

# Unprecedented Times

## *Virus, Social Issues Among Gene Smith's, Ohio State's Top Priorities*

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Gene Smith has seen a lot in his 15 years as the athletic director at Ohio State, but he's admittedly never had to deal with anything like the current state of affairs.

In just the last four months alone, the NCAA canceled all spring sports in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and implemented a lengthy recruiting dead period; students returned home and finished their courses online; nationwide protests began after a black man was killed by a white police officer, which prompted athletes and coaches to speak out against racial and social injustice in America; and schools started cutting athletic programs due to budgetary concerns, all while a new football season quickly approaches.

Though Ohio State's future – and the future of college athletics as a whole – hangs in the balance, Smith granted Buckeyes Sports Bulletin an exclusive remote interview on July 6 in which he openly discussed these unprecedented times, reflected on the year that was and much more.

**BSB: Things seem to change almost daily, but as of today, how do you feel about the chances of a football season happening?**

Smith: "I just don't know yet. As a conference, we're continuing to have discussions. You just have to wait and see how the virus continues to be managed. We'll hopefully have more clarity as we get through July."

**BSB: Along those same lines, you've previously mentioned the possibility of a reduced capacity in Ohio Stadium. How do you put that into effect?**



ANDREW LIND

**UNENVIABLE POSITION** – Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith has been tasked with leading the program through the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic while also showing support for his student-athletes amid the nationwide protests against racial inequality.

Smith: "We're going to follow the CDC guidelines, and if we have an opportunity to have people, if we have an opportunity to play, we're going to have to provide six feet of social distancing and so we're probably in that 20,000-people range. The virus has gotten worse in a lot of parts of our country, as you well know, and we have spikes right now in Ohio, so I don't think it's going to get better to the point where the CDC could loosen the guidelines.

"Every person will have seat assignments, so if you have 20,000 and a good portion of our students in a 100,000-seat stadium, it will be a lot easier to manage. We're so used to seeing our stadium with 100,000 people, and everybody is like, 'Oh my god, how are you going to manage 20,000?' Well, 20,000 is like a basketball game in the 'Shoe right now. I won't say it's easier, but it's easier than what people would imagine. We'll be able to manage that because we'll be so spaced out.

"If we were in a situation where the virus was under control and the CDC relaxed the guidelines, then we might have more challenges if we had more people trying to create whatever the social distancing number would be. With the six feet, it won't be as hard as people think."

**BSB: Of that reduced capacity, who would get first dibs? Would it be students, season ticket holders and so on?**

Smith: "We're just not there yet."

**BSB: Do you consider possibly raising prices of tickets to offset the lack of attendance?**

Smith: "We're not doing that. Whatever the current prices are is what we adhere to. We've had a number of people who ordered season tickets at the price that was announced, and we will honor that. We obviously have to refund quite a few, but we're not (raising prices). We're just waiting to see what decisions get made, and we'll build our budget up from there."

**BSB: How do you make sure to monitor the people who do attend the games to make sure they're not spreading the virus? Will there be checks and things like that?**

Smith: "You know, from an operations standpoint, we're not ready to talk about those things yet. I apologize. We're just not there. The reality is we are working on a plan, being tolerant and patient because this thing keeps changing and keeps evolving. What we've decided to do was to wait until our conference makes a decision on if we're going to play and what it will look like, and then we'll put in place our operational plans.

"We have a great team of people. We know whatever the model is, we'll be able to come up with a plan. It's kind of like

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# BUCKEYE SPORTS BULLETIN .COM

## From The Message Board

**The Big Ten Network recently named its All-Decade football team, which included 17 current and former Buckeyes. With so many players to choose from, Buckeye Sports Bulletin asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff members, which Buckeyes they would name the offensive and defensive players of the decade.**

**Here are some of the responses:**

"Braxton Miller and Chase Young, if I can name only two. Young was simply the most disruptive DL I've ever seen in college football. I'm not sure I can remember Lawrence Taylor's play in college, but I think the two might be comparable in terms of game-changers. (I think Taylor played LB instead of DE, but devastating mismatch)."

– Terrier Buck

"Offense: J.T. Barrett – limited QB but he just wins and was a great leader and I doubt anybody will ever touch his total touchdown record in the B1G.

Defense: Malik Hooker – best safety I've ever seen at Ohio State. He had the speed, the range, the ball skills. Just a fantastic player who I wish we had for more than one season."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"Ezekiel Elliott, as he got his 200+ yards in the championship season against the toughest opposition the Buckeyes faced, and Darron Lee, who accomplished more than he should have again against the best competition we faced."

– AnthonyBuckeye

"I will have to say Braxton and Chase. So much talent to choose from, it's difficult."

– Peyote Buck

"I was a little timid about offering up my choices because I was going to choose Malik Hooker on defense, and I thought it would be questioned because my choice was based on only one season – but what a season! But I see others have offered up Hooker as well so here are my votes: Malik Hooker on defense and Ezekiel Elliott on offense, based on his production and his championship run."

– Mcarr

"I'll go with a name I haven't seen yet for the offense and say J.K. Dobbins. A three-year starting halfback at Ohio State is very rare, and his stats are some of the best in school history. For me, it comes down to J.K. and Braxton, but J.K. was just so good his junior year that I'll give him the nod.

"Defensively, I'll go with Malik Hooker, for putting up the single most dominant season I've seen from a defensive back at Ohio State. I think he's considered an all-time college great if he plays more than one year as a starter, but with just that one year he still made a strong enough case to me to be my defender of the decade. He completely changed how that defense was able to play."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"I'll go with Braxton Miller and Joey Bosa because Bosa was slightly more productive over three years than Chase Young. Joey had 148 total tackles (101 solo) to 98 stops and 68 solos for Young. Bosa had 51.0 total TFLs to 40.5 for Young. Where Young stands out is his 30.5 sacks to 26.0 for Bosa. Bosa had an interception, six passes defended and two fumble recoveries. Young did not have an interception or a fumble recovery but defended eight passes.

"One stat that stood out for me with Young is he forced nine fumbles including seven last year. Bosa forced five fumbles while a Buckeye."

– Frank Moskowitz, BSB

"On offense I will go Ezekiel Elliott. J.T. may have him for some career accolades, but what Zeke did during the title run gives him the nod to me.

"Defensively, I can't in good conscience go with anyone except Chase Young. He might be the most dominant defensive player I have ever watched at the college level."

– Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"With all due respect to Saquon Barkley and Jonathan Taylor, any all-decade team without Ezekiel Elliott as one of the first-team running backs is nonsensical. At his career average of yards per carry, Taylor's additional 334 carries would have meant an additional 2,235 yards, pushing Zeke's career total to 6,196. That would have placed him sixth all time behind Ron Dayne (7,125), Ricky Williams (6,592), Tony Dorsett (6,526), Donnel Pumphrey (6,405) and Charles White (6,245)."

– Mark Rea, BSB

"I'll have to say Dobbins and Young. Maybe it's recency bias, but there's no denying their 2019 seasons were among the best in school history, with Dobbins setting the school record for yards in a single season and Young breaking the school's single-season sack record.

"Had Young not missed two late-season games against lesser opponents and then been double- and triple-teamed upon his return, there's a chance he could have flirted with the NCAA record, too.

"I won't argue against the network's selection of Barrett, but I will point out that Dobbins also has a case for longevity, as he burst onto the scene and set school records as a freshman, as well. He had a slight dip in production as a sophomore, but I can't blame him for the troubles along the offensive line and the fact that the Buckeyes aired it out more than ever in 2018.

"Both of their careers steadily built toward last year's successes, and that ultimately makes the playoff loss to Clemson sting that much more."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### OSU Pushes Politics In Sports Too Far

And so it goes in these troubled times. Politics now pervades and infects every facet of our society, from academia to business to media to entertainment. It used to be that we could find some relief in the world of sports, but even that has been taken from us.

All sports are now completely engulfed in politics. Every team, every coach, and every athlete has to tell you where they stand on the issues of the day. And, by the way, their opinions had better be the correct ones, or they will be out of a job.

It is difficult for me to express how distressed I was to see Gene Smith's statement that the Ohio State Department of Athletics supports Black Lives Matter. Black Lives Matter is not a civil rights organization. It is a hard-left political party.

What are we to make of that? How should Buckeye fans respond when this becomes the official position of our teams?

Can we expect Gene Smith and his department to take other political positions? Maybe he will tell us where they stand on taxation, foreign relations, or the First and Second Amendments.

Frankly, I don't need to know or want to know what some 20-year-old athlete has to say about anything other than his or her sport.

Like young people (especially college students) for centuries, these kids think they have some special wisdom to impart, which we must hear. They don't, but they aren't wise enough to know that. I can say this because I was a college student myself back in the turbulent '60s. We thought we had the answers back then, too, you know (we didn't).

It is my great fear that Smith and his department will permit, or even encourage, their athletes to carry their politics onto the fields and the courts during the coming academic year. I am afraid that this may take many forms of inappropriate conduct, including kneeling or otherwise acting disrespectfully during the playing of the national anthem.

If the University condones or permits this, it will force me to choose between America and the Buckeyes. The Buckeyes will lose that contest – as they should. I sincerely hope I am not forced to make this choice.

Terry Walrath  
Hinckley, Ohio

### Regarding The 16th University President

I am a taxpaying citizen and graduate of Ohio State University from 1954 that has no confidence in this Ohio State Board of Trustees.

As someone who has no support of this decision of putting a far-left liberal in the highest office as president of Ohio State University, why not let the people who pay the bill and financial support make this decision?

This decision will only cause this university to become another far-left school, to destroy the respect for our university for years to come.

H. Richard Kile  
Beavercreek, Ohio

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



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## Decision On 2020 Season Rapidly Approaching

This is usually the time of year when I write a column listing Ohio State's opponents for the upcoming season and what can be expected from each of those opponents.

You know the one I'm talking about. The one in which I remind everyone that Michigan is 1-15 since 2004 against Ohio State, including eight straight defeats, and that the Wolverines have never played in a Big Ten Championship Game; have no outright conference title since 2003; have lost six of their last seven bowl games; have no Rose Bowl appearances since 2006, no Rose Bowl victories since 1997 and no national championship of any kind since 1997; and have not won an undisputed national title since 1948.

Well, the fun and games are over.

The COVID-19 pandemic that has affected nearly 13 million people worldwide and claimed more than 570,000 lives, including nearly 140,000 in the United States alone, appeared in mid-July to be surging almost unabated in several parts of the country, leaving the 2020 college football season very much in doubt.

During a 48-hour period beginning July 8, Ohio State suspended voluntary workouts for athletes in seven fall sports, the Ivy League canceled its entire fall sports schedule, and the Big Ten announced a truncated, conference-only football schedule that scrubbed such early-season marquee games as Ohio State at Oregon, Michigan at Washington and Wisconsin vs. Notre Dame at Lambeau Field in Green Bay.

On July 10, the Pac-12 followed suit with its own plan to scrub nonconference games, canceling the big-money contest between Alabama and USC set for Sept. 5 at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. At the same time, the Pac-12 announced commissioner Larry Scott had tested positive for the coronavirus and had self-quarantined.

As each of those dominoes toppled, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren offered increasingly dire forecasts for those who believe the college football season should move forward with business as usual.

During a July 9 teleconference, Smith said he was "really concerned" about the possibility of not being able to play this season, adding he wasn't even "cautiously optimistic."

Warren followed with an appearance that same night on the Big Ten Network, during which he stated, "This is not a fait accompli that we're going to have sports in the fall. We may not have sports in the fall. We may not have a college football season in the Big Ten."

Still, there were voices insisting not only should college football be played this fall, but its absence would be some kind of assault on the American way of life.

During the same evening Smith and Warren were painting their ominous pictures of the future, former Notre Dame head coach Lou Holtz took to the Fox News Channel, suggesting fear accompanying the pandemic would end "when we have the election" and equating the risk of playing sports this fall to the D-Day assault by Allied forces during World War II.

"The way it is right now, they just don't want to have sports," the 83-year-old Holtz said. "There's no way in this world you can do anything in this world without a risk. People stormed Normandy ... They knew there was going to be casualties, they knew there was going to be risk, but it was a way of life."

I have steadfastly avoided any political discussion/debate/argument when it comes to the pandemic. I will note, however, that in my humble opinion, it is sad for anyone to

think this is all some kind of political game. Quote numbers about those who have recovered from the illness or that the death rate has slowed to a crawl over the past month. I seriously doubt, however, the nearly 140,000 souls this country has lost, and especially the loved ones they have left behind, believe this is some political game.

### EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

#### Seeing What Sticks

If indeed college football is to be played in the near future, one hopes the conferences and university athletic directors can formulate a plan that addresses the safety and well-being of players, coaches and staff members while offering fans a season that is not just a token one – in other words, a season staged only to keep the television, advertising and booster money pipeline flowing.

I understand the reasoning why you wouldn't want to put Ohio State players on an airplane and fly them across the country more than 2,400 miles to play in an empty stadium in Oregon. But is that really a whole lot different than Nebraska traveling to Rutgers (a trip of 1,300 miles) to play a late-October conference game? And someone is going to have to explain to me why it's OK for the Buckeyes to host Iowa and Nebraska as well as travel to Penn State, Maryland and Illinois, but it's too dangerous for Bowling Green players and coaches to make the 120-mile bus trip to Columbus.

As far as further monkeying around with the schedule itself, each new idea seems more ludicrous than the one that came before.

Front-loading the schedule? Seriously? Some believe that replacing the marquee non-conference games with rivalry games early in the season not only would delight fans who have been starved for live sports these past several months but also guard against losing those games should the virus continue to spike upward in October and November.

I would contend that part of the allure of college football is how it builds throughout the season to a crescendo of meaningful games that separate the contenders from the pretenders. I can't believe anyone would want to watch the Ohio State-Michigan or Alabama-Auburn games moved to the beginning of those schools' football seasons.

Some have posited a theory that postponing things until next spring makes sense. Not to me, it doesn't.

The prevailing thought is that the virus will have subsided by January or February, and that testing and treatment will be advanced six months from now. Well, that was the thought six months ago, too.

Besides, pushing the 2020 college football season to the spring of 2021 presents a whole new set of problems. First and foremost, football would be trampling on all of the spring sports that suffered shutdowns when the virus first reared its ugly head in March. Maybe it makes financial sense in light of the fact that football generally pays the bills at most universities for the entire athletic program. But would it be fair to the basketball and baseball players, the track and field athletes, the wrestlers and all of the other spring sports athletes to be asked to step aside for a second year in a row?

Additionally, postponement of the 2020 season until next spring would likely have an adverse effect on football itself.

It seems likely such star players as Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, Ohio State QB Justin Fields, Alabama cornerback Patrick Surtain and Oregon offensive tackle Penei Sewell would opt out of playing during a spring season and instead prepare themselves for the upcoming NFL draft.

Meanwhile, underclassmen who aspire to join Lawrence, Fields, Surtain and Sewell in the league someday would possibly be jeopardizing their own futures. As former OSU head coach Urban Meyer explained July 8 during a special edition of the "Fox Sports Big Noon Kickoff Show," playing in the spring of 2021 and then asking players to play again that fall is asking too much.

"When you play a long season and when you get to spring practice," Meyer said, "when you play 2,000 competitive reps, your body is not ready for contact in three months or two months. It's not. I would not put those players in harm's way. You talk about student-athlete welfare. No chance. You're not doing that."

#### It's Been Done Before

There is precedent for playing college football during a pandemic. During the second wave of the Spanish influenza outbreak in late 1918, games were pared from the schedules of several schools, and many programs took a monthlong break in October and early November as the pandemic spiked.

Archival records of the period would seem to indicate that colleges and universities were on their own in terms of how each would proceed during the pandemic, and that led to several scheduling anomalies. For example, among Western Conference teams, Iowa played nine games during the 1918 season while Indiana played only four.

Illinois is regarded as the 1918 conference champion thanks to its 4-0 league record, but most other conference schools played only two or three league games that season. The University of Chicago played only six games in 1918 that counted in the standings and it lost all six, marking the only winless season during the 41-year tenure of the legendary Amos Alonzo Stagg as head coach of the Maroons.

Ohio State opened its 1918 season with lopsided victories against Ohio Wesleyan and Denison on the first two Saturdays in October and then waited four weeks before resuming the season Nov. 9 with a 56-0 win against Case.

The Buckeyes went on to lose their final three games that year, including a season-ending loss to Michigan on Nov. 30. It marked the first time in program history that the Michigan game served as the regular-season finale, but that came about only because the game had been rescheduled from late October due to the pandemic. It would take another 17 years before the archrivals decided to make one another their traditional season-finale opponent.

The 14-0 loss to the Wolverines in 1918 was played at old Ohio Field on a turf made sloppy from recent rains. The game remained scoreless through three quarters until Michigan scored when OSU punter Roy Rife's kick was blocked at the 2-yard line and U-M end Angus Goetz fell on it in the end zone for the Wolverines.

One more thing. There were several thousand fans in the stands to witness the Ohio State defeat, and the few photographs that survive from that afternoon would seem to indicate that each of those fans was wearing a protective face covering.





## Ohio State Shuts Down, Resumes Voluntary Practices

While the Big Ten is still working to salvage any sort of a fall sports season, Ohio State hit the pause button on voluntary workouts for all fall sports teams on July 8 following a string of positive COVID tests from players and coaches on campus.

A little less than a week later, on July 14, the university announced that it would be resuming voluntary workouts following another batch of testing.

"Based on the advice of medical professionals and the results of testing on Monday (July 13) of all student-athletes currently in training, The Ohio State University Department of Athletics announced today that it will resume voluntary training operations after a suspension announced last week," a school statement read.

"Our Buckeyes are excited to be headed into a new school year and were disappointed last week when we had to temporarily suspend training," Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith said. "These young people come from across the nation and the world to be part of our Ohio State family, and we do everything we can to create a safe, healthy environment so that they have a chance to study and compete. Our medical team will continue to evaluate, and we will share decisions as we move forward."

Ohio State was originally set to start

## Big Ten Announces Conference-Only Schedule For Fall

The Big Ten Conference announced on July 9 that it would be moving to conference-only scheduling for all fall sports as a result of the coronavirus.

"If the conference is able to participate in fall sports (men's and women's cross country, field hockey, football, men's and women's soccer, and women's volleyball) based on medical advice, it will move to conference-only schedules in those sports," a conference statement read. "Details for these sports will be released at a later date, while decisions on sports not listed above will continue to be evaluated. By limiting competition to other Big Ten institutions, the conference will have the greatest flexibility to adjust its own operations throughout the season and make quick decisions in real-time based on the most current evolving medical advice and the fluid nature of the pandemic.

"This decision was made following many thoughtful conversations over several months between the Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors, Directors of Athletics, Conference Office staff, and medical experts including the Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases and the Big Ten Sports Medicine Committee."

The statement goes on to make clear that the conference is "also prepared not to play in order to ensure the health, safety and wellness of our student-athletes should the circumstances so dictate."

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith echoed those sentiments during an interview with the Big Ten Network.

"I can't reiterate enough the fact that we might not play," Smith said. "We just might not. And I think that people need to understand that."

Smith also spoke at length on July 9 during a teleconference with media about the shift to conference-only scheduling and the impact that it will have on Ohio State. He explained that he was not confident about the current trajectory of the disease as the scheduled season approaches.

"I'm really concerned. That is the question of the day. I am very concerned. I was cautiously optimistic. I'm not even there now," Smith explained, citing a spike in COVID cases in recent weeks.

"When you look at the behavior of our country and you consider that in May, we were on a downward trajectory with cases and our hospitals were creating opportunities for people to come back and get the care that they needed beyond COVID and elective surgeries and things of that nature, and now we're, if not the worst in the world, one of the worst in the world," Smith said. "So I'm concerned about where we are just across the board relative to management of the pandemic as individuals.

"I think our governor (Mike DeWine) has done a phenomenal job. He had us on a great trajectory downward. And we just didn't respond to opportunities that were provided to us. So people need to follow the protocols and give our kids a chance to compete."

Smith sees the appeal of flexibility, both in when games can be scheduled and the ability to apply a pause if needed.

"The biggest thing for us was just the opportunity for us to create the flexibility," Smith said. "If we're able to play in September and something occurs in late September or early October, we can pause. We can hit the pause button and provide a window of opportunity for our student-athletes not to be put at risk. We can move games. If we're scheduled to play somewhere else and an outbreak occurs in that environment and that school has to shut down, then we can change games. The flexibility – I can't say that enough – is significant.

"It just gives us that ability to say, 'You know what, it's not safe here in Franklin County, so Illinois can't come here. So, what does that mean?' We'll have the ability to address that."

When asked about nonconference matchups with Buffalo, Bowling Green and Oregon that are now without a date, Smith said that he'll work to reschedule those at a later date and that he assumes athletic directors and commissioners of other conferences would be understanding of the dire circumstances.

Oregon athletic director Rob Mullens thanked Smith for his cooperation in a statement.

"I appreciate Gene Smith reaching out to share the Big Ten's announcement," Mullens said. "We agreed to have ongoing discussions about the options for rescheduling the Oregon home game in our series."

Regarding what the conference schedule will actually look like, Smith explained that he's hoping for a 10-game season but said that the Big Ten plans to look into that further in the coming weeks before making any final decision about what the season will ultimately look like.

"We have a scheduler in the Big Ten, and we'll talk about our planning principles and we'll schedule games," Smith said. "Obviously the situation, from a competitive equity point of view, everybody won't be happy. But the reality is you get a chance to compete and allow your kids a chance to play, so we have to set aside to some degree competitive equity. So I don't see a challenge with scheduling the games. We have to determine how many. We have to determine the divisional issues. We have to determine how many games we want to preschedule."

As for anything past the regular season, Smith isn't ready to consider that yet.

"I just want to give our kids a chance to play," Smith said. "So I'm more concerned about the regular season right now. And if we're blessed to have a postseason, whatever that looks like, great. But right now, I would love to have Wyatt Davis and Josh Myers to have a chance to have a season.

"First and foremost, we're going to follow the lead of our medical experts. Their advice has been great for us as we move through this process. So we'll just have to wait and see how our different environments manage the pandemic and take their advice as we move forward."

required workouts on July 13 as set by NCAA Division I Oversight Committee guidelines, but the Big Ten's cancellation of nonconference games has shifted that

timeline back. Smith told media on July 9 that Ohio State and the conference are taking those decisions day-by-day.

"You literally have to go day-by-day, week-by-week," Smith said. "So we've got to see where things go next week across the country and locally, and then we have to make a decision on what week we're going to start relative to contests. So there's a couple variables in there, but it's too difficult for me to speculate at this point in time."

The school has declined to release testing numbers for the teams impacted, "as it could lead to the identification of specific individuals and compromise their medical privacy."

### Ohio State, Alabama Set For Future Series

Ohio State and Alabama have become familiar teams atop the college football world and familiar foes on the recruiting trail in recent years, but the two sides have faced off just once since the start of the new millennium. That's set to change after the two schools announced an agreement on June 18 for a future home-and-home series, scheduled for 2027 and 2028.

"We'd like to thank University of Alabama Director of Athletics Greg Byrne and Senior Deputy Director of Athletics Finus Gaston, who worked so hard with us to get this series scheduled," said Diana Sabau, Ohio State deputy director

of athletics.

"Building a nonconference schedule with tradition-rich programs is important to the competitive excellence of our program and the department, and it is great for our fans. We are excited for both schools and pleased to be able to share in this announcement today with the University of Alabama."

Alabama head coach Nick Saban issued a statement on the future series.

"The addition of Ohio State to our future nonconference schedule shows the commitment our program and administration has to creating the best possible games for our players and fans," Saban said. "I have coached a lot of years in the SEC and Big Ten, and Bryant-Denny Stadium and Ohio Stadium are two of the very best environments in college football.

"Nonconference series like Alabama-Ohio State are so important to the health of college football, and we are very pleased that we could get this series completed."

Ohio State and Alabama last squared off on Jan. 1, 2015, in the first College Football Playoff, a 42-35 win for the Buckeyes that former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer described as a "sledgehammer game" and "a classic."

The Buckeyes will get to play host first in 2027, while Alabama will return the favor in 2028.

The trips will be firsts for both schools,

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## 2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time (ET)	TV	2019 Record
Sept. 5	BOWLING GREEN	Canceled	N/A	3-9 (2-6 Mid-American)
Sept. 12	at Oregon*	Canceled	N/A	12-2 (8-1 Pac-12)
Sept. 19	BUFFALO*	Canceled	N/A	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)

## August Publishing Date Yet To Be Determined

With the ever-changing college football landscape, Buckeye Sports Bulletin has yet to schedule the publishing date of the August issue of BSB.

"We are waiting for more clarity with regard to the Ohio State football schedule before committing to a print date that best serves our readers," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "At this point we can't even determine if the August issue will be our traditional Football Preview issue or a normal issue with the Football Preview scheduled for a later date to reflect a later start to the season."

"Watch the BuckeyeSports.com website for an announcement on the August publishing date, as well as news on the football schedule and the start of formal practice."

Readers can keep up with any Buckeye activity at the website, free to all BSB subscribers. The BSB staff will continue its electronic recruiting coverage, daily stories and updates, 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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who have squared off just four times before, three times in a bowl game and once in the Kick-off Classic in East Rutherford, N.J.

That battle, a 16-10 win for the Crimson Tide in 1986, serves as the lone regular-season meeting between the two sides, due in large part to a lack of interest from the Big Ten and SEC in home-and-home series matchups. Alabama has taken just a single trip since 1980 to play a team that was in the Big Ten at the time: Penn State in 2011. The Crimson Tide had regular matchups against the Nittany Lions and Rutgers throughout the '80s but broke off those agreements prior to either program joining the Big Ten.

Ohio State's track record in the last 40 years isn't much better. The Buckeyes played a home-and-home series with LSU in 1987 and 1988, traveling to Baton Rouge in 1987, but that stands as the lone trip for OSU into SEC country in that time frame.

When including bowl games and teams that weren't in the SEC at the time but are now, such as Missouri and Texas A&M, Ohio State has squared off with the conference 16 times since 1980 and has managed a 6-9-1 record. Just four of those 16 came in the regular season (Alabama in 1986; LSU in 1987-88 and Missouri in 1998).

The contract agreed to by the two schools states that the visiting program will receive \$1 million and 5,000 tickets from the home team, with an agreement in place for a \$3 million payment to the other school if either party backs out of the deal prior to kickoff in 2027. The two sides also made it very clear that this would remain a home-and-home series, rather than a single neutral-site game.

This series is the latest in what has been a long run of marquee future matchups for the Buckeyes. Ohio State has a loaded slate for the 2020s and into the 2030s, with six Power Five (and Notre Dame) opponents on the future schedule, starting with what had been a scheduled trip to Oregon in 2020 and a return game in Columbus with the Ducks in 2021.

Ohio State has dates set with Notre Dame for 2022 and 2023, Washington for 2024 and 2025, Texas for 2025 and 2026 and Georgia for 2030 and 2031, along with this new Alabama series.

Notably missing from that list is Boston College, which Ohio State previously planned to play in 2026 and 2027. That series has been moved to a later date yet to be announced.

### Ohio State Names New Hall Of Fame Selections

Ohio State announced 12 new members had been selected to its Athletics Hall of Fame on June 15.

Athletes selected were Aaron Brown

(football), Eric Brunner (men's soccer), Amanda Furrer (rifle), Steven Kehoe (men's volleyball), Daren Lynch (men's gymnastics), Regis Monahan (football), Lance Palmer (wrestling), Don Perry (men's gymnastics), Samantha Prahalis (women's basketball) and Amanda Purcell (rowing), along with coaches Karen Dennis (track and field) and Francis Schmidt (football).

Brown (1974-77) was a three-year starter at nose tackle for Woody Hayes and a part of Big Ten championship teams in 1974 and 1975.

Brunner (2005-07) led Ohio State to a Big Ten championship and NCAA College Cup final in 2007. He was also the first Buckeye to make the U.S. Men's National Team in 2008.

Dennis (2003-present) has won eight Big Ten championship team titles since joining Ohio State's track program, first as an assistant track coach from 2003-2006 then as head coach of the women's track and field/cross country teams from 2006-2014, and now as the director of track and field and cross country.

Furrer (2010-12) was a three-time NCAA championships qualifier, finishing in the top 10 all three times.

Kehoe (2008-11) helped Ohio State capture the 2011 national title, and was named Most Outstanding Player for both the MIVA (Midwest Intercollegiate Volleyball Association) and NCAA post-season tournaments.

Lynch (1998-2001) is one of just three Buckeyes to win the NCAA vault champi-

onship, while helping the Buckeyes claim the 2001 team national title as well.

Monahan (1932-34) served as a guard, tackle and kicker for Ohio State and was named team captain and a first-team All-American in 1934.

Palmer (2007-10) is one of eight four-time All-Americans in school history, winning an individual Big Ten title in 2010.

Perry (1952-55) was Ohio State gymnastics' first All-American in 1954 after finishing fourth on trampoline at the national championships.

Prahalis (2009-12) was a two-time All-American and the 2012 Big Ten Player of the Year.

Purcell (2003-05) walked on to Ohio State's rowing program before becoming a first-team Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association Pocock All-American in 2005.

Schmidt (1934-40) led Ohio State's football program to a 39-16-1 record and two Big Ten titles during his tenure. He's credited as the creator of Ohio

State's tradition of awarding gold pants to players and coaches after a win over Michigan, thanks to his comments about the Wolverines in 1934.

"Those fellows put their pants on one leg at a time, the same as everyone else," Schmidt said.

The class of 2020 will be inducted at a dinner Sept. 25 and introduced at halftime of the Ohio State home football game vs. Rutgers on Sept. 26.

The Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame was created in 1977 and has inducted 446 athletes, coaches and administrators through 2019.

### Doss, Laurinaitis, Ward On CFB HOF Ballot

Former Ohio State safety Mike Doss joined linebacker James Laurinaitis and offensive tackle Chris Ward on Ohio State's 2021 College Football Hall of Fame

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Continued From Page 5

ballot on June 16. Laurinaitis was added to the ballot last year, while this is Ward's fourth year as a nominee.

Teams are allowed three nominees a year, and thanks to the selection of Keith Byars to the Hall of Fame in March, Ohio State had an open spot this year for Doss. Nominees are required to be at least 10 years out of school and must have received first-team All-American honors during their career. All nominees have to have played within the last 50 years.

Doss, like Laurinaitis, is a three-time first-team All-American and is one of just eight players in school history with that achievement. Ward was named a first-team selection in 1976 and 1977.

If any of the three are selected for the class of 2021, they would be the 27th player from Ohio State to earn the distinction and the 10th since 2001, when John Hicks was inducted.

Doss would be the second defensive back in school history to join the elite group, along with Jack Tatum, who was inducted in 2004.

During his time in Columbus, Doss served as an enforcer at the back of the Buckeye defense and helped guide Ohio State to its 2002 national title win over Miami. He recorded 331 total tackles in his Ohio State career, the most ever for a Buckeye defensive back.

### Drake Tabbed As President Of California System

Just one week removed from the end of Dr. Michael V. Drake's six-year tenure at Ohio State on June 30, Drake was approved by the University of California board of regents as the next president of the University of California system on July 7. The news was confirmed by an official statement from the University of California.

"Dr. Drake personifies the qualities we looked for in selecting a new president: He is committed to seeing the whole student and to supporting all our students. He recognizes the incalculable value of faculty and staff to the university's mission, and he understands the importance of the public and private partnerships that help us achieve that mission," said John A. Pérez, chair of the UC board of regents. "As the first person of color to serve as UC president, Dr. Drake returns to UC at an important point in the university's journey. This is a homecoming the University of California is very excited to be celebrating early."

Drake came to Ohio State by way of the California system, after serving as the chancellor of UC Irvine from 2005-14 and as the systemwide vice president for health affairs from 2000-05.

"Much has changed in the 15 years since I was given the privilege of becoming chancellor at UC Irvine, but not my absolute belief in this great university and its time-honored mission," Drake said. "I look forward to working with the regents, chancellors, students, faculty, staff, alumni and our broader community as we, together, guide the university through the challenging times ahead. Brenda and I are thrilled to be back."

Drake will serve as the first black president of the system in its 152-year history.

"UC faculty, staff and students repeatedly told us they want a president who will prioritize issues of equity and fairness and be a powerful advocate at the state and national level," said Regent Gareth Elliott, chair of the special committee in charge of the presidential search. "When we needed the right person to steward UC's global reputation, it turns out we didn't have to look too far from home. I am very proud

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If you have been thinking about becoming a BSB VIP subscriber and have the means to do so, now would be a helpful time to show your support for Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

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VIP subscribers enjoy a 20 percent discount at the new Conrads College Gifts at Easton. VIP subscribers also enjoy a 5 percent discount on any Ohio State football trip booked through Reynolds Travel. Watch for 2020 trips to be posted soon. And VIP subscribers receive a certificate good for \$10 off at Roosters restaurants, the "Fun, Casual Joint."

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.

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of this thorough and inclusive search, and I'm delighted it resulted in such a great match with Dr. Drake."

Drake was set to serve in a year-long president emeritus role at Ohio State prior to this announcement, following what was thought to be his announcement of his impending retirement back in November.

Drake's successor, Kristina M. Johnson, is set to take over the role starting Sept. 1.

Drake will take over his new role starting Aug. 1 following the departure of former president Janet Napolitano.

### Buckeyes Galore On Big Ten All-Decade Team

Ohio State could be found more frequently than any other team in the conference among the Big Ten Network's conference all-decade football list, with the Buckeyes racking up 17 total selections, including eight on the first team.

Ohio State swept the selections at quarterback, landing J.T. Barrett on the first team and Dwayne Haskins on the second-team.

Barrett was a four-year contributor for Ohio State, taking the reins as a starter in 2014 following Braxton Miller's season-ending injury and then leading the Buckeyes in the back half of 2015, 2016 and 2017. He put up a 38-6 record as a starter and tossed for 9,434 yards and 104 touchdowns on his career while rushing for 3,263 yards and an additional 43 scores. For his efforts, Barrett was named a three-time captain, three-time All-Big Ten honoree, three-time Big Ten Quarterback of the Year and Silver Football Award winner in 2016.

"That is pretty crazy," Barrett told BTN of being the top quarterback of the decade. "You think about the quarterbacks at the time. Connor Cook was obviously a baller at Michigan State, Trace McSorley at Penn State. I'm grateful for sure."

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## From The Pages Of BSB

**35 Years Ago – 1985**

July 1 marked the first anniversary of Rick Bay's arrival as director at athletics at Ohio State University, a year spent keeping a watchful eye over the 31 Buckeye varsity sports and an annual budget of over \$12.4 million, while making over a hundred speeches and pressing the flesh as he introduced himself as the new man on the OSU scene. Those efforts, Bay felt, had paid off.

"I knew, especially for the first year, it would be awfully busy," Bay told BSB. "I knew the level of expectation would be extremely high. It's proven to be both of those things."

"At the same time, though, I've been buoyed by the support and the positive attitude that the people connected with Ohio State University, either officially or unofficially, have demonstrated. There's a good positive atmosphere in which to work."

Bay also explained to BSB that he had set two primary goals for himself in his first 12 months, with the first being more available to the media and to the public, and the second to better know his staff and coaches. Bay felt he had accomplished both goals, though he still felt he had plenty of work to do.

**30 Years Ago – 1990**

Ohio State head football coach John Cooper indefinitely suspended tailback Carlos Snow and defensive back Vinnie Clark after the pair had a brush with the law June 22.

Shortly after 3:30 a.m. that morning, Snow reportedly drove his car off the road and into a fuel pump and a wall at the Certified Oil service station at the intersection of 11th Avenue and Summit Street.

After failing a field test, Snow also failed a Breathalyzer test at police headquarters. His blood alcohol level was shown to be at .17. The Ohio legal limit was .10.

Clark became involved when he reportedly drove up to the scene while Snow was being questioned in the back of a police cruiser. According to police reports, Clark jumped out of his car and pushed Columbus police officer Kenneth Griffs away from the cruiser.

Clark was charged with assault and resisting arrest and taken to Franklin County jail, where he was eventually released after posting bonds totaling \$106.

Snow was charged with operating a motor vehicle while intoxicated and failure to control a motor vehicle, both of which he pleaded not guilty to on June 27 in Franklin County Municipal Court.

**25 Years Ago – 1995**

The university unveiled plans for a new \$75 million arena at a June meeting of its board of trustees.

In those plans, Ohio State outlined the specifics for a state-of-the-art, red brick edifice that would, upon completion, be the Big Ten's largest basketball arena, with a capacity of 19,500. As part of the plans, OSU president E. Gordon Gee wanted to ensure a collegiate

feeling with the new building.

"All across the country they are building arenas that look like spaceships," Gee said. "This one looks like a college building, one that belongs on our campus."

The arena was planned for a vacant field at the corner of Olentangy River Road and Lane Avenue, adjacent to the Woody Hayes Athletic Center and across from the Fawcett Center. It was part of a comprehensive facilities upgrade that also included the new Bill Davis Stadium for OSU baseball and, down the line, a new soccer/track stadium.

**20 Years Ago – 2000**

Ohio State associate athletic director Archie Griffin was having some trouble lining up nonconference opponents with the addition of extra regular-season games in 2002 and 2003 on the horizon.

"It is difficult to get single home games right now," Griffin said. "We would like to have as many home games as we possibly can. We've got some prospects, but it is a little tough to get some teams to come in here."

OSU had not announced any more nonconference matchups since fall of 1999, when a game with San Diego State in 2001 was announced. In fact, Ohio State had yet to officially announce a home-and-home series with Washington in 2003 and 2007, even though the Huskies had already publicized those games.

"That is still tentative," Griffin said. "We have an agreement, but we have no signed contracts. Talks are still ongoing between the two schools' legal departments."

**15 Years Ago – 2005**

Ohio State cornerback E.J. Underwood's career in Columbus came to a close following academic and off-the field problems that had plagued him at the end of the 2004 season. A university spokesman confirmed that he was no longer on Ohio State's roster.

Underwood started the first six games of the 2004 season then surrendered his position to Ashton Youboty. Only 52 of his 212 total minutes of playing time came in the second half of the season, and he didn't play at all against Michigan or in the Alamo Bowl against Oklahoma State.

He was missing from winter conditioning as well as spring practice, although he reportedly remained in school in an attempt to regain his eligibility.

Reports began to surface shortly after his departure that he was considering a transfer to Campbellsville (Ky.) University, an NAIA Division II school.

**10 Years Ago – 2010**

Two Buckeye sophomores left the Ohio State football team in June, one on each side of the football.

Wide receiver Duron Carter was the first, as his father, Cris, told BSB on June 21 that he'd be leaving the team and enrolling at

Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College after being ruled academically ineligible at the end of the 2009 season. He had missed spring practice for academic reasons as well and would look to improve his standing at Coffeyville, with hopes to return to a Division I school in June 2011. Later that day, the university confirmed Carter's departure, as well as that of defensive lineman Keith Wells.

Wells struggled to find playing time as a freshman in 2008, earning just six minutes, and then redshirted in 2009 following an offseason injury. With plenty of defensive end depth, he wasn't expected to find the field much in 2010, sparking the transfer for more playing time elsewhere.

**Five Years Ago – 2015**

After a senior season in which Ohio State's Logan Stieber became just the fourth wrestler in NCAA history to win four individual national titles while helping the Buckeyes to their first team title in the program's 94-year history, the Monroeville, Ohio, native continued to receive honors for his accomplishments as a Buckeye.

Stieber was named the Ohio State Male Athlete of the Year and was then selected as the Big Ten Jesse Owens Male Athlete of the Year, making him the fourth Ohio State athlete to earn that conference-wide honor. He was the first Buckeye to capture the award since basketball's Evan Turner did so in 2010. Gymnast Blaine Wilson won for Ohio State in 1997, and football star Eddie George was chosen the winner in 1996.

"Logan is a special student-athlete who has left a legacy at Ohio State," head coach Tom Ryan said. "His four national titles are the first ever for a Big Ten athlete, but it was his ability to lead the program to our first-ever NCAA team title that most accurately defines him. I am proud that someone who has worked as hard as he has for as long as he has is receiving such great recognition."

**One Year Ago – 2019**

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith sat down with Buckeye Sports Bulletin to talk about the health of the athletic department and the development of two new additions to Ohio State's campus: the Covelli Center and the Schumaker Complex.

"It was a lot of work, and our fundraising team did a marvelous job in raising funding for two facilities at the same time – the Covelli and the Schumaker (Complex providing nutritional, physical and psychological support)," Smith told BSB. "It was north of \$90 million the team raised, and I'm so proud of them."

Smith also gave a vote of confidence to Ohio Stadium, which will turn 100 years old in 2022, when asked about how long he sees it remaining in Ohio State's plans.

"Forever," Smith said. "It's a landmark facility. It's why we invested more than \$6 million in concrete restoration. That will hold for nine to 10 years. There's no reason to believe that it won't last for a long, long, long time – minus shrinking capacity because of how fan behavior changes."

Haskins got the nod after just one year as a starter in Columbus, though it was a year that saw him shatter passing records, tossing for 4,831 yards and 50 touchdowns in 2018.

Ohio State didn't have quite as much success in the voting at running back but still placed Ezekiel Elliott on the second team.

A four-star prospect from St. Louis John Burroughs, Elliott rushed for 3,961 yards and 43 touchdowns in his three-year career with the Buckeyes. That includes 696 yards and eight scores in three straight wins over Wisconsin in the

Big Ten Championship Game, Alabama in the Sugar Bowl and Oregon in the inaugural College Football Playoff national championship.

Former Penn State halfback Saquon Barkley and former Wisconsin back Jonathan Taylor made up the first-team grouping.

The Buckeyes were without a selection at wide receiver, though former quarterback and wide receiver Braxton Miller was picked All-Purpose offensive player of the decade.

Miller was twice a winner of the Chicago Tribune Silver Football given to

the Big Ten's most valuable player, as well as a two-time conference offensive player of the year, conference quarterback of the year and All-Big Ten selection. For his career, Miller threw for 5,295 yards and 52 touchdowns, ran for 3,315 yards and 33 scores, and reeled in 25 receptions for 340 yards and three more touchdowns.

Ohio State dominated the trenches, with four selections on the offensive line including two on the first team.

Current guard Wyatt Davis and former guard and center Billy Price filled out the first team for the Buckeyes, while Pat Elflein and Taylor Decker were picked to

the second group.

Davis, who started for the first time in his career in 2019, talked to BTN about the selection.

"The first thing was disbelief," Davis said. "To receive that type of award is – I'm lost for words. I was so excited when I got the news and I just want to say thank you to everyone that voted for me on that ballot. I still have got to finish strong, but it's definitely something nice to look back on. It just gives me the chills thinking about it."

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# OHIO STATE INSIDER

Continued From Page 7

Price, who set a Big Ten record in starting 55 consecutive games, also spoke with the network about his inclusion.

"It's a tremendous honor," Price said. "You've got to think about the guys who have come through the Big Ten over the past decade, and some of those names and the history in the Big Ten for offensive linemen, it's incredible. To be selected is a huge honor."

On the other side of the line, Ohio State placed two more former Buckeyes on the first team in Chase Young and Joey Bosa, along with Joey's younger brother, Nick, on the second team.

Young played for the Buckeyes for three seasons and set the Buckeyes' single-season sack record with a nation-best 16½ sacks in 12 games last fall. He

became the first defensive player since Notre Dame linebacker Manti Te'o in 2012 to earn a trip to New York City as a finalist for the Heisman Trophy. He was the lone unanimous first-team selection on the all-decade team.

The elder Bosa recorded 148 tackles, 51 tackles for loss, 26 sacks, five forced fumbles and one interception during his three-year career with the Buckeyes (2013-15). He was a two-time consensus All-American (2014-15), two-time Big Ten Defensive Lineman of the Year (2014-15), two-time first-team All-Big Ten (2014-15) and the Nagurski-Woodson Defensive Player of the Year (2014).

At linebacker, Ryan Shazier was the only Ohio State representative, picked to the second team. He finished his college career with 317 tackles, 15 sacks, four pass breakups and one interception, which he returned for a touchdown in a 2012 win at Penn State. He was then named an All-American following his junior year, during which he recorded a Big Ten-leading 143 tackles, including a school-record 16 solo tackles in his final game in Ohio Stadium.

Rounding out the team in the defensive backfield was one more first-teamer, safety Malik Hooker, along with safety Vonn Bell and cornerback Jeff Okudah on the second group. The selection committee cited Hooker's playmaking ability in his single year as a starter.

"After a terrific 2016 season, Hooker was named a unanimous first-team All-American in his one year as a starter," the announcement statement said. "He tied third nationally that season in interceptions with seven and fourth in interceptions yards with 181, and he was tied

for first among all players with three interception return touchdowns, including a critical 16-yarder in a 30-27 double-overtime win over Michigan."

Despite not claiming a single Big Ten Coach of the Year title during his time at Ohio State, former head coach Urban Meyer was selected as the first-team coach, putting Ohio State at that final total of 17 selections.

Meyer finished with 83 wins in 92 games as Ohio State's head coach, three of which came in the form of Big Ten championships and another two coming on a run to a national title in the 2014 season.

## Preseason Magazines High On Buckeyes

Ohio State is listed near or at the top of almost every major preseason college football magazine, including Athlon, Lindy's, Pick Six Previews and Street & Smith's.

Of that group, Athlon represents the low-end for the Buckeyes, as they check in at No. 3 in the publication's preseason rankings, behind Clemson and Alabama, but ahead of Oklahoma, Penn State, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Notre Dame and Oregon to round out the top 10. It also projects the Buckeyes as a playoff team and a undefeated winner of the Big Ten against West representative Wisconsin.

In the reasoning behind the pick, Athlon cites Ohio State's immense talent as reason for optimism but relative lack of experience on defense as a point of concern.

"Even though this is a team with enough ability to contend and with several upperclassmen occupying key spots, a lot will have to fall into place for OSU to return to the College Football Playoff," the breakdown reads. "With (head coach Ryan) Day under the headset, (quarterback Justin) Fields at the controls and young blazers at the wideout positions, this offense could be electric again.

"Clearly, Fields will have every chance to confirm why he is a Heisman front-runner. But are the losses on defense going to prove to be too much to overcome?"

Athlon also features a team breakdown from anonymous conference coaches, many of which had positive things to say about the Buckeyes.

"They're a favorite to win the conference and the national title, and it's for a very good reason," one coach said. "They're operating at the highest level. They're dominant in every phase of construction. They recruit, develop and coach better than anyone in the conference and as good as an Alabama or Clemson."

Another coach spoke about the changes that Ohio State made on defense under former coordinator Jeff Hafley, who shifted the Buckeyes to a single-high, zone

coverage look in 2019 that new coordinator Kerry Coombs is expected to carry into 2020.

"They simplified defensively last year," the coach explained. "That was a big change for them and it paid off.

"Now they're going to have to adjust. The secondary is turning over, and they're good but not great on the defensive line. One of those units is going to have to lead the defense if they want to keep the momentum going from last season."

In Lindy's Ohio State sits atop the rankings, followed by Clemson, Alabama, Oklahoma, Florida, Penn State, Georgia, LSU, Oregon and Notre Dame. The Buckeyes are projected to face off with the Sooners in the Rose Bowl, with yet another date with Clemson to finish the year, this time in the national championship.

"It's good to be king," Lindy's writes of Ohio State. "And make no mistake about it: Ohio State is the king of the Big Ten.

"Wait. Ohio State is more than that in 2020. The Buckeyes will emerge as masters of college football.

"This is their time. Coming off a 13-1 season, a third consecutive league championship and a College Football Playoff appearance, they're ready to rise back to the top. It was an impressive debut for precocious Ryan Day, who is poised to overcome an exodus of NFL talent – so long, Chase Young, Jeff Okudah, Damon Arnette and seven others – but boffo talent remains."

It goes on to say that Ohio State "has the look of a national champion."

In Lindy's scouting report section, the anonymous sources spout similar views on the Buckeyes.

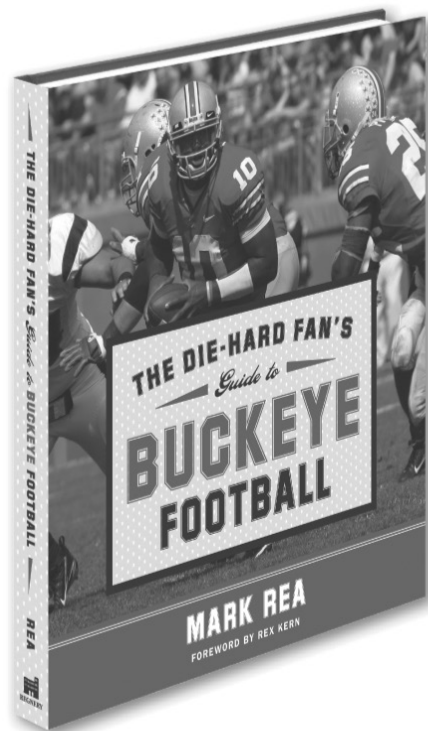
"What a collection of talent Urban Meyer left behind, but I have to give Ryan Day credit, too," Ohio State's scouting report reads. "He was exactly the steady force the Buckeyes needed last year. But we need to talk about that talent, right? Everybody was talking about it during the draft, but it really was remarkable that the first three picks (Joe Burrow, Chase Young, Jeff Okudah) were all in Columbus just a couple years ago. Day will keep that gravy train rolling."

Pick Six Previews sees Ohio State as the No. 2 team in the country entering the season, and calls for a playoff matchup with No. 3 Florida, while No. 1 Clemson takes on No. 4 Oregon on the other side of the bracket. Alabama, Georgia, Oklahoma, Notre Dame, Penn State and Texas A&M round out the top 10.

"Last preseason, I was the only publication to predict Ohio State as a Playoff team and they proved me right," writer Brett Ciancia says of the Buckeyes. "They were a near perfect team that was a few 50/50 calls away from a national championship appearance. They sent two candidates to

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the Heisman ceremony, won their eighth straight over Michigan and third straight Big Ten title.

"Yes, ten of those starters are now in the pros, but Ohio State has distanced itself from the rest of the Big Ten in terms of recruiting. Several All-Big Ten players return, plus those vacancies are being filled by nation-best blue-chip talent. Ryan Day passed his audition with flying colors.

"Ohio State is my pick to win the East Division and the Big Ten overall and will return to the Playoff."

Finally, in Street & Smith's, Ohio State checks in at No. 2, again behind Dabo Swinney's Tigers and ahead of Alabama, Penn State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Florida, Georgia, Auburn and LSU.

"The beat goes on, and Ohio State again will remain among the very small class of teams that can win the 2020 national championship," Ohio State's breakdown reads. "Like most years in Columbus, this is a title-or-bust affair.

**Brown Wants Title As NCAA's Fastest DB**

Ohio State junior cornerback Cameron Brown took to Twitter on June 25 to stake his claim as the fastest defensive back in America.

"Everybody keep asking me what my 40 is ... Just know I'm the fastest DB in college football," Brown said.

While the Buckeye is not lacking for confidence, he was quickly rebuked by several teammates and coaches, including former walk-on offensive lineman Kevin Woidke and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline.

"Cam my guy," replied Woidke, a 6-6, 305-pound offensive tackle. "Race me any day, I take me in that race 10/10."

Hartline took the smack talk a step further, saying that Brown would be the fourth-fastest player in his wide receivers room.

"Dang, we going to be straight then (because) you'd be like 4th in our room ... #WeNeedFootball." Hartline said. "1 on 1's can't come soon enough."

Brown took the jabs in stride and seemed up to the challenge that Hartline issued.

"Don't worry, (your) time will come to get clamped up soon ... I'm bout my business but you already knew that," Brown posted.

This isn't the first time in recent months that Brown has boasted about an improved 40-time. In December, he told media that he posted a 4.3 time in May of 2019 and said that when healthy, he could hit an even better number.

"I just came off a torn hamstring, so I think I was faster than that," Brown said of his run after the Big Ten championship. "I tripped in it too, so you never know. I think I can run a 4.2."

While there are plenty of questions about the validity of Brown's claim, due in large part to the 4.48 40-yard dash time that he posted as a high schooler, there aren't any questions about Brown's ability to step into a starting role this fall, as he's expected to following the departures of Jeff Okudah and Damon Arnette to the NFL.

"I think Cam would tell you that maybe six or seven months ago, he wasn't ready for this," Day said following Brown's first significant playing time of the 2019 season, when he was the first player off the bench against Michigan State on Oct. 5. "But he's matured into a really good young man who's taking care of all of his

business off the field, in the classroom and now on the field.

"That's typically what happens. When you really start to take care of what's going on in the classroom, you're doing a good job off the field, you start to make plays and you start to become reliable and play with discipline as well. I'm really impressed with how far he's come, and the good news with him is he's got a high ceiling, and he's got a long way to go."

Former defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley had high praise of Brown as well.

"In order to really succeed on the field, you have to be in a good place in school and a good place mentally," Hafley said. "Cam has worked so hard - academically, on the field. I wasn't surprised with how he's played because of the work he put in."

Despite social media posts about 40-times, Brown's focus entering the 2020 season is firmly on securing a starting spot, not on posting the fastest time.

"I've just got to lock in and take their spot like they never left, really," said Brown of his mind-set with Okudah and Arnette gone. "I've got to be prepared to go in and make sure it doesn't seem like they came out. I'm just trying to work on my game until it's my time to shine."

**Gill Declared Eligible At Boston College**

Former Ohio State wide receiver and Westerville (Ohio) South product Jaelen Gill was declared immediately eligible by the NCAA on July 14, meaning that he will be allowed to take the field this season for Jeff Hafley's Boston College program. Gill confirmed the news on his Twitter account.

"Blessed and thankful to be granted immediate eligibility," Gill wrote. "Let's get it."

A former blue-chip recruit who spent two seasons in Columbus, Gill announced his transfer to Boston College in mid-May, following a redshirt freshman campaign in which he served exclusively in a backup role. Gill hauled in six receptions for 51 yards and a touchdown in 2019.

Gill's play entering 2019 grabbed Hartline's attention, but not enough to yield more playing time for the former No. 30 overall player in the class of 2018.

"He's one of the guys that have made probably the biggest jumps," Hartline said of Gill last spring. "He's playing fast, he's at my hip, he wants to learn and learn, he's doing a great job with his academics off the field. There's still things he needs to clean up and he knows that and we'll keep that between us, but in the end, he's doing a great job on the field and I'm excited for him."

Although Gill had excited Buckeye coaches and fans in spring ball prior to the 2019 season, he found himself buried on the depth chart and was set to enter a

battle with former five-star Garrett Wilson for time in the slot this fall.

At Boston College, he's expected to compete for a starting role and will have three more years of eligibility.

**Former OSU QB Baldwin To Retire**

Former Ohio State quarterback Matthew Baldwin announced on June 25 that his football career has come to a close, due to lingering knee and back injuries.

"We thought this break would be the perfect chance to get his back well," Baldwin's mother told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram. "He did PT, various shots, a nerve ablation, but nothing has worked."

"We are all so heartbroken that Matthew won't be suiting up this year, but we will be cheering those guys on."

Baldwin left Ohio State for TCU after a single season in Columbus, citing a desire to be closer to home. He had joined the Buckeyes as a four-star recruit in the class of 2018 out of Lake Travis, Texas, but redshirted as a freshman as he recovered from a torn ACL.

After being initially named ineligible to play immediately for TCU in August 2019, Baldwin was named eligible for the Horned Frogs following an appeal in September, though he had already opted for season-ending surgery.

Baldwin ends his career without taking a regular-season snap, though he did go 20 of 36 for 246 yards with two touchdowns and two interceptions in Ohio State's 2019 spring game.

**Women's Lacrosse Finds Next Assistant Coach**

Ohio State head women's lacrosse coach Amy Bokker announced on July 8 that Taylor VanThof, a two-time second-team All-American during her time at Loyola (Md.) as a player, has joined the Ohio State staff as an assistant coach.

VanThof, who also plays for the New England Command in the women's professional lacrosse league, joins Ohio State after a year as an assistant with UConn's women lacrosse program.

"I am very pleased to welcome Taylor to Buckeye Nation," said Bokker. "She is a young, innovative coach who is ready to contribute to our offensive unit and draw teams. Taylor has had incredible mentors as a coach and a player, and I am excited to watch her continue to grow. She is competitive, passionate about the game and I believe will be a tremendous role model for the women in our program."

"I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity that head coach Amy Bokker, as well as the rest of the women's lacrosse support staff, has given me," said VanThof. "I am excited and honored to officially be a part of the Ohio State Department of Athletics and Buckeye Nation. Ohio State

is rich in tradition, and I am humbled to take part in continuing to build this legacy."

**Ohio State Wins Sustainability Award**

The National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) and USG Corporation announced Ohio State as the winner of the USG NACDA Sustainability Award on June 23. The award goes to schools that incorporate sustainable practices and materials into their athletics facilities.

"The Sustainability Award was designed to recognize NACDA member institutions across all divisions, honoring athletics directors and their universities for incorporating sustainable practices and materials into their athletics facilities," the announcement read. "A six-person committee consisting of athletics directors across the country and representatives from USG and NACDA aided in selecting Ohio State as this year's award winner."

Ohio State received the award thanks to its work on the Schumaker Complex, the Jennings Wrestling Facility and the Covelli Center.

"We're honored to receive this award, as it is a great testament to the hard work of many in our department," athletic director Smith said. "The process of creating and maintaining sustainability processes for The Schumaker Complex, Covelli Center and Jennings Wrestling Facility were truly a team effort. We also know that moving forward, continuing to find ways to keep the facilities on the forefront of sustainability will be critically important."

Added NACDA Chief Executive Officer Bob Vecchione, "Ohio State has produced some of the most impressive facilities in college athletics, and for The Schumaker Complex to have as positive an impact from a sustainability standpoint as a student-athlete experience standpoint is an accomplishment worth recognizing. NACDA is proud to continue its partnership with USG to highlight the new standard of sustainability in our industry."

For the award, Ohio State will also receive \$40,000 in USG product. The award will be presented to Ohio State at a later date.

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# Smith Reflects On Day's First Year As Head Coach

Continued From Page 1

the media in our press box, for example. We know we can handle that really quickly with the new regulations, so we're not focused a whole lot on that right now."

**BSB: Upon their return to campus, student-athletes were asked to sign a pledge, acknowledging their risk of participating amid the coronavirus pandemic. If it's not a legal document, what was the motivation behind having them sign it?**

Smith: "It was to make them make a commitment to themselves and their teammates. We feel comfortable and confident when they're with us in the weight room or out on the field. Our environment is clean and we're going to make sure that it's physically distanced. When they leave the Woody (Hayes Athletic Center), we're going to make sure they have their masks on and are physically distanced. But then they leave us, and so we wanted them to understand this is serious. You have to make a commitment to follow these guidelines. It's a team pledge, and that's what we wanted to do.

"To put it in writing. I've read it, I know what I need to do and I'm going to commit myself to when I'm in my apartment that I'm physically distancing or wearing my mask out of it and washing my hands.' All of those types of things. It's one thing to read it and sign it as opposed to hearing it on a Zoom

call. You're making a pledge to yourself and each other that you're going to follow the protocols that our experts say are needed to protect yourself and to protect your teammates and anybody else around you."

**BSB: People in the media made the assumption that it was a legal document. Did you expect that kind of pushback?**

Smith: "Not to the level it got to. We intentionally made it so it wasn't a legal document. We have waivers. I was talking to our lawyer after people started saying it was a liability waiver, and I said, 'Wait a minute. What am I missing here?' And she said, 'Well, they didn't read it.' And she was right. We have waivers of liability, and this isn't even close to the ballpark of what we use for waivers of liability. Student-athletes can't and won't lose their scholarships, and we'll take care of them medically. It says that right in there.

"At the end of the day, that is not something we would even think would stand up in the court of law. It's disappointing that people took it that way, but we anticipated it because we're Ohio State. There's a void here, too, and the media is looking for something to talk about. Somebody else had a stronger document, I think it was SMU. We thought some people would say some things but not to that level."

**BSB: During this process, schools have shared their testing results. They haven't been saying which players, but they've said X number of players have**

**tested positive. Ohio State is not doing that, though. How come?**

Smith: "That's more of the corners of identifying the player. The institution, legal and everyone else involved took the position that we want to protect the individual player, and our people are so rabid about us and they'll do everything they can to find out who that player is. If there's someone positive, you know that player is on social media and in the public, so the solution was to mitigate that opportunity.

"If a young person says that they tested positive, that's their business. That's their right. It's kind of like during the football season if somebody has an injury and they say they're out because of an ACL tear, that's their right. That's not our right. I know there are people who don't believe that's the right thing to do, but from a legal point of view, that's the position we took."

**BSB: The virus has obviously shifted the way people go about their daily business. What was a normal day like for you during the last few months?**

Smith: "It's really been challenging. Fortunately, technology has helped us quite a bit. Every single day since March, at least in the beginning, the athletic directors in the Big Ten had morning calls. Now we're down to five days a week, talking about different models, different structures, listening to medical experts. (Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren) put together a medical task force, so we are constantly getting education. Now all these new tests are emerging, so we're getting educated on that.

"We also had Zoom calls with our coaches almost weekly up until recently. I've been on Zoom calls with parents and some phone calls with athletes because some coaches wanted me to do that. We've been doing a lot of planning. Microsoft Teams has been used quite a bit with some of our stuff, so we've been doing a lot of planning with our coaches, primarily because there's been so much uncertainty. Early on, it was more about rules and regulations. Since you couldn't recruit anymore, what could you do virtually? Can you have virtual camps? All those types of things, so we were pretty busy. It's slowed up a little bit right now because it's normal vacation time for people."

**BSB: The virus hit in the middle of spring practice. So how do you feel head coach Ryan Day has handled these unprecedented times?**

Smith: "He's done well. We were a little bit fortunate in this challenge because we were on spring break when this hit. We were basically telling people not to come back to campus. It was a little different than a lot of places. I think he's handled it well. As you've seen, Ryan is a great communicator and always asking the right questions. He's been a leader in our league around certain topics,

and he's done exceptionally well. One thing we've always talked about with players and facilities is to make sure we overcommunicate. He was doing that early on. How can we make sure, since they're at home, we can communicate? What can we do for the student-athletes relative to workouts? What can we do relative to nutrition?

"He's always worried about making sure they had available to them whatever we could provide. We were, as a conference, always driving a lot of decisions with NCAA legislation as a result of the feedback we've gotten from the coaches, particularly from Ryan. He's done an excellent job."

**BSB: The interesting thing about the players being at home is that you're relying on them to do what they say they are, and that's not something that necessarily exists when you're in the Woody. How do you think that challenges the coaching staff?**

Smith: "That's big time. Early on, you didn't have all the information as a position coach or a head coach, but you're just talking to them about being safe. But then we started to get feedback from the players. What can we do from a nutritional point of view? Can we send them anything from an equipment point of view, like the rubber bands and the rollers and things of that nature?"

"Over time, it got to a point where we knew what we needed to do, but then Ryan also did a great job of including the parents. You're at home with your parents, so they're a part of making sure their son did what they needed to do. They want to see them have an opportunity to come back, so it was a family focus. You didn't want to set up a situation where you monitor them, but you want to educate and trust them. You know our kids, we have very mature kids. We trust them. We got a lot of feedback from them, so it's worked exceptionally well for us."

**BSB: Shifting to the on-field play, Day led the program to a Big Ten title and College Football Playoff in just his first season as head coach. Did he meet or exceed your expectations?**

Smith: "He exceeded them in every single way. I knew his football IQ was very high, but the way he managed the season from a team point of view, managed the kids, learning how to manage his entire staff and entire support staff. A lot of people tend to forget he doesn't just have assistant coaches, he's got a support staff around that program that are very important to manage on a daily basis, and he's done an excellent job in that space.

"He's a great communicator. He's inquisitive and if he doesn't know something, he always asks. That's really helpful. He doesn't just try to make decisions on the fly, and he's exceeded my expectations in so many different ways. A lot of coaches would have crashed and burned with the Chase Young

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challenge that we had and when we had it. He just embraced the challenge and helped compliance, Chase and the family get to a spot that allowed him to come back and play and take the high road. He did a really great job.”

**BSB: The season came to an unfortunate end with the controversial loss to Clemson. You were pretty outspoken after the game, particularly when it came to the overturned fumble call that resulted in a go-ahead touchdown. Seven months later, how much does that still sting?**

Smith: “It still stings. I have no problem losing to a team that is better than you. I have no problem losing to a team when you don’t execute or make enough mistakes and you ultimately deserve to lose. I was highly disappointed that we should have had the opportunity to win that game, but a couple opportunities were taken away. I still hurt for the players because who knows how it would have ended up after that. At the end of the day, that would have positioned us and the players to win that game. I still hurt from it. Not personally because I’ve been through it a million times, but the players deserved an opportunity to finish that game without the challenges they faced in it.”

**BSB: The defense was much improved under Jeff Hafley last season, so much so that he’s now the head coach at Boston College. Did you anticipate that he’d have that kind of impact and those kind of opportunities after just one season?**

Smith: “I didn’t have that crystal ball, but as he coached in the preseason and early games, I realized how special he was. Not just with the players and the schemes they ultimately ran, but how he worked with other people. He’s just a great personality. He’s been around the block and seen a lot, so I knew he had the potential to be a head coach one day. I didn’t know it would happen that fast, but he’s a talented man.”

**BSB: We’re all quite familiar with his replacement, Kerry Coombs, given his previous stint with the program. What is it about Kerry that makes you believe there won’t be a drop-off in play from the defense this fall?**

Smith: “We’re the total sum of our experiences in life, and he’s had the experience at the NFL level with some unbelievable talent and in a different game. Jeff had that. He’ll have the opportunity to bring that experience to the team that he didn’t have before. I think our kids will respond to that. We’re talented but we’re lacking some experience back there, but we have good leadership and a number of guys back. Kerry is a good teacher. He was a good teacher before, and that hasn’t changed. He’s high energy, which is a huge positive, so I think we’ll be fine.”

**BSB: You mentioned Young, who played a significant role in the defensive improvement by setting the school record for sacks last season and being**

**invited to the Heisman Trophy ceremony. Where would you say his season ranked among the all-time greats?**

Smith: “What a season. He put so much into it, and he would have more if he wasn’t double- and triple-teamed at times. He had a heck of a season, and I’m so proud of him. I’m glad he was picked where he was picked and as high as he was picked. He’ll do exceptionally well at the next level, and I’m proud of the season he had.”

**BSB: There was a bit of a rough patch toward the end of the year, when Young was suspended for two games for accepting a loan from a family friend. When it was first brought to your attention, did you think there was a chance the team would be missing its best defensive player for the rest of the season?**

Smith: “Oh, sure. I thought it could have gone both ways. It could have been an NCAA decision or it could have been his decision. He had the opportunity to say, ‘I’m not going to go through this.’ He could have decided to go work out and go pro. He chose to share the information with our compliance staff and gave himself an opportunity to come back. I told his parents and him to at least allow us (to determine) what the suspension would be and then he could still decide to go pro or come back. He definitely got a chance to leave in either scenario, but he chose to come back, which I thought said a lot about him.”

**BSB: Though under different circumstances, that would have been similar to when Nick Bosa decided he was going to focus his efforts on going pro vs. coming back from injury in 2018. When that happens, do you just have to support the player one way or the other, even if it might not benefit the school?**

Smith: “No question. I’ve always been that way. That’s the right thing to do. That’s a family decision and a player’s decision, and we’d never get in the way of that. Nick’s was different since it was an injury, and there were significant risks in him coming back, so I get it. That’s a tough call. You respect the family, the player and their rationale. We’re trying to position young people to have the opportunity to do what they want to do when they leave us. If their circumstances require them to leave earlier than others, I’ve always believed you have to support the family.”

**BSB: On offense, the Buckeyes greatly benefited from the transfer of quarterback Justin Fields. Does his success skew your feelings toward the transfer portal, and by contrast, what challenges do you feel still remain with that process?**

Smith: “I’ve always felt student-athletes should have the opportunity to transfer for whatever reason. I wasn’t a big believer in the portal and how it was structured, and I still believe there are some challenges with it. But my base support of providing student-athletes an opportunity to transfer and be immediately eligible one time hasn’t

changed. I just think the process of the portal has to continue to improve. You need to give it time and look back and say, ‘This needs to be tweaked,’ but I’ve been very supportive of the transfer part.”

**BSB: Former head coach Urban Meyer has been in his role as an assistant athletic director for more than a year now. How do you feel he’s done in that role, and do you believe he’s still happy doing that instead of coaching?**

Smith: “I’m sure he misses coaching. He and I haven’t talked about that piece for a while now. We’re beyond it. I’m sure he misses it like anyone that’s performed at his level, but he’s done a great job for us in the job that we’ve asked him to do. He’s very responsive, and he has a myriad of responsibilities. His impact on our staff, the student-athletes, the programs he’s run for us and the donors has been highly positive. I really feel good about his contribution to our team.”

**BSB: After a two-year stint on the playoff committee, you stepped down in February 2019 to lend your support to a first-year head coach and because you were notably displeased with how the committee was applying criteria. How was it to be on the outside of that**

**committee last year, and do you feel anything changed as a result of your departure?**

Smith: “That’s a good question. I haven’t thought about that one. I felt really good being out of that. I miss being in the room with my colleagues. That’s something that most people don’t understand. There’s a beauty of being in the room and talking about football at that level. I had the same experience on the basketball committee, and I miss that. But I really felt comfortable that I was here for Ryan.”

“The Chase situation was the perfect example. I was here the whole time. I wasn’t leaving Sunday and coming back Tuesday night or Wednesday morning. I needed to be here and I felt good about that. I also felt good that Gary Barta, my colleague from Iowa, was in the room and that he could talk about Ohio State pretty freely. I don’t know that much has changed in that perspective, but those are two things from my seat that were highly advantageous.”

**BSB: The biggest end-of-season debate was about which undefeated team should be No. 1, Ohio State or**

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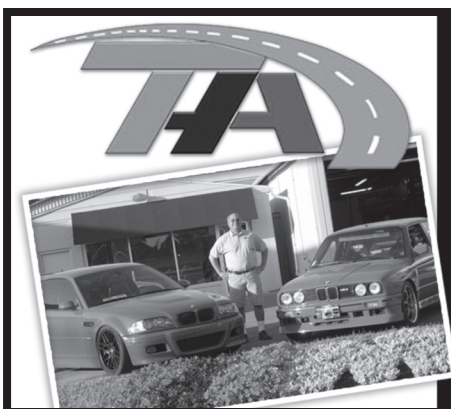
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# Smith Looking Forward To Tilts With Alabama

Continued From Page 11

**LSU. Who did you believe deserved that spot and the easier matchup with No. 4 Oklahoma?**

Smith: "Well, that's probably why I'm not in the room because I would have said Ohio State. Statistically, I haven't thought about that and I'd have to go back and look at the stats. One of the things you have to be objective about in that room is when you have two teams that are that close, you have to go back and look at offensive and defensive efficiency, how they perform on fourth down, all those types of things. There are a myriad of stats that would have taken me to an objective view. I didn't look at those things, so I can't really answer that question without looking at all of those indicators that said this team deserved the right to be No. 1 because they performed exceptionally well in these categories."

**BSB: Had the Buckeyes gotten past Clemson, they would have faced LSU and quarterback Joe Burrow. Would it have been difficult to root against him, since he used to play at Ohio State?**

Smith: "You love Joe. He's just an unbelievable human being. But in that situation, no. I would be rooting for Ohio State hands down. I would hope that he would have a decent game, but not too good of a game. It wouldn't have been that hard for me. They were really good. It would have been an interesting matchup."

**BSB: The college landscape is changing with student-athletes soon being able to profit off of their name, image and likeness. Do you think something like that will only further set Ohio State apart?**

Smith: "I think when NLI comes into play, we're going to be positioned well. I think our

student-athletes will have an opportunity to monetize their name, image and likeness at Ohio State better than other places. That's just reality. I think there will be more changes down the road that will occur that will allow us to help our athletes even more. That gives us an advantage, and that's the big concern around that issue. Our history, tradition and performance of our coaches is always going to give us an edge over other schools.

"Our coaches, compliance and support staff are trying to help our student-athletes understand their persona. Their brand is important for them to manage for the next level, be that going to work at Morgan Stanley Chase or going pro or whatever it is. You are making good decisions for yourself or positioning yourself from a branding point of view so that you can have the opportunity to realize the dreams you want to have after college. We've been educating them for a long time on that, on how to manage themselves appropriately on social media. I think our kids get that, so I think when the NIL comes into play, they'll be well-positioned to take advantage of that."

**BSB: Ohio State recently announced a home-and-home series with Alabama for 2027 and 2028. Why is it so important to get a big-time game like that on the docket?**

Smith: "When I was hired, Andy (Geiger) told me we had always done that, and I just wanted to continue that. I think our kids want, first and foremost, to play in those games and play those opponents. Fans want to see those games. I think it helps us be ready for the Big Ten. I think it helps us be ready for the postseason, whatever opportunity we have. Some of the contests allow us to go into geographies where Buckeyes historically haven't seen us before. When we went to Washington, when we went to Cal,

when we went to Texas, where there are a large number of fans and alums. Sometimes, we can do that. Sometimes, we can't. But I think it's important to play those big games."

**BSB: You mentioned in our interview last year that your contract runs through June 2022, but you'll stay at Ohio State as long as they'll have you and so long as your wife lets you. Do you see a scenario in which you'll be the athletic director when the Crimson Tide come to town?**

Smith: (laughs) "I don't think so. I doubt that one. I'm pretty sure I won't be the guy. I hope that I have the opportunity to come to the game. There are games on our future schedule that I'm hoping to be a fan in the stands, and Alabama is one of them. I'm very hopeful that I have that opportunity."

**BSB: Shifting gears, you released a statement voicing your – and the Ohio State athletic department's – support for the Black Lives Matter movement amid the nationwide protests following George Floyd's death. Why do you believe that was important?**

Smith: "I personally believe in the movement, having the life I've had as an African-American growing up, and then going into this business and having all the experiences that I've had. I think that this is a time where there is some real opportunity for change. I've seen different times in our history where protests have occurred and very little changed. I think this one is different. I think we have a chance for some systemic change, so I think it's important for us as an athletic department to make a statement that, first and foremost, supports our student-athletes. They needed to hear that. And, as people of influence, we need to see if we can influence the change that needs to be made. I think it's important that when we have an opportunity

to eliminate hate, to have leadership look at what structural changes need to occur in our society – be it in the police department, in real estate or just economic opportunities – we need to take that stance. While we aren't the ones who can actually make it happen, we want to let people know we are supportive of them."

**BSB: One thing that's interesting about the world we live in today is that athletes have a bigger platform than they've ever had, and we've seen current players and prospective student-athletes use that to speak out against racism and inequality, among other things. How do you feel about that?**

Smith: "I just love it. I've always told our athletes that whatever they do, make sure it's an informed effort. That it's not just emotional. Whatever statement you make, somebody is going to ask you a question about it, so make sure that you have the answer. It's not something that's just willy-nilly and uninformed. What's beautiful is someone like (basketball Buckeye) Seth Towns, who hasn't played for us yet, just making informed comments. It's just who he is. I love what our athletes have done with this movement."

"People don't recall, but I remember our hockey players back in the day wanted to support the You Can Play project, supporting the LGBTQ+ community. They came to us and asked if they could do it, and I said, 'Sure, you can do it. Let's talk about your messaging and how it's going to work.' I was just so proud of them. Or the mental health issues, when that became something that we all needed to talk about. We wanted our student-athletes to embrace our sports psychologists and get help. I just remember all of those conversations, and it was just so cool. It was, 'Let's just make sure you talk about it the right way.' I love how our student-athletes and coaches are talking about it. They're thoughtful and rational and prudent. It makes sense."

**BSB: On another note, the college basketball season came to an abrupt end amid the coronavirus outbreak. How disappointed were you for the Ohio**

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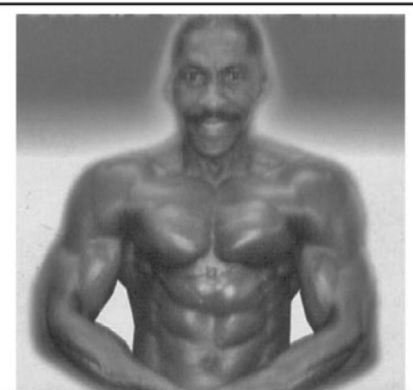
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State basketball teams, both men and women, as they seemed to be playing their best heading into their respective tournaments?

Smith: "I was extremely disappointed. There were a lot of things that piled up that were painful for a lot of reasons, but that one was the top of the pyramid. Our league was No. 1 in the country, and we would have gotten a large number of teams into the tournament. But our kids were playing great.

"Chris (Holtmann) is such a great teacher. He had them playing great. They accepted their roles and you could see the chemistry and cohesiveness. All of us could just tell that this team had a good chance to make a run. I thought we would have done well in the Big Ten tournament. I don't know that we would have won it, but we would have done well. And then it was just a matter of which bracket we got in. If we got a good draw, this team could have gone deep. How far, who knows? But they had positioned themselves to go deep, and that really, really hurt. There are so many different pain points, but that one really hurt."

**BSB: Since the end of the season, both programs have been hit hard by transfers. Why do you think that is?**

Smith: "Every case is different. We talked a little bit about each kid, so it's hard to look at them in the aggregate because I know each one's case. You should be respectful of a young person's decision and rationale. You may not necessarily agree with it, but you respect it and you move on.

"If you look at basketball and the transfer scenario over our history, basketball has had this challenge for a long time. It goes back to AAU ball and high school, where families are moving their sons and daughters around just to be on different teams. The culture and the behavior is, 'I just want to play somewhere in a different system and be the for-sure No. 1,' so they just transfer. It's a different attitude that you have to get used to. I tell our coaches to make sure to do a good job getting to know the kid, the family, the influencer and do our best to help them see why they should be at Ohio State. It's just the way it's going to happen and going to be."

**BSB: The most publicized transfer was point guard D.J. Carton, who cited his mental health as the main reason for his departure. What kind of support did he receive from the athletic department in that situation?**

Smith: "You just, again, look at each case differently and make sure the young person has what they need. D.J. was a great young man, but he needed help. That's why we gave him the space to go home and provided sports psychologists for him. At the end of the day, he just needed a different environment to be able to perform and deal with his personal challenge, so you respect it. You try and figure out what the issue is with that young person in whatever sport they're in and make sure you give them support.

"I've always said to our coaches that kids

sometime need a different environment to be successful. We've done a great job of recruiting, but they just may need to be somewhere else. Don't take it personally. We gave them everything that we could, but they just needed a different formula. Let them go."

**BSB: Jumping topics again, how did the virus impact the construction of various athletic facilities on campus?**

Smith: "You know, we were pretty fortunate in that we were already in construction with the Ty Tucker Tennis Center and that the money had already been raised. That's on track to be completed this fall, in September or October. It didn't hurt us from that perspective. Lacrosse fundraising is still going on. What's interesting is that fundraising is still pretty good. There are a lot of industries that are doing well. We did push it back, though, to when we would ultimately take it to the board. That will probably be next year. But from a fundraising point of view, it's going well."

**BSB: Ohio State opened the Covelli Center last year to rave reviews. How do you feel the building functioned in its first year of use?**

Smith: "It went well. I'm proud of our team. For volleyball, we built it to accommodate that operation because the crowds are different. We knew with wrestling, we'd probably fill it up a few times, which we did. It worked better than we thought, especially the stage in the middle of the floor. And then for women's gymnastics, we had an apparatus that we had to bring in, so our design team did a good job with it. It worked well with concessions and parking. We learned a lot after one year, but it worked well."

**BSB: I know you had bigger plans for it, too, with The Basketball Tournament that was supposed to be held there and then got moved to Nationwide Arena due to the pandemic.**

Smith: "That hurt. We really wanted the TBT. That would have been really cool. We thought the seating, the environment, the parking and all that would have been awesome. That was hard for us to give that up, but hopefully down the road, we'll have the opportunity to bring that back. We also want to have small concerts in there. That facility will have multiple purposes as we hopefully get this virus behind us. It will come to life in a lot of different ways."

**BSB: Speaking of bringing something back, Ohio State hosted games in each of the last two seasons at St. John Arena, but that was not on the schedule for this season. Are there any plans to return to the venue in the future, or were those just rare, special occasions?**

Smith: "I think it was just a special occasion. I doubt we'll go back. I just don't see it. You know, this year I think we have 16 home games. In the years we've had 19, 20 or 21 home games, it's easier to take one over there, but we're not going to be able to do that when we have 18 or less. I don't see that. We made a decision to play in some of these

big shootouts, the CBS Sports Classic and we're going to (the Battle 4) Atlantis in the Bahamas this year, so when we're playing in these big events, it makes it very difficult to go back to when we're playing 19, 20, 21 home games. We need at least 18 home games in the Schott if we can get them, so it's going to be very hard for us to go over to St. John. We did take a hit when we went over there last year, and I just can't do that again."

**BSB: Along those same lines, the pandemic will obviously have a far-reaching financial impact on Ohio State, but how does it impact the Olympic sports in particular?**

Smith: "We don't know yet the total depth of the impact. Everyone is tightening their belts, and we'll talk about this publicly later, probably in August when we have clarity. But, at the end of the day, everyone is being smart and being frugal. We've done some reductions here and there, but at this point in time, we're just waiting until we make our football decision, get into August and have more clarity."

"The coaches have done a good job of tightening their budgets, but keep in mind that we have expenditure savings because we didn't have spring sports. We didn't have baseball games, softball games and those operations, so those were significant savings for us. We feel good about how our Olympic sports have done, and now we just have to wait and see what we look like in August."

**BSB: Being in the midst of everything, I'm sure it's hard to look at it from this standpoint, but have you had the chance to step back and think about how unique the current situation is?**

Smith: "I haven't thought about that, but this is definitely the most challenging and unique year we've ever had in collegiate athletics. The decisions in what we do now will be so important for our student-athletes. They'll have to live with that for the rest of their lives. When you put the virus and social justice issues, there will be a time when you look back later in life and say, 'Oh my god, that's unbelievable what occurred in 2020.'"

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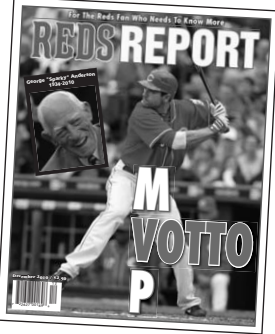
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# Gee Looks At 14-Year OSU Tenure With Fondness

By MARK REA  
BSB Managing Editor Emeritus

Only three persons have served longer as president of The Ohio State University than Dr. E. Gordon Gee, and perhaps no one during the institution's entire 150-year history has cut a more distinctive persona.

Born in Utah the son of an oil company employee and a schoolteacher and raised in the Mormon faith, Gee has been an overachiever his entire life. He was an Eagle scout and an honor student at the University of Utah, and he earned a law degree from Columbia University in 1971 and a doctorate in education from the same university a year later.

Gee began a law career by clerking for Chief Justice David T. Lewis of the U.S. 10th Circuit Court of Appeals before being named a judicial fellow and staff assistant to the U.S. Supreme Court. In that role, he worked for Chief Justice Warren Burger on administrative and legal problems facing the Supreme Court and federal judiciary.

In 1981, Gee switched to a career in academia when he was named president of West Virginia University, beginning a run of nearly 40 years as a university president that has included tenures at Colorado, Ohio State (twice), Brown and Vanderbilt. Since 2014, he has enjoyed a second stint at West Virginia, where the bespectacled president and his omnipresent bowtie remain popular in and around Morgantown.

Gee served two separate terms as university president at Ohio State, the first from September 1990 to January 1998, and the second from October 2007 through June 2013. Along the way, the university upgraded its admission requirements, facilities and staff and regained its standing as one of the country's elite institutions in academics and research as well as athletics.

There were well-publicized bumps along the way, too, such as what many observers felt was a mishandling of the so-called "Tattoogate" scandal that resulted in the forced resignation of football coach Jim Tressel. And there were a number of verbal gaffes that repeatedly got Gee into hot water with everyone from rival universities and conferences to the Polish American Congress and the Catholic Church.

Still, his combined 14 years at the helm of Ohio State are remembered as a period of growth and prosperity for the university, and Dr. Gee reminisced about his tenure at the university during a recent telephone interview with BSB from his office at West Virginia.

**BSB: I have a lot to get to, but first I'd like your take on what's happening in the country and around the world with regard to the coronavirus pandemic, specifically colleges and universities. In your opinion, will there be in-person classes this fall, and will there be a college football season?**

Gee: "I think in both of those cases, we are determined to move toward that goal. There is a lot of headwind, of course, but I think most of big universities are trying to figure out how to manage it. I'm talking about places like Ohio State and West Virginia and members of the so-called Power Five. We want to move toward that goal knowing that it won't be easy.

"There are three streams here that are coming together. First, obviously, is doubt. It's difficult to make any kind of decision when the landscape changes rapidly and radically almost every day. Second are the viruses – plural. There is the unseen virus, which is the COVID-19 pandemic, and there is the seen virus of social justice and racial inequality – the Black Lives Matter movement. And the third involves the financial implications of moving ahead or pulling back.

"All three of those streams are centered on the culture of university life and how one thinks about teaching and learning, how one thinks about laboratory science and running a medical center, how one thinks about getting young student-athletes together with coaches and staff members to keep a football program or volleyball program or soccer program going. All of those things get tied up together when you try to formulate a plan to move forward."

**BSB: So, how do you formulate a plan to move forward when so much of the future is unknown?**

Gee: "That is a challenge because things are ever-changing. Six weeks ago, for example, we thought the curve was flattening and we were well on our way to returning to some semblance of normal life. Now, in several places around the country, it appears to be going the other way.

"Universities have a unique responsibility, of course, and that is not only to teach our students but protect them as well. When you look at the numbers, it appears that very few of our young people and our college students have had serious consequences due to the virus. Approximately 90 percent who have died are well over the age of 75, and about half of that number have died in nursing homes and similar facilities. Then you look at the statistics that state even though the virus is spiking among young people, the number of hospitalizations is going down. So it's a hard thing to describe. A hard thing to really try to get a handle on.

"We can use a hammer, which is obviously shutting things down again and waiting for a vaccine. But this virus is going to be with us even after the vaccine comes along. We have vaccines for the flu, we still get the flu and still get colds, and I think more than 88,000 still died last year because of the flu. There were 50,000 people that died last year in car wrecks, and most of them had driver's licenses.

"What I'm saying is that we all have to live in an environment where there is risk. There is no reason to take undue risk, but there is a certain amount of risk-taking in nearly everything we do. And that's the thing. We are going to have to learn to live with the virus, and at the same time take care of the health and safety of our students and staff while formulating a plan to move for-

ward. Moving toward closing everything down again, I should think, is not possible.

"My biggest worry is about the collateral damage. There are 130,000 people who have died from the virus, and the loss of so many lives is tragic. But if one takes a look at surveys, the collateral damage from the virus – suicides, increased drug abuse, mental health problems – all of those are skyrocketing and could be the worst part of the pandemic. Those could ultimately cause more damage than the virus itself."

**BSB: What are your fondest memories of your time at Ohio State?**

Gee: "I was there a total of 14 years, and oh my gosh, I have such wonderful memories. Obviously, I had – and still have – a great love affair with the students there. I really found them to be exceptional people from all over the world. The relationships we made there were just outstanding. I have great faculty colleagues from there and great friends we made in Columbus and all around the state of Ohio. I have traveled all over the world and seen many people and many cultures, but many of the most outstanding, knowledgeable, friendly, down-to-earth people I have ever met were the Ohio people I met during my 14 years at Ohio State.

"I think my most enduring memory would be the enjoyment that came with the opportunity to really see our athletic program flourish. Very candidly, when I got to the university in 1990, the Ohio State athletic program was running on fumes. In many ways, it was living in the past. So we went out and found a great athletic director by the name of Andy Geiger, who I think stands as the premier architect of the Ohio State athletic program that you see today.

"I worked with Andy during my first term as university president and then Gene Smith during my second term, and under the guidance of Andy and Gene, Ohio State has accelerated into the ranks of the elite athletic programs in the country, and that is something that everyone should be very proud of. I certainly am with the small part that I had to play in that acceleration.

"There were some very serious challenges during my time, too, including the resignation of Jim Tressel, an extremely talented coach and leader who remains a great friend of mine. But that situation led to my great pleasure to help recruit Urban Meyer to come to the university as head football coach, and I remain very close to both Urban and his wife, Shelley, to this day. Urban very much was part of the renaissance of what has happened to the football program at Ohio State. Academics have been stressed, the staff recruits very wisely, the facilities have been renovated to state-of-the-art status, and the curriculum has been retooled and updated, all of which has really put Ohio State as one of the most comprehensive and competitive universities in the country. Watching that, and being part of that effort, gives me a great sense of pride."

**BSB: How did the university change between the time you left the first time in early 1998 and when you returned almost 10 years later?**

Gee: "I have to laugh a bit because I just saw that Dr. (Michael) Drake was named president of the University of California system. That was a position I was offered in 1995, so it seems they like Ohio State presidents out there.

"As to your question, I think the major difference from my first term was that the university had become much more academically competitive by the time I went back. It had gained a real sense of competitive purpose, which I thought was very good. We were really starting to grow the academic medical center, and the cancer center that had just opened shortly before I arrived in 1990 had become the James Cancer Hospital and Solove Research Institute, one of the world's

leading cancer treatment and research centers.

"I think one of things I get the greatest joy out of was the start of Pelotonia in 2008. I remember when they came to me with the idea of a 100-mile bike ride, I thought that was the craziest damned thing I'd ever heard of. Now, of course, I take full credit for it.

"I think Pelotonia shows what I was talking about earlier. It shows the kind of community that allows the university to flourish. I always think of Columbus as one of the great communities in the country. Columbus is such a solid and dynamic city. I have had the pleasure of living in some of the greatest cities in this country – cities like Providence, R.I., and Nashville, which is perhaps the country's hottest city in terms of growth right now. But Columbus will always have a piece of my heart. I enjoyed my time there and truly miss it."

**BSB: Which tenure was more enjoyable? Your first or your second?**

Gee: "Oh, my. That's like asking a parent which child he or she likes better. They were two different terms – totally different.

"I look at the first term as setting a foundation. We started selective admission and really focusing on getting the best and brightest to come to the university. You can think of the first term as setting the table and the second as eating at that table. So much of the success that we had during the first term enabled us to really increase the quality of life, the quality of the faculty and staff, enhance the beauty of campus, and grow and strengthen our relationships to the people of the city and the state.

"I traveled to every county in the state, carrying the gospel of Ohio State to every Ohioan, and was always welcomed with open arms."

**BSB: Your public persona at Ohio State was always that of a fun-loving guy. You'd walk the campus and converse with students, show up at student parties and tailgates, and there were the signature bowties. Do you still do that kind of thing?**

Gee: "Absolutely. The day I can't do that anymore, that's the day I get out of this business. I think there are three parts to having success as a university president. First, you have to grow very thick skin. You're going to have a lot of criticism and a lot of people in your ear telling you you're doing it wrong and maybe someone else would do it better. You have to let that roll off your back. Secondly, you have to have a sense of humor, and you have to maintain that sense of humor. If you can't laugh at yourself, you need to get the heck out of that world. And third, just understand that you're going to make decisions based on information that other people don't have. Therefore, you have to have confidence in your decisions.

"People have asked me about going to student parties over the years, and I always answer the same way. It's the sheer joy I feel out of getting to spend time with people and students. You know, everyone thought I was crazy. Here's this devout Mormon, who has supposedly never had a drop of alcohol in his life, going to all of those parties? He must be some kind of closet alcoholic to be seen at fraternity parties or all those bars all those times. But those formed some of my best memories of being a university president. I've always joked that whenever I have showed up at a party, the kids would all of sudden start talking about physics or philosophy or music. This year, I'm going to put on my mask and scare the hell out of them. But they are always polite and seem genuinely happy to have me there. Gotta be kind to the old guy, I guess."

**BSB: Your bowtie collection once numbered in the thousands. How many do you have now?**

Gee: "Right now, I have more than 1,000

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active ties and more than 1,000 more that I classify as inactive. Those, I keep and some of them I have made into quilts mostly for my granddaughters. In fact, I'm in my office looking at one right now. It looks like something you might buy at the state fair."

**BSB: Do you make those quilts yourself?**

Gee: "Oh, heavens, no. I couldn't do anything like that. I couldn't do anything that had to do with anything akin to using my art or mechanical talents. I tell everyone that I don't play golf because the only thing that could result from that is that I would kill someone. I am totally incapable of something like that."

**BSB: I want to talk a bit about the so-called "Tattoogate" incident in 2010 and 2011 that ultimately cost Jim Tressel his job as head football coach. Through the prism of history, and realizing that hindsight is always 20/20, do you think that incident was overblown?**

Gee: "Absolutely, I think it was overblown. I think, more than anything else, social media and the so-called pundits caused that overreaction because it was Ohio State. I think perhaps at a much smaller institution, it might have gone by the wayside. But because of our high profile, there were those who simply would not let it go."

"In many ways, I think the coach was hounded out of office, and I feel very sorry for that. If you take a look at subsequent situations, at some of the really terrible things that have happened in college athletics during the 10 years since, that was, in many ways, a minor violation. Now, having said that, we should have taken it more seriously, myself at the top of that list. I remember that I was coming back from a trip to China at the time when I first heard of the incident, and I just kind of rolled my eyes. I don't think I was alone in thinking it was a minor violation and we would get a minor penalty. Obviously, I made a

mistake in thinking that.

"Coach Tressel made a mistake by not being as clear or as forthcoming as he should have been. But I know that he was trying to protect his kids, and that was a noble purpose. People wanted to ultimately have scapegoats, however, and they got what they wanted."

"It was certainly a learning experience for the coach, athletic director and me, and I think all of us got humbled in that moment."

**BSB: Again asking you to look back, is there anything you or Coach Tressel or athletic director Gene Smith could have done at the time that would have or could have made things turn out differently?**

Gee: "As I said, I think the thing I learned from 'Tattoogate,' as well as many of the subsequent incidents in college athletics, is that a university president needs to learn to ask the tough questions. You know, when you have an iconic coach who so obviously loves the university, you tend to be not as rigorous in your inquiries as you might be. Once you ask the initial question of what happened, you have to ask why it happened. That is the second question, and I fault myself for not asking that second question at the time. I think if I had, maybe I would have better realized what kind of trouble the coach would have been in. I don't know why I didn't ask that second question."

"But regardless of what happened, I know that Coach Tressel is very happy in his present position (as president at Youngstown State University) and the situation led to our hiring of Urban Meyer, one of the greatest coaches ever to walk on a football field and one who brought great distinction to Ohio State and its football program."

**BSB: You have stated in the past that you left Ohio State in 2013 "just ahead of the sheriff." Do you still feel that way?**

Gee: "Oh, yeah, but you know, I've said some silly things. I'm well-known for quips like that sometimes, and I freely admit that. I might be the only guy who has had his top 10 gaffes printed in the New York Times."

"The truth is that I have said some things that have reflected badly on me and the institution, and no one likes to leave an institution under a cloud. But I left Ohio State very proudly. With the help of some great people that I alluded to earlier, we accomplished some great things during our time at Ohio State."

"I've always felt I left Ohio State better than I found it. The only thing you want in a legacy is that you did good work and the institution got better because of it. You need energy and leadership and good people doing good things to make your institution better, and I enjoyed both of my terms there. My time was a great time, but I always like to think my time was also value added to Ohio and to Ohio State."

**BSB: When you announced your retirement from Ohio State, you said it was time for you to re-energize and refocus yourself. That sounded like a man who was ready for a new chapter in his life. Yet you wound up returning to West Virginia.**

Gee: "When I left Ohio State in 2013, I had no expectations that I would be a university president again, and it was with great humility that I was able to return to West Virginia. The university has been very good to me, and the state has embraced me again. The university has allowed me to do things in my own way. My relationship with the board of trustees has been excellent – they don't micromanage or second-guess me on all the stuff I am doing, and I appreciate that."

"This second term at West Virginia has allowed me to really enjoy myself, have a real sense of purpose, continue to do good work and do things that I think will make a difference to a

lot of people. I have a lot to be grateful for."

**BSB: You turned 76 this year, and you have had some health-related blips in the past couple of years. How much longer do you want to do what you're doing?**

Gee: "I feel good. In fact, I feel very good. I had a (cardiac) defibrillator installed in 2018, which I named Stan after Dr. Stanley Schmidt (of the WVU Heart and Vascular Institute), and I had a hip replaced last Christmas. That was in anticipation of football season because they might need me out there."

"In all honesty, my general health is very good. Between the ears, I still think of myself as that 36-year-old who got his first chance to be a university president at West Virginia back in 1981. Now, I get up in the morning, get on the treadmill and find that the parts are maybe not as spry as they used to be. But I have the gift of experience, and I'm trying to use that gift in the very best way I can."

"I call myself a 'Buckaneer' – part Buckeye, part Mountaineer. I have loved all of the institutions I have served, but I served Ohio State the longest and I'm now approaching 10 years at West Virginia. It's pretty amazing either place would have put up with me that long."

"I have often said that running a university is in many ways like trying to catch a javelin. Not only is it a difficult enterprise, but it helps to be just a little bit crazy to even try it. But I'm so damned old now, it's obvious I've lost the commonsense gene, so ..."

**BSB: Final question. If you could write your own epitaph, what would it be?**

Gee: "That's an interesting question. I don't think I've ever been asked that before. (Pause) I think I'd like to have on my tombstone that he loved his university and the university loved him back – and that was the greatest gift that anyone could be given."

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# Punt Block Against Michigan Made Laughlin Famous

By CRAIG MERZ  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Jim Laughlin was a co-captain his senior season when he was Ohio State's MVP for the 1979 football team that came within minutes of winning a national championship in Earle Bruce's first year.

That same season Laughlin was a first-team All-Big Ten linebacker and winner of a National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame scholarship, marking him as one of the top players in college football.

Laughlin, 62, followed his OSU days with an eight-year career in the NFL with stops with the Atlanta Falcons (1980-82, 1987), Green Bay Packers (1983) and the Los Angeles Rams (1984-86).

But for all the accolades and honors, it's one play that cemented him in Buckeye lore – a blocked punt with 11:21 left in the fourth quarter of the 1979 Michigan game in Ann Arbor that was scooped by Todd Bell and returned for a touchdown to turn a 15-12 deficit into the final 18-15 margin that not only snapped a three-game losing streak to the Wolverines but sent the undefeated Buckeyes to the Rose Bowl against Southern Cal.

The Buckeyes led late in Pasadena, Calif., but couldn't put the Trojans away, and Heisman Trophy winner Charles White scored on a 1-yard run with 1:22 remaining to hand OSU a heartbreaking 17-16 defeat.

Laughlin discussed both games, including the unsung hero on his block, the tran-

sition from Woody Hayes to Bruce, and his first encounter with NFL legendary running back Walter Payton. Hint, it didn't go very well.

He spoke by phone with Buckeye Sports on July 11 from his northeast Ohio home in Salem. The Lyndhurst (Ohio) Charles F. Brush High School standout resided in Atlanta for nearly 40 years but retired and returned to the Buckeye state two years ago to help care for his father.

**BSB: What has it been like caring for your dad?**

Laughlin: "I don't mind. We have a good time. We're up here halfway between Pittsburgh and Cleveland so we go to a lot of Pirates games, a lot of Indians games because he's loved baseball his whole life. We'd do that two or three times a week. This year we're screwed (because the COVID-19 pandemic has forced teams to play in empty stadiums).

"We'd go to Columbus every fall for all the games. That's a weekend trip. We've always got something to do but not this year. It's crazy times. The craziest times of my life."

**BSB: Having played in front of 100,000 in college and 70,000 or so in the NFL, how would you today handle playing in front of no fans?**

Laughlin: "I think it would suck. Even in high school, for god's sake, we had big crowds. I think it would be (crappy) to play

in front of nobody. I can understand it in baseball because those guys are kind of used to it in college or the minor leagues. They don't get big crowds. In golf, I don't see what the big deal is, either, but in basketball and football it would be crazy without fans.

"That's one thing I tell people. Playing at Ohio State was a lot more exciting than in the NFL just because of the crowd and the excitement. It's not like that in the NFL. It's more of business, and yeah, people get excited when the team is going really good, but it's not like 100,000 in Columbus at the 'Shoe."

**BSB: What was it like that first time coming down the tunnel to the field to the roar of all those fans?**

Laughlin: "It was incredible. Back then we had about 87,000. Back in the '70s they still had the south stands, the wooden bleachers. I remember it. I wasn't going to play and I knew it – I knew I wasn't going to play all year – but it was fun. We used to run out and pile up on the 50-yard line."

**BSB: You played Michigan State that day, right, for the 1976 season opener as a freshman?**

Laughlin: "Woody hated Michigan State. He hated them worse than he hated Michigan because they had beaten him twice, '72 and '74. Man, did he want to beat the dog s\*\*t out of them. He was riled up like I've never seen him, even for the Michigan game.

"I remember during a press conference, back then they called them the sky writers, one of them says, 'Michigan State said they're accusing you of turning them in and putting them on probation, what do you say to that?'"

"He looked at the guy and said, 'You're goddamn right I turned them in. They were cheating bastards.' It was a real rivalry back then." (OSU won the game 49-21).

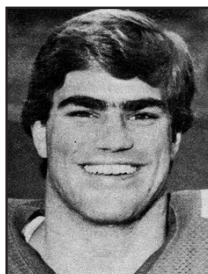
**BSB: What was it like to play for him?**

Laughlin: "He was crazy. He would punch himself he was so intense. I remember that first game he had a pitcher of water at the podium and a big chalkboard back there. It was a Thursday afternoon Hayes speech about the other team.

"He was diagramming one of our plays, and he said, 'OK, you pitch it to the tailback and the safety comes up, who's got him?' Nobody said anything and it was Pete Johnson who was supposed to block the safety. He didn't say anything, so (Hayes) walks up, picks up the pitcher made of glass and he smashes it against the chalkboard. He was one of a kind.

"I remember we were up at Michigan and he was telling about when we tore down that goddamn 'M' banner in '73. He told us they were going to have a tunnel for us to go out with a bunch of their lettermen and over to our bench because they didn't want us going to the 50-yard line.

"He says, 'You know what I think of that?' He's got those steel-rimmed glasses on and he looks right us, 'That's (expletive)



Jim Laughlin

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bulls\*\*t. After you knock down those guys with the damn "M" on their leather jackets, you can step on the back of their heads and you can run out to the 50-yard line and you do whatever the hell you want."

"That locker room up there is only about 10-15 feet away from the tunnel that goes down. He said, 'We've got 62 guys. They're going to have 120. That means there's going to be some pushing and crowding us in. You know what? (Screw) ABC. We'll just close up the tunnel and play the game in the tunnel and beat the s\*\*t out of them. Each one of you guys kick the ass of two of their guys, and I'll go over there and kick Bo's ass.'

"When I was with Green Bay I played with three or four guys who played for 'Bama. We'd go out for a few pops and they would always ask me to tell them some Woody stories. They'd listen and say, 'Bear (Alabama coach Paul Bryant) would never do something like that.' Well, that's Woody."

**BSB: Do people ask you about the blocked punt all the time?**

Laughlin: "Oh gosh, yeah. Anybody from that era who's over 50 remembers it. They all remember.

"I blocked four kicks for touchdowns at Ohio State. Four. But nobody remembers the one against Wisconsin, the one against Washington State or the one against SMU. They don't remember any of those but the one against Michigan. (Jim) Tressel had me talk to the team his first year, and that's what I told them, 'I'm still famous 30 years later because I blocked a punt. One play in this game can make you famous at Ohio State. Just think of that one play on that snap because you never know.'"

**BSB: You've said you knew going into the game that Michigan was vulnerable to a block. Why?**

Laughlin: "Their specialty teams weren't very good all year so in studying them I knew if we put pressure on, I could get there. The guy missed his block just a little bit. Nobody even blocked me.

"My (academic) coach, Larry Romanoff, told me they had their staff meeting Monday morning the week of the game and they were waiting for Earle. Earle comes walking in, slams his binder with all his stuff in his notebook, on the desk and says, 'I bet anybody \$20 that Laughlin blocks a punt this week.'"

**BSB: You're known for the block but who else was involved?**

Laughlin: "I was just lucky because they didn't block me. Actually, Mike D'Andrea got more of the ball than I did. I feel bad because I got all the credit. It was Mike who directed it backwards so that Todd could pick it off and run it in.

"It basically glanced off my forearm, but it hit Mike square in his hands and went backwards. It probably would have gone off to the side a little bit otherwise, but Mike never gets enough credit."

**BSB: Even though you were on the defense, what did the recruitment of quarterback Art Schlichter do to the team as it essentially moved away from Woody's three yards and a cloud of dust in 1978?**

Laughlin: "You could tell the difference in the offense. They were still running the option a little bit, but it was much more drop-back passes. It still wasn't like Bill Walsh and the West Coast offense or anything like that. It still was pretty simple: You run a hook. You run a slant. You run a go.

"Woody had to change some for Art. Otherwise, he probably would have gone maybe to Michigan or Penn State. Woody was smart. He really was, but he was stubborn. He just wanted to pound the ball.

"He'd always tell us, and you still hear it from other coaches nowadays, that you've got to get your playmakers the ball in open space. The way you do that is with a quick, short passing attack and let them get out there and break tackles and you get big chunks.

"Woody never did it. We practiced it but we never did it because he wanted to beat the hell out of people. He just wanted to pound them into submission. That's one of the reasons we didn't have a great goal-line offense inside the 20 because we would just tighten up - two tight ends, three backs, the robust offense.

"That's the way it was in that (1977) Michigan game. Hell, we had 430-some yards. They had 200 yards. We had 25 first downs. I think they had 11. We only scored six points (a 14-6 defeat). If we had Urban Meyer as the inside-the-20 coach, we would have scored 50 points."

**BSB: Where were you during the 1978 Gator Bowl vs. Clemson for Woody's infamous punch that cost him his job?**

Laughlin: "I was over on the bench with (coach) George Hill and all the defensive guys. He was talking to us about what we were going to run because we were down 17-15 so we'd kick a field goal and win the game. They were going to get the ball back with only a minute or so left. George Hill was talking about what they were going to run and to make sure you get containment and all that.

"All of a sudden you see this mass of humanity going out on the field. I didn't know what happened. We didn't have any replay screens back then. I just thought it was a fight. I saw that we got intercepted then it was a big fight. I thought, 'That's the ballgame.'

"Somebody said Woody hit a guy. Woody always punches people like a cameraman and stuff so I didn't think much of it, but one of the guys said, 'No, it was one of their players.'

"Back then you didn't have ESPN. All we had was the 11 o'clock news so we didn't know anything until the next morning when the plane landed and we're sitting there and Woody picked up the speaker that the flight attendants use and told us, 'I just want to let you guys know I'm not going to be back next year as your coach.' That was it.

"(Athletics director) Hugh Hindman had no choice, but a lot of coaches like Earle and I think Barry Switzer first said it, if he had beaten Michigan three times in a row he wouldn't have gotten fired. There's probably some truth in that."

**BSB: What was it like going from Woody to Earle Bruce?**

Laughlin: "Earle was great. He was definitely one of Woody's guys. He had that fire in the belly. He came in with so much confidence because we were so down. We got our ass kicked by 'Bama in the (1978) Sugar Bowl and then to lose to Clemson and four games that year or whatever (7-4-1 in 1978). This isn't the Ohio State I came to with Archie and those guys. Every year they were playing for the national title.

"He came into the room and said between you and I we're going to go out there and beat that team in the Coliseum (OSU defeated UCLA, 17-13). Then we're going up there north and we're going to beat Michigan. Then we're going back out to the Rose Bowl so get on board. Anybody who doesn't believe that can leave now. That's what we needed to hear.

"Now, he was more sophisticated in the passing game than Woody, obviously. We took advantage of that. We had Art throwing

to Doug Donley and Gary Williams, who ended up playing in the NFL for the Bengals, and we had a tough offensive line so we could score, and we kicked ass on defense."

**BSB: Was there a sense of relief in the way you were treated by Bruce compared to Woody?**

Laughlin: "Oh, yeah. There wasn't the tenseness and the tightness that there was with Woody. We'd go to dinner at the golf course and nobody would say a word. Everybody was uptight. At the pregame meal nobody said a word.

"Woody always had the clenched fist - Friday night and game days. You just had to try and stay away from him.

"Earle was a lot more relaxed. Earle was a disciplinarian too. You could do all you want, but he'd shake that finger at you and say, 'Abuse brings control so don't push it.' He could be a disciplinarian, but he wasn't a psycho like Woody.

"Earle was better at controlling his temper. When things went wrong, you see that nowadays from some coaches when things go wrong, they don't even get upset.

"Like when we went up to Minnesota that year for the second game. They had a new coach (Joe Salem) so we watched film from his old school and then we watched their first game but when we went up there, they had a totally different offense. They ran all over us in the first half (leading 17-7 at halftime).

"If that had happened to Woody, he would have gone berserk. Earle said, 'Look, dammit, all they're doing is this trap blocking. It's a lot of traps and misdirection stuff. You've just got to calm down and play and we'll stop them. We'll score in the second half and we'll beat them (OSU won 21-17).

That's exactly what happened and after that it was off to the races."

**BSB: Do you think what-if about the Rose Bowl game and how close you were to a national title?**

Laughlin: "All we had to do was get that one first down and it's over. There were like two minutes left (actually five). We couldn't do it.

"That USC team was so talented it was ungodly. The fact we held them to 10 points for 58 minutes was incredible. They had five first-round draft choices on the offensive line. They had a lot of Hall of Famers on that team."

**BSB: What was your "welcome to the NFL" moment with Walter Payton?**

Laughlin: "It was my rookie year. The Bears ran a lot of traps, and they try to get you to go the wrong way so there's a big hole for Walter to bust through. Well, I didn't take the bait because I watched the film, so I step up in the hole. It's a big hole, 'Aw s\*\*t, it's just me and Walter in the hole. He's going to put a move on me and embarrass me.'

"He just takes the crown of his helmet and sticks it in my sternum and ran right over me and plants me onto my back. I couldn't even breathe, but I tackled him. I just hung onto his shoulder pads and brought him down on top of me. He almost drilled me into the ground.

"He jumps up and is smiling, puts his hand out and helps me up. He was chuckling to himself, 'We both know I kicked your ass.' He didn't say anything. He didn't talk trash. He was right. We both knew he kicked my ass even though he got tackled for a 1-yard gain. Luckily, I was able to hang on so he didn't go for 20 or 30 yards and get in the highlight reel."

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# Matte Ascends From Emergency QB To NFL Standout

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Tom Matte made a name for himself at Ohio State by making a rare position switch. He transitioned from running back to quarterback under Woody Hayes in 1959, and the rest is history.

Due to his prowess as a runner, Matte earned All-American accolades for the Buckeyes. To his surprise, he became a first-round pick in the 1961 NFL draft by the Baltimore Colts, who were led by Hall of Fame quarterback Johnny Unitas.

The former Buckeye back won an NFL championship and a Super Bowl in Baltimore, playing alongside the likes of Unitas, Lenny Moore, Jim Parker and many more standouts. After playing for Hayes and Bo Schembechler at Ohio State, Matte enjoyed the tutelage of all-time great NFL coaches in Don Shula, Don McCafferty and Weeb Ewbank.

While still in the NFL, Matte returned to Ohio State to finish his undergraduate degree and ended up receiving his master's with some help from Hayes. Following his playing career, Matte helped start the Player Care Foundation for retired athletes.

Matte and his teammates disowned the Colts franchise after its move to Indianapolis because they did not feel welcomed by owner Jim Irsay. When the Ravens came to Baltimore from Cleveland, however, he and his teammates were embraced. Matte became a color analyst for CBS, and he also broadcast Ravens games for local radio.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with Matte about his time at Ohio State and beyond, including his perspective on his best teammates and coaches and a whole lot more.

**BSB: With your father playing professional hockey, how prevalent were athletics in your house growing up?**

Matte: "My dad played professional hockey for 17 years. He was a Canadian born in Montreal. He played for the Chicago Blackhawks and ended up in the American Hockey League, playing for the Cleveland Barons and, before that, the Pittsburgh Hornets, where he met my mother. Then they got married and then they moved to Cleveland, and my brother and I came along.

"Let me tell you, he was one of the toughest. I remember a couple times where I'd get out of hand, and he'd just come over and pick me up by the shirt and just pick me up off the ground. He had arms on him like a weightlifter. He was a strong guy and a tough, mean guy, played defense and had a lot of respect.

"If I didn't put up 150 percent, there was a boot in my butt because my dad said, 'You could do better than that.' It was challenging growing up, but I'll tell you what, I count it as blessings."

**BSB: With that tough hockey background, were you always destined to be an athlete?**

Matte: "Well, my grandfather was decathlon champion of Canada. My uncle Jock and my uncle Henry played professional hockey. My aunt Marcel was a division champion in tennis. I think it was a pretty well-rounded athletic family, no question. And my brother came along, and he was an All-American at Miami of Ohio, got drafted in baseball and football, and then got drafted by the U.S. Army."

**BSB: How do you think being an Eagle Scout may have helped you become so successful in football, and beyond?**

Matte: "Being an Eagle Scout was something that my dad pushed me to do, and it was fun. It taught you the lessons of life. It taught you how to survive. I really have a lot of respect, and I really went all the way up to the Eagle Scout, which is the top dog. And I enjoyed it. It was an outlet for me. I went to camp every year for a couple weeks, and then I became a counselor after that. I went as a kid, and as I got old got older, 16 17, 18, I became a counselor for the Boy Scouts."

**BSB: Moving forward, how did you end up at Ohio State and why did you want to play for Ohio State? What was it like playing for Woody Hayes and Bo Schembechler?**

Matte: "Well, Woody convinced my parents real quick. He came up and he was recruiting me, and he said to my mom and dad, 'Mr. and Mrs. Matte, I will guarantee that your son will graduate from college.' That's all my parents wanted to hear. And he did. He made me come back even after my rookie year with the Colts. I had to come back. I had seven hours to make up to graduate. And then I went on and I said, 'Well, as long as I'm here, I might as well start my master's,' which I got, and Woody Hayes picked it up for me, picked up the cost of me getting my master's degree. So I was very, very blessed with somebody kicking me in the butt and making sure I got that education.

"Bo Schembechler was there at that particular time, and he was a guy I had to report to, so you know how tough Bo was. He made sure my buns were there every day. My education at Ohio State was very special, and it was fun. It was fun. I had a great time, great coaches. I ran track also while I was in college and so I was pretty well-rounded."

**BSB: Considering you were primarily a runner in football, how did that track background help you on the gridiron?**

Matte: "I ran the quarter mile and did a pretty good job at it. And I had come in second or third in the state of Ohio, when we were in high school. I had as many track scholarships as football. And I was also pole vaulting. At that time, (U.S. Olympian) Bob Richards was doing

14½ feet, and I was doing 13½ feet as a high school kid. So I was sort of a jack-of-all trades. I could do everything well, nothing fantastic. But it was fun. It was very competitive. And I came from a very, very competitive family."

**BSB: With your family's hockey background, how drawn were you to the ice?**

Matte: "I played at Ohio State, I got my letters in hockey. When I came here to Baltimore, they had just started the American Hockey League with the Baltimore Clippers, and Terry Reardon, who was the coach, had played with my dad. And he said, 'Tom, will you come down and play a couple games with us, so we can get the crowds interested in hockey in Baltimore?' And I said, 'I'd love to, I'd love to do that.' So I started working out with him, and all the sudden the Colts found out about it. And they said, 'Read your contract, Tom. No other sports. You cannot participate without the consent of the team.' And they said, 'We don't want you playing hockey.' So I couldn't do it. But I supported the team a lot. I had grown up on skates."

**BSB: What was it like playing hockey at Ohio State back in the '60s?**

Matte: "It was really fun. It was the first year they had hockey at Ohio State. They had just built the ice rink there. They knew that I had played, and I had come back to school to get my master's. And I said, 'Yes, I'll be glad to come out and work out with the guys.' And they said, 'No, no, we want you to play.' And I got a letter from Ohio State for playing hockey, and I had a ball. And then I had my son come along, and he was a heck of a good hockey player. He had scholarships where we wanted to go, because he was big, he was about 6-4, and he was a tough kid. He enjoyed it."

**BSB: In the NFL, what was your experience like filling in as the emergency quarterback when Johnny Unitas and Gary Cuozzo went down with injuries?**

Matte: "Woody Hayes is calling Don Shula next thing you know and telling him how to use me. It was interesting because Woody called Shula and said, 'Listen, if you're really in dire need, he'll be able to play quarterback for you. He can throw the ball, but he can also run better.' So he said, 'Set him back there and go from a shotgun,' and that's what we did. And we had some fun with it. The team rallied around me. And the coaching staff with Don McCafferty as the backfield coach, they designed an offense around what I could do. And it worked, so we had some fun with it."

**BSB: When you filled in at quarterback, you wore a wristband with the plays written on it. How did that come to fruition?**

Matte: "They came up with the idea of a wristband for me to glance down at with all the formations on it. It had a little plastic thing around it. And I get tackled and the guys on defense would try and rip it off me: 'You don't need this wristband.' I'd say, 'Yes, I do.' Then a lot more athletes went to the wristband after that, too. I should have patented the darn thing."

**BSB: How proud are you that your wristband will forever be enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame?**

Matte: "It's a very nice honor. I didn't think it was that big of a deal. I just knew that I was the last man standing and I had to go in there and do it."

**BSB: Where did the nickname "garbage can" come from?**

Matte: "(Former nine-time All-Pro defensive tackle) Alex Karras came up with that one.

He said, 'How can a garbage-can halfback like Matte beat us at quarterback?' So we laughed about it. Alex and I were really good friends. He gave me that nickname, 'the garbage can.' And of course, the team loved it. I came into the locker room after the first game I had played, and in my locker, what was there? A garbage can."

**BSB: Given that Don McCafferty coached the backfield, served as offensive coordinator and eventually took over as Colts head coach, and that he hails from Cleveland and Ohio State like you, how was your relationship with him?**

Matte: "He was like a father to me. His family and my family are very, very close. McCafferty was just a great coach, and he was under Shula, and I can't give enough accolades to Shula because he did such a tremendous job wherever he coached.

"McCafferty was sort of low profile, but he took me under his wing. Each night I'd come home, I would go over to his house and we'd watch film and do all the stuff that we had to do to get prepared for me to play quarterback. And we designed an offense around what I could do best, which was run. Roll out and throw the short passes, and every once in a while, I'd stop there and throw the long one and it worked.

"I think that's one of the reasons why I was drafted No. 1 by the Colts here. I was sort of a good football player, master of nothing but I could do everything. I had that versatility."

**BSB: You said you were surprised to be the Colts' first pick and the No. 7 overall pick in the 1961 NFL draft. Why were you so surprised?**

Matte: "I was a quarterback in college, and I was saying, 'What the hell do they want me for? They've got John Unitas.' Well, McCafferty had come out, and he went around and checked out the ballplayers, and he was an Ohio State graduate, and he came in and he said, 'We're drafting you.' And I said, 'Why?' He said, 'Don't worry about it, you're not going to play quarterback.' But I had played defense at Ohio State, and I played running back. Woody had just made me a running quarterback, that's all."

**BSB: Did you have an opportunity to play in the AFL instead, and why did you ultimately choose the NFL?**

Matte: "The San Diego Chargers came after me, and I was drafted by them. And I thought San Diego would be a great place to go to, but I decided that the Colts were the best deal for me."

**BSB: Why was playing for the Colts the best option for you?**

Matte: "McCafferty had an influence on that, and Weeb Ewbank was an Ohio guy. And John Unitas was my hero, and watching him and Lenny Moore, good god, these guys were great. And Raymond Berry and Jim Parker had come out of Ohio State and gone to the Colts. I had a lot of ties with that, and it was a good move on my part."

**BSB: You spent a lot of time with all-time great coach Weeb Ewbank in Baltimore. What was your relationship like with him?**

Matte: "He taught me the game. Between Weeb, McCafferty and then Shula, I had some pretty damn good coaches."

**BSB: What was it like being a Cleveland kid and losing to the Browns in the 1964 NFL championship?**

Matte: "I was getting a lot of static from all the Browns fans saying you've got to be loyal to the Cleveland Browns. I said, 'How can I be that when I'm being paid by the Baltimore Colts?' But it was good, clean fun



Tom Matte

THE

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and competitiveness. And the two teams within it were pretty strong. I'd get all kinds of calls and letters and fans would write to me: 'You should be here in Cleveland playing with us. You wouldn't have lost the game.' It was all in good fun."

**BSB: Where does former Browns standout and Hall of Fame running back Jim Brown rank for you all-time?**

Matte: "He's probably one of the best running backs. You take a look at him, you take a look at Lenny Moore, they were just the class of the whole league."

**BSB: You had the opportunity to join the Browns when you were injured and they tried to steal you away from Baltimore. What went into that whole situation?**

Matte: "I think they wanted to get a little publicity out of it, I don't know. It was sort of funny. I had gotten screwed up and back in those days, they'd put you on waivers. And then all the sudden, they had to take me off waivers. And I think it was a strategic move by the Cleveland Browns, that's all."

**BSB: Joe Namath led the up-and-coming New York Jets from the old AFL to a victory over you and your Colts in Super Bowl III. What was it like when he predicted the win, and were the Jets taken seriously since they were an old AFL team?**

Matte: "We had a lot of respect for Joe. He was a competitor. And also, the coach at that time was Weeb Ewbank, who knew us pretty well. I have a lot of respect for Joe. I think he was a heck of a quarterback. I don't know about being an actor, but he was a pretty good quarterback. It was all in the hype. That's what they wanted to do. They wanted to develop that hype and get everybody fired up about it, and they did. But they came out and did a good job. Joe did a great job."

**BSB: What was the historical significance of an AFL team actually beating an NFL team in the Super Bowl? Did it show that the leagues may have been more even in talent than people thought?**

Matte: "Everyone thought that we were thinking that, but we didn't. We had a lot of respect for the Jets at that time, and especially Joe Namath. He was a good quarterback, had a great arm, could get rid of the ball real quick. And that's the one thing you have to do. That's the one that Unitas was so good at. He could read that defense right away and pop the ball to you. When we saw the blitz was coming, John Mackey and I were the two guys who were outlets. And when the blitz was coming with someone coming through clean, we would turn around and just drop into a 5-yard pattern and we'd turn around and the ball would be in our face."

**BSB: Against the Jets, you recorded the highest yards-per-carry mark ever in a Super Bowl, which still stands at 10.5 yards per carry. How does it feel to have a Super Bowl record still stand 55 years later?**

Matte: "I had a good game, but if you lose, who gives a s\*\*t?"

**BSB: Your 58-yard run in Super Bowl III was the longest rush in a Super Bowl at that time. On that play, former Colts teammate Johnny Sample tackled you, and there was an altercation after the play. What happened there?**

Matte: "He and I didn't get along too well. He was a cheap-shot artist. He'd always come up at the end of the play and you're going down, and he'd take a shot at you. He's not one of my favorite people. Just going in after your knees, coming in late on a pile – that's not the way to play the game. You play it competitively. You don't try to hurt people."

**BSB: How tough was it to be injured**

**for Super Bowl V, and how could you help out despite not being able to play?**

Matte: "I sort of started acting as a coach and working with the back (Don) McCauley. McCauley was really a good kid and a good football player. And I was just trying to really express what I had learned through the 12 years that I played."

**BSB: The NFL went through a lot of changes during your tenure, with the AFL coming in and a lot of new players and new teams. What was the difference in the NFL from when you arrived in 1961 to when you left in the 1972?**

Matte: "I think it was a little bit more competitive because they didn't have that many teams to spread out the talent around the country. And you had to really work your buns off to be able to make the ballclub, and if you didn't, there was always somebody out there standing in line to take your place."

**BSB: You had former Ohio State standout lineman Jim Parker also playing with you on the Colts. What was it like having him blocking for you?**

Matte: "He was one of the best offensive linemen that ever played the game. He could block, he could turn the corner, he had speed, he had size and he was competitive. He was just a phenomenal athlete. He and Lenny Moore made a great combination, and with me at the other halfback, or playing fullback, or even me playing quarterback, we made a good tandem."

**BSB: With Lenny Moore's ability as both a runner and a receiving back, how do you think he would do as an H-back, like a slot receiver who also runs the ball in Urban Meyer's offense?**

Matte: "Lenny Moore could do anything, from the inside to the outside, as a receiver, as a defensive back. He was just a phenomenal athlete – had great speed, great hands, and was very competitive."

**BSB: What was your perspective on Rex Kern playing defensive back on the Colts after playing quarterback at Ohio State? Were there any thoughts that maybe he could play quarterback in the pros, or was he just a good college quarterback?**

Matte: "He was more of just a college quarterback, but he was a great defensive back. Because of being a quarterback, he understood the defenses and he'd take a look at formations. Rex was very, very competitive and very bright. He did a great job."

**BSB: Would the history of the Colts be different if the Green Bay Packers had not been so great during that time?**

Matte: "You can't take anything away from the Packers because they had a great coach with (Vince) Lombardi, and they had some really good football players up there and then they were competitive. They were the toughest team we had to play, and I believe the other one was the Chicago Bears. They were another team that was very, very tough to deal with, and the Rams. I mean, it was always competitive. And you know you had to prepare, and we were blessed. I was blessed to have some great coaches. And then also to have John Unitas as a quarterback didn't hurt anything either."

**BSB: As a former backfield mate of Johnny Unitas, you had a unique perspective on the Hall of Fame quarterback. Where is Johnny Unitas' place in history?**

Matte: "Well I think he's probably one of the top quarterbacks that ever played the game because he knew how to read the defenses better than anybody. We'd go in the huddle, and he'd just call the formation, saying, 'Out left, flank right, Matte option,' and that meant I could do anything I wanted to do, get out and find a hole. And he'd stay with me, or he'd tell the tight end to do the same thing, or the outside receivers. We'd cover somebody to

come inside, and they could do inside-outside moves, and John could read it that well. And his arm was the thing that was the best thing about him. He didn't have any speed, he wasn't that big, but boy I tell you what, he knew the game of football."

**BSB: Your Baltimore Colts teams disowned the Colts when they took the team out of Baltimore and moved to Indianapolis. What happened there?**

Matte: "That was (Jim) Irsay. We have our own little alumni association. They don't include us, the Baltimore Colts, in anything at all. And that's frustrating as hell because we don't have a home to go back to. And he wanted to get out of Baltimore. He got out of Baltimore and said, 'Screw them.' So we have to organize our own selves and do stuff. I used to do a lot of getting the guys back together and bringing them in town and have a little bit of fun lying about how good we used to be."

"But the thing is this, if you take a look at the record of all of our Colts teams, why can't it be carried over to the Indianapolis Colts? Irsay didn't want anything to do with us, so the way they did it, they just abandoned us. And I think the NFL made a mistake in not including the Baltimore Colts as a separate organization as far as identification and getting the guys together, having reunions and telling lies about how good we used to be."

"Who identifies with us? There's no organization. When Art Modell came here, he started including us in some of the Ravens' stuff and tried to take us under his wing, which was great of him and we really appreciated it. But you know, we still were a team of destiny, there's no question. ... There's no identification anymore, with who we are, what we did or anything like that, so we're just sort of left in limbo, and Irsay hasn't done a damn thing to include us."

**BSB: What was it like calling Baltimore games as a broadcaster?**

Matte: "The Ravens gave me a chance to do the broadcast, which I really appreciate, and I had a lot of fun doing it. But I was also working for CBS national television, and they get the guys who have retired for a while and then if you're good enough you stick around. If you're not, you drop by the wayside. And then the Ravens wanted me to come back and do some broadcasting. And I said, 'Thank you very much, I'd love to.' And it was a great time, a fun time. And I think it was a sort of a tie-over that the Colts guys were taken under the wing of the Ravens."

**BSB: So you do not really have any qualms about Art Modell moving the Cleveland Browns to Baltimore?**

Matte: "I think it was an economic move. You can't go down the tubes if you don't have enough money to pay everybody. So I think it was a good move. Baltimore came up with the cash for him to come down here, and we love it. I thought he was a great guy and a great friend."

"They've taken all the old Colts under their wing. And that never happened in Indianapolis. The Baltimore Colts were never brought back into the picture, so we had no home. And what Art Modell did is he took us under his wing and we at least had some place to go, and what he did is he got the guys who lived around – he gave them a couple season passes and we'd go to the games and all this stuff."

"I was doing national broadcasting for CBS at that time. I mean, it was very, very nice of Art Modell, and he's a good friend and the family's always been great friends. And Unitas and I were the old dogs here, and Lenny Moore, Parker and a lot of guys were involved."

"That made us all happy, it I really did, because we were such a part of the city here in Baltimore and put back into the community. The guys stayed here, and they worked here."

And we weren't making any money back in those days. I mean, as soon as the season was over, I had a job. No question about it. I worked with Black and Decker. I went back and got my MBA at Ohio State. And they took us under their wing."

**BSB: You helped start the Player Care Foundation, which helps aid retired players. How did that come to be and where does it stand today?**

Matte: "After I got done playing ball, I had bleeding ulcers. I almost bled out a couple times. What we tried to do is make sure the athletes who have retired are taken care of. And thank God that Roger Goodell came in because he took the old dogs under his wing. And I have a lot of respect for him as a commissioner and what he's done for us as a team here in Baltimore because we were sort of like forgotten."

"It was very new back then, and thank God, because we were at the forefront. It was so important to be able to take care of you. I had a lot of major, major health problems with bleeding ulcers. One game I went right from the game to the hospital, and they put four pints of blood in me. That was as stupid as I was. And then they cut my stomach out and I lost 40 pounds. And I had to build myself all the way back up again, because of these damn bleeding ulcers. It was stupid on my part to even play. If you're bleeding internally, before the game you go and take a dump and all that's coming out of you is pure blood."

"We just didn't have anything to fall back on. Nothing was here anymore."

**BSB: What are your thoughts on the long-term effects of concussions and the prevalence of former football players with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE)?**

Matte: "If you get your bell rung, you've got to be careful because it will really do damage to you. I think that's what they have to go back and really take care of. There are a lot of athletes that I know that I'm not going to mention, but a lot of guys are suffering from the fact that they played too long, and played hurt."

"When you had concussions like that, you just shouldn't play because it's crazy. I was always worried about that, with the brain damage. And I've seen some of my friends who were pro ballplayers who are suffering from that."

**BSB: Baltimore fans are known for being great sports fans. What do you think of that assessment?**

Matte: "They are, they really are. They have been. It's still identifiable here in Baltimore, even though the Ravens are here. The old Colts are always remembered and well-respected. They used to have Colt Corrals here, and in the offseason the guys would go speak at them and they'd buy us dinner and serve us beer."

"We had a great time going around just talking. We'd take the highlight film that they made, and we'd go out there and sit down with these Colt Corrals, and there must have been 50 of them in the state of Maryland. They'd pay you 100 bucks and pick up your expenses if you had to stay overnight, but we did that because we appreciated our fans."

**BSB: As someone who played multiple positions and has followed the sport for so long, how critical is the mental aspect of football?**

Matte: "The mental part of it is important – studying the film – that's what you have to do. I would bring the film home. We used to have 16mm film. Now they have the good stuff, the easy stuff, but I had to bring home 16mm stuff. And my wife and I would watch the film at night, and I would tell her, 'You're responsible for the weakside safety, and I'll take the strongside safety.' And she got to the point where she could read the defense quicker than I could!"



# Craft Enters New Chapter Following Pro Career

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Aaron Craft is the Big Ten's all-time steals leader and helped the Ohio State men's basketball team win an average of 29.8 games per season during his standout career from 2011-14.

The Findlay, Ohio, native will be remembered in Buckeye lore for much more than his performance on the floor. Craft became the third back-to-back Academic All-American of the Year in the history of Division I men's basketball, and the standout student is set to start medical school at Ohio State in August following his retirement from professional basketball.

The intensity that made Craft a fan favorite in Columbus and an enemy of the rest of the Big Ten helped propel him to a successful pro career. After winning an NBA D-League championship, which has since been changed to the G-League, and the league's defensive player of the year award, he went on to play professionally in Italy, Monaco, Hungary and France.

Craft helped guide his team to the French Leaders Cup title in 2018, when he also was named Pro A Best Defender. Then in the summer of 2019, the former national defensive player of the year helped lead the Ohio State alumni team, Carmen's Crew, to a TBT crown and the \$2 million prize.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked with Craft prior to Carmen's Crew's loss in this year's TBT about his upbringing, college career, time in the D-League, adventures overseas and his change in profession.

**BSB: What was it like having your dad coaching basketball and stressing the importance of playing tough defense when you were growing up? What do you remember about those times, and how did that mold you?**

Craft: "I remember mostly him being a coach of older kids. He had a good understanding of the game and what was valuable. As a young kid, even though he was my dad, I knew that he knew what he was talking about. So I tried to take what he said and do it, not try to find an easy way out. And I'm glad I did.

"It's not super far-fetched to say I've had a career based on the defensive side of the ball. From an early age, he always told me that that was a way you could always impact the game on that end of the floor. No matter what else is going on, you can always control your effort and your energy. That's something I took to heart and I've always tried to do every time I step on the floor."

**BSB: What was it like playing AAU with Jared Sullinger and having so much success, becoming the only team to win AAU Nationals at three different age levels?**

Craft: "When you think about playing with Jared, the first thing that comes to mind is just he makes the game easy. Whether he's taking all the attention, he's the one with a lot of pressure on his back, so you don't really have to worry about that as much. And honestly, it wasn't just Jared. I think our top seven guys went on to play Division I basketball; one guy went and played football at Michigan.

"We had a really talented team, and we were fortunate somehow to stay together for all three years of high school, which isn't normal. It was a ton of fun. We lost nine games in three years, so it was a lot of fun traveling around the country playing against the best players that AAU had to offer and finding ways to win games. We talk about it often when we get together, just how good a team we had and how much fun it was."

**BSB: There is a lot of corruption associated with AAU, and coach Thad Matta**

**has been pretty outspoken against schools paying players. Did you ever see anything like that?**

Craft: "I can't say like visually with my own eyes I've seen everything. Especially as you get out in a way, people tend to talk more about their experiences and what happened. Obviously, with the FBI investigations going on and stuff with Adidas, I think it's pretty clear that stuff is no longer as secret as it once was. There are just a lot of things that go on that teams, coaches and players are doing.

"I can say that's one thing that I really appreciate about Coach Matta. He really sought to try to do it the right way. He knew what was allowed and what wasn't, and he wouldn't step over that line, even for the best recruit out there. I'm glad I got to play with a guy like that, so now I can hold my head high and tell good stories of when I needed something to eat and we went out, I had to pay full price for it and all that kind of stuff."

**BSB: From your perspective, how likely did you think you were to receive an offer from Ohio State, and how did you end up there?**

Craft: "I didn't think I was going to get an offer to play here. If you talk to Coach Matta, he says they already had a good guard and what changed was someone transferred. When they showed interest later on in the process, I was honestly pretty against it. I was young and pretty prideful, so I thought, 'They didn't want me before, why do they want me now? I'm fine where I am.' I was going to go to Tennessee. I liked the environment and the situation and I liked Coach (Bruce) Pearl."

"Fortunately, once again, my father comes into play and said, 'Hey, we don't have to do anything, but we should at least look into this.' We went from 6½ hours from home to about an hour and 45 minutes. And my family was a big part of all the sports I did growing up. They were at almost every game. The support was awesome. My dad traveled all around the country with us in AAU. So the idea of being closer to home, getting that opportunity to be around them more was a big factor in it.

"Then you throw in Jared who had good pitches, here and there. And then also, I actually knew Jon Diebler before our time at OSU. My dad coached him when he was in middle school. And my brother was the same age, so they were pretty good friends and I had seen him a lot. And that just added another comfort factor of, 'Hey, I can go here and kind of get under his wing, as a senior, and he can show me the ropes, I'm not going in completely blind.' So that was kind of the process of how we got there, and I'm glad Coach Matta came to his senses."

**BSB: What is Coach Matta's place in Ohio State history?**

Craft: "It's got to be toward the top if not the top. Short of a national championship, he did everything that was possible. That includes starting from where he did, pretty low in the rankings and pretty low in the respect category in the Big Ten and in the country. And he found a way to build teams, build a program that was built on hard work, and it was really about the players. And I think that's one of the best things that you'll hear about Coach Matta if you talk to all of his former players. He really wanted it to be about us – practices, time off the floor, meals that we had together. He wanted us to really enjoy it and have fun, and we did.

"And obviously, he made it to a national championship game, a couple Final Fours, won a plethora of championships in the Big Ten, regular season and tournament. So, I think stat-wise, it's pretty easy to put him at the top, but I think what really sets him apart is the way he related to his players. And that's something that I didn't

realize was uncommon until I got out of school.

"The more that you talk to guys from other schools, other professionals that talk about their colleges, they don't tend to talk about it as fondly as I do. And a lot of it was because of the culture that Coach Matta had established. And I could call Coach Matta right when we get off the phone, and he would pick up and we would have a talk, and that's just who he is."

**BSB: As a football player, you threw for 6,800 yards and rushed for 4,700 through your junior season in high school before focusing on basketball. How much thought did you give to pursuing football, and why did you ultimately choose basketball?**

Craft: "Caveat with the stats, I went to a smaller, country school. I was there for a long time, played three years, and played against smaller teams, so that's a little asterisk. But I love football. And I've said this before and I'll say it again. I've played in the Final Four. I played across the world. And there's still something just different enough about playing on a Friday night with football pads on. I haven't replicated that feeling. I loved it. I really enjoyed it, being a part of a team with my classmates, and we were relatively good so that was helpful.

"But I wouldn't say football was ever super serious for me, because the recruiting process for football is just so different. I went to one football camp. It was actually down here at OSU. I felt like I threw the best I'd ever thrown, and it didn't matter. So there was a lot more self-recruiting that goes into football and making videos and sending out tapes. And I just never got into that because I knew by the time I got to my sophomore year that basketball was my passion. So football was something I love to do, but it wasn't what I was going to pursue in the future.

"I came to the camp here, and they had everyone that was more highly rated and recruited on one side. And for whatever reason, they had me on that side at the beginning. The other side was people that no one was really looking at, but there was like no one over there throwing. So, I was like, 'I'm going go over here get more reps in and feel good.' And it was amazing. I think the ball was a little smaller, so I could just chuck it. It was great, but after that, nothing happened. So, I was like, 'OK that was fun.' The other thing was I was playing AAU too, so a lot of those camps were on the weekend. And AAU took precedence, so it was a decision early."

**BSB: Matta enjoyed a lot of success at Ohio State, but the end of his tenure did not go very smoothly. Why do you think there was a decline toward the end of his time?**

Craft: "I don't know. I think some of it was we lost some really good Ohio guys to other schools. So then when that happens, you have to recruit outside of the state. And I think when I was there, everyone but two guys were from Ohio, and I just think that created a sense of, not that there wasn't a sense of brotherhood afterward, but we just felt really prideful about representing Ohio. I think that other guys that came in after us did too. But he also had a couple of tough breaks as well.

"I mean, if you look at Coach Holtmann's first year here, that was Coach Matta's team. Jae'Sean (Tate) just happened to be healthy; Keita Bates-Diop was healthy that first year and he wasn't the year before. So Coach Matta still had great players. He had a great team. It was just they never were able to all be healthy at one time. That first year with Coach Holtmann, that was Coach Matta's team, and they had a great year. They finished well in the Big Ten, made the NCAA Tournament and then Keita got drafted, so he still had it. He was getting good players, he knew who to go after. Just sometimes it happens."

**BSB: Being a high-energy, aggressive player seemed to be polarizing when you**

**were in college. What was it like having a lot of big fans and a lot of critics?**

Craft: "Man, a lot of haters. It was crazy. It was interesting. One of the best things Coach Matta always told us was if you treat this opportunity with respect and do it the right way, if you take care of your academics, if you play hard and give your all, the fans will see that and they will appreciate that well beyond your time at Ohio State.

"I've experienced the truth of that since I've left school. People still come up and talk to me about it. And most of the time it's older, grandparent-age people: 'Man, we loved watching you guys play. You guys had great teams.' That part's awesome, just knowing that it's pretty simple to play hard and give your all, but people really appreciate that. They see that and they recognize that, so that part's great.

"The people that aren't fans of it, that part's kind of fun too. Especially now. I've actually had a few teammates that I played against in college, like Devyn Marble from Iowa and Shavon Shields (Nebraska), and talking to those guys and hearing their perspective when they were in school and not. It's funny to hear what people said about us and about me in particular because they don't know me at all, they don't know anything about who I am as a person, but they just saw the way I played and it just rubbed them the wrong way. But then Devyn becomes my teammate, and he loves being my teammate. And Shavon and I loved playing together."

**BSB: It seems the people who might appreciate your playing style more may be quieter and less likely to hate on social media, while the critics may be more outspoken. How did you handle the negativity?**

Craft: "I'm super grateful I didn't have social media back then. It's very easy to go either way. It was easier for me to either ignore stuff or not hear, which is probably a really good thing for me. And when you're younger, you tend to react to things a little differently."

**BSB: Was there anything funny that stands out about what those former Big Ten competitors said about you after college?**

Craft: "Dustin Hogue played at Iowa State after we had played them. But the first couple of times we were together, and I ended up on his Snapchat or something, he would get, 'I can't believe you're hanging out with that guy. He's the worst.' It was like that pain was still fresh, so that's always been funny.

"Probably the best thing was I just had this reputation in school, so other guys like Tre Demps, who played at Northwestern, and some other guys at other schools told me what their coaches told them about me before the game would start. They'd be like, 'Hey, you need to be really careful, don't play with the ball, don't over-dribble. If Craft's on you, you need to be very careful and aware.' And that immediately put fear in their mind before we played the game, which I didn't know about then. But I just loved hearing that. I was like, 'Oh, that was great, I had an advantage before the game even started.' So it's been funny to hear that kind of stuff."

**BSB: Were you aware your former assistant coach Chris Jent was known for his intensity and high-effort style? And what kind of influence did he have on you?**

Craft: "I wish my basketball history was better. I'd heard of him, but I didn't know much about him until Coach said he was going to bring him in. So you do a little bit of research, obviously, you have to know who's going to be coaching you. I love the tough guy, just that effort coach was great to be able to learn from him and his basketball mind is insane. He had the NBA experience, and if you needed to break something down, he could do it.

"I really enjoyed working with him, just pick-



ing his brain and us talking basketball. I like to think I have a decent IQ, so to be able to test it against another guy and just get his thoughts on things was a lot of fun. And his intensity didn't leave either. He was an intense coach that wanted greatness and found a way to get that out of you and wasn't afraid to call you out when you needed to be called out, but obviously encouraged you when you needed that too, so I love it. Those two years were great."

**BSB: When you guys went 34-3 during your freshman campaign, you caught many people by surprise. What was your expectation entering your freshman season?**

Craft: "My expectation going into my freshman year was I have no clue, I'm on the ride. The train is moving. Let's hop on the train and go with it. I have no idea, obviously, E.T. (Evan Turner) had a phenomenal year the year before. A year they could have gone to the Elite Eight. We didn't lose our first game until February. It was like, not that college basketball is easy, but college basketball is great. Practice was fun and light because those upperclassmen, they got after it, they worked hard and competed. And because of that, practices weren't super long, like we would get after it and compete. So it was a perfect entrance into college basketball.

"You don't really notice that while you're going through it. We were ranked No. 1 for a lot of time during that year, which is crazy to think about being ranked No. 1 in the country. I remember being on the bus coming back from a game. I don't know where it was, but Duke had lost and they were No. 1, and we were all kind of like, 'Guys, on Tuesday, we're going to be No. 1 in the country.' And it was really tough to really sink in, because you're young and you're just living in the moment."

**BSB: After going 34-3 and sitting at No. 1 for almost the entire season, how tough did that make the loss to Kentucky (in the NCAA Tournament) for you guys?**

Craft: "Oh man, it was tough. I think if we play them 10 times, we'd probably win seven or eight. Will (Buford) had a terrible shooting night, none of us really shot the ball well and we were still right there at the end. So that definitely does hurt every now and again when we think about it. But the more that we do talk about that season, Kentucky comes up for sure, but we really start talking about, man, we were 34-3.

"It was incredible, the basketball was fun. And that's what we really enjoy talking about is, man, the basketball was so much fun. Because everyone was a high-IQ player, everyone knew what their role was, and nobody cared whose night it was to go off. And I think that's what made that team so dangerous was obviously you always had Jared, but Jon one game hits 10 threes, the next game Will has 22, the next game Dave (Lighty) has 20, like you had to pick who you were going to gamble off of. That's fun basketball. There's not much better while you're playing than being on a team like that where no one cares and everyone's dangerous. That's great basketball."

**BSB: Then the next year, you guys lost Jon Diebler, David Lighty and Dallas Lauderdale but ended up going further in the tournament when you went to the Final Four. What was that experience like?**

Craft: "The first thing it shows you is that anything can really happen in a tournament. I don't think anyone would say our sophomore year team was better as a whole than our freshman year, but whatever it was, a better tournament draw or we were becoming a little better at a certain time, I don't know. But it was just crazy to look back because freshman year was the year we were like, 'Let's go to the Final Four, let's try to win this thing.' And then we end up going sophomore year. So it was just eye-opening to see. That is the NCAA Tournament. That's what makes it so much fun.

"But overall, that experience was great. It

did take us a little bit to find our rhythm, getting D.T. (Deshaun Thomas) in a starting position and Lenzelle (Smith) being a new starter. But as the season went on, that was a perfect example of us playing well at the right time. It was fun, it was a ton of fun that year continuing to build off of what was there the year before. And a lot of people probably didn't think that we could follow up what happened my freshman year, so to be able to do that the next year was pretty sweet. Playing in front of 70,000 people is incredible. It's obviously a once-in-a-lifetime experience because it just doesn't happen in basketball."

**BSB: Which team was better in your opinion, the group your freshman year or sophomore season?**

Craft: "That's tough. Honestly, I would have to go with my freshman year. Sophomore year, we were good. We were good, for sure. Jared was a little different. Jared was hurt at the beginning but obviously figured it out toward the end. But I think consistency-wise, my freshman year was so good because of those upperclassmen and the experience they had."

**BSB: Deshaun Thomas, who recently joined Carmen's Crew, took on a primary role when you two were sophomores, doubling his scoring average. What does he bring to the table?**

Craft: "D.T. hasn't changed. He's still the same, but he's a better basketball player right now, too. I love it. It's been great to see him improve. But he's still like that. He's a bucket. It's amazing."

**BSB: In a tie game against Iowa State in the tournament your junior year, it looked like you guys drew something up to get Deshaun Thomas the ball off screens, but you held onto it and buried a three-pointer for the win. Can you take me through that situation from your perspective, and what was going through your mind throughout the sequence?**

Craft: "I would love to tell you exactly what we were supposed to do. I can't remember, to be honest. I know it was a ball screen with Q (LaQuinton Ross), and D.T. was going to come off staggered screens. I'm pretty sure the plan was to get the ball to D.T. and let him do his thing, which isn't a wrong decision because it's D.T. and he takes and makes great shots.

"I can't tell you what possessed me in that moment to wave off our best scorer. I really have no clue. God, I'm really glad it worked out. I probably would have never heard the end of it if it didn't. But I think I knew they'd switch, so I was confident I could at least get a decent shot off without having to worry about it being too highly contested. So for whatever reason, I had a moment of extreme confidence, and maybe I should have that extreme confidence more often.

"I've been fortunate to be in that situation a few times, and I've definitely made some and I've missed some. But I shot the ball extra late in the clock, and I don't ever do that anymore. I usually shoot a lot sooner, which I don't know why, but it was more of a 'Let's win or go to overtime.' And man, I'm glad we won."

**BSB: What was it like going through the summer league process and then playing in the D-league?**

Craft: "It was a mental struggle, not that I was extremely highly talked about while I was in school. But when you're in school, people tend to focus on what you do well and they talk that up. But then the moment you get out of school, they instantly start talking about what you're bad at and what you can't do and what doesn't translate, so mentally handling that is difficult.

"And I was no different. I think every player has a vision for how that's going to go. And I wasn't unrealistic, I knew I wasn't going to be a lottery pick. Maybe I could go late in the second round, and I just wanted a chance. That didn't happen. Then you go to summer league, and I didn't play on my first summer league team,

so it's a bunch of things that I'm not used to. And trying to handle that mentally while also still knowing that I have to perform in a certain way for these people, it was a challenge. It was a struggle, for sure.

"I got really fortunate that Coach (Steve) Kerr took over at Golden State and had seen me in college play a decent amount as a commentator. So he was actually kind of fond of me, so that helped me out. The moment I got to play under him in summer league, it was like an injection of confidence and hope because he believed in me, and I knew he believed in me.

"That was huge. It took me back to Coach Matta. He believed in me, and he knew I could do more than I thought myself. And Coach Kerr had that same kind of energy, and that's huge for a player, especially in an unknown situation. It was tough to start. I don't know why, it had to be some of his commentating, but he called me personally right after the draft and was like, 'Hey, I heard you're going to play in the summer league. I'm really excited about it.' At summer league, he just believed. And he called me right after summer league and said, 'I'm really excited to have you at camp.'

"And honestly, once I left camp, he fought for me. He fought to have me on the team with the general manager. He wanted to give me an opportunity, give me a chance. If it was college, I would have been good, I would've had an offer. So even behind the scenes, not to my face, he was fighting for me and he really believed in me.

"It wasn't easy either getting cut after training camp because I felt like I had a chance. And if I was there enough time, he would see my value. It's very tough to see my value over an hour-and-a-half workout once. It's just super tough to see, 'We want him on our team, he'll help us.' And I get that, I understand it. I'm more of a guy you have to see me play multiple times and see me

impact the game.

"But with all that being said, I'm not denying that it wasn't a challenge, or it wasn't difficult. It was, but I probably wasn't ready to play in the NBA. I would like to say I was. I would like to say I would have figured it out, I would have gotten better and found a way to interact and be in the locker room and play well and all this stuff. But looking back, and being honest about myself as a person, where I was mentally, I just probably wasn't ready for it. It would have been more of a challenge to make it in the NBA and figure out that lifestyle with a new wife and doing all those things while having to try to perform and stick.

"That would have been more challenging than going to the D-League and dealing with the humility that I had to take on as a cut player playing in the D-League. So, it was a roller coaster for sure and it wasn't easy, but I really honestly believe it happened exactly how it was supposed to happen.

"Because even if you look at (Indiana Pacers guard) T.J. McConnell, I think he's a great player. He's probably better offensively than me. I think I'm better defensively than him. But he goes to Philly a year after I'm there and he ends up making the team and I think we're very similar players. Or if there were two-way contracts back then, I probably would have most likely made a two-way contract with Golden State and had an opportunity to play in the NBA a little bit, but they didn't exist. So you take it exactly where you are, and I firmly believe God's always taken me exactly where I needed to go, even though I may have thought I wanted to do something else.

"And I've had a great career. I've loved my career. I've gotten to do and see and experience things I never would have in the NBA."

**BSB: How cool was it to win the D-League**

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# Craft Discusses Time In Europe, Retirement Plans

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**championship and also be named D-League Defensive Player of the Year?**

Craft: "The D-League is an interesting animal. Sometimes it can really feel like it's a revolving door of players. I had a great coach. His name is Casey Hill. He's Bob Hill's son. Bob Hill was actually the Spurs coach before (Gregg) Popovich. Crazy basketball mind – he was super young so I kind of did not take to him at first. But man, he made a ton of fun. He was a player's coach.

"We had a lot of experience, kind of very similar to when I had got to college, that I could look up to as a rookie that either played in the NBA for a few years or had been in the D-League. So it wasn't this crazy rodeo experience. They really cared about us and wanted us to get better. And we really hit our stride come like January, February, and those games are fun because you're playing every two or three days. The games are high-paced, there are a lot of points being scored, and there are just a lot of possessions. As a player, that's a lot of fun to be a part of. It came down to the end.

"I think about right before the playoffs, we were like, 'We have a chance to win this thing.' It was awesome from the start of the season to the end to see how we've grown but also how you just enjoy where you are, and great things can happen. Because I think a lot of people get to the D-League and they feel bad or their self-pity starts growing in like, 'Why am I here?' But we found a way to enjoy it and make the most of it. And not to mention, Santa Cruz is a top-three city I've ever lived in – great weather, the beach was right there, and the people were super friendly. The entire experience was amazing."

**BSB: How was your experience playing overseas? Did you enjoy being abroad?**

Craft: "Playing overseas isn't all easy. I think a lot of people have a misconception that, OK, I'm in Italy and when they think of Italy, they think like I'm on vacation for 10 months. But it's like I'm really there to work and it is challenging. But my wife and I got to do some amazing things. So I really can't complain."

**BSB: Did you go out and take in the culture a lot? Do you have any stories about when you might not have understood the culture or language where you were?**

Craft: "The first place we went was Hungary, and there's no other language in the world that's similar to Hungarian. And it's not Latin-based, so you can't read anything, you can't understand anything, it sounds like gibberish. And I think the biggest thing that I didn't really understand before I got there was it was a communist country for years, and it was relatively young out of the communist rule. So the mind-set and the attitude of people was very different than people that have never lived in a communist country. People tended to not show much emotion. They didn't smile much and I'm a smiley guy. So even that took me off guard. I was like, 'Gosh, these people hate me. What is going on?'"

"Italy was a little easier. The language is really close to Spanish, and I'd studied that in school. So I could guess, and you get better as you're there just being around it. But still, Italian culture is different than American culture. They like to sit around and have a coffee and chill and talk for an hour or two. Lunches and meals take longer than they do in America.

"One of the great things about Europe, it seems like people aren't in a huge rush all the time. In Italy you have an hour and a half to two hours for lunch every day. So, people can really relax, they can slow down. And here you get 30 minutes if you want it, or you work while you're at the office and you just chowed your food down quick. It was great to see that other side of it.

Monaco was a completely different animal as well because the wealth in Monaco is unlike anything I've ever seen. So I definitely didn't belong there. But it was a good time."

**BSB: The churches and artwork in the Vatican are incredibly impressive. What stood out to you from that perspective?**

Craft: "I think one of the biggest things that you can easily see is the emphasis that taxes and money back in history were used to build churches, massive churches. And there's a lot of understandable debate about where that money comes from and how they got the money and whether it was the right thing to do. But outside of that, you can tell they had a lot of value in creating and building places that people could go worship, which is awesome and it's so different than the U.S.

"People in the U.S. want to collect money to build great things but not churches. You don't see anything like those. So it's very easy when you walk into a church like that to immediately be hit by, 'Man, this is amazing' and in a sense it does point you upward, because of how great they look, how detailed they are, how massive they are.

"It's really fun to think about how many people in history have come to this place and worshipped the same God that I'm worshipping today. That kind of gives me a little bit of chills. The faith has had ups and downs for sure, but the main gospel message is the same as when Jesus lived. From that point to now is the same. And there have been millions of people that have believed in that, trusted in that, based their life on that, and given their life for that, really. And over there you can just kind of get that feel a little more. It's not even just the churches, it's the artwork, it's the statues and those types of things. Nothing like that really exists in America, so if you go over there, it can be kind of surreal."

**BSB: You wrote Romans 5:8 on your basketball shoes in honor of the bible verse. What is the significance of that particular verse to you?**

Craft: "That verse is just a way to remind me and hopefully point others to the gospel message of Jesus. In sports it's so easy for me, especially, to get wrapped up in thinking my worth and my value and why I matter is wrapped up in how I play and who's talking about me before or after games. So that verse for me is just a way to get me back to center, get me back to what really is important or what really matters. What matters is that God loves me, and he cares about me. He proved that by sending his son to die for me, so it's really just a way for me to get back to what's really important and focus on those things."

**BSB: There is a lot of history abroad that predates the colonization of America by more than 1,000 years. How did your time overseas change your perspective, if at all?**

Craft: "It's bad to be disconnected from history, and I'm not great. And obviously, you've seen now in America, with everything going on with the Black Lives Matter movement and the racial injustice stuff happening, a lot of that exists and people don't think it's a big deal because they've forgotten history. They've forgotten what's happened in the past and what's really going on and how much time has really passed because everyone tends to just think about themselves and what they're going through and what they're dealing with. I'm not an exception. It's very easy to forget about others and what they may have experienced or what history has said and done."

**BSB: What was the atmosphere like playing overseas, and how does it compare to playing a big stage like at Ohio State?**

Craft: "It doesn't really. Like at Ohio State, there was 15,000 people at every game. And if you say that about a basketball game in Italy, they

kind of look at you funny. If you're talking about soccer, yes, they've got thousands upon thousands, it's insane. Basketball just doesn't garner that attention. There are some that historically have a great following and their fans are great, they whistle, and they get after it. And there are a decent amount of teams like that, but I'd say the majority of time it wasn't super crazy until we made the playoffs. The playoffs were a lot of fun. My Trento fans were awesome, so I can't bash them. They love me. Numbers-wise, it probably didn't compare, but rowdiness, it can be up there, for sure."

**BSB: How have you enjoyed TBT and playing with a lot of your former teammates?**

Craft: "Just being around these guys is fun. They're great guys. They understand how to play the game of basketball, but it's more fun just being around them as people. And we've all kind of gone our separate ways and have had different experiences and challenges. But to be able to continue to learn from them and hear their perspectives has always been great, so I don't anticipate that ever stopping."

**BSB: A large portion of Carmen's Crew played together at Ohio State, and you guys had some excellent teams that suffered some tough breaks in the tournament. What was it like to win the tourney, and was there any sense of vindication given how you guys had come up just short in college?**

Craft: "Yeah, we're not above that. And I think it felt good to win a championship with a group like this. But I also think at the same time, a lot of us, we don't live day to day looking back and wondering what if and trying to really validate what happened. For some of us, some of us, it was eight-nine years ago. So as we've all gotten older, I think we've really started to really appreciate the great things that we have experienced, and at times that includes falling short and losing and having to struggle through some things.

"Those things have helped us all grow and be stronger and even grow closer together at times. Winning the championship was awesome, and we are human. There is that sense of finally that we did it. But even if you listen to some interviews from last year, I think guys kind of touched on it. It's just great to compete with these guys, and whatever happens, happens. But to be able to go to war, in a sense, again with this group has been great. And we try not to spend a ton of time talking about the past and what we missed out on because it has helped us become what we are today, and we enjoy that."

**BSB: Congrats on retiring from basketball. How tough is it to give it up, and on the other side of that, how excited are you to move on to the next chapter in your life?**

Craft: "I'm excited to chase after another dream that I've had since I was a kid. I've always wanted to become a doctor, and really starting that path is really close. It's like a month away from orientation. But another part of me, it's challenging to have it really sink in because everything to this point this summer has been fairly similar to the past summers. I've been around these guys, I've played basketball, I've worked out and then I'm playing in the TBT.

"I think once the TBT is over, that will really start setting in. Basketball for me as a career is over, and I'm really stepping into this next season. I'm excited. I'm also a little nervous. This is going to be completely different for myself and my family, finding a new rhythm and a new routine that continues to prioritize them and honor them well. School is also something that's going to require time and attention and significant effort. And that's kind of who I am. Finding that balance, I'm very, very cautious, really trying to find that and not go too far one way or the other.

But I am excited about the opportunity, for sure."

**BSB: Medical personnel is always important, but the pandemic has shown us just how essential health care workers are. Why did you choose the medical field?**

Craft: "Being completely honest, when I was younger, I was probably drawn to it based on TV shows that were interesting to me. The one that really sticks out is 'House.' Seeing him solve these unsolvable problems and saving people's lives, that was interesting to me. And the combination of understanding how the body works in trying to solve issues and problems with the body has always fascinated me. Being able to diagnose and take a visit, ask a few questions and have an idea of what's wrong and what can help, that's amazing to me.

"And then, as I've gotten older, my world view's grown. The opportunity to help others in that capacity – I think that if you talk to most medical students and doctors, that's why they want to do it. Because it's an opportunity to help others when they're in a very vulnerable state. So I love the combination of skills and knowledge required and also the nature of the job. I hope and pray that when I'm older or my life's done, I'm remembered for a lot more than just playing basketball or diving on the floor. I'm really hoping my life is about helping others and being there for them. And being a doctor is a great means to that end."

**BSB: Ohio State transfer Seth Towns was on ESPN talking about when he was detained for peacefully protesting the murder of George Floyd. As an OSU alum what did you think of Towns' words and actions?**

Craft: "I think it's great. Obviously, he's standing up for something he believes in, and that's what I think our program is about. He was going about it the right way, and the things he said and was doing were right on point with the situation and everything going on. It's great to see a guy like that. He's from Columbus too so we've known him from before he left for Harvard and since he's been there. It's good to see a younger guy like that taking a stand for something he believes in and doing it the right way also."

**BSB: How does splitting the money up for TBT work?**

"The TBT took some money, gave some to the fans, and the rest went to us, so we split that up evenly. I think one or two other guys made a little less just because they didn't play at all. It's difficult for us to kind of look at each other and say, 'Dave, you have more value than Jon does.' But everyone's been understanding. Those have probably been the toughest conversations because we all really like each other, and sometimes it's hard to talk business when emotions and you feel that family pull toward one another."

**BSB: From what we know about a lot of you guys, the money's not the lone driving factor, and many would play if they weren't getting paid. How important is the TBT's cash incentive?**

Craft: "I think that's partially true. Money is definitely a good motivating factor for sure. But like you said, every summer we come back and play regardless with each other. This just kind of provides an opportunity for us to do it on a bigger stage again.

"The answer to that question is yes and no. We all are professionals, so we all play for money and that is part of the reason why you play. A lot of us have families now and little kids, so it is kind of our livelihood, to make money and provide for our family. And that's been a great blessing for us just to be able to do it through a basketball game. But also, at the same time, I think the love of the game is still there and the love of each other's there. So you kind of have both sides of that coin."



# Ryan Sees Big Things In OSU's Wrestling Future

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Ohio State wrestling head coach Tom Ryan has put together quite the program in Columbus. Since his arrival in 2006 following 11 successful seasons at Hofstra, Ryan has reversed the Buckeyes' struggles early in the decade, taking over a team that went 4-12 a year prior to his arrival and moving them to almost yearly Big Ten contention after just one season.

In the years since his arrival, Ohio State's wrestling program has reached new heights, claiming the school's first national title in 2015 and securing three Big Ten tournament championships in 2015, 2017 and 2018, more than half of OSU's five conference titles. Ryan has coached 12 individual national champions, including Logan Stieber, the first four-time champion to come through Columbus.

Entering his 15th season with the Buckeyes, Ryan sat down with Buckeye Sports Bulletin to talk about the past, the coronavirus-centric present and a future that he feels could feature his best team yet.

**BSB: It's been a couple of busy weeks at Ohio State. I know that some teams, namely football and the basketball programs, are starting to get athletes returning. How is the OSU wrestling program preparing to work guys back into an in-person routine when they're allowed back?**

Ryan: "Well the athletic department has a plan. Right now, their biggest concerns are the sports that are closest to beginning, closest to the start of their seasons. So all the fall sports right now are being slowly moved back into a sense of normalcy.

"Once the fall sports plan has been completed, then we'll move into the winter sports. So I don't know exactly when it will be before wrestling is back together. We haven't been together since March 11. And we still have that sign on the wall, the countdown. That was seven days away from national championships. That sign is not changed. Currently, our guys are at different places around the country, back at their hometowns in training environments back home. We're hoping to have them maybe mid-July."

**BSB: Of all the sports at Ohio State, it seems like wrestling would be one of the more difficult to train for away from home, because there's not really the elite competition within their household. I would imagine it would be kind of hard to wrestle with your little brother if you're an Ohio State-caliber wrestler. How have your guys been handling this process? Are they back at their high school gyms? Is it mostly that sort of thing, or are they just lifting?**

Ryan: "I think that's a great point. Wrestling is unique from the standpoint that speed and strength matter, but skill is so critically important. You get skill through repetitive movements against somebody that's tougher than you, better than you, who will refine you. So, for our guys – this is a challenge for us. We want to get back in the room, but we also understand the challenge in regard to transmitting the infection.

"Each of these guys have used the resources available to them through their time in high school to find the toughest places to go to work out. Some are in better areas than others. Some of these guys are in areas that are deeply rooted in wrestling, and there's a bunch of college kids back home. And some aren't. So it's a kind of a hit-and-miss scenario, with the guys that are in

a great situation from guys that are just in just OK situations."

**BSB: Two Buckeye wrestling legends, Kevin Randleman and Lance Palmer, were recognized recently, Kevin as an inductee to the UFC Hall of Fame and Lance to the Ohio State Hall of Fame. I'm interested in hearing your thoughts on those two, especially having coached Lance.**

Ryan: "I know Kevin pretty well. Obviously I did not coach Kevin, but Kevin and I were in college at the same time. Kevin wrestled at Ohio State while I was in Iowa, and he was a competitor of one of my good friends at Iowa, Bart Chelavig and Mark Reiland. I had the good fortune of watching him compete, and he was just an absolute terror on the mat and then obviously went into the MMA world and was a terror there. One of the elite athletes, I would say, in NCAA wrestling history.

"Then when I got the job here, my relationship with Kevin grew. I would do a camp with him every summer out in Vegas. I would go out to Vegas, and I'd do a wrestling camp with him. So I got to know him and his wife and his son. Obviously, his death was tragic. He's just too young. I knew him as a competitor and then again as a coach here.

"Lance I coached from his freshman year on. I tweeted that Lance is just a guy that understands all of the essentials of being elite for an extended period of time. He understands sustained success. It's no surprise that he's in the Hall of Fame at Ohio State. I think as a young freshman we saw something in him that would lead you to believe that he could control the future in some degree, by the way he dealt with his daily life."

**BSB: Just how good of an athlete was Kevin?**

Ryan: "I mean he could have probably played any sport. I mean he was explosive power. Also, he was an incredibly gifted person. I never coached him, but my understanding was he absolutely was an incredibly hardworking person. And when you mix the two, you usually have something pretty special, and that's Kevin Randleman."

**BSB: The National Wrestling Coaches Association announced All-Americans a while back, and that's serving as the resolution to the season. Were you happy with that as the recognition for the season? Or were you hoping for more?**

Ryan: "I think there's always compromise. You never get everything you want. And in the compromise for what the utopian situation would be, we're pleased with it. I think they recognized that we competed in 15 of the 16 allowable days of competition throughout the season. It was a wide array of data to pull that would allow you to reasonably determine who the best guys were in their weight. And I think that by using that data, it was a good move by the NWCA in declaring these guys All-Americans. So we were pleased with it overall."

**BSB: What would your utopia situation look like in that context?**

Ryan: "I felt that my utopia was, one, the NCAA should recognize it. So I think the NCAA should recognize all these guys as All-Americans. And I thought that based on your pre-seed, you should be considered first, second- or third-team All-American. If you were No. 1 through No. 3, you're first team; No. 4 to No. 6, second team; No. 7 to No. 10, third team. That's not how they did it. They lumped them all in as one. So I thought there should be a first, second and third team. Instead, just

All-Americans across the board, not based on your pre-seed."

**BSB: Among that group, you had the two seniors, Luke Pletcher and Kolin Moore, but there were also four wrestlers who will be back in 2020 – Kaleb Romero, Sammy Sasso, Ethan Smith and Rocky Jordan. What are the expectations for those guys moving forward now that you've seen this sort of season from them?**

Ryan: "I believe that Sammy would have won a national title as a freshman. I think he was in a position to do that. He's a competitor. I mean, (the abrupt end to the season) was challenging for him, because it takes away that you can't win four if you don't get the first one.

"I'm really excited about this team. This is a team that is loaded with talent, and all of those guys – all those four All-Americans return, we'll call them returning All-Americans – are going to be a nucleus to a team that adds a host of guys that were redshirting or incoming guys that certainly have the capability to compete for championships at this level.

"So we're excited. The biggest issue right now is that there are going to be guys that come out of this quarantine a lot better and there are guys that could come out of quarantine worse, so we need to make sure that our guys come out better. And it's challenging when you're not in an environment that is constantly pushing you forward."

**BSB: One of those redshirts that I know fans, in general, are very, very interested in is Carson Kharchla. Do you see him jumping into the starting lineup this season? Do you think he's ready for that jump?**

Ryan: "One of the blessings right now of the team is that we have a lot of depth. And depth is really good because it gives a heightened sense of awareness and of how hard it's going to be just to make the team. And your competition is, although they're a teammate, they're right in front of your face every day.

"So he's at a weight class (174 pounds) where we've got someone who's really good. I mean, he's been in a wrestle-off early on (against Ethan Smith), but Ethan really improved throughout the year. We're happy with Ethan. So we don't know what's going to happen, but we know that whoever is the most disciplined, harder-working person likely will prevail at that weight. And we're going to be really good there. Now Carson had a great freshman year. He didn't get to see any of the top five, but he did the best he could in regard to whoever he did wrestle, he beat. He finished his season unbeaten in open tournaments, and we're all excited to watch him."

**BSB: It seems like another place where that sort of competition in depth would apply is at heavyweight where you're bringing in (Utah Valley transfer) Tate Orndorff. What went into the call to bring him in to compete with Gary Traub and battle for that spot?**

Ryan: "Well obviously, before we make a decision like that, we talk to the student-athletes. So we called Gary and let him know that Tate reached out to us and the fact that he was going to transfer and we were his top school. He wanted to come wrestle. So what Tate allows us – Tate's potentially an Olympic-waiver guy.

"But what Tate gives us more than anything is that Gary has one more year left. And our big concern was the year after Gary left, what are we going to do? What are our solutions? So this

bought us some time.

"So it did a couple of things. One, it bought us time because Orndorff has two years left. So it fills that gap year where Gary leaves and what do we have? So it settles a problem that we're going to have a year from now by getting Tate. It also creates just a little more competition in the room, which is good for everyone. So we're excited about Tate. We're glad he chose to be a Buckeye, and he and Gary will settle it on the mat."

**BSB: One other new wrestler, Anthony Echemendia, has been a topic of discussion of late. You told me a few months ago that he was on track and ready to enroll. I'm sure the virus has changed those plans a bit, but is he still on that path and ready to go this upcoming season?**

Ryan: "Yeah. So he's moving into Columbus. He would be here already had there been a reason for him to come here in regard to practicing. Normally the Regional Training Center is practicing intensely right now, and because the room shut down, it didn't make sense for him to move here. So he's in class, he's doing extremely well in school right now, he will move down here probably Aug. 1, and he will be on our roster and fighting for a starting spot with the likes of Dylan D'Emilio, who is a four-time Ohio high school state champion. It looks like the two of them will be fighting it out for the starting spot at 141. But it's as you thought. He's committed, he's in school. He is NCAA eligible and he's an incoming freshman."

**BSB: You've said before that you think he can start right away, and I know you've seen him wrestle a few times since then. Have you seen anything that confirms what you were already believing working with him where you are just sort of thinking, "This kid could be really, really special?"**

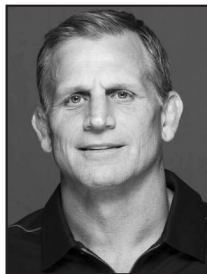
Ryan: "He's been down to a couple of RTC practices before the quarantine. When you watch him, you see things that are just not that common – his body awareness, his explosive power, his speed. So he's not your typical incoming freshman. Obviously, he's been trained around world and Olympic champions. These are the people he was trained with in Cuba. The Cuban system is a very good system. There are a lot of elite wrestlers there, and he was beating them. He's already been tested in the freestyle realm.

"Now what's going to be the biggest challenge for Anthony is simply the daily grind of being a college student and also wrestling. He also has a little bit of a transition from freestyle to folkstyle and mat wrestling. But the main thing is the discipline of life, of being a college student.

"But what I see in him, I see all of the things that lead you to believe that the things that can derail an elite athlete are not going to derail him. He's fundamentally, foundationally really strong in the areas that you need to be strong to combat the world that pulls at you."

**BSB: What are you most looking forward to about just having guys back on campus, being able to work with guys again?**

Ryan: "Just being back together. I mean, in 28 years around wrestling, it's the longest break I've had. In 28 years. There's a camaraderie, there are deep friendships built in a sport like wrestling that's so combative and you have so much respect for each other. I just want the team back together. And I'm looking forward to seeing who walked the walk. Their capacity to work when they get back will reflect what they've done in the quiet of their quarantine. So we'll see who was serious about things and who just talked about it."



Tom Ryan



# Titus Turns Walk-On Experience Into Media Career

By WYATT CROSER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Mark Titus finished his Ohio State career with nine points in four seasons on the men's basketball team. He also was a part of a run to the NCAA Tournament championship game, as well as three seasons with eventual Naismith and Wooden Trophy winner Evan Turner.

Titus' experiences as a walk-on under head coach Thad Matta became known through both his blog, Club Trillion, that he created while on the team, as well as his book "Don't Put Me In, Coach: My Incredible NCAA Journey from the End of the Bench to the End of the Bench," which he wrote in 2013. From there, Titus became a media personality and has most recently joined the FOX Sports Network, where he has a podcast with co-host Tate Frazier.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin spoke with Titus on his time at Ohio State, as well as how he ended up turning his walk-on experience into a media career.

**BSB: Taking it all the way back to AAU where you played with what would end up being three of your Ohio State teammates, how did you find yourself on that team, and what was that overall experience like for you?**

Titus: "I got on the team because of Mike Conley Jr. Mike Sr., Mike's dad, was moving to Indianapolis. He had taken a job with USA track and field which is based out of Indianapolis, so Mike was moving to Indianapolis and they wanted to form an AAU team with all the best talent because Mike was one of the best players in the country at that time.

"When he moved, he was basically just asking around, this is in seventh or eighth grade. He starts surveying the landscape of basketball in Indiana. And at that time, I was 6-4 in eighth grade and was dunking and shooting threes. I was definitely one of the best players in the state in eighth grade.

"So that was pretty much it. Mike Sr. was forming this AAU team, he called me, and I knew Mike Jr. because we played against them all the time. We played against his Arkansas team growing up, so I knew exactly who he was. I was like, 'Yeah, that's one of the best players in the country, I want to play with him.' So that was pretty much it.

"That's how I got on the AAU team because in eighth grade, I explain to people, I was like Kevin Love in eighth grade. How Kevin Love plays, that was me. And then I just stopped growing and everyone got better than me, and I just slowly got worse and worse. But they were loyal. I was loyal to them. So they kept me around on the team all through high school, and that was pretty much it. So that's how I got on the team. I have my genetics to thank. I hit a growth spurt when I was young."

**BSB: In your book you talk about going against Lou Williams' AAU team in the championship game and you had a moment in the final seconds potentially taken away. Can you kind of paint the scene of that final possession?**

Titus: "By the time I'm a senior, my playing time on the AAU team was very erratic. There were games where I would play well over half the game and would get a ton of minutes, even in close games. It wasn't just blowouts. I would play in close games. It all depended on matchups.

"Lou Williams' team was very athletic, and I

am not, so this was a horrible matchup for me, this was a game that was not good for me. So I ended up not even seeing the court. It was one of the few times, and people don't believe that because I have a reputation as being a benchwarmer, but I actually really did play in all these AAU games, but this was one of the few games I didn't see the court the entire game.

"We're down by three with like 10 seconds left and Mike Sr. turns to me and he's like, 'Mark, get in there,' and I was like, 'All right, so clearly, I'm going to be a decoy, like you're going to bring the white guy off the bench. We're down three. Like I'm going to serve as the decoy. Cool, I'm good with that,' because I'm ice cold, I haven't even played, I haven't even touched the court.

"I go in, and then Mike Sr. surveys the lay of the land and he calls timeout. And we get into the timeout huddle, and he draws up the play for me. And I'm like, this is bananas. This is absolutely insane that I have not played and there's 10 seconds left. Now I'm in and you're drawing up the game-tying shot for me, but whatever. I was down for it.

"We come out of the timeout huddle, and Lou Williams switches on to me and now Lou Williams is guarding me. He's face-guarding me and he won't let me breathe and he's absolutely locked me down and I'm just laughing. In the back of my mind I'm not even nervous because I'm just laughing at the whole scene of this future NBA player, one of the best players in the country is locking me down. The whole thing was hilarious.

"I was like, 'I'm going to run the play and I'm going to hit the shot,' because I was very confident. I was like, 'I don't miss. If I get open I'm making it so I'm not really worried about it.' So we run the play, I curl off the screen, I actually

lose Lou Williams for like a half second. I was really crafty coming off the screen so I pretend like I'm going to curl, I bump the screen, go to the corner.

"I wasn't wide-open but I was definitely open enough to throw a pass to me, and Daequan Cook decided 'I'm not going to pass it I'd rather just jack it from 40 feet,' completely pays no attention to what the play was called. He shoots it himself, misses, we lose the game. I think we lost like five AAU games our entire run, and that was one of them.

"That's one of the funniest things looking back because he actually saved me because I probably would have missed the shot. But now I can pretend like I was going to splash Lou Williams to send the game to OT and no one could check me on it because, there's no proof I wouldn't have."

**BSB: You said that that was your basketball peak. You had the height, and you had the shooting. Do you think at one point you were better than Mike Conley or Greg Oden?**

Titus: "Certainly by the time we were in high school I wasn't even close. I was better than Greg when we started, when we were in junior high. I was definitely better than Greg, and he'll tell you that, I think.

"I think he was like 6-9, 6-8, something like that, but he was not coordinated at all. He was kind of new to basketball and just feeling out his body. He was like a newborn deer out on the basketball court, and I was very coordinated in eighth grade, so I was definitely better than Greg.

"Greg will tell you Mike was better than him at all times. Mike was one of those guys that was just born gifted. I remember playing against

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## THE INTERVIEW ISSUE: MARK TITUS

Mike in like third grade. We played in Disney at the Wide World of Sports, where they're playing the NBA bubble. We played in that exact same complex. I remember playing Mike when he was in Arkansas and after the game, I told my dad, 'Dad, who is that kid? That's an NBA player.' I'm in third grade and I'm smart enough to know that kid is going to play in the NBA someday.

"He's so good, he's just so athletic, so smart. Mike was always that way, just so cerebral, but an unbelievable athlete at the same time. He was always just really, really good. But Greg came along late, and then Greg just became such a physically dominant force that I think by the time we were juniors in high school, I was like, 'All right, so Greg Oden is the best player in the country by far.'"

**BSB: Moving into high school, what was your basketball recruitment like, and how did it end up with you going to Ohio State?**

Titus: "I got recruited by a bunch of small schools. The two big ones were Harvard and UNC Wilmington. Those are the two I considered the most.

"Harvard didn't give scholarships, so my family – my parents are teachers – valued the idea of their son going to Harvard, but they didn't value the idea of paying like 60 grand out of pocket for their son to go to Harvard. I mean, probably more than that, I forget how much it is, but it was a ridiculous amount. So, they were sweating that, but then the Harvard thing kind of fell through. There were a lot of factors in that.

"But then UNC Wilmington, I ultimately was excited about the idea of playing there, but then the more I thought about it, the more I was like, 'I don't know anybody there, I don't really necessarily love basketball enough to go to a small school like that and not know a single person and just spend all my time playing basketball for people that aren't even going to be – is anybody even going to be watching? Does anybody care?'"

"I kind of had that 'coming to Jesus' moment of, 'Do I like basketball enough to play at this small of a level?' And the answer for me was no, I don't think I do. I don't think it can sustain me to be that far away from home. So I changed my focus, and I was like, 'I think I'm just not going to play basketball in college.'"

"So that was pretty much it, and then ultimately I ended up with Ohio State because once I made that decision, I applied to Northwestern, Vanderbilt and Ohio State. I think that was the three I applied to. I got into Vanderbilt, I did not get into Northwestern, and I got into Ohio State, obviously. And then Greg and Mike, it was mostly Greg – Greg came to me and was like, 'You have to come to Ohio State, man, like you have to come room with us and it'll be the most fun ever,' and on and on, and I was like, 'Yeah, that sounds pretty dope.'"

"I decided to go to Ohio State without even setting foot on campus. I never had visited Ohio State in my life. The first time I ever got to Ohio State was when I was moving into our dorms freshman year.

"I mean, that's pretty insane. It's the best decision I've ever made in my life, and it was probably the dumbest way of going about it. I lucked into that one."

**BSB: So when you first saw campus, what were your thoughts?**

Titus: "Beautiful, massive. I was blown away by the pride and by how much people love Ohio State. I grew up in Indiana, and people were IU fans, Purdue fans, Notre Dame fans, whatever. But just to have a singular university in the state, and I know Cincinnati fans who don't love to hear that, you know Dayton fans and Xavier, they pretend, but you know the truth. To have an entire state rallying around one school was crazy to me, and I could not believe how obsessed people were with Ohio State.

"My baptism was my freshman year with the 1-2 game with Michigan, the football game,

and when they ranked one vs. two and it was in Columbus. I had never really cared. I watched college football but I was never really passionate. I wasn't really into Ohio State football at all.

"But oh my god, after that game, I was like, 'I get it now. It all makes sense. I understand.' Like if I'd grown up watching all this, I would be insane about Ohio State football too. And I slowly got into it.

"I think it was weird to me to have a community that big but still that passionate. That was a foreign concept to me. Usually the people that had the passion were the small, tightly knit groups of people. That was what I was used to. But Ohio State was this massive community that had the passion and the camaraderie of a small town, a small school and I was like, 'This is unlike anything I've ever seen in my life.'"

**BSB: You started off as a team manager for a week and then eventually became a walk-on that year. Describe that whole process of eventually becoming a walk-on.**

Titus: "I was asked to be a manager. So once I decided to go to Ohio State, the basketball coaches had been recruiting Greg and Mike and Daequan for so long that they'd gotten to know me a little bit just by coming to all our AAU games, and they knew that I was coming to Ohio State so they thought it would be good to have me around the program because I was friends with all those guys.

"They asked me to be a manager. I was lied to. I was told that being a manager meant practicing with the team and running scout team and kind of coming to practice whenever. Basically, I thought I was just going to come to practice the day before games and run scout team. I thought that was kind of my job. I quickly found out that was not what being a manager is. You're wiping up sweat, you're filling up water bottles, you're rebounding for the guys. And I just had too big of an ego at that time because in my mind, all these guys were my peers because I'd spent the last five or six years playing with Greg and Mike and Daequan, to now I'm wiping up their sweat and filling up their water bottles and rebounding for them. I just was like, 'I can't do this.'"

"So I quit being a manager about two weeks in, and then I got a phone call from Coach Matta who told me – I think it was Coach Matta, one of the assistants it doesn't matter. I got a phone call from one of the coaches saying that they didn't have enough guys to run practice because Ron Lewis had turned his ankle, I think one of the walk-ons had quit, and they were down to nine guys on the roster. They couldn't even run five-

on-five at practice.

"They called me because they'd seen me play AAU. They knew I was good enough, like I was pretty talented. And so they're like, 'Yeah, you're decent enough to be a body for us, just to be a 10th body to throw out there.' So they called me to ask me to come do that, to actually run scout team like I thought I was going to the first place. I said, 'Yeah, of course. That would be awesome. I'd love to help out.'"

"I come back, I end up suiting up for the first game just because I practiced for a couple weeks or something that they threw me a jersey. Even then I thought like this is just a, as soon as they kind of figure out the roster numbers, I'm going away, but I turned into four years. I must have been really, really good those two weeks of practice or something."

**BSB: In that first season, that team makes it all the way to the national championship game, and you're playing with three of your former teammates. How special was that year just looking back at it?**

Titus: "Oh, man, it was great. I wish it didn't happen my freshman year because I kind of took it for granted because after we lost to Florida. I remember thinking to myself, 'Man, this is great. We're going to do this every year. College is going to be awesome.' And then obviously it never really did. We had good teams and I have a ton of memories from my final three years, but nothing compares to that first year.

"It was so cool because like you said it wasn't just that we went to the national championship. It wasn't just being a part of a great team, a team that people remember. I can tell people that don't really follow college basketball per se, and they ask me where I went to school, I say Ohio State, and they find out I played basketball, they're like, 'What years were you there?' I can just say I was on the '07 team, and people remember that. And that's so cool to be a part of something like that. That resonates with people all across the country.

"But then to do it with my buddies, my childhood friends, was unbelievable. For me to be a part of that was cool, but then also just to sort of be along for the ride for the rise of Mike Conley and Greg Oden, and to a lesser extent Daequan, but it was mostly Mike and Greg, to just be there and watch those two guys that I've known forever, to watch them become household names and superstars.

"We all knew that they were going to be that, but to watch it actually happen and to have a front-row seat for it was so, so cool, and to be

in the dorm with Greg. Greg would go get his photo shoot done with 'ESPN The Magazine' or something, and he'd come back to the dorm and he'd tell me about it, and I was like, 'Dude, that is so cool.' We were just like two kids talking to each other about how cool it is that one of my buddies is on the cover of 'ESPN The Magazine.' This is wild, you know? So that whole experience was so, so cool.

"The only regret I have is that I wish it would have happened my senior year, so I would appreciate it more, so I would have had the three years leading up to that. But it happened out of the gate and it spoiled me, and then I was like, 'Yeah, we're going to do this every year,' and it never really worked out quite like that again."

**BSB: Obviously Oden left after that year to the NBA, and once he gets there, he has a bunch of unfortunate injuries that kind of derail his career. What do you think would have been his potential ceiling if he hadn't had those sorts of issues in the NBA? What is the what-if scenario for him in your eyes?**

Titus: "When I watch Joel Embiid play now, I picture Greg Oden. But if Joel Embiid attacked the rim like DeAndre Jordan and Blake Griffin on the Clippers did when they were just dunking everything, that's basically what Greg is to me.

"I saw the Oden-Durant draft just a couple days ago and a lot of people were revisiting that. At the time, Kevin Durant did not go No. 2 in the draft because people didn't realize Kevin Durant would be as good as he was. Everyone that was evaluating those guys thought Kevin Durant was going to be as good as Kevin Durant has become in the NBA, and they still thought Greg Oden was better than him.

"It's not like they missed. It's not like people in the draft were like, 'Man, we didn't see that Durant would be this good.' Everyone knew it, and they still thought Greg was better. That's how good he was.

"I don't even really have words to describe him. I've never seen anything like it. He was just physical, like he would get the ball underneath the rim and would almost just wait and give guys a chance. He was like, 'I'm going to dunk it. You know I'm going to dunk it. I know I'm going to dunk it. Do you want to get out of the way or do you want to jump with me? I'll give you the chance. OK, you're going to jump with me? All right, I'll dunk on your face.'"

"Every time he got the ball, you knew he was scoring. It seemed like he blocked every single

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# Titus Sheds Light On Origin Of Feud With Turner

Continued From Page 25

shot. I've never seen anything like him. And the craziest thing is he was just the most soft-spoken, gentlest guy off the court. But when he would get on the court he was just absolutely ferocious, and he took it personally. Even as friends, like even in practice, it was crazy because he's so jovial and friendly with all the guys on the team, but you get him between the lines in practice, he's trying to kill everybody, like he genuinely wanted to hurt people by dunking. It was wild."

**BSB: Your junior year was when you started your Club Trillion blog, and that was also the year when you said you kind of gave up on trying. What was your thought process on kind of giving up?**

Titus: "I didn't play my freshman year, and I didn't expect to because we were No. 1 in the country for most of the year. I was out of shape. I didn't even think I was going to play basketball that year, so the idea of not playing on that team made a lot of sense to me.

"I got in pretty good shape in between freshman and sophomore year. I was playing well in practice all year, I was shooting the ball well. My defense sucked, but it always does, but it was getting better. I felt like I had a chance to maybe crack the rotation, and meanwhile, we didn't have a great year. We went to the NIT. We ended up winning the NIT. We probably should have made the NCAA Tournament, but it was definitely the worst team I was on in my four years at Ohio State, and part of our problem was shooting.

"That was Jon Diebler's freshman year. He was shooting 29 percent from the three-point

line. I like to remind him of that, that one of the greatest three-point shooters in Big Ten history sucked as a freshman. But shooting was one of our problems as a team, and that was one thing I was great at, so I kept telling myself, 'Just keep working at it, you're going to get your chance.'

"I didn't expect to start, I didn't expect to play a ton of minutes, but I thought I could get like five minutes at the end of the first half or something when a guy's in foul trouble, I thought I had a shot at that. But no, the entire season I didn't sniff the court – exact same situation as the first year.

"In between sophomore and junior year, I kind of just had to think through what my plan was here because I was like, 'I can't continue doing this. I can't continue wanting to play, giving this my all and not playing.' It was killing me.

"So I had to change my mind-set. It was either I'm going to transfer somewhere and play, or I'm going to change my mind-set, realize that this opportunity to be on a team at a place like Ohio State is unbelievable, it's incredible. There are so many people that would love to have this opportunity, and I shouldn't take it for granted. I should enjoy every moment of this, so that became my mind-set. I'm going to squeeze every moment of joy I can out of this position I've been put in, and instead of beating myself up over not playing, instead of killing myself trying to see the court, I'm just going to have as much fun as possible.

"I mean, using the phrase 'not trying' sounds horrible because I think people hear that and they think that I was just a huge slap d\*\*k at practice and I would get in there and just kind of go through the motions.

"If I was practicing, I was trying to win, I was competitive, all that kind of stuff. But my mind-

set wasn't like, I have to see the court, I have to crack the rotation. I was like, 'I'm going to let all that go. I'm going to do my best when I'm called upon. Otherwise, I'm going to have as much fun as possible. I'm going to enjoy the bus rides, the plane rides, the hotels, all of it.'

"And I decided I want to chronicle it, too. I want to tell stories. I want to have fun. I want to look back on this and remember it. So that's kind of how I started the blog. I just wanted to write down stories that were happening and just have as much fun as I possibly could, and it kind of just took on a life of its own and went from there."

**BSB: The blog focused on a behind-the-scenes look at the team. Was there ever a problem with any of your teammates? Did having that blog ever cause any issues with teammates?**

Titus: "Obviously Evan Turner didn't love it, but my problems with Evan weren't necessarily that I was writing about him on the blog. He just didn't like me. Even if I didn't have a blog, I still feel like we would have had the same problems.

"I don't think there was ever anything super serious. I mean, there were guys that were like, 'Did you write that about me? Did you tell them a story?' And I was like, 'Yeah, man, it was hilarious' and they're like, 'You have to be kidding me.' And guys started to self-censor around me a little bit by the end of my senior year where they would be talking, and they thought I was like a narc. I would walk in and they'd be like, 'You better not put this on the blog,' and I was like, 'I'm not going to write about it.' They kind of wouldn't trust me fully.

"I will say I never once breached anyone's trust, like if anyone ever was like, 'Whatever you

do, do not say this, don't tell the story,' then I wouldn't do it. But for the most part, honestly, the guys loved the attention.

"One of the most famous stories from my blog days was when we got stuck in an elevator at Minnesota and Walter Offutt, who ended up transferring to OU, was in the elevator with me and he was losing his mind and he had like a huge phobia, like he was he was having a panic attack, and I kind of made fun of him, which looking back probably wouldn't be well-received today. But I was making fun of him on the blog, and he loved it.

"He still to this day, when I see him, he's like, 'Man, I love so much that you told that, like people bring it up to me all the time. It's great.' He was the guy who was probably like the seventh or eighth guy on the bench and wasn't getting a ton of play time, and suddenly everyone kind of knew him because I told the story, so he loved it.

"That was the experience for me more than the guys getting mad at me. It was more of like, anytime I wrote about the role players, they would get excited because they were getting some shine that they weren't getting by, you know, they weren't playing as much. So they loved that I was telling stories about it."

**BSB: You mentioned Evan Turner. He was a pretty major part of the blog, that you two didn't get along. Can you describe your relationship through those three seasons with him at Ohio State?**

Titus: "Basically our problems came out of, he came to Ohio State and he had a huge chip on his shoulder. He was in a recruiting class with Jon Diebler, who was like all-everything, Mr. Ohio, and Evan thought he was better than



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Jon, and he was, he was right. So in Evan's mind, he kind of had this chip on his shoulder. He's the out-of-state kid from Illinois. He thought he was the best player in the recruiting class. All the Ohio State fans were going nuts that Jon Diebler was going to Ohio State. So he kind of took that personally and was just sort of in his own little bubble when he got to Ohio State.

"He didn't necessarily trust his teammates, he didn't trust the coaches, and he kind of would lash out at guys, and I just wasn't for that. I was kind of emboldened by being Greg Oden and Mike Conley's friend. This was my second year.

"My first year, I had Greg and Mike backing me up with everything. Like I could get away with stuff because I was protected by those two guys, and I just kind of carried that attitude over to the second year. So when Evan shows up and just starts lashing out at guys in the locker room, I just called him out on it, and I wasn't afraid to do so because I had an inflated sense of my importance on the team because I was Greg Oden and Mike Conley's friend.

"We just started butting heads over that, and I'm certainly not innocent by any stretch of the imagination. I would twist the knife a little bit whenever the opportunity arose, and I would definitely make his life hell in ways that I probably, looking back, shouldn't have. But that's kind of how it started is he just had a chip on his shoulder, rightfully so, and that is ultimately why he became National Player of the Year. That attitude is what fueled him to become the great player he was, so he was right in his approach.

"I felt like I was right by my approach as well, which was like, 'Dude, we're on your team. Stop yelling, stop fighting with us, we're your teammates. Fight with the other guys. Like, what are you doing?' But that's kind of how it happened.

"Time has passed, both of us have gotten older, we're in our 30s. I mean, I get asked that all the time. 'You guys still hate each other?' We're way too old for that. Like I hate my back pain at this point, that's what I hate. I don't hate Evan Turner. I'm too old for that stuff. So yeah, we're good now."

**BSB: You have mentioned that your senior night was the highlight moment of your time at Ohio State. What made that night so special in your mind?**

Titus: "What was so special for me was I had just dreamed my whole life of playing Big Ten basketball and just mattering to people.

"I bawled my eyes out, and everyone thought I was joking because I was just so sarcastic, they thought I was just fake crying. And I think the line I used in my blog, if I remember right from 10 years ago, was that my whole life I just wanted to feel like I mattered.

"I just wanted to feel like whatever I was doing mattered, and I was so overwhelmed that the whole student section was wearing Club Trillion shirts, they were chanting my name, we win the game and people lift me on their shoulders. The whole scene was just so overwhelming because all I ever wanted my entire life was just to matter, to be on a Big Ten basketball team and matter.

"As I started to get older and get through high school, I was like, 'The dream is dead for me, that's never going to happen.' And then I found my way on Ohio State, and even then I still didn't really matter. I was just this anonymous kid on the bench, and if anyone knew who I was, it was because I was Greg Oden's friend. To just kind of sit there and take it all in and be like, 'Oh my god, like I might not matter that much but I matter a little bit. Like I obviously matter. This is unbelievable.' It was just so overwhelming.

"That is 100 percent my No. 1 highlight. That is more memorable to me than playing in the Final Four, anything from the '07 season. The '07 season was the best season, but senior night for me, I mean I still get emotional when I think back on it. If you catch me at the right time talking about it, I'll cry again. I think I'm good right now.

"It was just the culmination of just a crazy four years for me, five years really. And I had a lot of problems. I mean I've spoken out on my mental health problems and being depressed and stuff, and I just I had so many nights of just like, 'What am I doing with my life? Where am I going? Does anybody care?'"

"Just to have that validation on such a big stage, it was just so overwhelming and so cool, and I'll never forget it."

**BSB: How were you able to overcome your mental health struggles and become the personality you are today with all of that in mind?**

Titus: "My personality, kind of taking a loose approach to life and trying to have fun and all that, it was born out of my depression because it was my way. It initially started as just like me wearing a mask. I didn't want people to know the real me, so I thought if I could be the funny guy, or the guy that doesn't take anything seriously, then no one can get that close to me to see the real me.

"That's kind of how it started, and now as I've gotten older, I think a lot of my personality is just feeling so blessed that I'm alive, to be honest with you. If you would have asked me when I was 16, 17, 18, I genuinely did not think I would be alive at 33 years old just because life was just so hard for me and I couldn't figure out why.

"I had everything in the world that you would want, and it just felt so hard. Like getting out of bed was so hard, interacting with friends was so hard, and I was like, 'I can't keep doing this. I can't do this for 80 more years. There's no way.'"

"My personality now is I just feel blessed, like I'm playing with house money. It took a long stretch there, especially after college I really had it bad. It really started to sink in how bad my depression was. But I think I just hit rock bottom and just decided rock bottom is a great foundation for building.

"I just took it day by day, step by step, started observing more around me like things that were working, things that weren't, and realized I can figure this out. I started reading more about people that have overcome it, and I found what worked for me. And so that's kind of it, man, like I can't believe what I do for a living. I can't believe that I cover college basketball. I can't believe I'm alive at all.

"My whole life just feels like a dream in a lot of ways, and I don't take that for granted. I really don't. I wake up every day and just feel very, very blessed, and I think that manifests itself when I do my show or, any of the content I create now, I try to have that shine through because that is my attitude toward life. I'm having fun. I hope everyone that reads what I write or listens to my show or anything else, I hope I bring an enjoyment to their lives too."

**BSB: Pretty quickly after you left Ohio State, you got to write a book. What went into that? How did you get that deal, and what was that process like trying to relive it all?**

Titus: "I got that deal through Jimmy Kimmel, believe it or not. He read my website. He's a big college basketball fan, big UNLV fan. He grew up in Vegas and loved those UNLV teams and all that, so he loved college basketball and knew about my website.

"When I graduated, he put me in touch with his agent who is the one who helped me facilitate the book, and then his agent was reaching out. His agent had me put together a book proposal. I'll never forget this story.

"He's clearly just doing this because Kimmel told him to, and he's like, 'I need you to put together a book proposal and get it back to me,' and I hang up the phone and I was like, 'All right, book proposal got it.' And then I hang up the phone and I think to myself, 'What the hell is a book proposal?'"

"I didn't want to ask him because I didn't want to be like a dumb kid, I wanted to be cool. I hang

up the phone and I have no idea what the hell a book proposal is, so I Google it. Google is all over the place as to what a book proposal actually is. Some things are like, just make an outline, just do bullet points of what your chapters will be about. Others are like, you should write half the book, and everything in between.

"I have no idea. I do my best guess. I kind of do a chapter outline. I write a cover letter more or less, like here's where I think the book will be about, here's the tone. I send it back to him. I think it's a good job. He calls me immediately and just starts cussing me out. 'No one's gonna give a s\*\*t about this. This is one of the worst proposals I've ever seen,' on and on and on, and I'm just horrified, my jaw is on the ground. I'm like, 'What have I done? This is so bad.'"

"So I reach out to Kimmel, and I was like, 'Hey, I don't want to make a big deal about this. I'm not trying to like tattle on this guy or anything else. I'm just genuinely very confused. I don't know how to proceed. I sent him the book proposal. He said it's the worst thing ever. He cussed me out. He told me no one is going to give a s\*\*t about me or my book. What should I do?'"

"Kimmel replies, in all caps, just put 'HAHAHAHA,' and then Kimmel calls me and is like, 'We'll take care of it. This is the funniest story I've ever heard.' Kimmel was dying.

"I was very, very lucky to have him help me out, and he got me a good deal and I wrote the book. The book was basically just all the stories I didn't tell on my blogs because I was too scared to, and that was pretty much it.

"I wrote it when I was 22 years old. If you go back and read, it reads like a book that was written by a guy that was 22 years old. I would definitely write it very differently today, but that was kind of the point. I think when I was writing – and I knew I might regret a lot of this later – but I wanted to be true to myself.

"I wanted to also write a book that was like a time capsule of this is what I was like when I was 22. These are the jokes that I know are funny, this is who I am. I've gotten older, I've changed, but I don't really regret the book at all. People seem to enjoy it still."

**BSB: How did all of that just lead to you going from Grantland to The Ringer and now what you are doing today with FOX Sports?**

Titus: "My first year after college I wrote the book, and right when I was graduating, Bill Simmons reached out to me, told me that ESPN was giving him money to start his own little thing called Grantland. He said, 'I need a college basketball writer, I want you to be the guy,' which at the time, I was like, 'Oh sweet, he must really value me.'"

"Looking back, I think it was just basically he was thinking, 'I can pay you nothing and know that you'll take the job. If I hire a 23-year-old I can pay him 30 grand and he'll be happy to have the job,' and he was right.

"I told him I wanted to write a book first, so I took the first year, wrote the book. After the book was done, I knew I had the job at Grantland waiting for me, and I was in over my head, man. I did not go to journalism school. To this day, the only time I've ever set foot in the journalism school is to speak to classes, which is hysterical to me, that professors have me come talk to kids and I have no idea what the hell I'm doing from a journalism perspective.

"I was a little in over my head, but Grantland was amazing. It was a great experience. I was still working from Ohio, I still lived in Columbus so I didn't get to be in the nitty-gritty of the newsroom or anything like that, but I was still interacting with guys that were so much better than I was.

"I learned so much at Grantland. That was basically my journalism school was my years at Grantland, and then Simmons gets fired from ESPN. I kind of saw the writing on the wall that Grantland was not long for this world so I was kind of already ready to jump ship. I mean I loved

Grantland. I was just like there's no way they're going to keep us around without Simmons.

"Then, Bill was like, 'I'm going to start my own thing again. You should just come with me,' and I said, 'Done. Let's do it,' and then I went to The Ringer.

"Then ultimately it was just time for me to do something else. I just felt like I got to the point in my life, I moved out to L.A. last year, and I just kind of got to a point where I wanted to branch out of the Bill Simmons universe and see what's out there and find something.

"My goal is to do more television stuff. I love Bill, I loved the time at The Ringer, all of that was great, but I wanted to get into television and The Ringer is not a television network and FOX is, and the opportunity came up, and that's kind of how I ended up there. It's going well and I work for a company that has college basketball rights, that's so cool that they broadcast college basketball games.

"We had so many cool things planned for March Madness and unfortunately got the rug pulled out from under me."

**BSB: What are your thoughts on where Ohio State stands right now under Chris Holtmann and where they're going with their team moving forward?**

Titus: "I love where Ohio State basketball is. You will not find a bigger Thad Matta supporter on Earth than me, so I was obviously very upset when Coach Matta was let go, but the one thing I love about Coach Holtmann is that when he took over, he was smart enough to know that the culture that Coach Matta had created at Ohio State was not the problem. That was not the reason that Ohio State wasn't as great at the end of Matta's tenure.

"He didn't come in saying we have to gut this whole thing and figure out our own thing because that's a mistake a lot of coaches will do, alienate yourself from the former players who loved Coach Matta because that was a big thing. When Coach Matta was at Ohio State, he was super, super big on former players. Even the guys that didn't play for him, he was like, 'I want you back at all times. I want you always coming back to campus, be around our program, talk to our guys, play with our guys if you can.' That was a big thing for him.

"When he was let go, I think a lot of us were panicking because we felt like the Ohio State basketball fraternity was so strong that we didn't want to be shut out. We didn't want a new coach that was going to tell us we aren't allowed to come to the Schott when we want, and Coach Holtmann from day one was just reaching out to guys.

"I remember the day he got the job, I was golfing with Mike Conley. We were golfing in Columbus, and Coach Holtmann called Mike. I think I was more of like day 38 or 39. I think I was further down on the list when he called me, but day one he called Mike Conley and I remember thinking that's so cool man that on the very first day of his job he's reaching out to an NBA player.

"He understands the importance of all that. So I think starting there, he understood the culture, he's maintained the culture. Just the way he goes about recruiting, the way he goes about learning the program, everything about it just reminds me of the way Coach Matta did it, and I cannot say enough nice things about Coach Matta. He's the best, he's absolutely the best.

"One of the good things about Coach Matta being fired is that he's no longer got the coach hat on. He's just Thad now, and I've gotten to know him really well and I just love talking to him about things that aren't basketball. I just love talking to him about life and calling and talking to him about all that.

"I think Coach Holtmann has a great culture and the way he's running the program is great, and we're obviously back to being a player on the national stage. I'm very, very excited about the future."



# Prahalis Speaks On Energetic Play, Move To Coaching

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Samantha Prahalis was the star point guard on the Ohio State women's basketball team during her tenure from 2008-12. In that time, the Buckeyes won three Big Ten tournament titles and made the NCAA tournament all four seasons.

Individually, Prahalis started her Ohio State career earning Big Ten Freshman of the Year, and then she capped it off with a Big Ten Player of the Year award and the conference record in assists with 901.

Prahalis ultimately was selected sixth overall in the WNBA draft and, after a few seasons there, jumped around on overseas teams before moving to coach high school basketball in her home state of New York, all of which led to her current position as an assistant coach at James Madison.

This year, Prahalis was a part of the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame Class of 2020 thanks to her efforts during her four successful years with the program, and Buckeye Sports Bulletin talked with Prahalis about that achievement as well as the rest of her impressive playing career, her new coaching career and the energy she has brought to both.

**BSB: To start off, since you were coming from New York, how did you end up ultimately choosing Ohio State for your college?**

Prahalis: "I wanted a big school with big sports and a big fan base, I wanted a big univer-

sity just in general. They recruited me pretty hard from the jump, like from the beginning, and then also they were already established as a good team. I remember they were ranked like sixth.

"It checked off big school, good team, obviously, and then the coaching staff I really liked. I just felt comfortable with the coaching staff."

**BSB: Before you got to Ohio State, you were on the United States U18 team, where you won a gold medal, and then you won it again at U19. What were those kinds of experiences like to have two gold medals by the time you were 19?**

Prahalis: "It was pretty cool. I think it was also cool because it was my first time out of the country.

"The first time, my parents came with me, but the second time I was by myself. So, it was eye-opening to see other parts of the world, I think. So that was really eye-opening, and then, like you said, I never thought about it like that, but yeah, it's pretty cool to win gold medals at a young age."

**BSB: In your first year at Ohio State, you immediately are part of a team that's a Big Ten champion and then you make a Sweet 16 run. What was it like to immediately be on a team that made an impact?**

Prahalis: "I was like lucky I went to a strong team. Some of the other teams that were recruiting me weren't as strong, so I don't know, I was pretty lucky to get on a team with a base already, and then when I got there, I just wanted to improve that.

"Going to the Sweet 16, I wish we could have gone further but it was a really good

experience, and then being a freshman and getting the minutes I got, I guess that's kind of rare. It was definitely cool. I was proud to make an impact."

**BSB: You were named Big Ten Freshman of the Year that year. Did you notice how much attention you were getting at that point? When did that attention start coming for your type of play?**

Prahalis: "I would say after that NCAA tournament my first year. I think I got more notice, like we played Stanford and we lost but I had a decent game, and I think after the game, people were taking notice and were definitely paying attention more."

**BSB: You obviously played with a certain level of passion and energy that many have commented on and that made you sort of a fan favorite with people. Where did that sort of energy come from? How long have you played with that much passion in your game?**

Prahalis: "I think forever. I think ever since I was young. I think I just loved the game so much, and I just want to do it justice, so I put everything into it and then that's when the passion came out, basically for the love of the game, but it's been there forever.

"I think my style of play, you need to have a little bit of a chip on your shoulder to throw no-look passes. To play the style that I played, it's kind of like a new-school, run-and-gun style, so I feel like you needed a chip and you needed some, I guess you could say, swagger."

**BSB: You said in the past that you wanted to make women's basketball as exciting as men's. Why was that such a**

**goal for you for such a long time?**

Prahalis: "I just felt like with me, it was like I wasn't given like 5-10 or 6-0 or 6-3, I was given 5-6, and I feel like I had to work really hard to get skillful. And I just felt like skilled players should feel rewarded, there should be excitement in that, people should understand moves and get excited when you use them, just like what they do in the men's games.

"So I just think my game was super skillful, and I just wanted to be fun to watch. I don't know, I just wanted people to care more about the sport and get a little bit more respect."

**BSB: What was the overall reaction that you got to how much energy you played with both from Ohio State fans and from the opposition?**

Prahalis: "I would say Ohio State fans, there was a lot of love for sure. I had great support. And then for the opposing, it was probably the polar opposite I would say. You know, it's like a love-hate thing, which I respect, like at least I'm making you feel something. So I would say it was the total opposite for the opposition."

**BSB: Did your teammates, on the whole, appreciate that passion or even use it as sort of a boost in some of the games?**

Prahalis: "Yeah, I think that I gained some respect because I really put in the time. So when that passion came out, I think they knew that it was genuine, it wasn't a show. I wasn't trying to be fake. It was genuine.

"I really cared because of all the behind-the-scenes stuff that I think that they saw, so I think it earned me some respect playing with passion."

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**BSB: In your time in Ohio State you won the Big Ten tournament three times. But as you said, you made it only to the Sweet 16. Did any of those seasons feel like a letdown because of the NCAA tournament performances?**

Prahalis: "Yeah, for sure. I would say they all stung really bad. To be honest, after my freshman year I was thinking we'd be to multiple Final Fours, like we're 100 percent going to do that, and then we fell short obviously."

"They all stung really bad. It's my one regret that I didn't get further, and I would say my sophomore and junior year especially, I thought that we had teams that we could have won a national championship. I mean it's easier to say it now, but definitely a letdown for sure."

**BSB: What was it about those sophomore and junior years that stood out as a team that you thought had the talent to win national championships?**

Prahalis: "My sophomore year, we just had a really solid bunch. From top to bottom, those senior classes like Shavelle Little, we had Andrea Walker, and then you go into Jantel (Lavender)'s class, we had shooters, we had Jantel and then you've got me. Then Tayler (Hill) came in."

"We were really stacked, and I remember we even started off the year ranked like fourth or third, it was legit. And then my junior year, same thing. We lost those seniors, but we still kind of stayed with my class and the class above me and behind me still stayed really well."

"It's just tough. It goes by so quick, and then the opportunity is a small window."

**BSB: You had Jim Foster as your coach for all four years. Often the criticism was that he had a lot of success in the regular season, but he could get only to the Sweet 16. What do you think it was either about his coaching style or his teams that made that a trend for him and his time in Ohio State?**

Prahalis: "Listen, he put together legit, very good, contending teams. That's on us to get it done. As players, we have to look at ourselves, so it had nothing to do with the coaching staff, in my opinion."

"If you're a player, you've got to get it done. I take it on myself because he gave me the keys to the team basically as the point guard and I didn't get it done. That has nothing to do with the coaches."

"He was a great coach. He gave me all the resources, he put me in great position to succeed and we just didn't get it done as a team."

**BSB: What were your overall thoughts on Jim Foster as a coach. What did you take from him in your time at Ohio State?**

Prahalis: "I thought he was awesome. You know, there were definitely growing pains, and I think that having him stay by me through all those growing up moments was important for me."

"He never swayed with having my back or anything. He was always there for me. So I'm just super grateful that I got to play under him. He's so knowledgeable about the game."

"People say that we're opposites in our personalities, but when basketball is the common denominator, we just bonded over basketball. And he knew me, I got to know him and Donna, his wife, so it was great. I'm super grateful."

**BSB: What did you take from him, if anything, as far as coaching experience for what you did both at the high school level and what you're doing now?**

Prahalis: "Oh yeah, I definitely took like a lot. I remember practices and some drills, like off the bat just drills and stuff. But then also the way that he communicates with his players. He learned some people are different than others, different styles of talking to people, just communication stuff behind the scenes stuff. How

to get your message across to different types of people, different personalities, like managing those personalities."

**BSB: In your final season at Ohio State, you became Big Ten Player the Year and you broke the conference record for assists. What do you consider your biggest accomplishment for your time at Ohio State?**

Prahalis: "I would say my biggest accomplishment would probably be my assist record just because it's stamped in the books, but also because everyone had a piece in it. I wouldn't have gotten that without my teammates. It's not like I had the record for scoring."

"This record literally is about me passing to teammates and them helping me out and scoring the basket, so everyone kind of has a hand in it. That's kind of special that one."

**BSB: What does it mean to you to be that fan favorite on the team because of how you play? Did you take pride in that, did it not mean much to you in playing? What was that like for you?**

Prahalis: "It was cool. I took pride in it, but at the same time I was just being myself, so it wasn't like I gave it much thought. It just came naturally with the way I played."

"I just got a lot of love, which was cool, and then I liked the love, it was awesome. People were really nice, and so it was cool, but again I was just being myself."

**BSB: What's your favorite overall moment at Ohio State? If you had to pick one thing from any of the seasons, what would you say that would be?**

Prahalis: "I think it's just everything. Like waking up, you're a kid, you wake up and go to the arena. I think it's the preparation into everything. I don't know, just being with my teammates. I think being with my teammates, playing in front of my family, I think that's the biggest thing for me."

"I was able to play at this huge university and my family got to be a part of that, so that was pretty cool."

**BSB: You move on, you get selected sixth overall in the WNBA draft. What was your time in the WNBA like for you?**

Prahalis: "My first year, it was cool. I mean, it was fun. You just play basketball for a living, so it was cool, it was fun. Then it got a little rocky, so there were some ups and downs, but it is what it is."

"It was fine for what it was. It ended kind of weirdly but, you know, maybe that had to happen to me to be a coach now, so I take it all as a learning lesson and just move on."

**BSB: What did happen, if you could break it down, by the end of your WNBA tenure?**

Prahalis: "I guess I wasn't a great fit in Phoenix, and they just wanted to go a different direction. I have great relationships still there, my past coaches, so like no relationships were severed or anything like that. It just kind of didn't work out."

"I can't pinpoint one thing, just I didn't fit really and then you know, it's hard to get a second shot. You need someone to stick their neck out for you, and it's tough in sports. I didn't quite have that. So it's all right, it happens. I learned a lot."

**BSB: Eventually you moved to playing overseas. What was just the difference in play styles that you noticed overseas in the multiple places you played?**

Prahalis: "You practice so much, you have so much practice overseas, it's crazy. You just like practice shooting so much, so I would say the game is a little bit softer, a lot of running, pass, shoot, a lot of shooting, but it's a little bit of a softer game. They don't call many fouls."

"It's definitely an adjustment, I don't even know how to describe it. It's a lot about your movements. It is just such an adjustment."

**BSB: You eventually came back to head coach at some New York high schools. What made you decide to go to that route and move into coaching?**

Prahalis: "I started coaching this little fifth-grade travel team, and I really enjoyed the whole aspect of coaching, which I didn't know if I would, and I really enjoyed it, and then I just decided I wanted to give it a try."

"I was a volunteer, and then I got to those two jobs at high schools in New York and I just fell in love with it. It's sort of like playing. It's up to you to steer the ship, and I really like that. I like the mentorship role. I like putting people in the right spots to succeed. I love all of it."

**BSB: Is it even more comparable because you were the point guard and you were the main facilitator when you played? Is it like a similar style as in coaching?**

Prahalis: "Yeah, it's an easy transition, because like you said, a point guard is basically an extension of a coach."

"I can see things that are going to happen, or like that pass should have been there just instinctively because I was a point guard."

**BSB: How much of that energy and passion that you used in games do you also bring as a coach?**

Prahalis: "I still bring it. Maybe a little bit too much at times, but yeah I still bring it."

**BSB: Do you teach your players to have that sort of energy, or do you try to tell them to bring it down a notch compared to what you were?**

Prahalis: "I would say a mix. You have to be confident. I would say go for it, like let it all hang out, but still be focused on what we're trying to do you. We just can't be out there like a free-for-all."

**BSB: And now you've moved to an assistant coach position at James Madison. What did you like about this position? Why did you move to the college level?**

Prahalis: "I just feel like it was the next step for me. Like high school, I loved it, but you got kids playing four sports. I just wanted college because they were focused on basketball."

"There's no other distraction. They're there for their education and then basketball, so I wanted something a little bit more serious and focused on one thing. So I just think it was the natural next step."

"It's funny, Coach Foster always said I'd be a coach, and I was always like, 'No, no way,'

and here I am."

**BSB: Because of the pandemic, you probably haven't seen a lot of this team, but what do you know about your team at James Madison, and what are your expectations for them?**

Prahalis: "James Madison has a winning tradition, so even though I haven't been able to work out face to face with them, we expect another CAA title."

"We expect to beat, quote unquote, high-major teams. What they've been doing is what we expect. The bar at James Madison is winning the league and beating high-major teams, so we aren't expecting anything less. We have a bunch of new freshmen coming in, so we're excited to hopefully start soon."

**BSB: Where do you think Foster is placed in women's basketball history for Ohio State? How much do you think his acclaim should still be even if he didn't have that NCAA success?**

Prahalis: "I think he should be right up there. I mean, like at the tippy top of the list, because it was more than the championships. I think he got the best out of his players, and again, it's on his players to make it happen and he put us all in position to succeed."

"I think he won the Big Ten like six, seven times in a row. I mean that's kind of unheard of. There is success there. I feel like he's so underrated. This guy's legit and he should get the tippy top of the list."

**BSB: How much do you pay attention, if at all, to Ohio State women's basketball in the current day?**

Prahalis: "Obviously now a little bit more. When I was playing, I was kind of out of touch, to be honest. I tried to check in every now and then and come visit, and it's hard because Coach Foster's not there, but (head coach Kevin) McGuff is super cool. I try to make it back every now and then, but I hear little things."

**BSB: What are your takes on Coach McGuff if you have any in your minimal experience with him?**

Prahalis: "I think he's a great guy, he gets great players to come to Ohio State. I love the style of play, he's kind of a get up and down, shoot a lot of threes. Seems like they play free, so I'm a fan."

**BSB: This year, you were put into the Ohio State Hall of Fame. What does that accomplishment mean to you?**

Prahalis: "Super cool. I think just for everything to come full circle, it's just cool. It's something that no one can take away from you, I guess, and to be among people that are in that Hall of Fame, it's crazy."

"I'm super grateful. I'm thankful, grateful. It's crazy."



Samantha Prahalis

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# Smith Decommits From OSU, Flips To Alabama

Ohio State suffered its first decommitment in the class of 2021 on June 25 when Cincinnati La Salle three-star cornerback Devonta Smith announced on Twitter he was reopening his recruitment. He then committed to Alabama just four days later.

The 6-0, 185-pound Smith – who is considered the 30th-best cornerback and No. 403 prospect overall in his class – landed an offer from defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs on March 12 and pledged his services to the Buckeyes on March 16.

He was just the third defensive back to commit to Ohio State this cycle, but the Buckeyes have since added Nashville Ensworth four-star safety Andre Turrentine; Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star safety Jantzen Dunn; and Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguro four-star cornerback Denzel Burke to the fold.

## RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

A source close to Smith indicated his concern about there being too many defensive backs in the class, which also includes St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star Jakailin Johnson and his cousin/teammate, three-star safety Jaylen Johnson. The Crimson Tide, meanwhile, have just one other defensive back committed in Marrero (La.) John Ehret four-star safety Kaine Williams.

Smith also has a unique tie to Alabama in that his cousin is former Crimson Tide running back Shaun Alexander, who helped guide him throughout the recruiting process. Alexander rushed for 3,565 yards and 41 touchdowns at Alabama before being selected by the Seattle Seahawks in the first round of the 2000 NFL draft.

### Top Cornerback Target Decommits From Clemson

Ohio State was widely considered the favorite to land a commitment from Suwanee (Ga.) North

Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock until he took an unofficial visit to Clemson in early March and pledged his services to the Tigers just a few days later.

The Buckeyes maintained contact with Hancock in the meantime, though, and that persistence may have paid off when he decommitted from Clemson on July 14.

The 6-1, 170-pound Hancock – who is considered the sixth-best cornerback and No. 77 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – becomes the second player to decommit from the Tigers in the last three months, joining Corona (Calif.) Centennial five-star defensive end Corey Foreman, which is quite significant since the program hadn't suffered a single decommitment in the previous three recruiting cycles combined.

Hancock admittedly grew up rooting for Ohio State and even has a video game controller and blanket with the Buckeyes' logo in his bedroom. Those close to him believed his commitment to the program was inevitable because of that, with a planned unofficial visit in the spring expected to seal the deal. But things quickly changed during the trip to Clemson, and Hancock cited the campus' proximity to his hometown and the overall focus on faith as the reasons that he picked the Tigers.

In the months since Hancock's initial decision, Ohio State has loaded up on commitments in the secondary. But Coombs, head coach Ryan Day and linebackers coach/area recruiter Al Washington have also made it clear there would always be a spot for Hancock if he ever wanted to flip to the Buckeyes.

Members of Ohio State's top-rated recruiting class – including those who have been publicly and privately interacting with Hancock in recent weeks – took to social media to display their satisfaction with his decision, suggesting a pledge to the Buckeyes might be imminent. However, sources close to the situation suggest he could wait until he can make it back to campus, where he has not been since he attended Ohio State's win over Wisconsin in October, before announcing his commitment.

If Hancock ultimately does choose the Buckeyes, it's worth keeping an eye on his high school teammate, Clemson four-star linebacker commit Barrett Carter. The two have been vocal about their desire to play together at the next

## 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
Tunmise Adeleye	DE	6-3	240	★★★★	Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	175	★★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Denzel Burke	CB	6-0	189	★★★★	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguro
Reid Carrico	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Ironton, Ohio
Ben Christman	OT	6-6	299	★★★★	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
Jantzen Dunn	CB	6-2	178	★★★★	Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren
Michael Hall	DT	6-3	290	★★★★	Streetsboro, Ohio
Marvin Harrison	WR	6-3	190	★★★★	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	200	★★★	Cincinnati La Salle
Kyle McCord	QB	6-3	215	★★★★★	Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep
Jesse Mirco	P	6-3	200	N/A	Fremantle, Western Australia
Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	190	★★★★	Cornelius (N.C.) W.A. Hough
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	220	★★★★★	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Andre Turrentine	CB	6-0	175	★★★★	Nashville (Tenn.) Ensworth

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jyaire Brown	CB	6-0	165	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
C.J. Hicks	LB	6-4	215	★★★★	Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter
Tegra Tshabola	OT	6-6	320	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

level, and Carter included Ohio State among his final schools before choosing the Tigers in May.

### Offensive Guard Target Delays Decision Date

Though he originally hoped to make his college decision on Aug. 24 as a way to celebrate his 18th birthday, Lexington (Ky.) Frederick Douglass four-star offensive guard Jager Burton announced on June 21 that he will instead push back his commitment date until after he can take all five official visits this fall.

The 6-4, 271-pound Burton – who is considered the seventh-best offensive guard and No. 119 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – was actually scheduled to take an official visit to Ohio State on the weekend of June 12-14, but that was canceled amid the coronavirus outbreak. He was also eyeing official visits to Alabama, Clemson, Kentucky and Oregon when the NCAA put a halt to in-person and off-campus recruiting in mid-March and subsequently extended the dead period until Aug. 31.

Burton is quite familiar with the Buckeyes nonetheless, as he landed an offer from offensive line coach Greg Studrawa in May 2019, attended a one-day camp in Columbus last June and then took an unofficial visit for Ohio State's 28-17 win over Penn State in November. He's maintained daily contact with Day, Studrawa, assistant secondary coach/special teams coordinator Matt Barnes and offensive line graduate assistant Kennedy Cook in the months since.

The Wildcats appear to be the biggest threat in Burton's Ohio State recruitment given both proximity and the fact that his teammate, 2021 four-star wide receiver Dekel Crowder, committed to Kentucky in mid-May. The two have been pretty outspoken on social media about their desire to play together at the next level.

Ohio State has not signed a player from the Bluegrass state since Louisville Trinity three-star cornerback Rodjay Burns in 2016. But with Dunn already in the fold and the Buckeyes among the favorites to land Burton, that dry spell could come to an end this cycle.

### Buckeyes Remain In Mix For Defensive Tackle

Manassas (Va.) Stonewall Jackson four-star defensive tackle Tyleik Williams listed

Ohio State in his top six on June 24 alongside Alabama, LSU, North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia Tech.

The 6-4, 317-pound Williams is considered the 10th-best defensive tackle and No. 160 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after recording 47 tackles and 3½ sacks to help the Raiders to the state playoffs last fall. He was named to the Virginia High School League's All-Class 6 second team as a result.

Washington and defensive line coach Larry Johnson extended a scholarship to Williams in April. He was supposed to take an unofficial visit to Ohio State later that month with his teammate, 2022 four-star linebacker Shawn Murphy, who also holds an offer from the Buckeyes, but that trip was ultimately put on hold amid the pandemic.

With 19 commitments already in the fold – including three defensive linemen in Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star end Jack Sawyer; Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star end Tunmise Adeleye; and Streetsboro, Ohio, defensive tackle Mike Hall – spots are limited in Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class. The Buckeyes are hoping to add two more interior defenders, with Williams; Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star tackle J.T. Tuimoloau; and Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star Tywone Malone among their few remaining targets.

Williams has a pair of crystal ball predictions to the home-state Hokies, and it's widely expected he'll make his college decision after taking all five official visits this fall.

### Running Back Commit Vows To Sit Out Amid Remarks

After a series of racist messages and videos at his high school were made public, Ohio State four-star running back commit Evan Pryor announced on June 25 he will sit out his senior season if changes are not made at Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough High School.

Pryor, who committed to the Buckeyes in March and has been one of the more vocal leaders in the nation's top-rated haul, discussed the situation with The Charlotte Observer.

"I talked to my principal, the AD and a few of my coaches this morning," Pryor said. "We've met a few times since the tweet was released.



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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Lettermen Row's Jeremy Birmingham

Although he's been committed to Ohio State since April, Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive end Tunmise Adeleye continues to hear from programs such as Alabama, Florida and Texas A&M. Do you think any of those schools have a chance to flip him from his pledge?

"In the modern era of recruiting, there are always reasons to worry about whether or not a prospect could flip away from a commitment, and that's especially true if a program like Alabama is involved. The Crimson Tide have been the pre-eminent program of the last decade-plus, and that carries a lot of weight with young prospects from around the country.

"Ohio State has obviously done pretty well in its own right and continues to recruit as well as anyone else, but the thing the Buckeyes have in Adeleye's recruitment is defensive line coach Larry Johnson. That relationship is the reason the four-star lineman committed to Ohio State, and that's going to be a challenge for any other school to overcome."

**With only a few spots remaining in the 2021**

recruiting class, Ohio State's priority chart is pretty clear. But let's say the Buckeyes miss out on someone like Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimolou or Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka. Where do you believe the staff would turn to fill the needs at those respective positions?

"Right now, if the Buckeyes were to end up missing on the five-star duo from Washington, it's unclear where they'd turn to try and replace them. Evaluations are at a standstill because of the ongoing recruiting dead periods, and there's no idea when recruiting can happen again in order to really start looking.

"At wide receiver, if Egbuka opts for another program, it's not necessarily a guarantee that Brian Hartline would replace him in the class of 2021, because he could turn to 2022 instead and just stick with the two top-100-ranked receivers that are presently committed.

"Tuimolou is a player who has never visited the Buckeyes, but he is an absolute priority that, like Egbuka, can't really be replaced by another prospect in the class of

2021. In either case, a replacement isn't likely at this point, especially with the unknowns of the recruiting calendar."

Ohio State appeared to make quite the impression on 2022 Olathe (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough during his virtual visit in April, and it's hard not to notice his increased interaction with several commits – including Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks – on social media in recent weeks. Where do you think the Buckeyes stand in his recruitment?

"McCullough is one player that has had his recruitment impacted as much as anyone in the country, and I think that if he'd had a chance to visit Ohio State this summer that a commitment could have already happened. That hasn't happened, of course, and he's hoping to visit the Buckeyes as well as a few other places before making a choice.

"Ohio State would love to do an in-person evaluation of McCullough to see exactly what kind of role he could play in the Buckeyes' defense because his almost 6-6, 220-pound frame is making it hard to see him sticking at a pure linebacker spot in the future as initially envisioned."

They're behind me 1,000 percent. We're just trying to come together to think of solutions to stop this and to bring awareness to it and get progress moving in the right direction."

Pryor noted he previously had a class with the student who made the remarks but has not discussed the situation with him. His teammate, 2022 four-star defensive tackle Curtis Neal has, though, and is also willing to sit out the 2020 season if action is not taken against the student.

"If it gets to that point and there's no change and it only gets worse, I'll do what I have to do because at some point it has to end," Pryor said. "We can't just let this keep going on around the state. If it gets there, yes, I'll sit out. Hopefully, in talking with my AD and principal, I don't think it'll get to that point. I think we're taking steps in the right direction."

Pryor's protest is similar to several other high-profile athletes taking a stand against racism, including Mississippi State running back Kylin Hill and Oklahoma State running back Chuba Hubbard. Hill said he would not represent Mississippi until the state flag was changed, while Hubbard announced he would not play after seeing his head coach, Mike Gundy, wearing a controversial One America News shirt.

State lawmakers have since voted to remove the Confederate symbol from the flag. Gundy has also promised to make significant changes within his own program, meanwhile.

"I did see what Chuba did on Twitter, and I thought it was very effective because football is a huge sport in America, and everyone loves to watch it," Pryor said. "If you're a huge figure in the sport, I feel like people will support it. He was using his platform, and that's something I'm trying to do right here."

Pryor added that he's received the full support of Day and running backs coach Tony Alford.

"He was just saying how brave it is of me to do this," Pryor said. "They're behind me 100 percent and praying for me because anything that happens like this to anybody, anything can happen. I'm just making sure that I know that I have the support of Ohio State, Coach Day's support and everyone's support. They think I'm doing the right thing by standing up for my people."

It appears progress has been made, though, as Pryor announced on July 1 he had an "encouraging" meeting with administrators and that the school will better enforce Rule 8 of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' Code of Student Conduct, which applies to "cursing, possessing, sending or receiving written materials or electronic text and/or images that convey an offensive, racial,

derogatory, bullying or obscene message to another person."

### Former OSU Linebacker Lands Job At IMG Academy

Former Ohio State linebacker Thomas "Pepper" Johnson has been named the new defensive coordinator at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, head coach Bobby Acosta announced on July 6. He replaces Brett Maxie, who left the program to become the safeties coach at Colorado.

Johnson recorded 379 tackles, 12 tackles for loss and five sacks during his four-year career with the Buckeyes (1982-85) and earned All-America honors as a senior. He was selected by the New York Giants in the second round of the 1986 NFL draft and won two Super Bowls (XXI

and XXV) with the franchise.

A two-time Pro Bowler, Johnson also played for the Cleveland Browns, Detroit Lions and New York Jets. He retired from the NFL in 1998, having recorded 983 tackles, 25½ sacks, 14 interceptions and 12 forced fumbles.

Johnson began his coaching career in 2000 as an assistant linebackers coach for the New England Patriots, where he was reunited with former Browns head coach and Jets assistant Bill Belichick. He served as the Patriots' linebackers coach or defensive line coach for the next 14 seasons, winning three Super Bowls (XXXVI, XXXVIII and XXXIX).

After short stints as the defensive line coach for the Buffalo Bills and New York Jets, Johnson moved on to the now-defunct Alliance of American Football last spring, where he was

the linebackers coach for the Memphis Express. After the league suspended operations, he joined the XFL's Los Angeles Wildcats as the defensive coordinator and linebackers coach. Johnson was fired after just one game, however, as the Wildcats allowed four passing touchdowns in a 37-17 loss. That league also folded amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Johnson's newest venture is significant given Ohio State has signed numerous players from IMG Academy in recent years, including four-star offensive guard Tyler Gerald and four-star defensive tackle Malik Barrow in 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 cor-

Continued On Page 32

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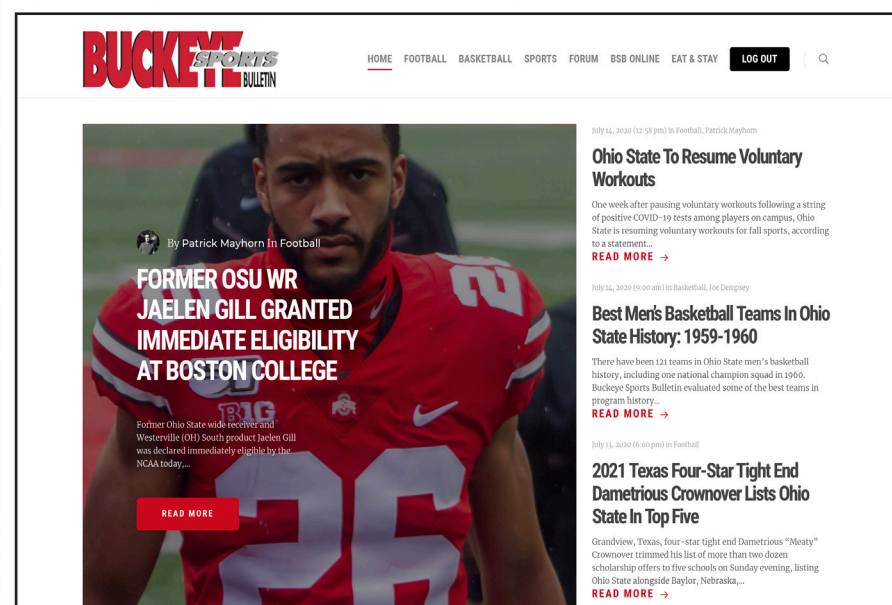
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# Linemen Near Decisions

Continued From Page 31

## Michigan Offensive Guard Sets Commitment Date

Clarkston, Mich., four-star offensive guard Rocco Spindler announced he will make his college decision on Aug. 8. He'll choose among finalists LSU, Michigan, Notre Dame, Ohio State and Penn State.

The 6-5, 315-pound Spindler – who is considered the third-best offensive guard and No. 49 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – was adamant about taking all five official visits before making an announcement, but the NCAA's recent decision to extend the recruiting dead period through the end of August has changed his thinking. He'll instead rely on his past visits and virtual meetings with coaches to decide between the schools.

The Buckeyes have been among the leaders in Spindler's recruitment thanks to his relationship with co-defensive coordinator Greg Mattison, which dates back to Mattison's time as the Wolverines' defensive line coach and when Spindler was unsure if his future was along the offensive or defensive side of the ball. He's even made a couple of trips to campus over the last year, most recently for the 28-17 win over the Nittany Lions in November.

The Tigers have also made a push in recent weeks after Spindler's teammate, four-star offensive tackle Garrett Dellinger, committed to LSU in late June. Spindler is widely expected to pick either the Fighting Irish or home-state Wolverines, with both programs holding 50 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions.

Spindler, who notably turned down the opportunity to play his senior season at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy, will graduate early and then enroll at the school of his choice in January.

Ohio State already holds commitments from Jackson and Richfield (Ohio) Revere four-star tackle Ben Christman, and the staff hopes to add two more linemen to the fold this cycle. Burton is one of the few remaining interior targets, while Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary five-star Tristan Leigh has emerged as the top target at the tackle position.

## Michigan Defensive Tackle Nears College Decision

Belleville, Mich., five-star defensive tackle Damon Payne has tabbed July 26 as the date he'll make his college decision.

The 6-4, 297-pound Payne – who is considered the top-rated defensive tackle and No. 15 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – will choose among finalists Alabama, Arizona State, Kentucky, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State and USC.

The Buckeyes were considered the favorite to land Payne from the time they offered him a scholarship back in April 2018 thanks – in large part – to Larry Johnson, who continues to churn out NFL-ready players at his position. But that lead eroded over time, and not because of a lack of interest from Ohio State's perspective. Simply put, communication between Johnson and the tight-lipped Payne dwindled, and the Buckeyes focused their attention elsewhere.

Most prognosticators expect him to choose Alabama. The Crimson Tide have ramped up their pursuit in recent months and currently hold 93 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions, with the other 7 percent undecided.

It's worth keeping an eye on the Sun Devils, though, because of their staff's background in the NFL. Arizona State head coach Herm Edwards; co-defensive coordinators Marvin Lewis and Antonio Pierce; and defensive line coach Robert Rodriguez have all played or coached at the NFL level.

The Wildcats are also a dark horse in Payne's recruitment given their recent success in

nerback Lejond Cavazos in 2020. The Buckeyes also hold a commitment from the aforementioned Adeleye.

## Defensive Tackle Commit To Play In All-American Bowl

Ohio State's top-rated recruiting class added another notch to its belt on July 8, as Hall announced his decision to play in the All-American Bowl.

The 6-3, 290-pound Hall – who is considered the fifth-best defensive tackle and No. 55 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – pledged his services to the Buckeyes back on Feb. 1. He is the eighth Ohio State commit to accept an invitation to the nation's premier high school showcase, joining Jakailin Johnson; Pryor; Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord; Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson; Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal four-star guard Donovan Jackson; Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard; and Ironton, Ohio, four-star linebacker Reid Carrico.

The Buckeyes are typically well-represented at the All-American Bowl, and there's a possibility they will reach double digits again this year with several of their top remaining targets, including Tuimolou and Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka, previously announcing their intentions to play in the game, as well.

The 2021 All-American Bowl is scheduled to take place at the Alamodome in San Antonio on Jan. 9. It will be broadcast live on NBC at 1 p.m. ET.

## Florida Defensive End Commit Reveals Top Schools

Although he's been committed to Florida for a little more than 18 months, Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas four-star defensive end Tyreak Sapp released a list of his top five schools on July 9. The Gators made the cut, as did Alabama, Georgia Tech, Miami (Fla.) and Ohio State.

"I still have options," Sapp told the South Florida Sun Sentinel. "Just because I committed there, it's not an obligation. I didn't put pen on paper. I'm not obligated to go to Florida just because I'm committed. That's something I said a long time ago."

The 6-3, 255-pound Sapp – who is of no relation to former Hurricanes defensive tackle and Pro Football Hall of Famer Warren Sapp – is considered the seventh-best strong-side defensive end and No. 96 prospect overall in the class of 2021. He recorded 29 tackles, nine tackles for loss, 8½ sacks and two fumble recoveries to help the Raiders to the state title last season.

As mentioned, Sapp committed to Florida on Christmas Eve 2018, but that didn't deter Larry Johnson, who extended an offer this past January. Johnson notably developed former St. Thomas Aquinas defensive ends Joey and Nick Bosa into top-five picks, which is a big reason that Sapp was scheduled to take an unofficial visit to Columbus this spring. That was put on hold amid the outbreak, however.

"Ohio State has the great defensive line tradition and a great winning tradition," Sapp said. "I want to go into a program where I'm going to win games, but I want to be taught by the right coaches. I feel like their defensive line coach, Larry Johnson, is the right guy, and I feel like I can grow as a defensive lineman with him."

Sapp is in the process of setting up a virtual trip to Ohio State in lieu of a physical visit, since the recruiting dead period remains in effect through at least the end of August.



## A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

**30 Years Ago – 1990**

Ohio State recruited six football players for the class of 1990 who posted 40-yard dash times of better than 4.5 seconds. Running backs Robert Smith and Butler By'not'e checked in at 4.4, while wide receivers Joey Galloway and Chris Sanders and defensive back Larry Kennedy clocked in at 4.45 seconds.

But the fastest of the incoming freshmen was wide receiver Norman Williams of Washington, D.C. One of the fastest high school prospects in the nation, Williams' listed 40 time was 4.38 seconds. Still, Williams was modest about his speed in talking to BSB.

"I don't think about it that much," he said. "I guess maybe when you're used to running against guys who all seem to have about the same amount of speed, you don't think about it.

"I've been blessed with some natural talent and a good deal of speed. That's what I've been given in life, and now it's up to me to see what I can do with it. Right now, I'm focusing on going to Ohio State and becoming a part of a program that's on the rise."

**25 Years Ago – 1995**

Ohio State hosted its annual summer football camp for high school players in June and netted three early verbal commitments for the 1996 recruiting class. In addition to those three commitments, it was reported that one other Ohio high school player had committed, but he later said he would take more time to decide.

The commitments came from Cuyahoga Falls (Ohio) Walsh Jesuit wide receiver Darik Warnke; Medina, Ohio, defensive end Marcus Perez; and Columbus Beechcroft tight end/defensive end Paris Long. The other Ohio player – Lancaster offensive lineman Benji Gilbert – was reported as a commitment in the June 26 edition of The Columbus Dispatch, but he later said that was not official, although Ohio State was still at the top of his list.

**20 Years Ago – 2000**

Ohio State conducted its annual summer football camp June 13-23 in four separate sessions. The camp netted a pair of verbal commitments with London, Ohio, tight end Andree Tyree and Martinsville, Ind., offensive tackle Ryan Cook each issuing verbals.

According to recruiting coordinator Bill Conley, as many as 2,500 athletes were expected to come through the doors of the Woody Hayes Athletic Center for the camp.

Ohio State head coach John Cooper spoke about the importance of the camp.

"Our camp is the most important thing we do in recruiting,"

Cooper said. "This is the first time these players can spend three or four days with our coaching staff. I'm impressed with the coaches we have. They not only do a good job of teaching football, but they do a good job of selling Ohio State.

"This also gives us an opportunity to get an accurate assessment of these players. This is the first time you can time and weigh and measure these guys. You see how fast they can run the 40 and how high they can vertical jump.

"The worst thing we can do is bring a player into Ohio State who is not good enough to play here."

**15 Years Ago – 2005**

Ohio State landed two verbal commitments from its recruiting summer camp on June 25, one from within Ohio and the other from the South.

The former came from Clayton (Ohio) Northmont defensive back Kurt Coleman, who had been offered by Ohio State several months prior and was long considered a Buckeye lean.

"I told Coach (Jim) Tressel that I wanted to see him and (coach Paul) Haynes and (coach Tim) Beckman in his office," Coleman told BSB. "My parents and I went in there, and I told everyone that I wanted to be a Buckeye."

Joining Coleman was Fort Valley (Ga.) Peach County quarterback Antonio Henton, who committed to Ohio State at the camp and then reaffirmed his pledge when he returned home to Georgia and spoke with his parents.

"They were proud of me, really," Henton told BSB. "They liked that I came to a decision and that I did it quickly. I think they want me to be independent."

**10 Years Ago – 2010**

Almost immediately after Ohio State signed Terrelle Pryor in 2008, fans began wondering if the Buckeyes would ever again land a similar athlete.

They got their answer June 3 when five-star quarterback Braxton Miller issued his verbal commitment to OSU during a press conference in his high school auditorium at Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne. A dual-threat quarterback in the same vein as Pryor, Miller showed more than just a passing similarity to the Buckeye signal caller.

Those comparisons nearly went one stage past comfortable though, when Miller's coach, Jay Minton joked that, like Pryor, Miller had cold feet and would be postponing his announcement. After holding a serious face for a moment, Minton relented.

"Nah, just kidding," he said.

Moments later, Miller donned an OSU hat and showed a large Block "O" shoulder tattoo, ending any questions about where the Ohio native would play his college ball.

**Five Years Ago – 2015**

Ohio State's lone June commitment came from Fort Wayne (Ind.) Bishop Luers four-star wide receiver Austin Mack (6-2, 205), the No. 16 wide receiver and No. 85 overall prospect in the class of 2016.

"It feels great," Mack told BSB at his announcement ceremony. "I took a long time to make this decision, and now that I was able to weigh my options and make this decision, I'm released from that pressure and I'm glad to be a Buckeye."

Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer was in attendance at the announcement, to Mack's delight, as was receivers coach Zach Smith.

"It was huge, man," Mack said. "It shows Coach Meyer's character to want to come and see his future players. It's definitely huge, and I'm thankful they came to see me commit."

**One Year Ago – 2019**

Ohio State snapped its drought on defense and special teams for the 2020 recruiting class in June, climbing into double-digit members with a Big Ten flip along the way.

"This month is a big month for us," head coach Ryan Day said during a June 5 press conference. "There are a couple of positions of need on offense, and we're working through all those, but it's really what we're going to be at the end of June. That's when I think we'll have a better handle on the whole class."

With momentum from May 31 when Catawissa (Pa.) Southern Columbia wide receiver Julian Fleming (6-2, 199), the 247Sports composite's No. 1 wide receiver, committed for 2020, Ohio State rode its biggest pledge in the past year into June and July.

June saw the Buckeyes bring in eight more commitments, highlighted by an enormous addition in the trenches and a top-50 overall player at a position of need from a talent-rich region outside Ohio.

Included in that group was Pickerington (Ohio) Central defensive tackle Ty Hamilton; Cincinnati Princeton defensive tackle Darrion Henry; La Habra, Calif., cornerback Clark Phillips; Cincinnati La Salle kicker Jake Siebert; Jersey City (N.J.) St. Peter's Prep linebacker Cody Simon and Warren (Mich.) De La Salle offensive tackle Grant Toutant; as well as 2021 Massillon (Ohio) Washington wideout Jayden Ballard and 2021 Richfield (Ohio) Revere offensive tackle Ben Christman.

Michigan, as they notably pulled four-star offensive guard Marquan McCall and four-star defensive tackle Justin Rogers out of Oak Park in 2018 and 2020, respectively, despite them garnering interest from some of the nation's top programs.

**Pennsylvania Safety Lists Top Schools**

Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway four-star safety Derrick Davis took the next big step in his recruitment when he released his top seven schools on July 12, listing Ohio State alongside Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Penn State, Pittsburgh and USC.

The Buckeyes have been recruiting the 6-1, 194-pound Davis – who is considered the second-best safety and No. 53 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – for more than two years, dating back to when former co-defensive coordinator Alex Grinch offered him a scholarship in February 2018. He's been to campus a half-dozen times since, which is a big reason why his relationship with the program has notably withstood changes at head coach, defensive coordinator and defensive backs coach.

Davis' most recent trip to Columbus came in February, when he and his father made the trip for an exclusive visitors weekend that also included Hall and Sawyer. That also marked their first meeting with Coombs, who made it clear that Davis was among his top priorities, as well as assistant secondary/special teams coach Matt Barnes.

As mentioned, Ohio State holds five commitments in the defensive backfield. The hope is to add one or two more, though, depending on what happens with Davis and Hancock.

Davis – who hails from the same high school

as former Ohio State defensive back Corey "Pitt" Brown and linebacker Dorian Bell – hopes to take all five official visits this fall before making his college decision, though that could change if the NCAA decides to extend the current recruiting dead period. As things stand now, though, the Nittany Lions are the perceived favorite in his recruitment, holding 90 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions.

**Tight End Names Top Five Schools**

Grandview, Texas, four-star tight end Dametrious "Meaty" Crownover trimmed his list of more than two dozen scholarship offers to five schools on July 12, listing Ohio State alongside Baylor, Nebraska, Texas and Texas A&M.

The 6-6, 235-pound Crownover is considered the 10th-best tight end and No. 240 prospect overall in the class of 2021, though he garnered first-team all-district honors as a defensive end after registering 62 tackles, 15 tackles for loss, 5½ sacks and four pass breakups to help the Zebras win their second straight state title last season. The Buckeyes and offensive coordinator/tight ends coach/area recruiter Kevin Wilson are strictly recruiting him on the offensive side of the ball, however.

Spots are limited in Ohio State's current recruiting class, but the Buckeyes hope to add one more tight end as a complement to Aurora, Colo., three-star Sam Hart. In addition to Crownover, Wilson has been in contact with Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day four-star Michael Trigg and Bowling Green, Ky., three-star Jordan Dingle.

Most prognosticators expect Crownover – who has never been to Columbus – to choose the

Aggies since his older brother, Earnest, recently transferred to Texas A&M after playing one year at Kilgore (Texas) Junior College. It's worth noting his father, also named Earnest, played for the Bears, meanwhile.

**Other Notes From Around The Country**

• 2021 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Jaylin Davies committed to Oregon on June 19 over finalists Arizona State, Ohio State and USC.

• Virginia Beach (Va.) Princess Anne five-star cornerback Tony Grimes committed to North Carolina on June 30. He has since announced he will reclassify to the class of 2020 and enroll in college courses this August, ending Ohio State's

pursuit altogether.

• 2022 Hollywood (Fla.) Chaminade-Madonna Prep four-star defensive end Kenyatta Jackson listed Ohio State in his top 12 on June 23 alongside Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Florida State, Georgia Tech, Miami (Fla.), Nebraska, North Carolina, Oregon, Oklahoma and Penn State.

• 2022 Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star cornerback Domani Jackson included Ohio State in his top 10 on July 4, listing the Buckeyes with Alabama, Arizona State, Clemson, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Oklahoma, Texas and USC.

*For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports.com, free to all BSB subscribers, daily.*



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# Former Buckeyes Get Bounced From Tournament

Well, that didn't go as planned, but in this crazy world we're living in now why should that come as a surprise?

The Basketball Tournament, or TBT as it is known by the hoops junkies who crave summer ball, is played mostly by former college players – standouts and scrubs alike – who provide entertainment, a decent level of skill, something called the Elam Ending and a winner-take-all \$1 million prize.

## COURT REPORT Craig Merz

That was supposed to go to one of the two hometown favorites as far as Ohio State fans were concerned. After all, the Buckeye-heavy Carmen's Crew was the defending champion playing in the 24-team tourney in Columbus with one of their challengers to their crown being Big X with former Ohio State players Andrew Dakich, who doubled as coach, and C.J. Jackson.

Each team should have had the home-court advantage with thousands of cheering fans at Nationwide Arena for the games from July 4-14.

"Should have" were the operative words. Although the TBT represented the first live basketball played in the United States since the Big East tournament was halted on March 12 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, spectators were barred from attending while the all the players and staff lived in a "bubble" in a downtown Columbus hotel throughout the tourney.

The games were televised on the ESPN networks, and what Buckeye fans witnessed on the afternoon of July 8 left them cringing.

In back-to-back round of 16 games over a four-hour period, Big X was defeated 77-66 by Red Scare, consisting of ex-Dayton players and former Buckeye forward Trevor Thompson, and No. 1 seed Carmen's Crew was a 76-68 victim to No. 16 House of 'Paig, as in Urbana-Champaign, where several members played for Illinois.

Goodbye, Columbus.

Golden Eagles, the Marquette alumni team, won its first TBT title with a 78-73 win against Sideline Cancer on July 14.

Carmen's Crew had ex-OSU players William Buford, Aaron Craft, Jon Diebler, Dallas Lauderdale, David Lighty, Lenzelle Smith and Deshaun Thomas and was coached by Jared Sullinger.

"We weren't thinking about last year coming into this year," Diebler said after the loss. "We felt leading up to this we had a great week of practice. We had an off night shooting the ball, and it happens. This isn't the only game that we've had off nights shooting the ball, but this is basketball. That's what makes it fun."

It was a one-and-done for Carmen's Crew, which earned a bye to the round of 16. At least Big X got a victory under its belt. They downed D2 79-74 in the first round on July 4.

Big X trailed by as many as 15 points but rallied behind former Michigan State standout Nick Ward from nearby Gahanna High School. He had 18 points, and Jackson added seven, including the winning bucket, a rebound of his own miss.

Under the Elam Ending, which has been



COURTESY OF THE BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

**THE END OF THE ROAD** – Former Ohio State point guard Aaron Craft, left, saw his professional career come to a close with Carmen's Crew's 76-68 loss to House of 'Paig in the first round of The Basketball Tournament.

used in all TBT games since 2018 but was introduced to a wider audience during the 2020 NBA All-Star Game, the winning team must reach a formulated number of points to finish the game instead of being decided by a clock.

The Elam Ending begins at the first stoppage of play with four minutes remaining. A target score is set by adding eight points to the team that is ahead and the first team to reach that number wins. For example, if Big X were ahead 66-65, the target for both teams would be 74 points.

Dakich, in his first season as player-coach after playing last season, had three points but had trouble adjusting to the role.

"It was weird subbing myself in, I'm not going to lie," Dakich said. "It took some self-awareness on my part."

Big X was going to rival Carmen's Crew with a large contingent of ex-Buckeyes, but things fell apart. Keyshawn Woods tested positive for the coronavirus before entering the tournament quarantine and was ineligible. Also, Jae'Sean Tate did not get a chance to play because of repeated positive tests prior to the tourney.

Brothers Andre and Kaleb Wesson, members of the 2019-20 Ohio State team, were also expected to participate but withdrew to prepare for their possible pro careers.

In the round of 16, Carmen's Crew couldn't hold a nine-point lead in the second half, and House of 'Paig took advantage by hitting their final six field goals in a game that had five ties and 10 lead changes. Lighty led Carmen's Crew with 21 points.

"Give (House of 'Paig) a ton of credit," Craft said. "They played great. They stayed with it. That's a great team."

Although Craft will attend medical school and said several times this would be his last tournament, Diebler is hoping he and others stick around for another run.

"I'm sure we're all planning on playing again," said Diebler. "We love playing in TBT. We love playing on the same team together."

## OSU Men's Basketball Signees & Verbal Commits

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

Players in the class of 2022 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
Bowen Hardman	SG	6-3	160	★★★	Cincinnati Princeton

Big X faced a similar finish to their game as Carmen's Crew when Red Scare went on a 13-0 tear in the fourth quarter. Thompson had 12 points and seven rebounds in 17 minutes.

"It's tough to really marinate on that right now after this loss," Dakich said. "It's difficult. You've got guys who are battling. I'm grateful that these guys all played and were eager to be a part of this."

Red Scare reached the semifinals by beating House of 'Paig 83-76 on July 10 before falling 79-70 to the Golden Eagles two days later. Trey Landers, the younger brother of former Ohio State defensive tackle Robert Landers, had 21 points for the Red Scare in the loss.

The tournament took on a new look because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 64-team field was trimmed to 24, while \$2 million jackpot shared by Carmen's Crew last year was cut in half.

UD Arena in Dayton was to host the final under the original format, but once the field was reduced, it was decided that all games would be played in one city instead of regional sites for safety reasons and Columbus was chosen.

All players and personnel involved in the tournament were tested before it began and throughout while living in the bubble. One team, Eberlein Drive, had a player test positive before the round of 16 and had to forfeit

its game against Brother Love per protocol.

"We crowned a champion putting health and safety first," TBT founder and CEO Jon Mugar said on Twitter after the championship game. "Wasn't clean or easy, but it was worthwhile seeing people having fun again. Love our team. Love our players. Grateful for our partners. Total group effort and we all fought together. We will take this one with us forever."

### Among The Best

Evan Turner set a standard for the few short months he played in the 2010s that few could match. As a result, the forward was named to the Big Ten's all-decade team on June 24.

He was joined by Michigan guard and Columbus native Trey Burke, Michigan State guard Denzel Valentine, teammate Draymond Green at forward and Wisconsin forward Frank Kaminsky.

Turner's last of three seasons for the Buckeyes encompassed the 2009-10 season when he was a consensus national Player of the Year with 20.4 points, 9.2 rebounds and 6.0 assists. He currently is with the Minnesota Timberwolves.

Sullinger made the second team, and guards Craft and D'Angelo Russell made the third team to give the Buckeyes a conference-high four selections, one more than Michigan State and Purdue.



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# Buckeyes Boast Most All-Decade Honorees

The team that won four Big Ten championships from 2010-19 also dominated the conference's all-decade football list, as determined by the Big Ten Network. Ohio State's 16 honorees represented seven more than second-place Wisconsin.

The three newest members of the Big Ten – Nebraska, Maryland and Rutgers – combined for zero representatives on the all-decade team, as well as Northwestern. Beyond the Badgers, Iowa ranked third with eight, Michigan had six and Penn State posted four.

## BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

In addition to the Buckeyes' 16 players, Urban Meyer was named head coach of the decade for the conference after going 83-9 at the helm in Columbus. Former Michigan State head coach Mark Dantonio, who called the Ohio State defense from 2001-03, won second-team coach accolades.

Ohio State's J.T. Barrett was named the first-team quarterback after he was responsible for 147 touchdowns and 12,697 total yards, which are both Big Ten records. Fellow Scarlet and Gray signal callers' Dwayne Haskins and Braxton Miller were also honored, with Miller as the first-team all-purpose player and Haskins as the second-team quarterback.

Wisconsin's Jonathan Taylor and Penn State's Saquon Barkley earned the two running back spots on the first-team offense. Ezekiel Elliott of Ohio State and Melvin Gordon of the Badgers made the second team.

Allen Robinson of the Nittany Lions and Tyler Johnson of the Golden Gophers claimed the two first-team wide receiver spots, with Michigan's Jake Butt at tight end. Purdue's Rondale Moore and Wisconsin's Jared Abbrederis were the

wideouts on the second team with tight end T.J. Hockenson of Iowa.

The first-team all-decade offensive line featured players from five different programs. Taylor Lewan represented Michigan, while Brandon Scherff was a first-team selection for the Hawkeyes. Wisconsin's Michael Deiter, Indiana's Dan Feeney and Ohio State's Billy Price rounded out the first-team offensive line.

Two Buckeyes and two Badgers made up the bulk of the second-team offensive line. Pat Elflein and Taylor Decker represented the Scarlet and Gray, while Kevin Zeitler and Gabe Carimi secured spots for the Badgers. Stefen Wisniewski of Penn State rounded out the unit.

Ohio State also led the all-decade first-team defense with three players in defensive ends Joey Bosa and Chase Young and safety Malik Hooker. The Buckeyes' four players on the second team represented a conference high as well, including defensive end Nick Bosa, linebacker Ryan Shazier, and Vonn Bell and Jeff Okudah at defensive back.

The Hawkeyes had the second-most defensive selections on the Big Ten all-decade team with five. Linebacker Josey Jewell and defensive back Desmond King were first-team nods, while end A.J. Epenesa and former secondary mates Amani Hooker and Josh Jackson landed second-team laurels.

Michigan and Wisconsin both totaled three players on defense with two first-team honorees apiece. Devin Bush represented the Wolverines at linebacker with Jabrill Peppers in the all-purpose slot, while end J.J. Watt and linebacker Chris Borland made it for the Badgers. Watt's brother, T.J., claimed a spot on the second team for Wisconsin, along with defensive tackle Maurice Hurst from the Maize and Blue.

Joining their former coach on the all-decade squad, Michigan State corner Darqueze Dennard received a first-team slot, and three-time All-American defensive lineman Shilique Calhoun was on the second group.

Minnesota and Purdue each earned one spot on the first team in defensive



JOSH WINSLOW

**QUARTERBACK OF THE DECADE – Former Ohio State signal-caller J.T. Barrett set 39 school and conference records during his five seasons with the Buckeyes (2013-17).**

back Antoine Winfield Jr. and end Ryan Kerrigan, respectively. Illinois and Penn State both managed just one all-decade second-team recipient in end Whitney Mercilus, an Akron native, and linebacker Michael Mauti, respectively.

Indiana kicker Griffin Oakes was named the best at his position for the past decade as the lone placekicker to be honored. Spartan punter Mike Sadler snagged the first-team role, while Ohio State product Cameron Johnston earned the second-team spot.

The Big Ten all-decade teams were selected by a panel of 24 people, which primarily consisted of national media members and Big Ten Network personalities.

### Izzo, Kaminsky Claim Top Honors Of The Decade

Michigan State head coach Tom Izzo led the Spartans to four Big Ten regular-season and tournament titles, along with three Final Four appearances in the past decade. After leading the conference in championships and wins in that decade, Izzo was awarded with the coach of the decade title in men's basketball.

Wisconsin big man Frank Kaminsky, who was the 2015 Consensus National College Player of the Year, won Big Ten Player of the Decade.

Joining Kaminsky on the first team were two of Izzo's pupils in Draymond Green and Denzel Valentine. Former Michigan guard

Trey Burke and former Ohio State standout Evan Turner filled out the first group.

Purdue, with three total honorees, had guard Carsen Edwards on the second team, with Wisconsin forward Ethan Happ, Ohio State big man Jared Sullinger, Indiana guard Victor Oladipo and Michigan State guard Cassius Winston representing the second-team squad.

Minnesota's lone all-decade member, forward Jordan Murphy, made the third team with former Hoosier guard Yogi Ferrell. The Boilermakers and Buckeyes both received two third-team accolades. Forwards JaJuan Johnson and Caleb Swanigan earned the recognition for Purdue, while guards Aaron Craft and D'Angelo Russell reeled in the laurels for the Scarlet and Gray.

### Rettke, Young Earn Big Ten Athlete Of The Year Honors

Wisconsin junior middle blocker Dana Rettke won Big Ten Female Athlete of the Year, while Ohio State junior defensive end Chase Young was named the Big Ten Jesse Owens Male Athlete of the Year.

With the honor, Rettke became the first Wisconsin student-athlete to receive the conference's female athlete of the year accolade since 1997, when track and field standout Kathy Butler shared the honor with Minnesota swimmer Gretchen Hegener. Rettke also became the fourth volleyball player to earn the award and the first since Penn State's Megan Hodge in



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2010.

Guiding the Badgers to the 2019 NCAA national championship match, Rettke earned her third straight first-team All-America selection along the way. The 2019 Big Ten Player of the Year was also selected to both the 2019 NCAA championship all-tournament team and 2019 NCAA regional all-tournament team.

Rettke led the Big Ten with 1.45 blocks per set, while pacing the Badgers and ranking third in the Big Ten with a .390 hitting percentage. Her 3.75 kills per set also led Wisconsin, setting a single-season school record, and ranked fifth in the conference. The 6-8 middle blocker from Riverside, Ill., recorded double-figure kills in 26 matches.

Rettke competed with the U.S. National Team during the summer of 2019, winning the Volleyball Nations League and qualifying for the 2020 (now 2021) Tokyo Olympics. The two-time Academic All-Big Ten honoree was also a finalist for both the 2020 AAU James E. Sullivan Award and 2019 Honda Sports Award.

Young led the country in 16½ sacks, which set an Ohio State record despite missing two games due to a suspension for accepting a loan from a family friend. He also ranked second nationally with 21½ tackles for loss.

On the national stage, Young won both the Chuck Bednarik Award and the Bronko Nagurski Trophy, which both recognize the most outstanding defensive player in the country. The unanimous All-American also won the Ted Hendricks Award as the top defensive end nationally before becoming the No. 2 overall pick in the 2020 NFL draft by Washington.

Young and Rettke won the respective awards among a field of nominees that included three national champions, 23 All-Americans, 11 Big Ten champions, 11 conference players of the year and two who collected a national player of the year honor.

### Nation's No. 1 Recruit Commits To Michigan State

Emoni Bates, the No. 1 men's basketball recruit in the country for 2022 and deemed the best high school prospect in more than a decade, committed to Michigan State. Additionally, Bates announced he will attend a new prep school that his father, Elgin, is opening in the fall for his final two years of high school.

"Coach Izzo and Coach (Mike) Garland and that entire MSU staff has been showing love since his seventh-grade year," Elgin Bates said. "They've been very consistent. They really have a genuine care for him and the family. They care for him, not only as a player, but as a person. That's really big for us as a family and for him as a player."

Emoni Bates, who is a 6-8, 200-pound wing, has drawn comparisons to future NBA Hall of Famers Kevin Durant and LeBron James. The Ypsilanti, Mich., native became the Spartans' first commitment from the nation's No. 1 prospect in the Internet rankings era, and their first five-star commit since Jaren Jackson in 2017, though Michigan State added another five-star when guard Max Christie committed on July 7.

Although Bates has been hyped as the best prep star in 15 years, the Green and White were the only program to consistently recruit the lanky wing. Many may have assumed Bates will choose a professional route over college, but Izzo went to his games and stayed in contact throughout his recruitment.

"They get all my respect, really," Emoni Bates said. "I love how they coach, Coach



INDIANA FOOTBALL/TWITTER

**WELCOME BACK – Indiana head coach Tom Allen announced that junior tight end Peyton Hendershot has rejoined the Hoosiers after completing team discipline and legal obligations stemming from an arrest in February.**

Izzo, I like how they focus on defense more than offense. That's a big key in basketball, and people don't understand that. On and off the court, he has passion. He's just an amazing guy, overall."

Bates won Gatorade National Boys Basketball Player of the Year, becoming the first sophomore to receive the honor. The prior season, Emoni Bates led Ypsilanti Lincoln to the school's first state championship as a freshman.

As a sophomore in 2019-20, the No. 1 recruit regardless of class led his squad to a 19-3 record and a spot in the District 18 state tournament final against Ann Arbor Huron, which was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Indiana TE Hendershot Reinstated To Hoosier Football

Indiana tight end Peyton Hendershot was cleared to rejoin the Hoosier football program, head coach Tom Allen announced during a video conference on July 14.

"He has completed his team-sanctioned discipline," Allen said. "He has completed the conduct process that we went through for the student conduct as a student-athlete at Indiana University. He's closed his matter with the judicial system, and we have a campus committee that determines if the student-athlete is reinstated to a team and able to be cleared, and that is the case."

"He is completely cleared and back with the team now fully as he's completed all the different things he was asked to do."

Initially, Hendershot was suspended indefinitely after being arrested on multiple charges in February. He faced charges of misdemeanor criminal trespassing, domestic battery, criminal conversion and criminal mischief from an incident involving an ex-girlfriend.

In June, Hendershot pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor criminal trespassing charge and was also required "to receive a mental health evaluation and participate in a batterers treatment program," according to the Bloomington Herald Times.

Hendershot is a critical part of Indiana's team, having set school records with 52 receptions and 622 yards by a tight end in 2019.

The North Salem, Ind., native earned third-team All-Big Ten honors and hauled in four touchdowns for the 8-5 Hoosiers.

### Big Ten Student-Athletes Garner Academic Recognition

The Academic All-Big Ten team was loaded with 2,058 student-athletes who competed in spring and at-large sports

The long list of honorees includes 178 student-athletes in baseball, 140 in softball, 261 in women's rowing, 75 in men's and 84 in women's golf, 127 in men's and 154 in women's lacrosse, 73 in both men's and women's tennis, 267 in men's and 369 in women's track and field and 78 in men's at-large sports (representing fencing, rifle and pistol, rowing and volleyball) and 179 in women's at-large sports (representing bowling, fencing, ice hockey, lightweight rowing, rifle and pistol, sand volleyball, synchronized swimming and water polo).

In order to earn Academic All-Big Ten recognition, student-athletes must be on a varsity team, as verified by being on the official squad list as of March 12 for spring sports, have been enrolled full-time at the institution for a minimum of one year and

hold a cumulative grade-point average of 3.0 or higher.

The Big Ten Distinguished Scholar Award was earned by 1,524 student-athletes for the 2019-20 academic year. The honorees include student-athletes from all 14 schools in the conference and 38 different sports who have recorded a minimum GPA of 3.7 or higher for the previous academic year.

More than 250 student-athletes who received the Distinguished Scholar Award for 2019-20 achieved a flawless 4.0 GPA. The prestigious group of straight-A student-athletes featured those pursuing diverse fields of study with a list of majors that include kinesiology, horticulture, psychology, retailing and consumer behavior, electrical engineering, elementary education, political science, human development and family science, journalism and many more.

### Michigan Outlines Ticket Policy For 2020 Football Season

The University of Michigan announced that if the Wolverines are able to have a 2020 football season, the capacity of Michigan Stadium will be reduced, or games could even be held without fans as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Medical experts, university leadership, the Big Ten, and government officials/agencies will be consulted to make a final decision on capacity at a later date.

"We have been working closely with a wide variety of leaders to ensure a safe and healthy environment for our student-athletes, coaches, fans and support staff associated with a game at Michigan Stadium," said athletic director Warde Manuel. "We will follow the direction that all of these agencies and experts continue to provide during this challenging time."

As a result, numerous policies will be enacted for the 2020 football season, including the removal of football season tickets. Former season-ticket holders will still be in line for their seats in their same locations for the 2021 season.

If the Wolverines can host fans at Michigan Stadium, all home games will be sold on an individual game basis, with sales limited to current season-ticket holders and students. There will be no ticket sales to the general public.

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# Big Ten-Only Slate Makes For Throwback Season

One thing is for certain in this uncertain world of COVID-19: If there is a college football season, it will be intriguing.

I'm sure no one wanted a season without nonconference matchups, missing out on games like the one that had been planned between Oregon and Ohio State. Nor did anyone want a season possibly – if not likely – without fans in the stands.

## EXNER POINT Rich Exner

But the idea of conference-only games does put an interesting twist on things.

The Big Ten was the first to announce the plan. The Pac-12 followed. Will the Big 12, ACC and SEC do the same?

I'm guessing that within a few weeks, the SEC might be the only holdout. Those schools just can't seem to part with classic matchups against sub-division foes like those of last year – Alabama vs. Western Carolina, LSU vs. Northwestern State, and Georgia vs. Murray State.

But if most of the big five conferences go the route of league-only games, marquee nonconference battles such as OSU-Oregon will either be few or none at all.

Why do I think this change could be interesting?

This would return a focus to conference games and conference championships – with mystery lingering until January about who really are the best teams nationally.

I miss the days when Ohio State played every Big Ten opponent (1983 and 1984) or all but one (from 1971-82 and 1985-92) until the arrival of Penn State as the league's 11th member.

Uneven schedules are unfair and uninteresting. Every season should include a game against Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin and all others. Expansion doesn't make that possible anymore. But playing just eight conference games through 2015 in a 14-school league was ridiculous. Moving to a nine-game conference schedule in 2016 was an improvement.

Now, if there is a season, one option floated by OSU Athletic Director Gene Smith has been for a 10-game season. That's better yet.

What I don't miss about the old system was postseason play. Bowl matchups weren't designed to determine national championships. Many slots were determined by conference tie-ins and the rest by deals cut before the regular season was even finished to get the best TV ratings and ticket sales.

The playoff system, however flawed, has been an improvement. So let's imagine for a moment how it could be better this year.

What if all the major conferences play only league games, or nearly all league games? And then, crossing our fingers here, let's assume the concerns for coronavirus finally pass by the end of the year to allow for a national playoff.

College football would be stuck with an even harder task of determining who should be in the playoffs, absent those nonconference games as a barometer. And college football will be hurting for money.

This could be the situation that forces the lords of the game into finally expanding the playoffs to include all the conference champions, the field determined not in the court of public opinion but by actual results on the football field.

And what intrigue this would be – kind of like the old days in Major League Baseball when the World Series and the All-Star Game marked the only times American and National league teams competed against one another. And, by the way, those were quite interesting times for a baseball fan.

### Scheduling

The Big Ten didn't address scheduling details when it announced its intention for a conference-only season. Schedules could be entirely shuffled to make it work for all. But as the schedule now stands for OSU:

- Home games (5) against Indiana, Iowa, Nebraska, Rutgers and Michigan.
- Away games (4) against Illinois, Maryland, Michigan State and Penn State.
- Not playing Minnesota, Northwestern, Purdue and Wisconsin.

Presuming a 10th game is added, who would that be for Ohio State?

Nathan Baird of cleveland.com in a recent story noted that under the original schedules, both Ohio State and Purdue are off on October 3. So perhaps OSU's 10th game could be against Purdue, which Baird also noted is 3-3 against Ohio State over their last six meetings.

### Ticket Money

TV money shared equally among the Big Ten schools plays a huge part in covering the \$2 billion bill for sports in the Big Ten. But ticket money has long helped Ohio State expand its money advantage over the other schools. That equation changes this year if there are no fans in the seats. Ohio State stands to lose the most.

The degree to which this is the case

can be found within annual financial disclosures each school files with the NCAA. Northwestern, as a private school, won't release its form. But for years I've been collecting others. The latest reports, filed early this year, are for the 2018-19 school year. So the information covers the 2018 football season.

Here's how much each school collected in football ticket money, and each school's total athletic department spending.

- Maryland - \$5.9 million from football tickets, with \$108.8 million spent on all athletics.
- Illinois - \$6.2 million and \$120.2 million.
- Indiana - \$6.8 million and \$114.8 million.
- Purdue - \$7.1 million and \$102 million.
- Rutgers - \$8.4 million and \$103.2 million.
- Minnesota - \$9.4 million and \$129.5 million.
- Michigan State - \$19.8 million and \$135.7 million.
- Iowa - \$22.3 million and \$146.3 million.
- Wisconsin - \$24 million and \$154.6 million.
- Nebraska - \$30.2 million and \$124.1 million.
- Penn State - \$36.8 million and \$160.4 million.
- Michigan - \$46.3 million and \$191 million.
- Ohio State - \$50.6 million and \$220.6 million.

Further illustrating the importance of football ticket sales at Ohio State, the \$50.6 million from football represented 84 percent of the \$59.8 million in ticket money for all sports, with most of the rest coming from men's basketball.

Some concern has been raised over the million-dollar payouts some Mid-American Conference level schools will lose by not playing big-time opponents this year. That will put a hurt on some budgets. But on the ticket side, those same schools do not stand to lose as much.

For all sports in 2018-19, Akron took in \$734,000 in ticket sales, Kent State \$791,000, Ohio U. \$1.1 million, Miami \$1.4 million, Bowling Green \$2 million, and Toledo \$2.5 million.

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# Schmidt Set Standard For Beating Michigan

I must admit that I was surprised when it was announced that Francis Schmidt was among the newest inductees into the Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame. I wasn't surprised that he was selected. I was surprised that he wasn't already in the Hall of Fame.

The guy invented the tradition of Gold Pants, for God's sake! That should have been enough right there.

Aside from creating one of the most endearing and enduring traditions in Ohio State football history, I think Schmidt's record more than speaks for itself.

There are eight football coaches in the Ohio State Hall of Fame: Paul Brown, Earle Bruce, John Cooper, Wes Fesler, Woody Hayes, Jim Tressel, John Wilce and now Schmidt.

Schmidt's .705 winning percentage on his 39-16-1 record over seven seasons is better than that of Wilce (.688), Brown (.685) and Fesler (.608) and not far behind Cooper's .715. Schmidt's 39 wins are bettered only by Hall of Famers Hayes (205), Cooper (111), Tressel (94), Bruce (81), Wilce (78) and surefire future Hall of Famer Urban Meyer (83).

But when you talk about Schmidt you have to talk about Michigan.

Prior to his arrival in Columbus from TCU in 1934, the Buckeyes had defeated their rivals from the north just six times in 30 tries. Ohio State defeated the Wolverines in Schmidt's first four times at the helm of the Buckeyes, becoming the first OSU coach to win that many consecutive games against Michigan. Only Hayes (1960-63), Tressel (2004-10) and Meyer (2012-18) have done it since.

But it's not just that Schmidt's teams beat the Wolverines, it's how they beat them. The Buckeyes won those four games by a combined 114-0. No other Ohio State team or coach has shut out the Wolverines four times in a row. Despite their gaudy records against Michigan, neither Tressel nor Meyer recorded even one shutout against U-M. Nor did Brown, Fesler, Bruce or Cooper. In fact, after starting the series by shutting out the Buckeyes five straight times between 1897 and 1903, Michigan hasn't recorded four consecutive shutouts in The Game.

The Hall of Fame eligibility rules, as posted on Ohio State's website, say that a "coach or member of the Athletic Department must have served the University for at least 15 years." I thought that maybe that is what held Schmidt out, but only Wilce and Hayes would have met that standard. Fesler, of course, was also an All-America player at Ohio State, so he gets a pass.

I reached out to Varsity O to see if that rule was no longer in force or if they were allowed to make exceptions, but I did not hear back from them. If they respond, I will make note of it in a future column.

But now, 80 years after his departure from the Ohio State sideline, he is in the school's Hall of Fame, and rightfully so.

Not only did he invent the tradition of the Gold Pants, but he set the standard for earning them.

## Others Who Belong

Schmidt's election to the hall and the realization that he was not already in it set off a discussion on our electronic BuckeyeSports.com Forum as to who was not in who should be.

Before I tick off some of the names, let me first point out that a player is not eligible for consideration for "at least five years after the graduation of his or her class."

Qualifications for induction read as follows:

"Qualifications and criteria shall be based on the candidate's participation while attending The Ohio State University and shall include

accomplishments after leaving the University. The record of the individual considered shall be so outstanding that there is no question as to the qualifications necessary for induction. Consideration shall also be given for personal conduct in life and personal contributions to the high ideals of intercollegiate athletics. The selection shall be on merit only and never of a political nature."

Presumably, the part about "personal conduct in life" has kept out Art Schlichter, who was the topic of much discussion among BSB readers regarding Hall of Fame credentials.

Among others mentioned, Malcolm Jenkins got a lot of play for his contributions both on and off the field. Most of the names tossed out were of the fairly recent variety, including Joe Germaine, Carlos Hyde, Michael Jenkins, Ryan Shazier, Will Smith and Chris "Beanie" Wells. David Boston and Maurice Claret were offered as players with on-field credentials who might fall in the same category as Schlichter because of off-the-field issues.

Because I am a big guy on winning, I offered up Chris Gamble. Gamble played three years for the Buckeyes, but I based my selection on just one season, the championship year of 2002. I've long maintained that if Tressel and his staff had not moved Gamble to the defensive secondary, they would not have won OSU's first national championship in 34 years.

How is this for a championship résumé:

Despite not moving to the secondary until the fourth game of the season in 2002 against Cincinnati, Gamble led the team in interceptions with four and was tied for third in pass breakups. On offense he was second on the team in receptions and average per catch with 31 and 16.1 yards, respectively. Gamble also carried the ball three times with a 43-yard touchdown run on a reverse. On special teams, he led the team with a 23.0-yard kickoff average on 11 returns with a long of 56 and led the team with 35 punt returns for an 8.4 average and a long of 27.

It wasn't just his team-leading number of interceptions, however, that makes him stand out on defense. It was when he made them.

His first interception in the game against Cincinnati was in the end zone on his first play as cornerback. Later in that game he broke up a pass when the Bearcats were threatening to score the game-winner. His second theft came in the end zone at Wisconsin with the Badgers driving late in the game. His third pick was against Penn State for the Buckeyes' only touchdown in a 13-7 win. And finally, he intercepted the pass that ended Purdue's final drive in the famous Holy Buckeye game that season, a 10-6 Ohio State win.

Gamble didn't disappoint in the championship game against Miami, either.

He held Miami receiver Andre Johnson to four receptions, with three of those coming in the first quarter. Johnson, in case you are not familiar with him, went on to a 14-year NFL career and ranks 11th all-time with 1,062 receptions. In 2002, he averaged 21.0 yards on 52 receptions, but Gamble helped hold him to 54 yards and a long of 20 in the national championship game.

Gamble not only locked Johnson down on defense but outgained him on offense, catching two passes for 69 yards including a 57-yard reception.

Gamble went on to a nine-year career with

Carolina in the NFL.

Unless there is some off-field issue I don't know about, that one championship season alone is good enough for me.

## The Interview Issue

I have made no secret that the July Interview Issue is one of my favorites each year. There are so many interesting and accomplished people associated with Ohio State out there, and it is fun to hear their stories in their own words.

Before I delve too far into this year's edition of the Interview Issue, I wanted to mention that BSB women's basketball beat writer Wyatt Crosher was lucky enough to secure an interview with newly elected Ohio State Athletics Hall of Fame member Samantha Prahalis, a fan favorite during her time in Columbus.

While at Ohio State, Prahalis was part of an OSU basketball power couple with fellow Buckeye Evan Turner. Wyatt asked her about that relationship, and the current assistant coach at James Madison just said that was a long time ago and Wyatt and Prahalis left it at that.

I wanted to let readers know that we did ask.

Mark Titus, on the other hand, was more than willing to talk about his relationship with Turner, his former teammate. That was to be expected from Titus, who had a unique perspective on the Buckeyes from his spot down the bench from 2006-2010 and is known for his candor through his various media outlets. Not only is he known for his candor, but also for a rocky relationship with his star teammate.

"Basically our problems came out of, he came to Ohio State and he had a huge chip on his shoulder," Titus explained. "He was in a recruiting class with Jon Diebler, who was like all-everything, Mr. Ohio, and Evan thought he was better than Jon, and he was – he was right."

"So in Evan's mind, he kind of had this chip on his shoulder. He's the out-of-state kid from Illinois. He thought he was the best player in the recruiting class. All the Ohio State fans were going nuts that Jon Diebler was going to Ohio State. So he kind of took that personally and was just sort of in his own little bubble when he got to Ohio State. He didn't necessarily trust his teammates, he didn't trust the coaches, and he kind of would lash out at guys, and I just wasn't for that."

Titus admits he was emboldened in the locker room by being friends with Greg Oden and Mike Conley, whom he had known and played with since childhood and who had recently departed to the NBA. In the "what might have been department," it was interesting to hear him talk about the off-injured Oden.

"I don't even really have words to describe him. I've never seen anything like it. He was just physical, like he would get the ball underneath the rim and would almost just wait and give guys a chance. He was like, 'I'm going to dunk it. You know I'm going to dunk it. I know I'm going to dunk it. Do you want to get out of the way, or do you want to jump with me? I'll give you the chance. OK, you're going to jump with me? All right, I'll dunk on your face.'"

"Every time he got the ball, you knew he was scoring. It seemed like he blocked every single shot. I've never seen anything like him. And the craziest thing is he was just the most soft-spoken, gentlest guy off the court."

Between Titus and fellow interviewee Aaron Craft, we get a good perspective on the Thad

Matta years at Ohio State, as the two were part of eight of the coach's 13 seasons in Columbus.

Craft speaks very highly of his collegiate mentor and his place in Ohio State history.

"It's got to be toward the top if not the top," Craft said of Matta's standing in OSU lore. "Short of a national championship, he did everything that was possible."

"That includes starting from where he did, pretty low in the rankings and pretty low in the respect category in the Big Ten and in the country. And he found a way to build teams, build a program that was built on hard work, and it was really about the players. And I think that's one of the best things that you'll hear about Coach Matta if you talk to all of his former players. He really wanted it to be about us – practices, time off the floor, meals that we had together. He wanted us to really enjoy it and have fun, and we did."

"And that's something that I didn't realize was uncommon until I got out of school," Craft added. "The more that you talk to guys from other schools, other professionals that talk about their colleges, they don't tend to talk about it as fondly as I do. And a lot of it was because of the culture that Coach Matta had established."

In my more than 40 years on the Ohio State beat, I must say that nobody tells Woody Hayes stories better than Jim Laughlin. I'll let you read his remembrances of Hayes yourself, but I will say Jim had me laughing out loud when I was editing his interview.

While Laughlin was a linebacker, he did provide an interesting insight into Hayes' offense.

"Woody was smart. He really was, but he was stubborn," Laughlin explained. "He just wanted to pound the ball."

"He'd always tell us, and you still hear it from other coaches nowadays, that you've got to get your playmakers the ball in open space. The way you do that is with a quick, short passing attack and let them get out there and break tackles and you get big chunks."

"Woody never did it. We practiced it but we never did it because he wanted to beat the hell out of people. He just wanted to pound them into submission. That's one of the reasons we didn't have a great goal-line offense inside the 20 because we would just tighten up – two tight ends, three backs, the robust offense."

Here I am running out of space and I haven't even gotten to Tom Matte, who played with and against some of the greatest players in NFL history (hint, don't mention former Baltimore Colts owner Jim Irsay if you bump into Matte) and offers up the gentler side of Hayes. Nor have I mentioned President Gee, for whom I will always have fondness and who maintains a fondness for Ohio State; athletic director Gene Smith, who certainly has had an interesting year; nor highly successful wrestling coach Tom Ryan.

You'll just have to come up with your own excerpts from those interviews.

Enjoy.

## August Print Date

We are holding off on setting the print date of the August issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We are waiting for (hopefully) more clarity on the upcoming (hopefully) football schedule. At this time we are not even sure if the August issue will be the traditional Football Preview issue or a regular edition of BSB.

Check the electronic BuckeyeSports.com for an official print date announcement as well as all the latest news on the football schedule and the Buckeyes. Don't forget to put your two cents' worth in on the BuckeyeSports.com Forum.



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- Feel more emotional or problems remembering
- Feel more emotional or "down"
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Avoid hits to the head and follow the rules for safe and fair play to lower your chances of getting a concussion. Ask your coaches for more tips.

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Concussion symptoms usually show up right away, but you might not notice that something "isn't right" for hours or days. A concussion feels different to each person, so it is important to tell your parents and doctor how you are feeling.

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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