disconnect on the defensive side of the ball during that defensive debacle of a season, and the wild card, in my mind, was Grinch.

By 2019, Ryan Day was head coach and both Schiano and Grinch were gone so we may never know who might have been at fault. But it was nice to hear from Okudah that Schiano was at least in step with the culture that Ohio State promotes, and I wish him well in his second attempt to revitalize Rutgers football.

I'll be watching how Grinch fares in his tenure at Oklahoma. His Sooner defense made major strides in his first year. But he's also got the 63-28 shiner that Joe Burrow and LSU hung on him in the CFP semifinal.

The question was asked on the Forum (by me), "If you had to take one coach back, would you take Grinch or Schiano?" There seemed to be a split between the younger posters (Grinch) and the older posters (Schiano).

My predictions for the two are this: Grinch's

tenure at Oklahoma will be brief. He may be a great defensive mind, but he may also be difficult.

As for Schiano, he will improve Rutgers but he will not bring it back to the heights he reached from 2001-2011. He finds himself in the Big Ten East now, not the Big East. The chances of having another 11-2 season as he did with the Knights in 2006 seem unlikely.

But Rutgers fans can dream.

Other Topics

I know I have been harping on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, but with no spring practice to report on, and with people having plenty of time on their hands, it has been kind of an online free-for-all between readers and staff members with a wide array of topics being addressed.

One of the more interesting questions posed was, "Who is the most overrated Ohio State basketball player?" The time frame given was back to the Fred Taylor era.

The reader nod appears to have gone to Kosta Koufos, though big men who left Ohio State early seem to be the target of the posters, with Byron Mullens also getting consideration.

My choice was another one-and-doner in Daequan Cook. And speaking of a player here for just a year, the question was asked whether Greg Oden was overrated or simply injury-prone. The latter seemed to win out with most pointing out that the big guy led Ohio State to the 2007 national championship game while playing with virtually one hand.

With the May issue of BSB not scheduled to be mailed until the 19th of the month, now is a great time to jump on board BuckeyeSports.com, with not only the Forum, but 24/7 coverage of everything Buckeye, including the latest in recruiting. Recruiting news goes on, regardless of global pandemics and mandated dead periods.

If you are not already enjoying the online BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers, see the instructions on page 4 or give us a call at (614) 486-2202. The affable Dave Breithaupt will be glad to help you get online and also help you access the Forum.

Now if we could get the always opinionated and entertaining Dave to start posting, that would be even better!

A Longtime Buckeye Fan

Many of you may recall, as part of our "Reverse Green Bananas Special," we are offering a free year of BSB to any readers who are 100 years or older. This is because every reader saves with this special, where you pay by your age, except those 100 and above.

Those centenarians who send me their names and their all-time favorite Buckeye will have their names listed in the paper along with said Buckeye.

The first person to take advantage of this offer is William Precek of Shadyside, Ohio.

"Having been born on July 19, 1917, in Shadyside, Ohio, I am happy to say that I qualify," Mr. Precek wrote. "Per your request, I would say that my favorite Buckeye athlete would be John Havlicek. Of course, John's having grown up and attended school just seven miles from my hometown has nothing to do with my choice."

For information on how to save on your BSB subscription with the Reverse Green Bananas Special, including a special offer to introduce BSB to Buckeye fans under 21, see page 5 of this issue. And if you are or, know of Buckeye fans 100 or older who would enjoy BSB, just send us their name and address and favorite Buckeye or call (614) 486-2202.



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The information provided in this document or through linkages to other sites is not a substitute for medical or professional care. Questions about diagnosis and treatment for concussion should be directed to a physician or other health care provider.

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<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>



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