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"For The Buckeye Fan Who Needs To Know More"

August 2020

## Big Ten Postpones Fall Sports With Eye On Winter Or Spring Season

**Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer** 

There will be no college football for members of the Big Ten or Pac-12 this fall, as both conferences announced the postponement of fall sports on Aug. 11 due to safety concerns associated with the ongoing coronavirus pan-

"The mental and physical health and welfare of our student-athletes has been at the center of every decision we have made regarding the ability to proceed forward," Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren said in a statement. "As time progressed and after hours of discussion with our Big Ten Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases and the Big Ten Sports Medicine Committee, it became abundantly clear that there was too much uncertainty regarding potential medical risks to allow our student-athletes to compete this fall.

While football is the sport most notably impacted, the decision also has an effect on men's and women's cross country, field hockey, men's and women's soccer and women's vollevball.

"While I know our decision today will be disappointing in many ways for our thousands of student-athletes and

their families, I am heartened and inspired by their resilience, their insightful and discerning thoughts, and their participation through our conversations to this point," Warren said. "Everyone associated with the Big Ten Conference and its member institutions is committed to getting everyone back to competition as soon as it is safe to do so.'

The Big Ten's announcement came just six days after the conference unveiled a 10-game conference-only football schedule, which featured Ohio State opening the season at Illinois on Thursday, Sept. 3. The Buckeyes were also set to host Michigan on Saturday, Oct. 24, marking the first time since 1933 the game would have been played before November.

In a statement released that same afternoon, incoming Ohio State president Dr. Kristina Johnson and athletic director Gene Smith made it clear the university was in favor of delaying the start of the season rather than postponing it until the



FALSE START - Ohio State and head coach Ryan Day began fall camp on Aug. 6, but the Big Ten announced its decision to postpone the 2020 season just five days later.

winter or spring.

"President-elect Johnson and I were totally aligned in our efforts to delay the start of the season rather than postpone," Smith said. "I am so grateful to her for all her efforts in support of our student-athletes and a traditional fall season.

"This is an incredibly sad day for our student-athletes who have worked so hard and been so vigilant fighting against this pandemic to get this close to their season. My heart aches for them and their families.'

Johnson, who officially became the university's president on Aug. 24 following a three-year stint as the chancellor at the State University of New York, empathized with the student-athletes

"As a former collegiate athlete whose career in sports was cut short by circumstances beyond my control, I deeply feel the pain, frustration and disappointment that all our players, coaches and staff - and all Buckeye fans are feeling today," said Johnson, who played field hockey and founded the club varsity lacrosse team at Stanford. "I will continue to work closely with athletic director Gene Smith, coach Ryan Day and all coaches and other leaders to return our student-athletes to competition as soon as possible, while staying safe and healthy.

Although Ohio State notably played through the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic and World Wars I and II, 2020 will

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### From The Message Board

The Big Ten's decision to postpone the college football season has sparked criticism from fans, players, media and coaches, as well as a few theories on what the Big Ten could have done better. We asked the readers on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as staff writers, how they would have handled the fall season. Here are some of their responses:

"This question is not about the result but the process. I think B1G officials should have had ongoing discussions much earlier, with several different plans in place, based on different contingencies. By April, it should have been obvious that some adjustments would likely need to be made to the schedule. Between April and mid-August, they should have had a Plan B, C and maybe Z."

- Terrier Buck

"If the vote was eight against and six for, take the six and let them play a round robin 10-game conference schedule. The eight can sit."

- mrbigbux

"It's pathetic the way all of this has been handled. No reason the season couldn't have at the least been pushed back for a few weeks. The snakes in suits strike us again."

- Tiffin Buckeye

"I think the B1G waited as long as they did in hopes the virus curve would flatten and they could have a season. There is no playbook for a pandemic. I hope there will be now. But the writing was on the wall, it wasn't getting any better. I would have done the same thing, cancel the season. You can bring football back but not the dead."

- PeyoteBuck

"I agree with Terrier and said as much in a couple of BSB columns. I don't understand why different kinds of plans weren't put in place unless the conference powers-that-be felt the crisis would simply disappear by September. We knew by early summer that wasn't going to be the case.

"As to why the Big Ten made the decision to cancel the season less than a week after releasing a proposed schedule, that's anyone's guess. I'm not much of a conspiracy theorist, but speculation often turns ugly in a fact-free vacuum. It seems (at least to me) that it would serve everyone's best interests if the commissioner explained the problems/risks the conference anticipated by moving

forward with the season, and then the reasons why canceling the season made the most sense."

- Mark Rea, BSB

"If I were in charge of the Big Ten, there would have been aiming for a Sept. 26 kickoff all along. There was no reason to alter the schedule beyond moving the few early-season conference matchups back a few weeks and then adding the 10th game into the open week, which would have been Oct. 3 for Ohio State. The conference preached patience and the ability to be flexible all along, but then switched course on the drop of a dime without offering any real insight into the decision. And we're still waiting for that insight. That said, it will be a massive mistake if other Power Five conferences play this fall, and it could have been avoided if the Big Ten (and Pac-12) spent as much time on improving and implementing player safety measures as they did worrying about the players rising against them."

- Andrew Lind, BSB

"I'm not sure I even come out to a different outcome than what the Big Ten did, but I would have been far more transparent as to why that outcome was reached. Just say what led to the postponement and how that decision was reached instead of deflecting answers and staying dead silent while chaos goes on around you. That has, to me, been the biggest problem with this whole situation."

- Wyatt Crosher, BSB

"My answer requires quite a bit of hindsight, in that I'd go back to March and begin the setup for a conference bubble as soon as the NBA started to plan its bubble. As for the more recent decision, I don't think that the conference made the wrong call, just that it likely made the call too soon. Push the season (and padded practice back) as the three remaining conferences have done, and work with the other conferences to make sure that if a decision is made, it's made by everyone at the same time."

Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### **On The Other Hand**

I am not sure why the two letters featured in your July issue felt the need to vent their political opinions in your publication. They seem better suited to The Columbus Dispatch than Buckeye Sports Bulletin. But they did write and you did feature them, so I felt the need to present an opposing viewpoint.

I would hope that Mr. Walrath's and Mr. Kile's thoughts are not reflective of the majority of BSB readers, but I suspect they are. Both touched on polarizing subjects in a polarizing time, and we do live in a state that played a large role in electing our current president. I just want to dispute a few of their statements.

First, Black Lives Matter is not a "hard-left political party." Political parties run candidates for political offices. BLM is an increasingly well-supported movement trying to right some long-standing wrongs in our society. They are making progress, and I salute our university for also supporting the achievement of those goals.

Mr. Walrath also writes that he doesn't need to know what a 20-year-old athlete thinks. That sounds like a repackaging of the "shut up and dribble" wisdom once featured on FOX News. Fortunately, LeBron James is not listening to either FOX News or Mr. Walrath. He is also convinced that kneeling during the playing of our national anthem is blatantly disrespectful. To me, a 26-year veteran of the military, there are obvious ways of disrespecting that song, but kneeling – generally a sign of reverence – is not one of them. I believe that most Americans now see the act for what is has always been, a silent plea for empathy and justice.

Finally, Mr. Kile laments the appointment of the uni-

versity's newest president, a highly respected and highly credentialed individual who happens to be a woman. I am not sure what marks her as a "far-left liberal" or why her political beliefs would have any bearing on the huge responsibility she's about to undertake. The Board of Regents surveyed the field and picked the best person available. I salute their choice. She has taken on a tough job. Let's all support her and trust that she will provide the university the leadership and the vision it needs in these troubled times.

Dave Clark Huron, Ohio

#### **Right To Your Opinion**

In response to Terry Walrath, Black Lives Matter is not a political party. BLM is not on the ballot and has no candidates that I know of. I agree with Gene Smith and his support of our athletes and their positions. In case you think I'm a liberal snowflake, I served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam era and I support the right of free speech, including your misguided letter.

In response to H. Richard Kile, I'm sure The Ohio State Board of Trustees conducted a thorough search for our next president. I support their decision and look forward to her guiding our great university into the future.

Dan Lease Fremont, Ohio

#### **Play While Protecting Players**

This could be a real answer for the Buckeyes and the Big Ten. I just don't have the contacts to get in front of the right people.

The current COVID-19 test presents a variety of challenges: The nasal swab is often painful; it takes a long time to get results, up to a week or longer; the test requires completing in a lab using complicated instruments. And while waiting for results, asymptomatic players and staff mingle everywhere while potentially infecting others. Then COVID-19 positive players and other people have to remain quarantined longer while waiting for results even after they have cleared the virus.

But with rapid, point-of-care testing, results are delivered on the spot in 20 minutes and will show if a player/staff/fan is infected with Coronavirus-2 without labs or long wait times. The rapid test can be deployed even at a stadium by lab techs, and results in 20 minutes show if a player/staff/fan is infected with Coronavirus-2. People who test positive can then be denied admission and quarantined, minimizing the potential of putting others at risk.

Utilizing widespread rapid testing would allow Ohio State and the Big Ten to play football today while protecting players, staff and fans.

Michael G. McNerey Heath, Ohio

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



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No. 1	Sept. 19	No. 5	Nov. 14
No. 2	Oct. 3	No. 6	Nov. 28
No. 3	Oct. 17	No. 7	Dec. 12
No. 4	Oct. 31	No. 8	Dec. 26

The 2021 schedule will be determined based on the Big Ten's winter or spring schedule.

The next issue (Sept. 19 cover date) will be mailed on Sept. 15.

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#### **OPINION**

## 'The Answer Man' Returns After Postponement

Longtime subscribers to BSB might recall that I wrote an annual column for the better part of 20 years called "The Spring Answer Man." It was published at the end of Ohio State spring football practice sessions and attempted to provide answers to the wide range of questions facing the Buckeyes as they prepared for the upcoming season.

The column was mothballed several years ago when Ohio State began to use its spring drills to split the atom, work on the NORAD launch codes or whatever sort of other secret government business it had been assigned. Why else would access to spring practice – used mostly to work on fundamentals such as blocking and tackling – be so severely curtailed when it comes to media coverage?

Now, with the recent revelations regarding the current state of college football with regard to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic producing many more questions than answers, it seemed like the perfect time to revisit "The Answer Man" to try to make some kind of sense as to what is happening and why.

Q. College football found a way to play through the Spanish flu epidemic in 1918. With all the scientific advances the world has made over the last century, why couldn't the Big Ten find a way to play in 2020?

A. First, college football wasn't a multibillion-dollar industry in 1918. Likewise, we didn't have the kind of grasp of virology and epidemiology that we do today. And we had not yet in 1918 become the lawsuit-happy society we are today. The cold and simple truth seems to be that some conferences and their member universities were unwilling to expose themselves to future litigation for endangering players' lives after receiving medical advice to do otherwise. What occurred in 1918 and what is transpiring today seems to be a useless apples-to-oranges comparison.

Q. Why did the Big Ten and Pac-12 decide against playing while the ACC, Big 12 and SEC are moving ahead with plans for the 2020 season?

A. The reasoning behind the decisions by the Big Ten and Pac-12 – as well as the Mid-American Conference and the Ivy League – to shut things down seems obvious. Each of those conferences cited ongoing concerns about COVID-19's impact on athletes' health, and their decisions are mostly (if not solely) about future liability. They don't want to be sued 10, 15 or 20 years from now for health-related problems that might by COVID-related.

Q. So are you saying that players in the Big Ten and Pac-12 are somehow more susceptible to the coronavirus than those who play in the other three conferences of the so-called Power Five?

**A.** Not at all. The ACC, Big 12 and SEC presumably have the same information as the Big Ten and Pac-12, yet as of this writing, they have come to different conclusions. However, those conclusions could face major roadblocks before the season actually gets under way.

On Aug. 19, after nearly a dozen of its players tested positive for the virus, Oklahoma and its head coach Lincoln Riley were, according to Sports Illustrated, "leaning against the sentiment of its brethren who want to continue with the season." And although other Big 12 schools are plunging ahead – some even delighting in the fact that a potential Oklahoma absence would enhance their chances for a title – a conference spokesman is on record as saying, "Evaluations are ongoing and will continue into the foreseeable future. If at any time our scientists and doctors conclude that our institutions cannot provide a safe and appropriate environment for our participants, we will change course."

Perhaps the best explanation came from

Oregon State president F. King Alexander. When asked what the Big Ten and Pac-12 are seeing that the SEC is not, Alexander replied, "I think, probably, reality."

And before you dismiss Alexander as some out-of-touch elitist from the Pacific Northwest, you might want to know he was born in Kentucky and raised in Gainesville, Fla., and he spent 6½ years as president at LSU.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Q. How can anyone be sure of what will happen 10, 15, 20 years from now?

A. Good question. If the pandemic has proved anything, it is that we cannot be sure of what will happen a month from now much less 10 or 20 years in the future. However, conference commissioners and university presidents – many of whom hold either medical or law degrees – must at least try to anticipate what might happen.

An attorney friend of mine opined about the discussions likely being held on college campuses between risk management officers, the general counsel's office and companies that provide liability insurance for the universities in the SEC, ACC and Big 12 – especially private schools such as Baylor, Duke, Vanderbilt and Wake Forest that are not protected by sovereign immunity defenses to lawsuits.

"The federal government values a life at around \$10 million for cost/benefit analysis purposes," he said. "But the cost of a disability claim? Much higher. Especially if you are talking about a world-class athlete. That is what probably spooked the Big Ten and Pac-12 – the idea of a plaintiff's lawyer from Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, D.C., New York suing on behalf of a disabled young man who had kidney, lung, brain or heart damage from COVID-19.

"After the Big Ten and Pac-12 joined the MAC and the Ivy League in canceling football, the stakes got higher for the SEC, ACC and Big 12. If a player becomes disabled after those leagues decide to press on, the lawyers will have Harvard, the Cleveland Clinic, Michigan, Northwestern, Stanford and UCLA doctors who advised the Ivy League, MAC, Big Ten and Pac-12 testify as to what everybody knew about the (virus) and long-term damage when the southern conferences 'recklessly and intentionally' ignored the facts and pushed the players (to play)."

And for those reasons, my attorney friend believes it's only a matter of time before the Big 12, ACC and SEC decide it will be in their best interests to also cancel the season. Stay tuned.

Q. There have been player petitions, parent protests and stadium rallies leading to rumblings that Big Ten commissioner Kevin Warren might consider reversing his decision to postpone the football season. Is that a possibility?

A. Anything is possible, I guess, but it seems clear that ship has sailed, and the sooner everyone comes to grips with Warren's decision, the better everyone will be.

There is no doubt the Big Ten has handled this thing poorly. From the failure to months ago have plans in place for every contingency to releasing a 10-game conference schedule only to cancel the season just six days later, the conference has not earned much respect or admiration. Likewise, Warren has done little to enhance his own image by issuing vague statements regarding how and why he came to the decision he made or by evading questions about

that decision altogether.

Q. Should Warren be fired? In addition to his wildly unpopular decision, reportedly made without a full vote of conference presidents, the commissioner seems extremely disingenuous since his son is a member of the football team at Mississippi State and apparently will play this season.

A. Seriously? Have we, as a society, become so entitled that we throw a hissy fit every time we don't get our way? I dislike wearing a mask in public as much as the next person, but I do so based upon the feeling that doctors and epidemiologists know more about the spread of the virus than I do. A great deal of my personal livelihood is tied to Ohio State football, and I don't like the fact that the Buckeyes are not going to play this fall. But again, I am under the assumption that Warren made his decision based upon facts and his assessment of those facts.

As for the commissioner's son playing at Mississippi State, that's another apples-to-oranges comparison. Powers Warren is a redshirt junior tight end for the Bulldogs, and so far, the SEC is moving ahead with plans to play. If Mississippi State was a member of the Big Ten, the younger Warren wouldn't be playing. Simple as that

Q. Ohio State players have indicated their desire to play this season, and head coach Ryan Day has backed that stance. Do the Buckeyes have any recourse against the Big Ten decision not to play? Could Ohio State put together a schedule on its own and still play in 2020?

A. Of course, the players want to play. That's why they come to Ohio State in the first place – to play football. But to answer the question, no, the Buckeyes have no recourse against the Big Ten decision. Ohio State is a member of the Big Ten and, as a member of that conference, is contractually obligated to do what the conference says. If the Big Ten says there will be no football in the fall of 2020, there will be no football in the

Q. Can the season be somehow salvaged by playing in the spring?

A. I don't see how. Again, anything is possible, but most of the best players who are draft-eligible will opt out of any kind of spring season to concentrate on the draft. And many current and former coaches have indicated that the wear-and-tear on players' bodies would simply be too great to ask them to play two seasons within one calendar year.

Q. It seems such a shame that it has come to this – and during a year when Ohio State had a legitimate chance to win another national championship.

**A.** I feel badly for the players and coaches across the nation who have put in the time, effort and sacrifice to play football this fall. But I think we need to keep our eye on what is most important, and that is the safety and well-being of every person who makes up the great game of college football.

As I am writing this, more than 175,000 lives have been lost to the virus in this country alone. Everyone who dies was at the center of some universe. Teachers, doctors, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, wives, husbands, brothers, sisters. My wife died suddenly more than five years ago, and it is still difficult to articulate the devastation I felt. So please spare me the uninformed opinions about how safe the college football season would be. If even one life is in danger – today, tomorrow or 20 years from now – that is one life too many to put in harm's way.

Ohio State football has been played for 120 years, and it will be played for at least 120 more. If giving up this one season in this most unusual of circumstances prevents the needless death of even one person, it will have been worth it.



#### Fall Athletes Granted Extra Season Of Eligibility

The NCAA Division I Council made a formal recommendation on Aug. 19 to give all fall athletes an additional year of eligibility, regardless of the number of competitions that they take part in. This comes as an extension of a recommendation put forth on Aug. 12, in which the council recommended eligibility extensions for athletes who "participate in 50 percent or less of the maximum number of competitions allowed in each sport."

The new blanket recommendation would cover all fall athletes, as "members now think more flexibility is warranted at a time when some conferences have postponed fall sports, some have canceled and others continue to move toward competing in abbreviated seasons."

In its list of recommendations, the council also called for the prohibition of legal rights

waivers regarding COVID-19 and of schools canceling or reducing scholarships for athletes who choose to opt out. It also stated that fall championships should be moved to spring, though that doesn't include the College Football Playoff, which is a separate entity. The NCAA board of directors approved the recommendations on Aug. 21.

"By providing clarity and removing that uncertainty from their minds is something that's going to be very beneficial as we move forward," said West Virginia athletic director Shane Lyons, who is the chair of the Football Oversight Committee. "Not having a normal season, not having that normal 20 games in soccer, or 28 matches in volleyball, and even football not sure what that season's going to look like, that was the No. 1 concern that the student-athletes had, was the eligibility piece.

"We have to look at what was right for the student-athlete for this situation," Lyons continued. "The eligibility piece, without question in my mind, this is a win for them. As administrators, as coaches, we're going to have to deal with a potential backlog on the back end, but I'm very confident that we've done it in other situations in a yearly basis. It may be greater numbers, but we can work through that with the normal attrition you have on your rosters, as well as discussions with athletes in the coming years about their playing time and their interest in potentially transferring to other institutions.

"It all works its way out. We had to look at what was in front of us today, and that's taking care of the athletes on our rosters right now."

Ohio State head coach Ryan Day spoke in favor of eligibility being extended if a season isn't played but said that it wouldn't be necessary if a spring season does happen.

"If we play in the spring, then it won't

#### **BSB Will Offer Football Coverage This Season**

For those who are concerned there will be no football coverage in Buckeye Sports Bulletin this season, BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz says there is no need to worry. In celebration of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 40th year of publication, there will be coverage of a 40th Anniversary football season throughout the fall.

"Each issue we will be looking back at the biggest game in our previous 39 years of publishing from the corresponding week with our original coverage of the big game," Moskowitz explained. "Because we will be publishing every other week this fall, there will generally be two games covered per issue. We will sometimes complement the original coverage with new features or analysis. We will also be posting reprints of additional stories on our BuckeyeSports.com website, generally as part of or popular Reprint Thursdays."

The 40th Anniversary season kicks off in this issue with the Buckeyes traveling to the Meadowlands to take on No. 5 Alabama in the 1986 Kickoff Classic. If the Buckeyes make the 40th Anniversary Playoffs, the season could stretch to as many as 16 games.

"We hope this feature helps fill the football void this fall and brings back memories of big games past," Moskowitz said. "It will also give readers a chance to enjoy the work of some of the outstanding writers who have worked at BSB through the years.

"I have to warn readers that because the season will feature the biggest games of the past 39 years, the competition will be tough and the Buckeyes may not post the gaudy record to which we have become accustomed lately.

"Enjoy!"

matter as much," Day said. "If we can get the season, then those guys, they played a season and then we move on. But if there's no season, then I think they should, yes."

Athletes who do take advantage of that extra year of eligibility who would have graduated following this season will not count toward the 2021-2022 scholarship limits, though no further comment has been given on whether scholarship limits will be extended or ignored to account for incoming recruiting classes.

"The financial aid of fall sport senior student-athletes who take advantage of the additional year of eligibility and extended clock should not count against team limits in 2021-22," the recommendation noted.

#### NCAA Sets Practice Limits For Conferences Opting Out

In that Aug. 21 meeting, the board of directors also approved guidelines for football practice this fall for teams in conferences that will not be playing. In the Division I Council guidelines announced on Aug. 19, the plan called for 12 hours of practice a week, with two required days off. The board signed off on that, adding comments in support of a modified and shortened practice schedule to keep teams together without overworking athletes.

"The Football Oversight Committee recommended that schools that have postponed their football fall competition and plan to compete in the spring of 2021 be allowed to participate in up to 12 hours of countable





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athletics activities per week, with two required days off," the council said. "No more than five of those hours can be skill instruction, during which footballs, helmets and spider pads can be used. No contact would be allowed, but strength and conditioning, team, position and individual meetings and film review would be allowed within the 12-hour weekly limit. A four-hour daily limit on athletics activities is included."

The approved limits serve as a compromise between the traditional in-season 20-hour practice weeks and the off-season eight-hour practice weeks. The model went into effect on Aug. 24 and will carry through Oct. 4 and will allow teams to conduct noncontact practices with only helmets and spider pads permitted at this stage.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported on Aug. 18 that the Big Ten is working on a schedule that would see teams start their seasons in early January, which would likely mean that a full preseason camp could start in late November or December.

Day spoke in support of a spring season with a similar timeline to what the Big Ten is planning for and mentioned the importance of getting ample practice time.

"I think that starting the first week in January would be the best way to go," Day said. "That way there is some separation between that season and the next season.

"We need to develop our young players. I'm worried about the game moving forward, if we're not able to get these guys developed. Missed a whole spring, now we've missed a whole preseason and these guys need to play some football."

While Day is looking for any chance to practice, other coaches in the Big Ten such as Penn State's James Franklin aren't satisfied with the 12-hour decision.

"I don't agree at all with the 12 hours," Franklin said. "That makes no sense that other teams are going to be having a season and we're only going to get to work with our guys for 12 hours. You've got voting from basically all the different conferences, and right now, the only people voting in the best interests of the Big Ten are the people from the Big Ten."

#### Wade Wouldn't Play In Spring Season

While the Big Ten is putting together plans to play a modified spring season, Randy and Gwen Wade, the parents of junior cornerback Shaun Wade, told Jacksonville TV station First Coast News that Shaun won't be participating.

"He's out of here, baby," Randy told the reporter when asked about whether his son would suit up for a spring season.

"I want him to be smart," Gwen said. "He could get hurt. Anything could happen. So, why play in the spring? I kind of voiced my opinion to him, talked to him. Pretty much, mama said, 'We're not playing.'"

Wade is projected as a top-10 pick in the 2021 NFL draft by most analysts, including ESPN's Todd McShay, who had Wade at No. 9 on his big board in May. Wade returned to Ohio State in part to increase his draft stock by playing as an outside cornerback, after spending the 2019 season on the inside.

"I want to do it to show I can play outside corner, I want to do it for the team and I want to win a national championship," Wade said in January. "I feel like we're going to have a great team next year, and I feel like we're going to be elite. I want to be part of it.

"It was tough, but at the end of the day I feel like I made the right decision for me."

Other Buckeyes with eyes on the first round of the upcoming NFL draft have remained quiet on the possibility of playing in the spring, though quarterback Justin Fields said on "Good Morning America" that he hasn't given it a ton of thought yet.

"Right now, I'm just taking it day by day," Fields said. "One thing I've learned over this whole process is that things can change daily. I've kind of just taken each day at a time, so I haven't really thought about that, but hopefully I'll come up with a decision if that happens and just pray about it, really."

While Fields is considered one of the top prospects in the draft, he also mentioned on GMA that he desperately wants the chance to play for the Buckeyes again.

"For me, it's really just for the love of the game," Fields said. "My love for Ohio State, my love for my coaches and my teammates."

Several coaches, including Alabama's Nick Saban and former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, have spoken critically of a potential spring season. Saban said that he worries if it would "become sort of a JV season with a lot of these juniors and seniors opting out."

Meyer spoke on Fox's "Big Noon Kickoff" that he thinks there's no chance of a spring season happening and expressed concern about safety and health for players who would have to play two seasons in one year.

"When you play 2,000 competitive reps, your body is not ready for contact in three months or two months," Meyer said. "It's not. I would not put those players in harm's way."

Day said at a press conference shortly after the announcement that the season would be postponed that he doesn't expect players to make a decision until a timetable is announced.

"I think Justin wants to see what the schedule is, and I think it's our job and we owe it to these guys to make sure that we put the schedule and put the plan (together) quickly here, so that someone like Justin can plan on his next year, his next few months," Day said. "Us having whether it's a spring season or a winter season or however that works out, I think we need to start this in at least the first week of January, and that will allow players like Justin the opportunity to play in the season and then also get himself ready for the draft. But I think we need to get on this right now and get these guys some answers."

Day also made a brief pitch toward players who are considering opting out of a spring season.

"Regardless of what happens, the NFL draft isn't going to be until next spring. So we have everything in place here in Columbus to help those guys," Day said. "We have the best strength coach in America (Mickey Marotti). We have all the resources here that they would need. We're going to test (for COVID-19) continually. We're going to give them meals. We're going to meet on football, watch film, and just get them better physically, football-wise, football IQ, all of the above. And then if by chance they do want to go ahead and go somewhere in the spring, they still have all spring to do that.

"In a normal cycle, they wouldn't be leaving anywhere till January anyhow. So to go somewhere right now, to me, doesn't make a lot of sense when you have everything you need right here. And I also don't think it's good for them mentally to go off somewhere and just be by themselves in isolation, which is kind of what you are when you go to those places. So we're going to provide them everything they need to get better and get stronger, because we have those resources here at Ohio State."

#### **Buckeyes Name Seven Captains**

While Ohio State won't be playing any football this fall, it did still take the opportunity to name team captains on Aug. 4. Linebacker Tuf Borland, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, right guard Wyatt Davis, Fields, linebacker Justin Hilliard, center Josh Myers and Wade were selected by their teammates to represent the

#### **BSB To Publish Every Other Week This Fall**

With the cancellation of the Big Ten football season Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be on an every-other-week publishing schedule this fall. The next issue of BSB, the Sept. 19 issue, will be mailed on Sept. 15, and the paper will continue to be published every other week through the holiday season.

"We will await clarification from the Big Ten before projecting the schedule beyond that," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz said. "If the conference elects to play a spring football schedule we will adjust our schedule accordingly. In the meantime, we will continue to provide interesting and informative issues of BSB.

"Watch your Buckeye Sports Bulletin or the Buckeye Sports.com website for updates on the publishing schedule."

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 any 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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Buckeyes as captains.

For Borland and Cooper, this marked a return to captaincy, while the other five players were first-time selections. Borland joins former quarterback J.T. Barrett as the second three-time captain in school history, and if he decides to use the NCAA's blanket eligibility extension to return for the 2021 fall season, he could be the first four-time captain in OSU history.

"I think this group is really impressive in so many areas," Day said of the captains. "When you look at their accomplishments in their young careers as a group, it's already really long and, like I said, very impressive."

While Ohio State's seven selections is certainly a crowd, Day told media on Aug. 4 that the Buckeyes easily could have had as many as a dozen total selections.

"I don't want to be overdramatic, but the leadership that we've had on this team, we probably could have had 11 or 12 captains," Day said. "I didn't want to make it over the top, but we have great leadership."

The head coach also mentioned that the captains were far from the only players leading Ohio State throughout the summer.

"We have good leadership from the freshman and sophomore class as well, but the upperclassmen ... just to hear them speak and just the way that they handle themselves like men is really impressive," Day said.

#### Saunders Denied Sixth Year Of Eligibility

A noticeable omission among the list of captains was former walk-on wide receiver C.J. Saunders, who was named a captain in 2019 as a fifth-year senior, prior to a leg injury that ended his season in fall camp. Because of that leg injury, Saunders and Ohio State submitted a request for a sixth year of eligibility, citing medical hardship.

On Aug. 4, as the captains were announced, Day also shared that the waiver request was officially denied, meaning that Saunders' college football career has ended. The NCAA determined that Saunders didn't meet the criteria for a medical hardship.

While his playing career has ended, Day confirmed that Saunders will remain at Ohio State and join the coaching staff in some capacity, either as a graduate assistant or as a member of the quality control staff.

"He's got coaching in his blood, and he

wants to be a part of it this season," Day said. "I just want to make sure publicly we all thank C.J. for everything he's done for our program. He's meant a lot to us and we're certainly disappointed he can't play this season, but we're excited he is still going to be a part of our program."

Saunders ends his Ohio State career with 27 catches for 294 yards and a touchdown.

#### **Eight Buckeyes Crack Senior Bowl Top 250**

Ohio State placed eight seniors on the Senior Bowl top 250 prospects list released on Aug. 20, tied with Alabama, Michigan and Texas A&M for the second most of any school, behind only Georgia, which has 11 players listed.

Running back Trey Sermon, tight end Luke Farrell, left tackle Thayer Munford, Cooper and linebackers Borland, Baron Browning, Hilliard and Pete Werner were all included. Senior Bowl director Jim Nagy clarified that the list includes only seniors, not graduation-eligible juniors.

"This list does not include 25-plus talented juniors on track to graduate and be eligible for the game," Nagy posted to Twitter. "Later this fall our roster construction process will include input from trusted contacts around NFL. Initial invites scheduled go out in early November."

Being on the list also doesn't serve as a prerequisite to being selected to a senior bowl team, it just serves primarily as a watch-list.

For players on teams that won't be playing the fall, the Senior Bowl may not mean a whole lot this year. Because the game is scheduled for Jan. 30, players preparing to play in a spring season wouldn't be eligible to play in the Senior Bowl, meaning that only players on teams that kick off in the fall and spring-season seniors who opt out will be available for the Senior Bowl.

#### Former OSU Fullback Payton Passes Away

Former Ohio State fullback Joel Payton passed away on Aug. 21 at the age of 61.

Payton, a product of Mentor, Ohio, played for the Buckeyes in 1977 and 1978 under head coach Woody Hayes, racking up 111 carries for 420 yards and 14 touchdowns, including

**Continued On Page 6** 



#### **Continued From Page 5**

four scores in a 46-0 win over Purdue in 1977. As a freshman, he led the Big Ten in scoring with 80 points.

"His freshman year, he was leading the nation in scoring in Woody's old robust offense," former Ohio State linebacker Iim Laughlin told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "Great guy. He was just like, 'Aw shucks.' Never said much. Real humble guy. He was a hell of a player. (His death) was a total surprise. I used to see him every Saturday (at football games) walking up to Section 17.3

Ohio State's media guide referred to him as the hardest-hitting halfback and a go-to runner on third downs, as well as a player who was "frequently not impressive in practice but a Saturday afternoon player.'

Payton began a career in the automotive industry following his days on the gridiron. He retired in March 2018 and shifted focus to his golf game, hitting his first hole-in-one last year.

Payton is survived by his wife of 28 years and a fellow Ohio State alum, Patty, as well as two children and four grandchildren.

#### **Former OSU Linebacker Pollitt Succumbs To Covid**

Former Ohio State linebacker and Franklin County Municipal Court Judge H. William Pollitt passed away at 72 on Aug. 13 from COVID-19 complications.

Pollitt filled a vacancy on the Municipal Court bench in 1996 after being appointed by former governor George Voinovich. He would remain in the seat for 24 years and was consistently rated one of the best judges on the bench in Columbus Bar Association polls.

Pollitt played linebacker at Ohio State under Hayes from 1966 to 1970 and served as the backup for Jim Stillwagon on Ohio State's 1968 national title-winning team. He served as a graduate assistant under Hayes in 1970 and 1971 before departing, at Hayes' recommendation, to attend law school at Capital University.

As Pollitt recalled in a 2013 interview with Akron Legal News, he found a fresh start at Capital, sparked by a desire to make Hayes proud because the football coach had served as

a key reference for Pollitt.

'My grades were good in law school for the first time," he said. "I started off fast and then kept it up because I was scared for a couple reasons: One, that was a whole different area for me, and two, Woody was counting on me because he put his word on the line."

He is survived by his wife, Lee, and two daughters.

#### **Bosa, Buckeye Rookies Nab New Contracts**

It was a big summer for former Buckeyes in the NFL, as Ohio State's rookies and former defensive end Joey Bosa all inked new contracts with their NFL teams. The rookies alone signed deals worth more than \$100 million combined, headlined by defensive end Chase Young, who signed a four-year contract with Washington worth \$34.5 million.

Cornerbacks Jeff Okudah and Damon Arnette signed big deals out of the first round as well, with Okudah signing on with Detroit for a four-year, \$33.5 million deal and Arnette with Las Vegas for four years and \$13.4 million.

Ohio State's lone second-round selection. halfback J.K. Dobbins, signed a four-year deal worth \$5.7 million with Baltimore. The trio of third-round selections - defensive tackle DaVon Hamilton (four years, \$4.8 million), guard Jonah Jackson (four years, \$4.7 million) and linebacker Malik Harrison (four years, \$4.5 million) - agreed to terms with Jacksonville, Detroit and Baltimore respectively.

Sixth-round pick safety Jordan Fuller signed with the Los Angeles Rams for four years and \$3.4 million, while wideout K.J. Hill (four years, \$3.3 million) and defensive tackle Jashon Cornell (four years, \$3.3 million) finished up the draft for the Buckeyes in the seventh round, signing with the Los Angeles Chargers and Detroit.

Bosa managed to topple that total on his own on July 28, when he agreed to a five-year, \$135 million extension with the Chargers that includes \$78 million fully guaranteed at signing and \$102 million guaranteed, the latter of which was a new NFL record. The 2016 first-round selection is now the second highest paid defensive end in the NFL, trailing only Cleveland's Myles Garrett.

#### **Six Buckeyes Named** In NFL Top 100

Ohio State was well-represented on the annual NFL Network's top 100 list, as voted on by NFL players. The Buckeyes had six players selected in the top 100, led by New Orleans Saints wideout Michael Thomas for the second season in a row.

After pacing OSU alumni at No. 13 on last season's list, Thomas made a large jump up to No. 5 on this year's list, following his record-setting 2019 campaign which had him haul in 149 receptions for 1,725 yards and nine touchdowns. At No. 5, Thomas is considered the top wideout in the game, just ahead of Arizona wideout DeAndre Hopkins at No. 8 and Atlanta's Julio Jones at No. 11.

Following Thomas among former Buckeyes

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As most of you know, the newspaper business these days is challenging in the best of times. BSB is now facing more challenges with recent events that have slowed the economy and the concerns of some readers about what the paper will look like now that football season has been postponed.

"Rest assured, we will continue to publish entertaining and informative issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, with or without football," BSB publisher Frank Moskowitz pledged. "But 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

A VIP subscription can easily pay for itself each year with special VIP discounts.

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was a bit of a surprise selection, with the younger of the two Bosa brothers, Nick, checking in ahead of his older brother at No. 17 after just one season in the league. That season, which saw him record 47 total tackles with 16 tackles for loss and nine sacks along with an interception, a forced fumble and two fumble recoveries, was enough to garner Defensive Rookie of the Year honors. The San Francisco standout is the top defensive end on the list.

Dallas halfback Ezekiel Elliott recorded his third top-25 selection in four years, coming in at No. 24, the fourth-best running back behind Christian McCaffrey, Derrick Henry and Dalvin Cook.

The elder Bosa, Joey, jumped 22 spots from his place on the 2019 list up to No. 34 after putting up 67 total tackles with 18 tackles for loss and 11½ sacks in 2019.

New Orleans cornerback Marshon Lattimore made his second appearance on the list in three seasons, slotting in at No. 76, while Pittsburgh defensive lineman Cameron Heyward rounded out the list for the Buckeyes at No. 84, his fourth selection to the top-100 list.

Ohio State's six players represented is tied for the second most of any school with LSU, trailing only Alabama, which had seven former players selected.

#### **Alex Boone Looking For Return To NFL**

NFL Network analyst Ian Rapoport reported on July 28 that former Ohio State offensive lineman Alex Boone is eyeing a return to the NFL after two seasons of retirement and has bulked

up to 315 pounds, just 15 pounds short of his former playing weight.

"Plot twist: Offensive lineman Alex Boone, who last played for the #AZCardinals in 2017 before retiring, is planning a comeback, sources say," Rapoport shared on Twitter. "He's been training, is finally healthy, and is back near his playing weight. Boone, by the way, is just 33."

Boone, who graduated from Ohio State after the 2008 season following four years as a starter, has been eyeing a comeback since March, when he told his cohosts on SKOR North, a Minnesota radio show, that he had garnered interest from several NFL teams in the spring.

"Now that there's mutual interest ... I absolutely need to go back and try to do this," Boone

With dozens of NFL players opting out of the upcoming season, roster vacancies could provide an opportunity for Boone to play one more time.

A former standout for San Francisco, which signed him as an undrafted free agent in 2009. Boone started 13 games for Arizona in '17 but dealt with nagging injuries to his legs and upper body that ultimately forced him into retirement

#### **NWCA Calls For Delayed Start**

The National Wrestling Coaches Association Division I Leadership Group published a letter on Aug. 13 which called for a delay to the start of the college wrestling season in response to the NCAA's decision to cancel all fall sport championships. The coaches, hoping to avoid





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#### From The Pages Of BSB

#### 35 Years Ago - 1985

Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce and Michigan leader Bo Schembechler found some common ground at the Big Ten's annual preseason meeting in Chicago. With Illinois and Wisconsin on probation for breaking NCAA rules, the two coaches agreed that neither school should have been eligible to compete for a conference title.

"If you're on probation, in my opinion, you shouldn't be eligible for the league championship," Bruce said. "I think that's a farce in my book. I don't see how you can be on probation and be a league champion.

"It seems to me that (the university presidents) can't even pull together and we (the coaches) can't pull together as to what the penalties are. But if you want to straighten it out, it can be straightened out. There's a right way to do things."

Schembechler agreed.

"I don't think a team that has gotten an unfair advantage, through a violation of the rules, should be considered a conference champion," he commented, "any more than they should be considered a national champion."

#### 30 Years Ago - 1990

Ohio State's John Cooper told media at the annual Big Ten Kickoff Luncheon that he was entering the 1990 season with high expectations for his experienced skill position groups but questions about a young defense.

With quarterback Greg Frey, fullback Scottie Graham, tailback Dante Lee, wideouts Bobby Olive and Bernard Edwards and tight end Jeff Ellis all returning, Cooper was hoping to field an explosive offense.

"Obviously, one of the biggest things in our favor is that we have a lot of people coming back at the skill positions," Cooper said. "On the other side of the coin, we have to replace four interior offensive linemen who were very good players for us. That's going to be hard to do. It may take us three or four ballgames to get that offensive line playing to the level we hope for."

On the other side of the ball, with only five starters returning on defense, Cooper did not mince words.

"My biggest concern all along has been how good we are going to be on defense. How good can some of those young players play? That's what we'll have to find out.

"We got better on defense in the spring. We're a little more aggressive. We have better talent. We're young, but we are more talented."

#### 25 Years Ago - 1995

Ohio State was ranked 10th in the initial USA Today/CNN coaches poll and 12th in the preseason Associated Press media poll prior to the 1995 season.

The Buckeyes had finished the 1994 season ranked ninth in the coaches poll and 14th in the AP poll after posting a 9-4 mark.

The top five teams in both polls were identical, with Florida State the consensus top pick, followed by Nebraska, Texas A&M, Penn State and Florida. Seven of Ohio State's 12 foes on its upcoming schedule were ranked in at least one of the two polls. They were Penn State (fourth in both polls), Notre

Dame (eighth in coaches, ninth in AP), Michigan (12th in coaches, 14th in AP), Washington (21st in coaches, 24th in AP), Wisconsin (22nd in coaches, 21st in AP), Boston College (23rd in coaches, 22nd in AP) and Illinois (24th in coaches, unranked in AP).

#### 20 Years Ago - 2000

Cooper reflected on Ohio State's 6-6 campaign in the 1999 season at the Big Ten Football Luncheon while stating that he felt improvement was on the horizon for the 2000 season.

"The six teams that beat us last year were pretty good football teams," Cooper said. "Sometimes it's not how good you are, but how good you are compared to who you're playing. Those six teams all went to bowl games and won those games.

"We lost to some good teams, but that is not an excuse. Maybe our talent level wasn't as good as it needed to be. Maybe we didn't coach as well last year. We turned the ball over too many times, we didn't play good enough defense, and our kicking game wasn't as good as it needed to be."

While Cooper was preaching the need to improve, he did single out one player, sophomore safety Michael Doss, as a potential star in the making.

"Mike Doss may be the next great defensive player at Ohio State," Cooper said. "I predict he will be an All-Big Ten safety, maybe an All-American, and he might even win the Thorpe Award someday."

#### 15 Years Ago - 2005

Ohio State determined that quarterback Troy Smith did not commit any NCAA infractions by working at a quarterback camp in June. The matter came to light in mid-July when it was reported that Smith had attended a football camp sponsored by Tennessee Titans quarterback Steve McNair.

NCAA rules allowed players to attend educational or charitable activities as long as they didn't miss class and had written permission from the school's athletic director.

Additionally, the rules prohibited players from lending their names or images to commercial products that appear on promotional materials for these events, and any money from these appearances must go to the educational or charitable agency.

Smith reportedly did not lend his name or image to the promotion of the camps, but the fact that he missed class to attend the camp was a problem.

However, Heather Lyke, Ohio State associate athletic director for compliance, said that the university could not find any violation of NCAA rules.

"We have spent nearly six weeks thoroughly reviewing all the information concerning Troy's employment at Steve McNair's camp," Lyke reported in a university news release. "After talking to a number of key people and collecting the necessary documentation, we were able to determine there were no NCAA rule violations."

#### 10 Years Ago - 2010

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith and Michigan athletic director Dave Brandon ruffled some feathers in mid-August

when they both opened the door to a change to the annual Ohio State-Michigan matchup. With divisional alignment coming to the Big Ten in 2011 that was expected to split up the two teams, Smith said that he wasn't sure if the Buckeyes and Wolverines would continue playing in the final game of the season as they had done since 1935.

"I know one thing for sure, that we're going to play (Michigan) every year," Smith said. "We may end up playing the last game of the year or not. I just don't know that yet."

A day later, Brandon made a similar statement on WTKA Radio in Ann Arbor.

"I think there's a distinct possibility that game will be a later game in the season but not necessarily the last game of the season," Brandon said. "That's simply because I don't think the coaches or players or the fans or the networks or anyone would appreciate that matchup twice within a seven-day period (if the two were to meet in the Big Ten title game)."

#### Five Years Ago - 2015

Ohio State made history when it received all 61 first-place votes in the Associated Press preseason poll on Aug. 23, making the Buckeyes the first unanimous No. 1 pick in the 65-year history of the AP's preseason rankings.

TCU was the second-ranked team in the preseason rankings with Alabama, Baylor and Michigan State rounding out the top five. Wisconsin was the third and final Big Ten team in the rankings, checking in at No. 20, while Penn State and Michigan also received votes.

This was the eighth time that Ohio State opened the season at No. 1 in the AP poll, but the Buckeyes had never won a national championship in any such season.

#### One Year Ago - 2019

Ohio State released more than 2,000 pages of emails and text messages related to the internal investigation into former head coach Urban Meyer and former wide receivers coach Zach Smith on Aug. 2, exactly one year after the university formed an independent working group to conduct said investigation. It was also coincidentally the same day the Buckeyes opened fall camp.

Many of the documents were heavily redacted in accordance with FERPA, HIPAA and attorney-client privilege rules, and what remained did not reveal much other than what was previously disseminated.

Text messages showed that Meyer raised concerns about Smith's job performance, specifically his wide receivers' routes after a 31-16 loss to Oklahoma in September 2017. Meyer then checked with director of player personnel Mark Pantoni in December 2017 to make sure Smith was working hard on the recruiting trail.

Smith was also absent from a meeting where the coaching staff was preparing for the Cotton Bowl against USC. "(We) need to make (sure) his guys play well," Meyer said in a text to an unknown recipient.

a similar fate for wrestling, announced that they would like to push the start of the season back to Jan. 1, 2021, as opposed to the traditional November start.

Along with several meetings of the leadership group, the NWCA surveyed all Division I head coaches asking for their thoughts on delaying the season and is reporting that 92 percent of polled coaches would favor the delay. Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan spoke on Aug. 13 in support of the delay and mentioned the possibility of a conference-only slate.

"I think we had thought as a group that we would likely go with a Big Ten schedule," Ryan said. "Be conservative and just start in January, end in March; a shortened season, and then hopefully the following year you go back to more of a normal college wrestling season."

While wrestling coaches are hoping to play it safe to avoid any sort of disaster that stops the season before it can begin, there are more questions than answers, especially in the wake of several conferences postponing the fall football season.

"Right now, I don't know what the worst-

case scenario is," Ryan said. "The worst-case scenario is, if you don't have football, is there a wrestling season? Are there going to be winter sports?"

#### Several Programs Hire New Assistant Coaches

Ohio State Olympic programs welcomed three new assistant coaches since BSB last published, kicking off on July 27 with the hire of Zoe Hickel as the newest women's hockey assistant coach. Hickel played her college hockey at the University of Minnesota Duluth from 2011-15 and twice served as a captain, leading the Bulldogs in goals as a senior.

After graduating, Hickel spent time professionally in the National Women's Hockey League, Canadian Women's Hockey League and the Swedish Women's Hockey League while serving as a member of the U.S. Women's National Team. She doubled as a coach and trainer for nearly her entire career.

"I am honored to be joining the women's hockey program at Ohio State," Hickel said. "The standard of excellence Coach (Nadine)

Muzerall has established, along with the commitment from her staff and the student-athletes, has proven that the Buckeyes will continue to be leaders in the women's game. I am at a perfect place in my life to use the experience and cultures I've absorbed over the years of elite play, coaching and world travel to give that back to our team and to embrace the opportunity to help make a difference in this next generation."

Two days later on July 29, first-year Ohio State rowing coach Kate Sweeney announced Taylor Ruden as Ohio State's new assistant coach.

"I am eager to welcome Taylor to the Buckeye family," Sweeney said. "I've known her since she was a student-athlete and have always been impressed with her level of character and work ethic. She's done a great job everywhere she's been, and I am excited for her to start working with our student-athletes."

Ruden, who rowed at Indiana from 2012 to 2016, comes to Ohio State by way of Bloomington, where she was an assistant under head coach Steve Patterson for the canceled 2019-20 season. Before returning to Indiana as

an assistant, Ruden spent three years in the same role with Navy and was part of a staff that won two Patriot League titles. She coached the First Varsity 4 boat to a 14th-place finish at the 2018 NCAA championships, a school best.

And on Aug. 19, men's lacrosse coach Nick Myers announced the addition of 2018 captain Bo Lori as the team's volunteer assistant coach. Lori spent the past two seasons in the same role at Virginia.

"Bo is a home-run addition to the coaching staff," Myers said. "He has walked in the shoes of our men and has experienced success as both a Buckeye and coach at UVA. We are thrilled to welcome him back home and have no doubt he will make an immediate impact."

Lori played 49 games for the Buckeyes from 2016-18, serving as a key part of Ohio State's defensive unit

"I am grateful for all the places the game of lacrosse has taken me, but there's no feeling like coming back home to the place I grew up," said Lori. "I am beyond excited to get to work in the scarlet and gray and serve the men of Buckeye lacrosse."

## Fields Leads Ohio State's Charge Against Decision

**Continued From Page 1** 

be the first calendar year in which the Buckeyes will not play a game since 1889. The program fielded its first team the following May.

"This whole year has been difficult, but we're going to stick together and work through it," Day said. "It hurts. I have a range of emotions – sad, angry, frustrated, all the above. I think our players do, as well. They feel like they've had something taken away from them.

"At the same time, we're really focused on what's next. That's really focusing on the spring and the spring schedule and working on the plans for moving forward in the fall and the different options that are available. You don't just wake up and everything is fine, not when you invested this much time and effort into it. It's not fine. It's devastating. It's going to take some time to heal, but as we keep putting one foot in front of the other, we're going to get going again."

Ohio State briefly explored options to play in another conference or against teams from other conferences this fall, but the Buckeyes quickly ended that pursuit due to contractual obligations to the Big Ten, ESPN and FOX Sports.

"That's not realistic," Smith said. "We've been a member of the Big Ten for a long time. We share the same values as our member institutions. We're in the Big Ten. We're not looking to play someone else outside our conference. We have a contract

that we're obligated to with our television partners, so that's not happening."

#### **Not Going Down Without A Fight**

On Aug. 16, just five days after the Big Ten announced its decision, Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields started an online petition calling for the Big Ten to immediately reinstate the 2020 football season. It received more than 200,000 signatures in the first 24 hours.

"My biggest message is to get them to realize how bad our players want to play and just the guys that have come back for their fifth year, coming back off of injury, I think we owe it to those guys the most," Fields said during an appearance on ESPN Radio's "Keyshawn, JWill & Zubin" the following morning. "I've just seen behind the scenes all the work that they've put in and how much they really care about it, and I also believe all the coaches and all the parents of players want us to play, and they're also safe with the guidelines Ohio State has set."

As someone who is widely projected to be a top-five pick in next year's NFL draft, Fields doesn't need to play another snap at the collegiate level to secure a multi-million-dollar contract. But he said he was fighting for his teammates who may not have the same opportunities ahead of them, in addition to his love for the game of football.

"Really, it's just my love for college football and my love for my teammates at Ohio State," Fields said. "I've seen the guys battle back from injuries and I've seen how



ANDREW LIND

FIGHT 'TIL THE END FOR O-HI-O – Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields started an online petition to push the Big Ten to immediately reinstate the 2020 season.



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hard our coaches have fought for us to play, so really just for them and just my love for the game."

While the Big Ten and Pac-12 have postponed fall sports, the ACC, Big 12 and SEC are forging ahead with their scheduled seasons. That lack of consistency was a big reason that Fields was hoping the Big Ten would reconsider.

"If the (other conferences) all think that we can have a season safely, then I don't see any reason why the Big Ten can't do the same," Fields said. "What we're doing at Ohio State is very safe. If we can get everybody on the same track in the conference, I think that will be a safe way to conduct a season."

"If we're sitting at home watching the other conferences play, I think that's going to hit somewhere down deep. Sometimes it doesn't hurt that much until you realize that you're not playing, but I think the players don't realize how much it's going to affect them once they see other conferences and other schools playing, and we're just sitting at home not doing anything."

Groups representing the parents of players at Illinois, Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska, Ohio State and Penn State all sent letters to Warren asking the conference to reverse course and to provide transparency into the decision. Fields echoed their desires, seemingly understanding the risks associated with playing amid the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think COVID brings a risk to everybody, but the question I would like to ask you is would we be more safe on campus playing football or off campus doing whatever," Fields said. "I think you can contract (the virus) anywhere, but me personally, I feel safer at the facility and around my teammates knowing they're going to get tested twice a week. I would have to argue back that my teammates are safer in the facility than out and about in the city."

#### **Moving Forward**

Despite the pleas from players and their parents, Warren announced in an open letter to the Big Ten community on Aug. 19 that the conference will not reconsider its decision to postpone fall sports.

"We thoroughly understand and deeply value what sports mean to our student-athletes, their families, our coaches and our fans," Warren said. "The vote by the Big Ten Council of Presidents and Chancellors was overwhelmingly in support of postponing fall sports and will not be revisited.

"The decision was thorough and deliberative and based on sound feedback, guidance and advice from medical experts. Despite the decision to postpone fall sports, we continue our work to find a path forward that creates a healthy and safe environment for all Big Ten student-athletes to compete in the sports they love in a manner that helps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protects both student-athletes and the surrounding communities."

While several factors contributed to the Big Ten's decision, the primary reasons include the number of positive cases across the country, the uncertainty surrounding the virus' long-term health impact and the inability to follow social distancing guidelines while playing contact sports.

"We understand the disappointment and questions surrounding the timing of our decision to postpone fall sports, especially in light of releasing a football schedule only six days prior to that decision," Warren said. "From the beginning, we consistently communicated our commitment to cautiously proceed one day at a time with the health,

safety and wellness of our student-athletes at the center of our decision-making process. That is why we took simultaneous paths in releasing the football schedule, while also diligently monitoring the spread of the virus, testing and medical concerns as student-athletes were transitioning to full-contact practice."

Warren's letter did not share the Big Ten's plans for a winter or spring football season. However, multiple reports have suggested the conference is aiming for an early January start, which would allow players to finish their season before the 2021 NFL draft that is scheduled for April 29 through May 1. In such a scenario, indoor NFL venues like Ford Field in Detroit, Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis and U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis could be used, provided the Lions, Colts and Vikings are not hosting playoff games.

"Moving forward, we will continue to build upon the framework that our medical experts have developed over the past five months while we take the opportunity to learn more about the virus and its effects," Warren said. "As we expand upon a plan to allow our student-athletes to compete as soon as it is safe to do so, we will keep our focus on creating protocols and standards set forth and established by our medical advisors that are responsive to the medical concerns evaluated by our council of presidents and chancellors.

"In evaluating winter/spring models, we will explore many factors including the number of football games that can reasonably be played from a health perspective in a full calendar year while maintaining a premier competitive experience for our student-athletes culminating in a Big Ten championship. The Big Ten Conference will continue to collect feedback from student-athletes, families and other constituents and remains in active discussions with its television partners regarding all future plans."

In a statement released approximately 20 minutes later, Smith reiterated Ohio State's desire to play football and other sports this fall but also acknowledged the athletic department has shifted its focus to a winter or spring schedule.

"While a decision has been made by the presidents of the Big Ten Conference to postpone the fall season, we view this as a temporary delay," Smith said. "As an athletics director at a Big Ten institution, I will always be respectful of our conference as it provides an outstanding platform for our student-athletes to pursue the championship experience. The health and safety of all our students, coaches and support staff is our highest priority.

"We are hopeful our medical experts will continue to learn more about COVID-19 and its effects, our society at large will respond to the requests to implement measures/protocols that contribute to a safe and healthy environment for all, and our research scientists will be successful in their quest to develop a vaccine."

Who will be playing for the Buckeyes during a potential winter or spring season remains very much up in the air, with players like Fields, cornerback Shaun Wade and others eligible to enter the draft. Concerns regarding eligibility and roster sizes remain, as well, especially with early enrollees set to arrive on campus in January.

For those reasons, Day is putting pressure on the Big Ten to come up with a plan as soon as possible.

"I think we need to get on this right now and get these guys some answers," Day said. "It has to be weeks. It can't be months."

#### **Twitter Reacts To Big Ten's Decision**

Leading up to and following the Big Ten's decision to postpone the football season on Aug. 11, multiple Ohio State players and coaches took to Twitter to speak their thoughts on the situation. Many student-athletes voiced their feeling of safety within the Ohio State facilities, while also saying that they want to play football this fall.

"There's been too much work put in!! #WeWantToPlay"

- Junior quarterback Justin Fields, Aug. 9

"Looking back at all the work I've put in through the years and seeing my senior year gone to injury and now seeing all of this stuff going on. Man I want a season to show everyone the player I am and have the senior year I earned and worked for."

- Fifth-year senior defensive end Jonathon Cooper, Aug. 9

"I feel for all college athletes right now. I hope their voices are heard by the decision makers. If this happened a year ago I may be looking for a job right now."

- Former Ohio State and LSU quarterback Joe Burrow, Aug. 10

"I ain't come back to have no season.... we have a voice and we want to play!!!!!! #IWantToPlay"

- Junior cornerback Shaun Wade, Aug. 10

"God has a plan during this time of uncertainty all you can do is have faith! We all chose to come back to school during this pandemic and were all given the option to stay home. We came back to school for a reason and that is to play the game we love! #WeWantASeason"

- Junior guard Wyatt Davis, Aug. 10

"Years of work will come down to votes from Presidents and Execs who haven't even witnessed our protocols and safety measures with their own eyes. Our guys are safe. #WeWantASeason"

- Sixth-year senior linebacker Justin Hilliard, Aug. 10

"A lot of sweat has been put in, and bonds were built over these last 2-3 months. Since returning we have taken all the right precautions, and the results can attest to that. What changed the last 2 days? Regardless of when, where, and how #IWantToPlay!"

- Sophomore wide receiver Garrett Wilson, Aug. 10

"I wish everyone could see our players over these last 3 months, the last 3 days, and especially the last few hours. Never been so proud of a group of men!!!!! Ridiculous leadership, unbelievable energy and relentless fight!!!! All in order to play the game they love!! BUCKEYES"

- Strength and performance coach Mickey Marotti, Aug. 10

"Our players deserve the opportunity to choose whether they play or don't play. We will play anyone, anywhere. We don't care who it is. #WeWantASeason"

- Wide receivers coach Brian Hartline, Aug. 10

"If there's anything certain about this time it's that I know I chose the right school. Through everything @OSU\_AD (athletic director Gene Smith) @ryandaytime (Ryan Day) and everyone else on staff had our back and fought for our best interest. Can't say the same for others on the outside and that's the sad truth #GoBucks"

- Junior tight end Jeremy Ruckert, Aug. 11

"They didn't want to see Ohio State win the Natty."

- Former Ohio State cornerback Jeff Okudah, Aug. 11

"Our players have been absolutely amazing through this entire time. I'm in awe of their commitment to one another, our team, & our university. They have unbelievable character and a warriors heart. They truly deserve to play! #anyoneanytimeanywhere #WeWantToPlay #Fight"

- Defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, Aug. 11

"I could not be more proud of Justin Fields and I support his efforts. He loves Ohio State. He loves his teammates. We ask our players to be leaders and he's leading. I'm honored to coach him and this team. #FIGHT."

- Head coach Ryan Day, Aug. 17

"I'm not a PR expert... BUT it seems silence isn't the best course of action right now. #WeWantAnswers #WeWantToPlay"

- Assistant athletic director Mark Pantoni, Aug. 17



## Fields, Lawrence Leading Push For Player Solidarity

By PATRICK MAYHORN Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

The beginning of August and the rapid approach of a cobbled-together college football season in the face of a pandemic sparked the rise of two distinct movements among college football players. The first of the two saw players from the Pac-12 release a unified statement on Aug. 2, including an extended list of demands, under the title "#WeAreUnited."

Specifically, the letter called for freedom to opt out of the season over health concerns, the prohibition of COVID-19 agreements that waive liability, and player-approved safety standards enforced by a third party.

Health was far from the only concern on the list, though it did serve as the spark for a player-led organization effort. As Cal senior Jake Curhan explained to ESPN's Bomani Jones, the list of demands expanded as more players became involved with organization efforts.

"When we first got started, our only thought was coronavirus," said Curhan. "We started talking to some of our teammates, and they said, 'What about the Black Lives Matter issue? We don't want to detract from their issue.' The more we started talking with them, it became clear the two were the same issues."

To accommodate, the letter goes on to include several demands related to racial justice, including the creation of a "permanent civic-engagement task force made up of our leaders, experts of our choice, and university and conference administrators to address outstanding issues such as racial injustice in college sports and in society."

It also makes a call for 2 percent of conference revenue to be "directed by players to support financial aid for low-income black students, community initiatives, and development programs for college athletes on each campus" and for the start of an "annual Pac-12 Black College Athlete Summit."

The biggest demands, and the most significant part of the letter comes at the end, under a subhead titled "Economic Freedom and Equity" where the players ask for guaranteed medical expense insurance for six years after leaving college and name, image and likeness rights. The letter ends with a call for the Pac-12 to "distribute 50 percent of each sport's total conference revenue evenly among athletes in their respective sports."

If the list of demands isn't met by the conference?

"Due to COVID-19 and other serious concerns, we will opt out of Pac-12 fall camp and game participation unless the following demands are guaranteed in writing by our conference to protect and benefit both scholarship athletes and walk-ons," the letter reads.

On Aug. 5, players of the Big Ten released a similar statement, titled "#BigTenUnited," which made demands for greater health procedures, though it was lacking the racial justice, player compensation or opt-out threat of the Pac-12 letter that had garnered headlines. Still, it was an almost unprecedented push for solidarity all the same, the likes of which have rarely – if ever – been seen before in college football.

A few days later on Aug. 9 and into Aug. 10, a second player-led movement shot into the limelight. As rumors swirled about the Big Ten and Pac-12 planning to postpone the upcoming fall football season, which both would do on Aug. 11, college football players around the country—including Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields and Clemson's Trevor Lawrence—shared a new hashtae, stating

simply "#WeWantToPlay." Like the letters, it gained national traction and became a rallying cry for coaches and players alike hoping to play a season this fall.

Later that evening, after more than 72,000 tweets were posted using the rallying cry, Fields, Lawrence and other recognizable names such as Oklahoma State halfback Chuba Hubbard, Alabama halfback Najee Harris and Oregon offensive tackle Penei Sewell shared a graphic created by Washington State defensive lineman Dallas Hobbs.

In the new letter, which featured the logos of each of the five power conferences, the two movements combined and released a concise list of demands. In that list, the players stated that they want to play a season, with universal health and safety procedures and assured eligibility for all players whether they play or opt out. At the bottom, it calls for something that may change the landscape of college football forever.

"Use our voices to establish open communication and trust between players and officials; ultimately create a college football players association," the graphic reads.

Hobbs was at the forefront of the Pac-12 letter as well and told KREM in Spokane, Wash., that the unification of the two movements came about in just the span of a couple of hours, over a group chat and a Zoom call.

"It really started out as a group chat," Hobbs said. "We (the players) just talked about some conversations that people had and really what #WeWantToPlay and #WeAreUnited had in common. That's kind of what we talked about and said, 'Hey, we can't let the media and we can't let people divide us when we're really working for the same goal.' We all want to play, but we're just coming at it from a different side of things."

The rapid organization and the call for something at least resembling a college football players union sent shockwaves through the sport. Clemson head coach Dabo Swinney told reporters that he would be supportive of a players association, but not a players union.

"I think it would be great to have a players association. That's different from a union, I'll say that," Swinney said

While college football players have almost unilaterally rallied around the movement, the reaction elsewhere has been one similar to Swinney's. Bleacher Report's Matt Hayes posted that an anonymous athletic director said that unionization efforts are a far bigger deal than they appear from the outside.

"You and your colleagues are chasing the wrong story," the AD told Hayes, as reported in an Aug. 8 tweet. "The virus alone is enough to stop the season. But presidents are terrified of players organizing. It's the paradigm shift to change amateur sports."

While a push on this scale has not been seen before, union talk is not new to college football. In 2014, Northwestern quarterback Kain Colter attempted to unionize the Wildcats, though his request was eventually denied by the National Labor Relations Board, citing issues with Northwestern's status as the only private school in the Big Ten, and the fact that the overwhelming majority of Division I FBS schools are public, leaving them outside of the NLRB's jurisdiction.

"In the decision, the Board held that asserting jurisdiction would not promote labor stability due to the nature and structure of NCAA Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS)," the NLRB wrote. "By statute the Board does not have jurisdiction over state-run colleges and universities, which constitute 108 of the roughly 125 FBS teams.

"In addition, every school in the Big Ten, except Northwestern, is a state-run institution. As the NCAA and conference maintain substantial control over individual teams, the Board held that asserting jurisdiction over a single team would not promote stability in labor relations across the league."

In this attempt, just over five years after Colter was denied, the differences between public and private schools will be one of several major hurdles to getting any formal recognition for a players union. Chief among them is another crucial component of that case: Employees can start unions, and currently, college athletes are not legally identified as employees.

"It was ruled in (the Colter case) that college football players, college athletes, aren't employees of the university," Columbus union organizer Luke Ward told BSB. "So what that means is because they're not employees they're not allowed to form a labor union under the National Labor Relations Act. So that is the biggest hurdle, I think, to the players ultimately forming a union. They first need to be recognized as employees. (However), I think oftentimes these court cases go with the landscape of the times and I think times have changed in the last six years."

Another issue to clear is that of the national nature of college football and, again, the differences between public and private schools. Every state has different laws regarding unionization, organized labor and collective bargaining when it comes to public employees, which players at public schools would be considered if they are officially recognized as employees.

"This is another tricky thing under the National Labor Relations Act," Ward explained. "Public employees are governed on a state-by-state basis. So Ohio has a collective bargaining law and there are different collective bargaining laws varying state by state, and that law governs state employees. So the difference here between a college football players union and an NFL players union or the NFL Players Association (is that) that's a private body, so that's governed by the National Labor Relations Board and so they're able to have one cohesive union."

Even if the employee threshold is crossed, employer would have to be determined, and at this point, it's difficult to say if a court would rule that the individual schools, conferences or the NCAA at large would be considered the employer.

"The tricky part about this is if we get to a point where college football players are determined to be employees, then the question becomes who is their employer?" Ward said. "Is their employer each individual institution? Because if Ohio State is the employer for (its) players, then they're bargaining with Ohio State, and there would have to be an Ohio State players union and you'd have to duplicate that team by team.

"Now if you could make the argument that the Big Ten Conference is in fact the employer of these athletes or the NCAA is the employer of these athletes, then you could go through a National Labor Relations Board organizing effort and form a union that way. Then you would have either a Big Ten players union, SEC players union, Pac-12 players union, et cetera, or just one single college football players union. So the big question if they were determined to be employees would be who's their employer."

That isn't to say that not being officially recognized as employees would be a death knell for the unionization efforts, just that players may have to look toward more aggressive and less official action.

"There were unions before they were cod-

ified or legally recognized," Ward said. "In the late 1800s there were unions. Even if they weren't legally recognized, they still were able to collectively bargain. It was a little bit more of a 'withholding of labor' situation then, where employees would just strike and not come into work and force management to bargain with them.

"So that's a method. Those are more militant methods, but ultimately the players, they hold all the cards. Because if they refuse to play, everything dries up for these universities and the money that they have coming in goes away. To say that these players who generate millions if not billions of dollars for these universities and these conferences are not employees, I think is a little naive. They're the ones (making) this money. It's not just falling out of the sky because the coaches are such great guys. There's a product on the field, and the players are the product."

The other option, the one that Swinney and several other coaches have come out in support of, is a players association, which actually better matches the wording of the original graphic but doesn't likely accomplish what players are hoping for in creating a unified force. An association would allow players to avoid the hurdles of public vs. private and of being defined as employees, but it could also take the teeth out of the movement.

"There's been some stuff floated about players association vs. union, and the way I would say (it is that) all unions are associations, but not all associations are a union," Ward explained. "The NFL Players Association is a union, but when I hear things like Dabo (Swinney) in an interview talking about how he'd like to see players have a voice, but that's different from a union. I would be hesitant hearing language like that. Because when you're talking about a players association and not a union, think of it like this: There are student government bodies, and they're effectively an association. They can advocate for positions, but they don't have to be listened to, they don't have to be bargained with. The presidents can say, 'OK, those are nice concerns about the students, but we're going to shut the door now and we're going to make the decisions.'

"If they're not legally recognized employees, an association is a nice in-between step, but ultimately there's no legally binding authority there to guarantee that they have the ability to collectively bargain over these things, over the concerns that the players all tweeted."

Be it union, association or anything in between, the first steps are already starting for what could be a seismic shift if the players are successful. A collective bargaining unit of any sort for college football players would likely bring with it massive changes to the revenue structure of the sport and could ultimately spell the end of collegiate amateurism.

For players looking to make that change, the coming weeks and months will be as crucial as any, not just for looking to jump the legal hurdles but, more importantly, to present a truly unified workforce to the conferences, to the NCAA, and to the courts.

"The only way an organizing effort is successful is when it builds solidarity among the workforce," Ward said. "So that's the biggest next step. This has to be something that is widely felt, widely believed, and that has wide buy-in from the athletes at the institutional level and at a conference and NCAA level. There has to be unified buy-in from these athletes who are saying, 'These are the things that we want to fight for to benefit all of us.'

"If you don't have buy-in and you don't build strong solidarity, you won't get off the ground."

## Lack Of Season Hurts Title-Threatening Buckeyes

By WYATT CROSHER Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ryan Day's first full season as a head coach was mostly a success. Taking over for one of the most successful coaches of all time in Urban Meyer, Day led Ohio State to a 13-0 start, winning every game by double digits and 11 of them by 24 points or more.

That gave Day a 16-0 head coaching record coming into a College Football Playoff semifinal matchup against Clemson. In a back-and-forth game that had the Buckeyes storm out to a 16-0 lead, the matchup ultimately ended in Day's first loss, with OSU falling 29-23 to the Tigers.

"It's tough to go into a locker room with such a great team who played their hearts out and not be able to celebrate a victory," Day said following the loss on Dec. 28. "But our guys played hard. I'm certainly feeling a range of emotions right now: proud, sad and certainly angry.

"I thought our guys left it all on the field. We played hard and played bold. But certainly there were a lot of plays in that game that didn't go our way. It's very hard to swallow right now."

In a typical offseason, the returning players from Ohio State's 2019 team would likely come in hyper-motivated, ready to avenge their loss and make a serious run for a national title.

The roster seemed prepared for it as well, with quarterback Justin Fields returning as a junior and cornerback Shaun Wade choosing to return instead of entering the 2020 NFL draft. Wade was also not alone, with three key members of Ohio State's offensive line – guard Wyatt Davis, tackle Thayer Munford and center Josh Myers each coming back instead of taking their chances at the professional level.

Along with them, defensive end Jonathon Cooper, after missing games at the start of the season due to an injury, elected to play in only four games in 2019 to redshirt and return for a fifth year.

But nothing about this offseason was typical, and after COVID-19 changed the course of an entire summer, it also took away the football season for the rest of the year when the Big Ten announced on Aug. 11 that all fall sports will be postponed until 2021.

Now, the team that seemed to be in a prime position to hoist the trophy at the end of the season may not be able to play as a unit at all.

"I'll get emotional if I start thinking about it," Day said. "As a player, you work your whole life, and as a coach, you work your whole life for an opportunity to coach a team like this. This team is special. It's special because it's talented; it's special because it has leadership; it's special because of the character. It could have been a once-in-a-lifetime team."

Even with 10 Ohio State players getting drafted, two of whom were in the top three selections in defensive end Chase Young and cornerback Jeff Okudah, the Buckeyes were in a strong place with their talent heading into 2020.

According to ESPN's Bill Connelly, Ohio State was returning the 93rd-most production from the season prior. That number seems low compared to the rest of Division I, but it is better than both Clemson (96th) and LSU (127th), the two teams that made the national title game a season ago.

That, along with that extra motivation after coming so close a year ago, made this 2020 group an improvement over what was already a dominant team in 2019, at least according to Day.

"Certainly the team last year I'll never for-

get. It was my first time as a head coach, and what they did was awesome, but there was just something about this team that had it," Day said. "They came back hungry after their last game on the field, they were determined, and this quarantine, this virus was not going to get in their way."

But the virus did get in their way, even with no wrongdoing of their own.

Despite a vocal outpouring by players, parents, coaches and fans from Ohio State, there will be no fall football season, leaving everything that the 2020 team was hoping to accomplish in limbo.

Cooper is one of the players who stands to lose the most from a lost season after sitting out the Big Ten Championship Game and College Football Playoff semifinal in order to redshirt.

That added level of desire to play came out in a speech he gave to the players as fall camp began, which was posted on Twitter by the Ohio State football account.

"Just me personally, when I think about my five years here and how much I sacrificed to try and have a healthy year, healthy season, to get through it and do what I want to do with you all, like this is easy for me, this is an easy sacrifice," Cooper told the team. "I can wear a mask; I don't have to go out and see anybody. I live by myself, I'm cool, I don't have to be around anybody. This is one of the easiest sacrifices I have ever had to make here. This is nothing to me because of all the years and the work that I put in with Coach Mick(ey) Marotti, Coach Day, Coach (Larry) Johnson and working here and being here.

"Me getting hurt last year and not being with you brothers and not being at every single game, that hurt me way more than me not being able to go out to the club, me not being able to see my friends – that means nothing to me. The only thing that matters to me is you all being safe and this season, that's why I'm here, that's why I'm back. I don't care about wearing a mask; I don't care about social distance. And I know some of the young guys they might not get it, but for me, being a fifth-year senior here, all the work I've put in here, this is an easy sacrifice. And all I ask you all is for you all to think about that too.

"When you all are out there at the club, you're not just putting yourself at risk, you're putting the team, the coaches, and my season at risk, and I can't have that, man. But I love you boys and just be safe, really just be safe, be smart, because in order for us to have a season that's what we have to do."

But the speech wasn't enough to change the decision made by the Big Ten, and the eventual decision to postpone the season for the remainder of the year left Cooper, as well as many of the veteran members of the team, stunned.

"I think everybody, including myself and a lot of the seniors, were just shocked," Cooper said in an interview with ESPN. "We didn't know how to react. You always knew it was a possibility, you always knew that it was coming, but when you actually hear it and you have to accept it for what it is, it's different. And it was just completely silent, and I think everybody was kind of shocked."

Cooper, who was named a two-time captain by his teammates prior to the decision to postpone, is not the only player who made the decision to return, but he is the one who actively missed games in 2019 to return for this upcoming season.

Because of that difficult decision, Day said he and Cooper have had "a lot of hard conversations," and that he was excited to see just how much the defensive end developed in the time off

"We've had multiple conversations, and I told him that I can't explain why this is happening to you," Day said. "I shared some of my life experiences with him, and that life can take you to your knees. And this sport can take you to your knees, and it has to me, but it will make him stronger for it in the end. The good news is he has a really bright future, and that he's healthy and he's going to have a bright future no matter what, and he's an unbelievable young man who's had an impact on this program. So this is just one of those things, another obstacle that he has to push through and push forward."

Ohio State might not get its chance at revenge in the same way that the team was hoping for, but the hope for a season is not gone yet. In the initial statement made by the Big Ten, it said "the Big Ten Conference will continue to evaluate a number of options regarding these sports, including the possibility of competition in the spring."

But even with a spring season, Ohio State might not be the "once-in-a-lifetime" team that Day saw this offseason. Shaun Wade's father, Randy, has already made it clear that his son will not play in a spring season. Fields told "Good Morning America" that he has not yet thought about that outcome. Cooper told ESPN he was unsure of what the future holds.

"I wish I could say. I honestly do. I don't know what I'm going to do right now, at this point in time," Cooper said. "This is the second time, two years in a row that my season has been somewhat taken away from me without my control, and that's a lot. It sucks. So I am just trying to figure out what is the best route for me and my family right now. I'm just trying to listen and get my emotions in check, because once again, this just happened yesterday, and I'm still coming to terms with the fact that I'm not able to play right now."

Football won't be played in the Big Ten for 2020, and it might not be played at all until the fall of next year, all of which was caused by a problem out of Ohio State's control. Still, if the Buckeyes don't get to play with the same roster that left the Clemson game hungry for revenge, it will be a major opportunity missed for one of the most talented teams in the country.

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## Media Reacts To Postponement Of Football Season

By WYATT CROSHER Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

With the Big Ten's decision to postpone all fall sports, including football, for the remainder of 2020 came a variety of opinions on everything from the decision to the aftermath to if football should be played at all before the fall of 2021.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out to six writers from the Ohio State football beat to discuss what they thought of the Big Ten's decision, how this will affect the Buckeyes moving forward, and if the conference will be able to play in the spring.

#### Colin Hass-Hill Eleven Warriors

BSB: When the Big Ten schedule was released and Ohio State was practicing, what were your expectations about the fall season at that point?

Hass-Hill: "I think when they released the schedule, I really had to re-evaluate where I stood. Because up until that point, it was sort of a 'prove it' thing to me where I was just waiting for them to actually show that they are going to take the necessary steps to getting on the runway to even play a season.

"And once they did that, I sort of thought if they can stay the course, there's a way to actually play, and I think you see that with the other three conferences that are still going to play. And it falls apart in what was it, 24 to 48 hours? And I think on that Saturday, maybe it was two or three days after they released the schedule, it seemed pretty obvious that things were rolling backward and this thing wasn't actually going to happen.

"Once they released the schedule, to me, it felt like they were really taking strides. And all of a sudden, I thought there is a real chance, and I hadn't really felt that way for about a month. I just thought that, at some point, they were going to realize that they weren't going to play football this fall, and then they decided to go for it. And it wasn't like I was 100 percent certain they were going to play football this fall by any means, but I really believed that was an important step in the process."

BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled this situation overall, and what do you think they could have done differently to avoid the negativity they've received?

Hass-Hill: "I don't even know if that decision is the wrong decision. I think that will just be proven by time. I think everything but the decision is what they bungled. I think the communication from the Big Ten to the schools, and then from the schools to the parents, was an abomination.

"You see people speaking out, like Minnesota's president and Penn State's AD, in a way that typically in the Big Ten that doesn't usually happen. And when you have people that powerful talking about what happened behind the closed doors and making it seem like an even greater mystery, and the fact that we still haven't heard from Kevin Warren nearly a week after the cancellation happened, other than a BTN interview where he dodged a bunch of questions and didn't have great answers, I think that's a problem.

"And you compare that to the transparency out in the Pac-12 of why they made the decision, and it's such a stark contrast

to me. So I don't know that the decision was wrong, but I think basically everything else along the way was wrong and it could have been handled better.

"I think that it's tough for Kevin Warren to come in and have this be the first thing that he deals with as the commissioner. For him to deal with that in his first year is difficult, but you were hired for a reason. You were hired because there are these difficult situations, and I think that whether or not the result is the right one and the correct one and the safe one, you have to have better answers and better transparency, at least with the people who matter in this."

BSB: Do you think at this point that the other conferences will play in the fall?

Hass-Hill: "No, I don't think so. It's 2020, again, so good luck trying to actually make a real prediction. But I think at some point over the next month or month and a half, they all reach the same conclusion. And I do think it will take one to pull out, and then the other two will follow. I really do think that that's the case.

"When you have so many schools involved, and three conferences, I just think the odds are that one of them is going to pull out. Then there's going to be a domino effect. It sounds great for the SEC to say it means more, but I'm not sure you want to be the only conference in the country playing football when everybody else is sitting on the sidelines for safety reasons. That seems like significant risks that even the SEC wouldn't take."

BSB: If those other conferences did play in the fall, what do you think the effect would be on the Big Ten?

Hass-Hill: "I think that's a fascinating question that, I'll be honest, I think a lot of hard-core Ohio State fans are a little bit ahead of themselves with worrying about that and thinking that this is the death penalty or something crazy. Like Ohio State is Ohio State, the Big Ten still has football powers in Michigan and Penn State, historical programs. They have solid programs, Michigan State and Nebraska and whatnot.

"And I fully understand that this would be a bad thing for the Big Ten football-wise if they played. Unless of course, there was an outbreak and all of a sudden something happened in the other three conferences. But if, in this world where they play football and get through it without any outbreaks or anything else, then I think it would hurt them for a recruiting cycle or two but I think they would recover from it. I don't think that this is something that would harm them forever."

BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten will play football in the spring?

Hass-Hill: "Yes, I do. I think that one way or another, it will happen. It will be interesting to see if Ryan Day can actually make his plan happen. Because like everybody had said, nobody in the Big Ten had really discussed spring or winter plans until they really made the decision.

"Then shortly thereafter, Ryan Day comes out with a plan of his own. And then Jeff Brohm comes out and has a plan that is to start two months after Ryan Day's plan. I think it will be fascinating to see if Ryan Day and Ohio State can throw their weight around and get it to start in the first week of January or at least early in January. But I think it will happen. I think there's too much money on the line

to not try to make it happen.

"I think you really do have to start this thing early in order to make the 2021 fall schedule as normal as possible, which is why Ryan Day's plan is so intriguing. But I do think one way or another, they're going to play football in the spring. For some reason I feel that fairly strongly."

#### Joey Kaufman The Columbus Dispatch

BSB: When Ohio State was starting practice a couple of weeks ago and the Big Ten released an official schedule, what were your expectations about the fall season?

Kaufman: "Well, I think when they released that conference-only schedule, Gene Smith put it well when he came out with a statement that said basically that this was not a guarantee that they were going to have a season. I think it was a case where you keep marching up to a season until you can't. You keep putting your left foot in front of your right foot and you see what happens. I think what surprised me, probably surprised most people, was that it got scrapped six days later. So I think, maybe, that was going to be the eventual outcome, but I don't think I expected it to be so close together."

BSB: Were you surprised by the decision to postpone?

Kaufman: "I was, basically by the timing because they decided to postpone after less than a week of fall camp and before teams even got to a padded-practice situation. So I guess, in my mind, the way the season was going to blow up or fall apart was that you would get multiple situations like what we saw at Rutgers, where you had 20-plus people in quarantines. I thought that was going to happen in fall camp once they started tackling and doing 11-on-11s and closer contact, because a lot of the testing numbers were great or pretty decent at the Big Ten schools in the summer. Well, sure, because you're in a weightlifting group of 9-10 people.

"I think there was always going to be the risk, when you started practice, of getting spread of COVID that way, or when the students come back to campus. So I guess I expected to see more outbreaks that were going to then cause the Big Ten to postpone. I was surprised the Big Ten preemptively canceled rather than canceling as the result of some outbreaks."

BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled the situation?

Kaufman: "I feel like most schools are going to end up going the way the Big Ten's gone. I think where you'd have to knock them down some grade levels is... 'OK, they canceled the season, but why?' And I think in large part, they haven't really explained their rationale the way other conferences have. When the Pac-12 canceled their season, they put out a 12-page document, talking about how community spread is too high in the Pac-12 states. It's very difficult to keep a team healthy. The community spread in the surrounding city is high, so that was the reason the Pac-12 cited.

"They cited reasons about testing being low, not being able to test players on a game day, and having to test three days early, and some of those difficulties made it tough for them to have a season. And I think the Big Ten hasn't really explained in detail or in

depth why they arrived at the decision that they did. They haven't put out any sort of literature, medical literature, medical data really explaining that decision. So I think the Big Ten, if I'm going to critique them, I think it's been the inability to explain their decision."

BSB: Do you think that's the main thing that they should have done differently? Would you have encouraged waiting a little bit longer, like some of the other conferences have?

Kaufman: "My thought is you could wait longer to make your decision, and I don't think they really had anything to lose by waiting until September to make a decision. There's a new saliva test that's come out that is less invasive to people. You're not going into their nose with a swab, you're having them spit in the cup, and so, maybe there's testing advancements and maybe by holding off on a season or holding off on the decision, the Big Ten would have benefited from that. So I think that's something that they probably should have looked at. I have yet to see a convincing or compelling argument as to why they had to do it now.

"The only thing that would be a reason to make the decision now is that I think it would be hard to go through a training camp, maybe somebody busts up their knee, maybe you get some other regular football injuries. Imagine going through a training camp like that then five days before the season opener get told you can't play the game. So I think that was something that they had to probably weigh as well, but to me, it seems like you could have maybe held out until October, hoping for some testing advancements."

BSB: Do you think that they should have played?

**Kaufman:** "It's hard for me to really say, because maybe they should have played in October, but I don't know what the world looks like in October. I think if you're going to try and play now it's very difficult in the absence of a bubble environment. So it's hard to totally know if they should play. I mean, I would like to see them play, but I think you would need to have some tighter protocols than what they had, because they were only talking about testing 72 hours before game day.

"The NFL is doing daily testing. Major League Baseball is doing daily testing and they still had outbreaks. So I think in large part, the consideration needs to be 'can you finish the season,' and I think if you were to start the season now, you would have a hard time finishing the season."

BSB: Do you think that other conferences will actually play this fall?

Kaufman: "I mean, some of it is bluster, but I think they will play if the players in their teams do not all get COVID. I mean, I think basically it's a little bit of a war of attrition on some level, where if you can keep your entire roster from getting COVID, then you're going to play. And I think maybe they can do that, maybe they can't. A lot's going to depend on the amount of virus in their communities and how players can separate themselves from parts of the student body that are going to have it, but the early returns with students on campus have not been encouraging.

"In North Carolina, there was an outbreak. Notre Dame has seen cases rise, and Notre Dame is doing online-only classes

#### **OHIO STATE FOOTBALL**

for the next two weeks. So if you can keep your roster safe from getting COVID and from parts of student body that are going to be carrying the virus, then I think they'll complete the season, but that's what the whole thing hinges on, is whether you can keep your players safe, keep them healthy because obviously you can't play a football season if your entire quarterback room gets wiped out with COVID."

BSB: How do you think, if at all, that would impact Ohio State, not just recruiting, but the current roster moving forward? Do you think that that would have an impact on Ohio State?

Kaufman: "I don't see it impacting the current roster that much, because even if those schools go ahead and play, they're pretty much all at the 85-man scholarship limit, or maybe just below. So I don't think all of a sudden we're going to see a flood of Ohio State players in the transfer portal next week. Maybe there's some negative recruiting for high school players, but I mean, Ohio State has the No. 1-ranked recruiting class in 2021, and so I don't know if it's really going to then affect future classes

"Now, I think just on a practical element, it's a year of lost opportunity because unless those conferences postpone and play in the spring, Ohio State is not going to get a chance to compete for a national title with Justin Fields as its quarterback.

"They're not going to get a rematch with Clemson. You're not going to get another Justin Fields-Trevor Lawrence bout. So I think in a lot of ways this is going to compound the frustration that fans felt from the 2019 season where you have this potentially all-time, historic, great team, and you whiff on a chance of realizing some of that potential with the loss to Clemson in the Fiesta Bowl. You get over it by saying, 'OK, well, 2020, we're going to be pretty good too, and we have a great quarterback,' but if you're an Ohio State fan, now you don't get to see them get a chance to realize that.

"But then in the long run, Ryan Day is still the coach. He's proven so far to hire a good staff. He's proven to be able to recruit. He's proven himself as a good play caller. It's still Ohio State. They've been a powerhouse for decades. I don't see that changing."

#### BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten and the Pac-12 will play in the spring?

**Kaufman:** "I think there's a chance, if two things happen. I think there's a chance if the virus is under control and if internal politics and questions about eligibility don't get in the way. I've seen some comments about, 'Oh, you can't play two seasons in a calendar year,' and there are some questions about that, and that is fair. That's a lot of games to be played, but there are ways to work around that. You could see the Big Ten go the way of the Ivy League. The Ivy League doesn't allow for in-season contact in practice.

"So, if you're going to play more games, you could take steps to dramatically reduce the contact in practice. I think there are ways to do it. I don't think it's a total pipe dream, and I think in some ways a spring season is feasible, but there'd be a lot of logistical things that would need to get hammered out."

#### Bill Landis The Athletic

BSB: When Ohio State was starting practice a couple of weeks ago and the Big Ten released an official schedule, what were your expectations about the fall season?

Landis: "I tend to be an optimistic person, so my expectations were probably a little higher than they should have been, that they were actually going to start playing and get a season off the ground. I will say as they progressed toward camp and I thought the camp was going to happen, I was feeling pretty good.

"And then when I saw that the Big Ten decided it could somehow start its season on Sept. 3, I started to feel a little worse about that. Not that it wasn't going to happen, but just that that seemed like a really kind of foolish endeavor to try to rush to get that done, when they could have just started on the 26th, or really any other weekend in September or even October if they wanted to. So, when that happened I started to question the plan just a little bit, but not to the extent where I thought that they were so unsure about the situation that they would cancel things a week later."

#### BSB: Were you surprised by the decision to postpone?

Landis: "I was, only because I felt some of the momentum had been won back by the programs. When Justin Fields went on Twitter that Sunday night and put out that joint statement with players from other conferences, and then Ryan Day went on ESPN and Scott Frost was doing his thing in Nebraska, I just thought to myself, 'This is a losing PR battle for the Big Ten if they start to do this, and there's no harm in simply just kicking the can a little bit in delaying.'

"I thought we had gotten to that point. And then it was Tuesday, I had gotten wind of the decision maybe 15 minutes before it came out, and I was pretty stunned. I thought there had been some reversal of momentum there to bring it back to a delay. And when I heard cancellation, hope to play in the spring, I was pretty shocked."

#### BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled the situation?

Landis: "They handled it about as poorly as possible. And my stance on this is not that I thought the decision was wrong. I don't really know if you can know whether the decision was right or wrong yet, and we'll see what happens with these other leagues. The process was terrible, and the way they've handled it since then has been worse. The idea that Ohio State parents and players and some staffers, although much more passive aggressively than directly, have to take to social media to try to get answers from their own conference about why the season was canceled and what's going to happen in the future is frankly unbelievable to me.

"I don't know if there's anything that Kevin Warren could say at the moment that would appease anybody, other than, 'We're back on,' which isn't going to happen. But the idea that it's just been silence since then is kind of baffling. So I don't disagree with the decision if it was Sept. 17 and they said, 'You know what, we just can't do this.' I would feel better with it, it would sit better with me because I would have felt they at least exhausted all their options and tried like these other leagues are. To set it up like you're going to try, then not try, and then not explain why you're not trying, I don't understand that."

## BSB: Do you think that those other conferences will end up playing this fall?

Landis: "I didn't initially, and I even hesitate to say this because I'm not a medical expert, but some of the stuff that's come out about the testing and that saliva test pull me back from my stance that they're definitely going to cancel, but I still lean that way.

"You see some of the outbreaks that have happened especially in the ACC, and honestly I just think it's going to take one more league to decide that they can't go forward. And I know there are a lot of people who might say that the SEC is the SEC and it's going to march forward even if it has to do it by itself. I don't think it would do that. So I think it takes one more league for the whole thing to get shut down, and there are some things trending in a bad way for the ACC right now that leads me to believe that no one's going to play this fall."

BSB: How do you think, if at all, that would impact Ohio State, not just recruiting, but the current roster moving forward? Do you think that that would have an impact on Ohio State?

Landis: "Definitely not the current roster. The idea that there would be mass transfers, I just don't even know how that would work. The start of the semester is the start of the semester, and I can't think off the top of my head of any of these programs that are on the quarter system. Maybe some of them are and there would be a window there for someone to transfer, get into the school and start playing. But I don't think that that's the case. And otherwise I just don't think it would work. I don't think you can transfer after the semester starts and get an, 'OK, you're in school, you can pick up classes three weeks after everyone else has started their classes and play football for us.' I just don't think that will fly.

"The recruiting piece of it is a little different. I don't think it would have much of an effect on Ohio State because if anyone tried to claim that Ohio State doesn't care about football, I don't know how you wouldn't laugh at them for an hour. I was speaking to recruits last week about that, and they said the same thing, 'That's not going to work as a recruiting pitch for me if Ohio State's one of the programs that I'm considering.' And I don't think saying, 'The Big Ten doesn't care about football' is true. But I think it can matter for some schools, maybe Big Ten schools lower down the line in future recruiting classes. If they're trying to go down to Florida and get a three-star prospect who is considering Indiana and Central Florida, and because the AAC is still playing, perhaps this could come back up and maybe that has an impact.

"But I don't think it has quite the impact that people are making it out to. But I do think the football reputation of the Big Ten will be damaged a little bit, just not in a way that prohibits Ohio State from competing for national championships. It has felt like, and maybe it doesn't even matter, but it has felt like the Big Ten had pulled back part of the ownership of the sport a little bit from the SEC. I think you might lose some of that in the public discourse. But I'm not sure that matters much to revenue or ultimately recruiting ability in any kind of tangible way."

#### BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten and the Pac-12 will play in the spring?

Landis: "Again, I'm an optimist, so yes. I'm in on this Ryan Day, 'Let's start in January, end in March' plan, and hopefully the NFL plays ball. Maybe I'm naive to think that. But I do think the financial implications of not playing any football this year are not being taken into consideration enough by people who just sort of write off the idea of playing in the spring.

"I understand that it's going to be hard and it might impact the following fall. But I think in theory you could play a season where you start in January, you end in March, you play eight regular-season games. And even in a world where there was some kind of actual playoff, if everyone was playing in the spring, at most you're playing 11 games and you're done by the time the NCAA Tournament starts.

"I think you could play a full fall after that. You'd have to obviously modify the offseason schedule, but I think you could pull that off without encountering too much blowback. So I'm in on that. Part of it is I have nothing else to look forward to, so I might as well embrace that thing. I hate that there's been so much pessimism pawned off as realism in this. It's OK to have a little bit of hope every now and then, so I think I'm going to hold onto that, while acknowledging that it could be a logistical nightmare for a lot of schools. I do think they are going to be highly motivated to try to pull something off."

#### Doug Lesmerises Cleveland.com

BSB: When Ohio State was practicing and the Big Ten released a schedule, what were your expectations about the fall season?

Lesmerises: "My main thing was I was waiting to see what happened when they got to contact and that fifth practice of the preseason when you can go full pads and you really start playing football. And I thought that was really going to be a line in the sand for them. We didn't know until that point because we didn't know what happened when you played football during coronavirus.

"I thought it could go any direction from there, but I was super curious. And I thought the big deal was going to be 4-5 days or a week after you start contact, what does it look like? And then that's when we'll know. In the end, what surprised me and what I didn't anticipate was them drawing the line at 'We're not going to let you get to full contact in practice. That's where we're stopping.' I thought maybe it was 50-50 that it could have gone either way that they would at least start in the fall. But the timing in the end is what surprised me the most."

#### BSB: Were you surprised by the decision to postpone? Why or why not?

Lesmerises: "I can't say I was surprised because I certainly thought it was possible that it would happen. And when the Big Ten acted first on doing away with nonconference games, I understood that and sort of appreciated that idea of, 'You don't have to wait for anybody else if you think this is the right thing, do it.' And I thought that was fine for the Big Ten to do that. Why would you let the SEC or the ACC decide your fate? So I wasn't surprised. I just think I've been most surprised in the end by what has happened since they canceled. I wasn't super surprised in the moment that they did because we are in the middle of an unprecedented, 100-year pandemic.'

#### BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled the situation, and what do you think they could have done differently?

Lesmerises: "Awful. Making a decision doesn't end at the decision. They made the decision, and then they went into a bunker. And again, I'm not complaining as a media member, 'Why hasn't Kevin Warren talked to us?' But why coaches, players and parents are so frustrated, and they feel so in the dark. Even if they screwed it up for three days, why do you let it go for more than a week?

"It's just a failure of public relations. And it's a failure of a human touch. This is important to your people. Why aren't

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## Questions Remain About Conference's Reasoning

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you talking to your people? That I don't get. But then once you let those people take over the entire narrative and dominate the news cycles with their displeasure, what are you doing? I don't comprehend how you allow that to happen. I have been absolutely dumbfounded by their, I would say strategy, but I think it's a lack of strategy since the decision."

BSB: Do you think they should have played in the fall?

Lesmerises: "No, I would not say that. I think this is a reasonable, defensible position. And I think it is still possible that the leagues who do try to play are going to have a lot of trouble doing it. I know it's complicated, and to the idea that people say, 'Well, the NFL can do it, high schools can do it, why can't Ohio State play?' college is in the sticky middle here.

"Everything about college sports make something like this more difficult because they're kind of like pros and kind of like kids, but they're kind of neither. It's more complicated than the NFL, and it's more complicated than high school, and you have to say that. Just to be like, 'Well, how come everybody else can do it and Ohio State can't?' It's not a rational argument. There are complexities to this.

"I would not say I think they should have played. I think there is a reasonable decision on either side. I think their decision is OK. I think it's fine if it's what they believe. But it's just everything since then it has been handled terribly."

BSB: Do you think other conferences will play in the fall?

Lesmerises: "I'm still waiting. I know they're partially into practice. They're starting. I don't know exactly where they are in full contact. When you see what's happening on the campuses that have returned, obviously with Notre Dame and North Carolina and some other places, even the Big Ten, students are still in the process of coming back to campus.

"Those are two important things I think when your student population is back, how do things go? And when you're fully into practice, into contact, how do things go? My guess is probably 50-50. I think they really want to and I think they've cleared a hurdle that the Big Ten and the Pac-12 didn't clear with that sort of initial medical determination, but I don't think it's a foregone conclusion. I would say right now, I'm still 50-50 on the other three conferences playing. And I think there easily could be a rise in positive cases either on campus or within their team as a result of contact that leads them to also not play this fall.

"It's complicated. And then there's the great debate of if the students are online-only, does that increase the chance of having football or decrease the chance of having

football? Because it puts the players more in a bubble, but it also clearly draws the line on they're not students, they're separate. They are different, and you can never claim it again. It's been crap all along, and we know it's been crap. But it's the NCAA's consistent line of reasoning.

"Are the NCAA, the schools and the presidents willing to give up that facade, because once the only people on campus are football players, it's over. So then what's next after that? I have thought all along that is a very difficult place for them to go, and I think maybe they'd rather give up one season in a pandemic that's not going to have many people in the stands than admit that the basis of the entire system is a joke. I think that if they if they can't do on-campus learning, that's the choice that they're all going to face."

BSB: If they did, what effects would that have?

Lesmerises: "I think would they maybe take a hit in 2022 recruiting, like the kids they're still getting to know. I don't think they're going to lose a million guys out of their '21 class. It seems pretty locked in. I think by the '23 and '24 classes things will get back to normal and they'll be OK. A one-year recruiting hit? Maybe. A fundamental change in who Ohio State is as a football program? No, I don't see that.

"I had a reader send me a message like, 'If the Big Ten doesn't play, the league is going to fold.' OK, that's not what we're talking about. It wouldn't be great, but I also think Ohio State, very purposefully, and I think it's genuine, but I also think it's good PR by them – they're making the case very vociferously that 'We don't agree with it.'

"So if someone tries to say, 'Oh, the Big Ten doesn't care about football, they canceled the season.' Then Ohio State says, 'Well, yeah, but we care about it because we disagreed with that.' And so I think in the end it's possible Ohio State might be able to have a cake and eat it too because they're in a league that was cautious, but they can say, 'Yeah, but we wanted to play.' And so then, maybe you can triangulate, and then have a message to recruits that will maybe resonate."

BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten will play in the spring?

Lesmerises: "I think they're going to

Lesmerises: "I think they're going to play in the winter, and I keep calling it winter football. Nick Saban is playing the game and characterizing spring football as JV and that kind of thing. I think January/February football where many of the NFL-bound guys stay is possible and I think a pretty decent alternative. I think there are many reasons why that would make more sense for the Big Ten, one of them being that other people will have played football by then.

"They'll have a test if the other college conferences play, they can be guinea pigs for the Big Ten. If they don't play but the NFL does, they'll have data gathered from the NFL. The saliva test might really matter. Time is on your side a little bit. A February season, 6-9 games or whatever, that culminates with some kind of Rose Bowl say against the Pac-12 and includes most, 60-70 percent of your best players, I think that's pretty good and pretty doable.

"And I think you could still then, on that calendar, have a pretty decently normal fall of '21, assuming they'd reduce it by a few games. I think that's what Ryan Day wants to do. I think they need to get a plan out, but I'm not sure why it wouldn't work. Lots of it makes sense to me."

#### **Griffin Strom Buckeye Grove**

BSB: When Ohio State was practicing and the Big Ten released its schedule, what were your expectations at that point about if the fall season was going to happen?

Strom: "I knew that it wasn't like, 'Oh, they released the schedule, so the season is definitely going to happen now.' But I was most hopeful at that point compared to the previous long stretch of time. For the longest time I was of the opinion that the season wasn't going to happen, but then they released that schedule, and it did get me excited to be like, 'OK, well, now we've got a set season ahead of the teams and whatnot.'

"Especially content-wise as well, then you can start actually jumping back into writing stuff about a season that's actually in place now because for a while they had scrapped the season in terms of the regular scheduled games. So yeah, I remember me and (Kevin) Noon did a podcast after that came out, and I was like, 'Yeah, it seems like things are going in the right direction now. This is the most hopeful I had been in a while.' But then it wasn't. It was just a couple of days later that bad news started to come out again."

BSB: When the Big Ten ultimately made the decision to postpone until 2021, were you surprised by that decision at all?

Strom: "I wasn't surprised in general by it, because like I said, for a while there in the summer, I was writing a lot of stories assuming that the season was going to happen as scheduled. And knowing in my head like, man, there's no way this season's going to happen as scheduled. There's no way it's going to look like any type of normal season.

"So, from that perspective, no, it doesn't really surprise me. But just because I think a lot of people and myself included were surprised by just how soon it was after they had released the revised schedule and those conference-wide medical protocols that they had said that they were waiting on to get the preseason practice schedule started.

"It seemed like when they released those two things, it was like, 'OK, we are going to take these steps and actually move forward with this.' And then when they decided against it, I just don't know why they would have gotten all the fans and everyone's hopes up at that point."

BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled the situation, and what do you think they could have done differently to avoid the negativity they've received?

Strom: "The main thing is just the transparency from the administrators, which if you were listening to Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren's initial statements on the Big Ten Network right after the announcement of the Big Ten's decision, it was like he was just talking his way around every burning question that everyone was wondering about. You know, what changed in the last six days? Why release the schedule? All that stuff. What happened with the vote? And that's been a thing that's taken on more of a life the last few days too. How did the vote actually go? Was it a unanimous vote? Which schools voted against, which schools voted for?

"But then you have the Penn State athletic director coming out on a Zoom



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#### **OHIO STATE FOOTBALL**

call with the media and saying that it was unclear to her if there was actually a vote. I think the Minnesota president said that it was more of a deliberative process than an actual vote, and then you have the Nebraska president referring to it as a vote still. And then you've got Kevin Warren, he's not saying anything.

"He said he didn't even want to talk about the vote, and I think that's why you see the stuff about the Randy Wades of the world who are wanting to protest and get answers from Kevin Warren. That's because he just wasn't answering these burning questions that everyone has. I think if you come out and you just give answers, like direct answers, to those questions, I think people can at least process it a little better.

"There's still going to be critics no matter what because people want to see college football, and especially if there's other conferences trying to persevere. No one that's a fan of Big Ten football is going to be happy about the decision no matter what, but if you actually are as transparent as possible, as open as possible and actually give answers to some of those burning questions, I think you avoid a little bit of that criticism."

#### BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten should have played football in the fall?

**Strom:** "I mean, it comes down to this: There's so many sports that are coming back now and have restarted, and I understand you can't. These guys aren't getting paid millions of dollars to potentially put themselves in a health risk.

"A lot of people that have been successful with these restarts in terms of commissioners and whatnot have said, 'Man, you need a bubble for this to work out.' And then you've heard other college program administrators saying there's not going to be a bubble. These guys have to go to class and this and that. So, it's really tough.

"Should the Big Ten specifically? I thought that the Big Ten was going to punt on the decision until closer. I thought they were going to postpone until Sept. 26 or whatever like the other conferences were doing and then just kind of see where things go. I think that's what they should have done."

## BSB: Do you think the other conferences will play football in the fall? And if they do, what effect do you think that will have on the Big Ten?

Strom: "I think they will definitely try. I mean I can envision in my head both ways, but I think in terms of the impacts on the Big Ten, if the SEC, ACC and Big 12 and whoever else play a season in the fall and that actually goes off mostly without a hitch, I think that puts a lot of pressure on the Big Ten to have some type of spring season. Because then if you don't have a season at all, people are really going to be mad.

"If the other the other Power Five conferences do play a fall season and it goes and it's a catastrophe, I think that makes everyone be like, 'OK, maybe the Big Ten made the right decision here, and I think that also lessens the chance of there being a spring season as well. But it would take some heat off of the back of some of these administrators if that happened, just because, not that they want to see that happen, obviously, but it would make people be like, 'OK, the Big Ten and the Pac-12 and Kevin Warren and these people, they were playing it safe and they weren't trying to risk the potential catastrophic results.

#### Ari Wasserman The Athletic

BSB: When Ohio State was practicing and the Big Ten released a schedule, what were your expectations about the fall season?

Wasserman: "I don't know if I'm alone in this, but I thought the writing was on the wall, even dating back to May. And that was at a time when the cases were down, but I just never could figure out a way that they could make this work. I know people want to play, reporters want to cover it, players want to play, and fans want to watch it. That's not the problem. The problem is how can we do it in a safe manner without exposing unpaid athletes to a potentially harmful virus with long-term health effects. And I think what we're seeing now is that it's pretty impossible to come up with. There are too many moving parts.

"There are too many kids on the team, there are too many staffers, medical people. Being on campus, you can't put them in the bubble because they're not being compensated. It's just a very impossible thing to kind of corral. So you have two options: You either cancel the season and hope that we as a country get this under control, or you accept the fact that a large number of players in college football are going to get sick. And I think some conferences are more willing to do the second one than others. But right now, I just don't really see how this is a tenable thing."

#### BSB: Were you surprised by the decision to postpone? Why or why not?

Wasserman: "I'm not surprised that it came to this. I'm surprised that they made a decision they didn't have to make sooner than they had to. I think they could have pushed it back two more weeks, let the kids practice before students get back on campus, maybe even reduce contact, and then come up with a plan.

"The thing that sucks is it was just a bad look for the Big Ten because they didn't have a plan. They just said, 'We're not playing,' and then that was it. There was no spring-season plan, there was no way to return to practice. The players on the teams didn't even know what they were supposed to do the next day – it was a disaster. And from an optics standpoint, the Big Ten had four or five months to try

to consider these things and they didn't. And that's why it looks so bad right now."

BSB: How do you think the Big Ten handled the situation, and what do you think they could have done differently?

Wasserman: "This is so above a sports-writer's paygrade in terms of the health and safety of children who are competing at a high level and already risking their bodies enough. What do I think of the Big Ten's decision? I think that they did what they had to do in order to protect the players who weren't being compensated for risking their bodies. That's the problem here. Everybody can understand the decision. What people can't understand is the way the decision was made, and why there was no fallback plan.

"And that's the reason why you had a coach like Ryan Day get on a Zoom call two days later and say, 'We need to come up with a plan now, and we need an explanation for the players.' It was just like everybody was consulted, and everybody was giving their theory of what should happen, without really kind of weighing in with what the players are thinking. And that's why you're seeing all of them step up and try to protest and write letters and sign petitions and all those things, because the Big Ten didn't consider those things. I think from an optics standpoint, this could have been handled a much better way. But I don't know that the decision was wrong. I think the way they handled it was wrong."

#### BSB: Do you think they should have played in the fall?

Wasserman: "It's not my place to say whether they should or shouldn't. I know I'm not a medical expert. I trust the opinions of the medical advisors and the reasons why they came to the decisions that they've made as a result of those medical opinions. And it makes sense to me that they canceled the season if they thought that the kids were in danger."

BSB: Do you think other conferences will play in the fall, and if they did, what effects would that have?

**Wasserman:** "I don't think they're going to play a down in the fall anywhere.

"I think the major concern for people is that they're going to be sitting on their couches in November watching Alabama play football, and Ohio State's just not going to play. Meanwhile, high school football is playing and Cincinnati's playing and all that stuff. If that actually happens, that will have an impact, mostly in recruiting, but that's the place that you don't want that impact at all. Because the reason why Ohio State is good every year is because of recruiting. And the thing too is that there are advantages and disadvantages.

"If Alabama is playing and Ohio State isn't, Alabama has to prepare and practice and use resources to prepare for meetings, while Ohio State and the staff has full rein to recruit prospects, so that would be good. On the other hand, Alabama can tell prospects that their conference cares more about football than the Big Ten. But there are long-term effects to this too. If Ohio State ends up playing in the spring and Alabama's season is over with, then Ohio State is behind the eight ball for the spring evaluation period.

"We don't know exactly what's going to happen with visits and whether or not they'll even have them or if there will be in-person evaluations at all in the next six months or a year, just for safety reasons. But it's going to have a profound impact not only on the psyche of the Big Ten fans' minds, but the way that these prospects view the Big Ten and the Ohio State program as a result of being in it."

BSB: Do you think that the Big Ten will play in the spring?

Wasserman: "I don't. I think they're going to get everybody back on the same page. And then once you get to the spring, they're going to cancel it, because it doesn't really make sense to try to cram two seasons in and shorten two. And then, we're just going to get back onto the 2021 season, and everyone will be back on the same page.

"It would be fun to have football in any capacity. But there are just too many rule changes that would have to be made, the NFL draft would have to play ball, safety precautions would have to be taken, because you could argue that playing two seasons in one calendar year is more dangerous than coronavirus. There are a lot of moving pieces in that. And right now, I just think that it's healthy to formulate a plan and try to follow it. Whether or not it's doable, I think is a completely different issue."



## Former Coaches, Players React To Big Ten's Decision

By WYATT CROSHER Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

The Big Ten's decision to postpone the football season for the rest of the year garnered reactions from many former Ohio State players and coaches, plenty of which were voiced through social media as more information came out on how the decision was ultimately made.

Buckeye Sports Bulletin reached out to five former Buckeyes to discuss their opinions on how the Big Ten handled the situation and what their perspective is on the safety of players, as well as what they would have done as a player in this situation.

#### Vaughn Broadnax Fullback, 1980-83

BSB: When Ohio State was practicing and the Big Ten released a schedule, what were your expectations about the fall season?

**Broadnax:** "It was already a possibility, but I didn't expect the cancellation to come within a week of putting the schedule out. It really was nonsensical because if you put a schedule out and then five days later you decide to cancel, there should have been questions answered enough for you to make a schedule or put out a schedule in the first place.

"The general public has a harder time with this than maybe players because we're not sure about everything that is involved in the decision. But even the players and coaches, and now we're finding out maybe even the college presidents, are not sure what all went into the decision. It's crazy.

"Well, here's my main thing. If you move it to spring or winter or whatever, what are the kids playing for? I mean, they're not playing for a Big Ten championship unless they construct some faux championship game. With a Big Ten championship comes a Rose Bowl – that's out of the picture. And I think about the kids like Justin Fields, who was a legitimate Heisman contender. Wyatt Davis, an Outland/Lombardi Trophy consideration, and all the other guys that have the singular



honors and expectations that they were to strive for taken away from them. Besides the team being positioned well, you had individuals that were positioned well to walk away with some honors for the rest of the lives."

BSB: If you were a likely first-round pick in the upcoming NFL draft like Justin Fields or Shaun Wade, would you play in a spring season?

**Broadnax:** "Why? After the bowl games, you're heading off to train to enhance your stock for the combine. So why would you wait months to prove yourself for nothing?

"Like I said, it's a different atmosphere, even if you're playing against another team, but without those fans beefing you up, it's really just a glorified scrimmage. Because you take the fans out a competition like that and it really makes a difference. I just don't understand. They think it's going to be all clear in the spring? What about the other sports teams and schedules that have to be adjusted and interrupted and things like that?"

BSB: How would you balance your personal safety vs. your desire to play?

Broadnax: "Well I always looked at football as a game of risk. I looked at any sport as an opportunity for risk of injury. And the only thing you can do is prepare yourself the best way you can. We have the equipment – the equipment has changed so much over the years from reducing knee injuries with knee braces to improvements on the helmet and face mask. But you can only protect so far. And in the instance of COVID-19, again you can only protect so far. Because a player can practice, he can compete against another team, and then maybe walk into a convenience store and get it from somebody else. I mean, you can only protect and defend.

"I think as a former player, myself, I understand that risk, and if I'm willing to play, that's fine. And if others aren't willing to play, that's fine. They get an opportunity to sit out. But there are so few of those. Let the kids play. But they go in understanding the risk, as they do any other injury-risk possibility in their careers."

BSB: Why do you think the players feel safest at Ohio State's facilities rather than at home or among the general student population on campus?

**Broadnax:** "Before they are in session in school, they are virtually in a cocoon. They eat there, they can study there, they practice there. They're in a cocoon that has the personnel tested frequently, things are sanitized constantly. They know that environment. But once they step foot out of there and they go to campus, they go to a store, they go to regular life outside of that bubble, they don't know what's going on.

"They don't know who's carrying it. They don't know who's asymptomatic that may pass it on to them. So that's why Trevor Lawrence, Justin Fields and other players realize that they are safer in their current environment than being out in the regular environment. And that just makes sense because they have less chance of contracting the virus in their current environment instead of being in the world.

"I understand the position of the presidents, but they're taking a 20- to 30-year look at this – will we be liable for that? And that's all it is. Whereas kids – they're young, they're strong, they think they're invincible. You're going have a group of parents or group of kids that don't want their son or daughter to play or don't want to play, but you can define that. You can weed that out. You can say, 'Hey, well if you don't want to play, here's what we can

do for you. If you do want to play, this is what we should be able to do for you,' and come to agreements.

"People say, 'Well, those things don't hold up in court.' Well, it's a choice people want to make and things are going to happen unfortunately, but don't drag this opportunity away, and I'm talking from the point of a selfish fan, but I also talk from the viewpoint of being a former player, knowing what these guys are looking forward to, what they've worked hard for, and the opportunities that they can have during the season and postseason. And we're literally snatching that away from these kids."

#### Bill Conley Assistant, 1984-87 and 1991-2004 Offensive Lineman, 1969-71

BSB: When the Big Ten schedule was released and Ohio State was practicing, what were your expectations about the fall season at that point?

Conley: "Well, I felt very positive about it. I mean, when you cancel a football season in a major college division then it affects so many different things. I mean it affects, number one, income to the university and to the other programs, and not necessarily just athletics. You've got money that goes to a general fund from the athletic department and everything else. So when it looked like they were going to have (a season), it looked like the powers that be made the intelligent decision and they had plenty of time to provide safety precautions

"It was proven that they did in different facilities, not just at Ohio State, throughout the Big Ten, and it was safe, what they were doing was safe, and then all of a sudden they backtrack on the thing. So, first of all, the line of communication was terrible. They gave no hint that they were going to up and cancel after they seemed like they had made all the safety precautions and the number of fans that could go and the whole ball of wax. Then they backpedal on it.

"I think it was a wrong decision. I think it was poorly communicated, and I hope it's not too late to make a change and maybe go back and have some type of season like before because spring football will not work. Anybody that says that stuff is crazy. That will not work."

BSB: Were you surprised by the Big Ten's decision to postpone the season when they did?

Conley: "Yeah, absolutely, especially when you had other Power Five conferences that were hinting they were going to definitely have it. And the negative aspect for the football program at Ohio State and the rest of the Big Ten, if you have three major Power Five conferences having a football season and you're not, that is a tremendous recruiting advantage for those schools that have it. And they can always use that as a throwback when they're in somebody's home and talking to parents and high school coaches and athletes. They can say, 'Hey, we don't postpone football.'

BSB: What do you think exactly the Big Ten could have done to handle this situation better?

Conley: "I think it was transparency and have a set procedure, step one to step two to step three. And it looked like that's what they were doing, but obviously they weren't because they had all the safety precautions at the different schools. They had planned on how many people could attend, they had a limit on that and all the kinds of safety precautions that go along with it. They decided

to drop the nonconference teams, which also was a safety factor.

"So it looked like they were making the right decisions, but it looks like the different programs relied on the different medical teams they had and took their advice. And of course they're going to err on safety because they're medical people. What do you expect? But it seems to me like they let them make the entire decision, and that was, I think, a wrong move to make."

BSB: Looking at it from a player's perspective, how would you balance safety vs. wanting to play in this situation?

Conley: "Well, I think first of all, the age group that is involved in playing athletics, number one is one of the least susceptible to disease anyway. And the physical training, they're in great shape and that type of thing. And again, the safety precautions they were taking, and they were doing everything from looking at different types of face shields and things like that, which would also help out.

"If you have a controlled environment, which they had, then the chances of something bad happening are limited. And then you turn around and then say you're going to cancel and then, like I said, you can go to Kroger or Walmart, you have definitely more chance of picking up the disease than if you're on a football practice field."

BSB: In your experience in the Ohio State facilities, do you understand why they're saying they feel so much safer there than elsewhere?

Conley: "Yeah, obviously they were doing everything right. I mean, Ohio State was doing a great job. They were having meetings outside. They were limiting the number of physical contact sessions they had. They were not letting outsiders come into the facility. I mean, they were doing everything the right way, and it seemed like they got the rug pulled out from under them."

BSB: Do you think that those other conferences will end up actually playing in the fall, or do you think they're just waiting longer to make that decision?

Conley: "I think they'll play. First of all, they made a heck of a statement that they're going to, and then that would be bad PR to go back on it. Second thing though, I think they've researched enough that they think they're making the right decision, and also as you know, you can't go around letting this situation control you.

"You can't let COVID control you. You have to control the situation as much as possible. I think it's a terrible precedent to set is every time some type of new disease or virus comes on the scene that you're going to lock everything down? That's not the right thing to do. I mean, society has to go on."

BSB: You said you don't think a spring season is viable. Why do you think that?

Conley: "I mean, it might be possible, but it would be so watered down. First of all, you have a lot of seniors that won't be playing. You're not going to get everybody that would have played in the fall. You have guys that are going to go to the NFL – they're not going to take a chance of getting hurt. You have an issue with now freshmen coming in that plan to enroll early. They can't enroll early they wouldn't be physically ready to do that

"So the freshmen that missed the whole spring practices as it is, you have a new group of freshmen coming in. The quality of football will not be the same for the spring teams because of the number of experienced play-

#### OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

ers that will opt out of a plan in spring."

BSB: Do you think the Big Ten will try to play in the spring?

Conley: "The only way I see that happening, the only way, is they would have to do it in some type of controlled environment because if they're talking about playing sometime after the first of the year in the winter. you know the climate doesn't work. You have to play in an indoor facility that's controlled with no crowd type of thing or limited people in the stands, but the main thing is the weather is so bad for the Big Ten."

#### **John Johnson Coached Under Woody Hayes**

BSB: Were you surprised by the Big Ten's decision to postpone?

Johnson: "Yes and no. I go all the way back to 1960 being involved with Ohio State. Then the faculty voted to not let the team go to the Rose Bowl. We could have won a national championship. So it surprised me in a way. I understand they didn't take a vote. It sounds like the Big Ten commissioner made the decision, and supposedly Ohio State's people voted to play.

"It's like they don't understand the sacrifices made to get yourself ready to do what they're getting themselves ready to. I feel the same way about the high school athletes. Give them the chance."

BSB: If you were Justin Fields or Shaun Wade, would you play in the spring?

Johnson: "Wow. I don't know. I'm not sure. I think you'd need to know exactly what the value is, as far as the guarantees with. For me, that would be a toss-up because these kids, they have the rest of their lives (to make that money). I'll go way back, that's the reason Coach Hayes stressed getting a degree so much, because after you're done playing football at Ohio State, then you're into real life.

"It's up to them whether or not they would go ahead and play. The advice they might get is, 'Yeah, do it. You're going to really increase your value by (playing).'

BSB: How would you balance your personal safety vs. your desire to play?

Johnson: "Well I think you just treat it like it doesn't exist, from the standpoint of the mentality of the preparation to play. If they need to wear a mask in a closed environment. we have ways and the facilities to where we could separate them.

"In fact, they're wearing masks now. Everybody's wearing masks now. I think that's the key thing. Everybody's got to have a mask on.

"But they need to be given a chance. If not, my goodness, I think it would be wrong. I'm proud of the great efforts, and of Ryan (Day) - he's stood up and fought big-time for those kids."

BSB: Why do you think the players feel safer at Ohio State's facilities than at home or among the general student population on campus?

Johnson: "Well, the first thing is that they're all going to be wearing a mask, and except for certain situations, they'll be practicing the social distancing. Rather than setting up in the meeting rooms where they're all right up against each other, you can go and set up outside on the field.

"I mean there's just so many things that you can do to create an environment where they are not interacting as much as possible."

#### Jim Laughlin Linebacker, 1976-79

BSB: How surprised were you by the Big Ten's decision to postpone fall sports, particularly football?

Laughlin: "I was kind of surprised. I

think, and this is just my opinion and I've read a lot about it, young people and young studs playing football, I'm sorry, you've got a one in 30- or 40-million chance of dying from this thing just as you do from a regular influenza, probably even less.

"So go to school, go back to grade school, elementary, high school, college. If you get sick, stay away from grandma and grandpa and anybody who's got respiratory problems or diabetes or asthma or heart problems. I mean, I'm not going to take my dad to games. I wasn't going to take him anyway.

"I was just surprised. I thought, 'Well hell, they're going to limit it to 20-, 30-, 40,000 and you won't have to sit next to anybody.' Really, I think they should have played the (majorleague) baseball season (sooner) and put a sign up that said if you're over 50, 55 and if you have any problems, you shouldn't be coming in. But these guys are young studs. They're not going to get sick. That's not to say they can't, but the chances of any of them developing anything is pretty small.

"I don't know much about this myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle, which is possible after contracting COVID-19). I don't know enough about it to comment on that if that's why they made the decision they did. As far as them getting sick, I don't think it's much of a risk, actually. Anybody who's young and healthy shouldn't really have any problem, and stay away from people who do.

BSB: If you were Justin Fields or Shaun Wade and draft eligible next year, would you play spring football?

Laughlin: "That's a tough one. I don't know. I'd probably play because they'd probably do something with the draft if they do have spring football. I can't imagine they'll play in the spring. That just sounds kind of crazy. Didn't Urban Meyer say he didn't think they'd do it, that is was kind of silly? It seems weird. Obviously, it's weird.

"Everything is strange about 2020. The craziest year ever. I don't know. If you're playing in the spring and you're having only 20-, 30,000 people, it's just not the same thing. Now, if I'm a high draft choice, then you've got to think about it.

"I said a few years ago I think Cardale Jones cost himself about a million dollars by coming back (for the 2015 season after winning the College Football Playoff the previous year), honestly. They always talk about they

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didn't see that much of him. They were all so impressed with his shotgun arm that they we're going to take him in the first 20 or 25 players. Then he ends up coming back and ends up getting drafted way down lower.

"You have to think about if you want to come out. For me, I always wanted to play college football. I didn't really care about pro football because I wasn't that good. I wasn't Ezekiel Elliott or Justin Fields, a Tom Cousineau, who was the first player picked (1979 NFL draft).

BSB: How would you balance your personal safety vs. the desire to play football?

Laughlin: "I would just study it and read it just like I've done myself now.

"Of course, I'm 60 years old now. I read more and you've got the Internet and can find out stuff easier and faster and better now than when I was a kid. You click on a button and you've got instant information from Johns Hopkins, Harvard Medical Journal, AMA, I've. read a lot about it. That's why I say if I was a kid I'd say, 'Let's play. I'm a young stud.'

"It doesn't affect young people like old people. There's so many people going around that are asymptomatic that it doesn't affect that I'm like, 'Hell, let's go play.' You have to monitor every day, which is what they're planning to do. They're so worried about one or two guys getting sick and that myocarditis."

BSB: Why do think the athletes feel safer at OSU's facilities rather than at home or among the general student population on campus?

Laughlin: "They've got doctors there. They're going to test them like every day or every other day. I took my dad to the doctor a couple of times, and as soon as we get there, they tested my temperature and his

"Then you read stuff that only 15 percent of the people show a high fever, so you don't know. That's the thing because it's so asymptomatic.'

#### **Billy Price** Center, 2013-17

BSB: Were you surprised by the Big Ten's decision to postpone the season to the winter or spring?

Price: "I'm extremely surprised by the

Big Ten's decision to cancel the season. There are ways to make the season happen during this COVID period, but I feel like they never explored those options."

BSB: If you were Justin Fields or Shaun Wade, would you play whenever the season resumes?

Price: "I would not play. Two seasons within 12 months is extremely tough on the body.

BSB: As a player, whether it's in college or now in the NFL as a member of the Cincinnati Bengals, how would or do you balance your personal safety vs. your desire to play?

Price: "My wife and I have taken extra precautions, purchased air purifiers, etc. We limit exposure to public places in order to keep ourselves healthy.'

BSB: Why do you think the players feel safer at Ohio State's facilities than at home or among the general student population on campus?

**Price:** "Those facilities have to take extra precautions to keep players safe in order to operate vs. other places across campus that don't have the higher standards. I know for a fact the faculty in the football department are keeping things extremely clean and safe for the staff members and players.



## **COVID-19 TIMELINE**

#### Major Developments That Have Occurred Since The First Case In The United States

Prior to the Big Ten's decision to postpone fall sports on Aug. 11 for the remainder of 2020, there were multiple delays, cancellations and other moments that led up to it. Here are the major events that happened in the sports world from the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Jan. 20** – First case of COVID-19 in the United States is confirmed.

**March 10** – The Ivy League announces it will be canceling its men's and women's basketball tournaments, marking the first conference to make a cancellation due to COVID-19.

March 11 – NCAA announces that the men's and women's basketball tournaments will be played without fans. The Big Ten, after previously saying otherwise, says the conference tournament will continue with no fans. Ohio State also cancels the 2020 spring game.

March 12 – The Big Ten, as well as every other major conference, cancels its postseason basketball tournaments and all athletic competition for the remainder of the academic year. That same day, the NCAA cancels the men's and women's basketball tournaments, as well as all spring and winter championships.

March 13 – Big Ten suspends all organized team activities until April 6.

March 27 – Big Ten suspends all organized team activities until May 4.

**April 20** – The Big Ten forms a Task Force for Emerging Infectious Diseases to address concerns related to coronavirus.

May  ${\bf 4}$  – Big Ten suspends all organized team activities until June 1.

May 13 - The NCAA and NBA indefinitely post-

pone the player withdrawal date for the NBA draft for prospects, which was initially set for June 3.

May 22 – Big Ten announces that the Big Ten Media Days, which were set to take place in Chicago from July 22-23, will not be held as scheduled.

**June 8** – Ohio State players return to campus for voluntary workouts.

**June 14** – It is first reported that Ohio State required football players and parents to sign risk waivers before returning to campus.

**June 18** – NCAA Division I Council approves plan for a six-week preseason practice schedule.

**July 8** – The Ivy League cancels fall sports, including football, for the remainder of 2020, becoming the first conference to postpone for the fall.

**July 9** – The Big Ten announces that all fall sports will play in conference-only schedules for the 2020 season.

**July 14** – Ohio State resumes voluntary workouts a week after pausing them due to coronavirus concerns.

**July 24** – Ohio State begins walk-through football practices.

**July 28** – Ohio State announces there will be a capacity of no more than 20 percent at Ohio Stadium for football games this season.

**Aug. 4** – Minnesota wide receiver Rashod Bateman opts out of football season to prepare for the 2021 NFL draft.

**Aug. 5** – Big Ten releases conference-only 10-game schedule for the 2020 fall season. Ohio State is set to open the season with a Sept. 3 matchup against Illinois.

**Aug. 6** – Penn State linebacker Micah Parsons and Purdue wide receiver Rondale Moore both opt out of football season to prepare for the NFL draft.

Aug. 7 - Two days after the release of Big Ten

United, a statement from a group of unnamed Big Ten players on their concerns about playing during COVID-19, Ohio State players respond with a statement emphasizing how safe they feel within Ohio State's facilities.

**Aug. 8** – Big Ten announces that there will be no padded practices until further notice.

**Aug. 9** – A report by ESPN says that Big Ten presidents are "ready to pull the plug on its fall sports" following a meeting between them that weekend.

**Aug. 10** – It is reported that Ohio State would not be one of the schools to vote for canceling the fall season if a vote were to take place. Ohio State head coach Ryan Day talks on ESPN2 and says that he thinks the season should be delayed to later in the fall if anything.

**Aug. 11** – The Big Ten officially cancels fall sports for the remainder of 2020, with the plan to attempt to play those sports in the spring. Despite talk from Day and those around Ohio State, athletic director Gene Smith says that the program will not look elsewhere to play football in the fall.

**Aug. 12** – Day speaks with the media and says he believes a spring season can work.

**Aug. 15** – Parents of Ohio State football student-athletes issue a letter to Big Ten Commissioner Kevin Warren asking him to reverse the decision of canceling the fall football season.

**Aug. 16** – Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields creates a petition asking for the fall season to be reinstated. As of Aug. 24, the petition had over 301,000 signatures.

**Aug. 21** – Parents of Ohio State players, as well as parents from Iowa, peacefully protest outside the Big Ten headquarters asking for transparency and a video call with Warren.

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## Top Cornerback Target Commits To Ohio State

Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett fourstar cornerback Jordan Hancock committed to Ohio State on July 19, a move that seemed inevitable from the time he decommitted from Clemson just a few days prior.

#### RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

The 6-1, 170-pound Hancock is considered the fifth-best cornerback and No. 77 prospect overall in the class of 2021 after he recorded 12 pass breakups, two interceptions and one forced fumble to lead the Bulldogs to the state semifinals last fall.

The Buckeyes were considered the early favorite in Hancock's recruitment, as he grew up rooting for the program and even had a blanket and video game controller with an Ohio State logo in his bedroom. He planned to take an unofficial visit to Columbus last spring, and most prognosticators expected him to announce his commitment to the program at that time.

But before that trip could happen, Hancock took an unexpected unofficial visit to Clemson in early March. He pledged his services to the Tigers just a few days later, citing the campus' proximity to his hometown and their overall focus on faith as the reasons for his commitment.

Ohio State wasn't deterred by Hancock's commitment, though, with head coach Ryan Day, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and linebackers coach/area recruiter Al Washington making it clear there would be a spot for him in the class if he ever wanted to flip to the Buckeyes. That persistence paid off when he reopened his recruitment on July 14.

While schools such as Alabama, Georgia and Florida State hoped Hancock would take official visits this fall before making another decision, the quick turnaround seemed to indicate he had wanted to be at Ohio State all along.

Hancock becomes the sixth defensive back to commit to the Buckeyes in the 2021 recruiting cycle, joining St. Louis De Smet Jesuit four-star cornerback Jakailin Johnson, Nashville Ensworth four-star safety Andre Turrentine, Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star safety Jantzen Dunn, Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro four-star cornerback Denzel Burke and Cincinnati La Salle three-star safety Jaylen Johnson.

The staff hopes to add one more player in the secondary this cycle, though, with Monroeville (Pa.) Gateway four-star safety Derrick Davis being the most realistic remaining target.

It's also worth keeping an eye on Hancock's high school teammate, Clemson four-star linebacker target Barrett Carter. He appears solid in his commitment to the Tigers, but the two have been vocal about their desire to play together at the next level, and Ohio State was one of Carter's final schools before he picked Clemson in May.

Hancock then announced on Aug. 3

that he will not play his senior season because both of his parents have underlying heath conditions and he wants to limit potential interactions with other people amid the coronavirus pandemic. His father has a heart condition, and his mother recently completed radiation treatments for breast cancer.

"There comes a point in everyone's life where we have to make tough decisions, but what is His plan is my plan," Hancock wrote on Twitter. "I love North Gwinnett and will never forget the precious memories I made with the community, the coaches and my brothers I call teammates. Memories that will resonate with me for a lifetime, but as you know, we only have one lifetime and my family's lifetime matters the absolute most to me. I love the game of football, but this is not a time for me to be selfish and think about myself."

Hancock is one of five Ohio State commits to announce his plans to sit out his senior season, joining Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer; Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson; Cornelius (N.C.) William Amos Hough four-star running back Evan Pryor; and Aurora (Col.) Cherokee Trail three-star tight end Sam Hart. The four others did so with the intention of enrolling early and preparing for a potential spring season, however.

#### Local Linebacker Picks The Buckeyes

Ohio State continued its strong start to the 2022 recruiting cycle by landing a commitment on Aug. 1 from Marysville, Ohio, five-star linebacker Gabe Powers.

The 6-4, 220-pound Powers is considered the second-best outside linebacker and No. 31 prospect overall in his class. He recorded 90 tackles to lead the Monarchs to the state playoffs last fall. He picked Ohio State over offers from programs such as Boston College, Florida State, Kentucky, Michigan, Michigan State, Minnesota, Notre Dame, Penn State, Pittsburgh, Stanford, Tennessee, West Virginia and Wisconsin, among others

Powers – who lives roughly 30 minutes northwest of Columbus – made his first trip to campus last August, at which time he met with Washington and director of high school relations Ed Terwilliger. He made two additional unofficial visits over the fall, including the 34-10 win over the Spartans in October and the 28-17 win over the Nittany Lions in November, landing an offer from the staff just days ahead of the most recent visit.

Powers previously planned to make his college decision next summer, but the lack of visits amid the ongoing recruiting dead period – which was recently extended through Sept. 30 – made him realize there was no place he'd rather be than home

#### Kansas Athlete Commits To OSU

In what is becoming a trend amid the coronavirus pandemic, Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough committed to Ohio State on Aug. 18 without ever having stepped foot on campus.

The 6-5, 220-pound McCullough is considered the seventh-best athlete and No.



COURTESY OF JORDAN HANCOCK

GOT THEIR MAN – Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, right, secured a pledge from Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett four-star cornerback Jordan Hancock just five days after he decommitted from Clemson.

#### **OSU Football Verbal Commitments**

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

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Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	175	****	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Denzel Burke	CB	6-0	189	****	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro
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
Jordan Hancock	CB	6-1	170	****	Suwanee (Ga.) North Gwinnett
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	6-1	175	****	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	Р	6-3	200	***	Fremantle, Western Australia
Evan Pryor	RB	5-10	190	****	Cornelius (N.C.) W.A. Hough
Jack Sawyer	DE	6-5	248	****	Pickerington (Ohio) North
Andre Turrentine	S	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	СВ	5-11	165	****	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Č.J. Hicks	LB	6-4	218	****	Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter
Dasan McCullough	ATH	6-5	220	****	Overland Park (Kan.) B.V. North
Gabe Powers	LB	6-4	220	****	Marysville, Ohio
Tegra Tshabola	ОТ	6-5	340	****	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

#### A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

#### 35 Years Ago - 1985

Ohio State quarterback signee Tom Bolyard shone in his final prep game, the annual North-South All-Star football game held in Massillon, Ohio, on July 20.

Bolyard was named the North's most valuable player, completing 4 of 6 passes for 58 yards and a touchdown with no interceptions in a 31-10 victory. He also nailed a 33-yard field goal and handled punting chores.

The Orrville, Ohio, native came on in the second guarter after Warren Western Reserve's Roselle Richardson (a Minnesota signee) started the contest. The 6-3, 195-pound Bolyard said that not starting might be a help to him for preparing for Ohio State.

"I think it will help me with learning to put up with competition," he said. "When you come from a small high school, you are used to being on top the whole time. Here, I was behind Roselle Richardson. I just had to keep my composure and wait

#### 30 Years Ago - 1990

The 45th Ohio High School North-South All-Star game was filled with an encouraging performance from a future Buckeyes.

The North team, led by OSU quarterback signee Joe Pickens, scored on its first play from scrimmage and went on to a convincing 26-0 win over the South stars at Paul Brown Stadium in Massillon.

Pickens was the only future Ohio State player on the North squad. Playing on the South team were future Buckeye wide receiver Joey Galloway of Bellaire and offensive lineman Mike Dully of Hamilton.

Pickens was named the game's most valuable player for his efforts, which included tossing two touchdown passes and finishing 7 of 13 for 175 yards.

"It felt good to win it, but I didn't think I deserved it," Pickens said of the MVP title. "I think that (wideout) Brian (Winters) had a great night, and he probably should have gotten it over me."

Winters, a Michigan State signee, hauled in a 49-yard touchdown pass from Pickens to open the scoring and also returned a punt 65 yards for another touchdown.

#### 25 Years Ago - 1995

Orrville, Ohio, kicker Dan Stultz became the fourth member of Ohio State's 1996 recruiting class when he committed to the Buckeyes on July 5. He spoke to BSB later in the month about his commitment, camping at Ohio State and what led him to join the fold.

"That helped me a lot to come to the camp there," Stultz said. "The coaches there got a chance to see me kick, and they were happy with my leg strength. I also kicked off pretty well there. Most of the high school kids were kicking off from the 40, but I backed up to the college line at the 35 and still was able to consistently put the ball into the end zone."

For Ohio State, the sell to Stultz wasn't particularly chal-

"I guess I've always watched Ohio State on TV every Saturday," he said. "Ever since I can remember, I loved Ohio State. As soon as I started playing football, I knew if I ever became good enough, that OSU was where I wanted to try and play. I guess I got lucky."

#### 20 Years Ago - 2000

Ohio State was still six months away from National Signing Day for the 2001 football recruiting campaign, but the Buckeyes had already staked a claim to several of the top prospects in Ohio, if not the nation.

Ohio State pushed its class to nine commitments during July, picking up verbal commitments from two of the Buckeve State's best prospects, as well as a hard-hitting safety from Michigan.

The productive month included the surprise commitment of Canton (Ohio) GlenOak defensive back Dustin Fox, whose brother Derek had just finished a successful four-year run at

That news was topped July 21, when Upper Arlington defensive end Simon Fraser announced he was picking the Buckeyes over Michigan. That same day, Ypsilanti, Mich., safety Jacob Stewart notified the coaches of his intention to play for the Buckeyes as well.

#### 15 Years Ago - 2005

Ohio State landed its first offensive line pledge for the class of 2006 on July 31, securing a commitment from Cincinnati Colerain big man Connor Smith.

Smith was thought to be the most likely Buckeye among a trio of elite in-state offensive line talent, along with Pickerington North's Justin Boren and Aaron Brown of Cincinnati Princeton. His father, Joe, was a letter-winning offensive lineman at OSU between 1979 and 1982.

"I've been an Ohio State fan since I was 5 years old," Smith told BSB. "Obviously my dad playing there had something to do with that, but I always could picture myself playing there, too. When they offered me on Feb. 3, I really wanted to commit right there. But I waited and took some unofficial visits to a couple of places to make sure that my thoughts about Ohio State were correct. They were."

#### 10 Years Ago - 2010

Four members of the Cleveland Glenville football powerhouse said at an Aug. 18 press conference that they wanted to play their college ball together, complicating matters for Ohio State a bit at one of its strongest pipeline schools.

Wide receiver Shane Wynn, quarterback Cardale Jones, linebacker Andre Sturdivant and offensive lineman Aundrey Walker all said that they planned to stick together when it came to picking a college. Only two colleges had offered all four players - Bowling Green and Michigan - as of August.

"We do talk about going to the same school a lot because we've all been playing together since we were so young," Jones said. "All of us have the opportunity to go to one school. We don't want to all just split up. We want to stick together.'

Of the four Tarblooders in question, only two held offers from OSU - the 6-6, 355-pound Walker and the 5-8, 155-pound Wvnn.

Sturdivant said he was given a verbal offer by the Buckeyes

during the spring but had yet to receive an official written offer. Jones was the stickiest situation of the bunch for the Buckeyes, who had already accepted a pledge from quarterback Braxton Miller and told Miller that he'd be alone at the position in his

#### Five Years Ago - 2015

Although it was long anticipated, the official announcement that Ohio State would have at least three more years with a Bosa chasing quarterbacks didn't make the news any less sweet.

Nick Bosa, the younger brother of standout defensive end Joey, committed to Ohio State on July 23 by announcing his pledge on Twitter. The brothers both attended Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas, and Nick played the same position and wore the same number (97) as Joey. As such, many expected him to follow in the footsteps of his brother and pledge to suit up in the scarlet and gray.

The announcement came after he took a pair of visits to in-state schools. Secure in his decision to play for OSU head coach Urban Meyer after seeing what others had to offer, he made the call.

"It wasn't that I wanted to get it done, it was just that it felt right at the time," Bosa said. "I took my visits to Florida and Florida State, and I knew the best place for me was in Ohio, so that's when I made my decision.

"It doesn't get better than the program that Urban Meyer runs. It's run the right way, and he has all good guys at the positions. He only has the best.'

#### One Year Ago - 2019

The month of July was significant for Ohio State on the recruiting trail, as the staff landed commitments from seven of the nation's top prospects to bring the total number of pledges for the 2020 recruiting class to 22 players.

The Buckeyes climbed all the way to No. 2 in the 247Sports composite team rankings but dropped back to No. 4 behind Clemson, Alabama and LSU prior to the end of the month.

Cincinnati Elder three-star tight end Joe Royer kicked off the fireworks for the Buckeyes on July 2. Less than 24 hours later, Olnev (Md.) Good Counsel three-star linebacker Mitchell Melton pledged his services to Ohio State.

On July 4, OSU landed a pair of commitments from Muskegon, Mich., three-star athlete Cameron Martinez and Beech Grove, Ind., three-star offensive lineman Josh Fryar.

After a brief break, the Buckeyes went right back at it on July 7, adding St. Louis Trinity Catholic four-star wideout Mookie Cooper and Tucson (Ariz.) Salpointe Catholic four-star safety Lathan Ransom on July 16.

To end the swarm of commitments, Ohio State picked up Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco four-star safety Kourt Williams on July 24. The barrage helped the Buckeyes recover from the loss of three top targets at the halfback position, as Clovis (Calif.) Buchanan five-star Kendall Milton (Oklahoma); Salpointe Catholic five-star Bijan Robinson (Texas); and Deerfield Beach, Fla., four-star Jaylan Knighton (Florida State) all snubbed the Buckeyes.

46 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He's been recruited by some schools as a linebacker and by others as a safety. The Buckeyes view him as an outside linebacker who can drop back in coverage from time to time, filling a need at the Bullet position.

McCullough landed an offer from Ohio State on April 21, when he and his father, Kansas City Chiefs running backs coach Deland McCullough, took a virtual tour of the Buckeyes' campus and facilities with Washington and Day. He subsequently named his top schools on June 10, listing Ohio State alongside Clemson, Florida, Florida State, LSU, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Texas and USC.

Even before that virtual visit, though, McCullough was quite familiar with the state. He was born in Cincinnati and lived

there until he was 9 years old. Both his father and grandfather played college football at Miami (Ohio), while his older brother, Deland II, currently plays defensive back for the RedHawks.

McCullough's relationship with offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson predates his recruitment, as well. Wilson was the offensive coordinator at Miami during Deland's playing days

(1992-95) then hired him to be the running backs coach at Indiana from 2011-16, which is when the family moved away from Cincinnati in the first place.

The Buckeyes already hold a pair of commitments at linebacker in Powers and Kettering (Ohio) Archbishop Alter four-star C.J. Hicks, and that duo has put

**Continued On Page 22** 

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## Defensive End Adeleye Backs Off Pledge To OSU

**Continued From Page 21** 

increased pressure on McCullough to join the fold in recent weeks. He planned to take several unofficial visits this fall before making a decision, but the postponement of the Big Ten season made him reconsider his timeline.

McCullough becomes the fifth member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class, joining Hicks and Powers as well as West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West teammates Tegra Tshabola, a four-star offensive tackle, and four-star cornerback Jyaire Brown. That group gives the Buckeyes the nation's second-best haul, trailing only LSU, which holds commitments from seven players by comparison.

Moving forward, Ohio State hopes to round out the class with one more commitment at linebacker, with Manassas (Va.) Stonewall Jackson five-star Shawn Murphy and Manvel, Texas, three-star Justin Medlock among the top remaining targets to fill that need.

#### **Defensive End Commit Reopens Recruitment**

Ohio State suffered its second decommitment of the 2021 recruiting cycle when Katy (Texas) Tompkins four-star defensive end Tunmise Adeleye announced he was reopening his recruitment on Aug. 11. He joins Cincinnati La Salle three-star cornerback Devonta Smith, who flipped to Alabama in late June.

"First and foremost, I would like to

thank Coach (Larry) Johnson and the rest of the Ohio State staff for taking me in as one of their own since the day I committed," Adeleye wrote on Twitter. "The opportunity to play at Ohio State has always been a dream of mine, and I can't thank the staff enough for believing in my abilities and rewarding me with a scholar-ship offer. This experience has been nothing but a good one, and I have nothing but love for Coach Johnson on my end.

"However, with that being said, I feel it's best for me to decommit from Ohio State at this time. The decision to attend a university is a life-altering one, and I believe it's in my best interest to sit back and carefully re-evaluate all options at hand."

The 6-3, 245-pound Adeleye – who is considered the fourth-best strongside defensive end and No. 30 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – had been committed to Ohio State since April 15. He chose the Buckeyes over finalists Alabama, Florida, Oklahoma and Texas A&M.

The Aggies, Crimson Tide and Gators continued their pursuit of Adeleye in spite of his pledge, and the constant contact with other coaches is a big reason that he's now reconsidering his options.

Interestingly enough, Adeleye told 247Sports recruiting insider Brian Perroni on the eve of his decommitment that he was happy with his pledge to Ohio State and that a trip to Columbus was his only planned official visit for the fall.

"You know how recruiting can go one

way or it can go another way, but I'm happy with Ohio State, for sure," he said. "They understand that I'm committed to them. They know that I'm not just going to ignore people that want to talk to me. Just because I'm listening (to other schools) doesn't necessarily mean I'm going to change my mind about the school that I committed to or anything like that."

With Adeleye – who spent the spring semester at Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy but returned home this spring amid the coronavirus pandemic and will finish high school via online classes – no longer in the fold, Ohio State's pursuit of Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau becomes even more important. He doesn't plan to make a decision until the traditional National Signing Day in February, however.

One additional name to keep in mind is Sumter, S.C., four-star Justus Boone, who has been committed to Florida since February but received an offer from the Buckeyes on Aug. 18.

#### Five-Star Tackle Down To Five Schools

Fairfax (Va.) Robinson Secondary fivestar offensive tackle Tristan Leigh included Ohio State in his much-anticipated top five on July 23 alongside Alabama, Clemson, LSU and Oklahoma.

The 6-5, 270-pound Leigh is considered the third-best offensive tackle and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2021, mak-

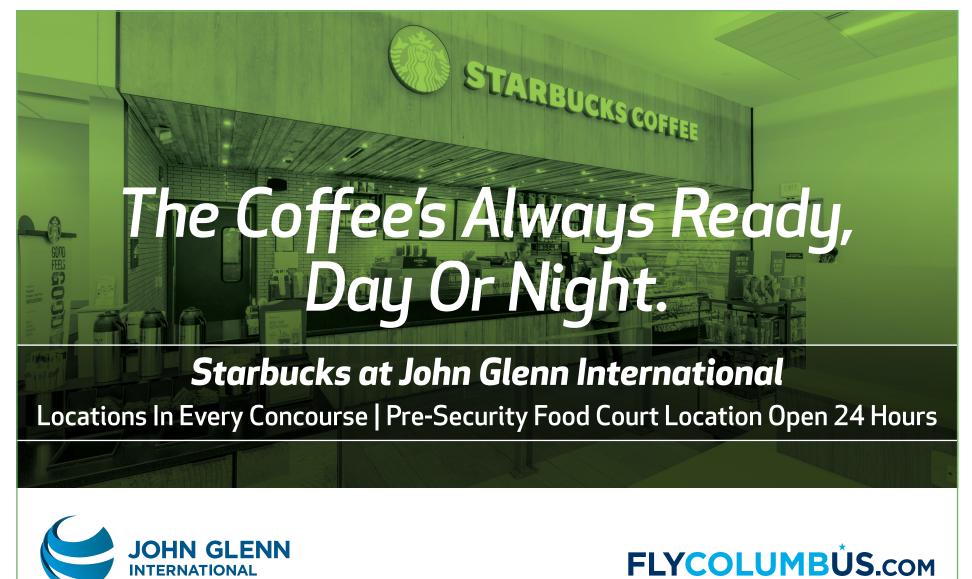
ing him one of the Buckeyes' top remaining targets in the current recruiting cycle next to Tuimoloau and Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receiver Emeka Egbuka.

Day and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa extended a scholarship offer to Leigh last September, and he made his first and only trip to Columbus on an unofficial visit for the win over Penn State in November. It's worth noting, though, the Buckeyes weren't actively recruiting him until IMG Academy five-star offensive tackle J.C. Latham unexpectedly committed to the Crimson Tide in June.

That allowed LSU to take an early lead in Leigh's recruitment, and the Tigers now hold 50 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions. Ohio State is in line for an official visit, though, and the Buckeyes hope to swing things in their favor at that time, pandemic permitting.

Ohio State already holds commitments along the offensive line from Bellaire (Texas) Episcopal five-star guard Donovan Jackson and Richfield (Ohio) Revere fourstar tackle Ben Christman, but the plan is to add two more this cycle. Leigh and Lexington (Ky.) Frederick Douglass fourstar guard Jager Burton are the top targets to fill those remaining slots.

Although it won't sway Leigh's decision one way or another, it's also worth noting the Buckeyes offered a scholarship to his younger brother, Aidan, on July 27. The younger Leigh is an unranked offensive tackle in the class of 2023 with early offers from Florida, LSU and Maryland, as well.



## **ASK AN ANALYST**

#### With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

How much do you think the Big Ten's decision to postpone the 2020 season will impact Ohio State's recruiting efforts in both the short and long term, especially if the ACC, Big 12 and SEC do play this fall?

"I think Ohio State is going to be able to survive this pretty well. Most kids aren't thinking that the Buckeyes won't be back on the field next year when it would actually start to impact them. While it's not an ideal situation, kids aren't looking that far ahead anyway, and the assumption is that Ohio State will be back playing next year and that it won't impact their college experience. Could be a rough few months public relations-wise if teams are playing in the fall, but I don't see this having a significant impact."

After being committed to Ohio State for four months, Katy (Texas) Tompkins four-star defensive end Tunmise Adeleye reopened his recruitment on Aug. 11. What factors led him to that decision, and who is the player (or players) most likely to replace him in the class?

"Despite his comments about dreaming about playing for the Buckeyes since the win over Oregon in the 2015 College Football Playoff National Championship Game, Tunmise never fully shut his recruitment down and kept up communication with other schools. I think this was always their most flimsy commitment. Ohio State just offered Florida defensive end commit Justus Boone, and they'll try to make the flip there. That could be tough without a visit, but Boone told me this week that he's pretty intrigued by what Larry Johnson has produced lately, and sources on the ground in Florida believe he will visit if the NCAA gives the green light for that stuff. Akron Archbishop Hoban three-star Darryl Peterson, a Wisconsin commit, could be one to watch, as well."

For the second consecutive cycle, Ohio State is locked in a battle with Tennessee for a Volunteer legacy who plays tight end. After missing out on 2021 Savannah (Tenn.) Hardin County four-star Hudson Wolfe, do you think the Buckeyes can secure a commitment next

month from 2022 Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star Bennett Christian?

"I have Ohio State as my pick to land Christian, though that final visit to Tennessee could be a hurdle. The Buckeyes have been on Christian from the jump and are also able to sell a very appealing depth chart with a lot of the tight end room expected to be gone by the time Christian arrives on campus."

Of the five Ohio State commits sitting out their senior seasons of high school with the intention of enrolling early, who do you think is most likely to make an impact for the Buckeyes as a true freshman, whether it's in a potential spring season or the traditional fall schedule?

"The easy answer is Pickerington (Ohio) North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer because Ohio State is going to rotate a lot of players at his position and he is their best committed prospect. However, allow me to cast a second vote for Hopewell, Va., five-star running back TreVeyon Henderson, who I feel will be tough to keep off the field as a true freshman."

#### Tight End Target Trims List To Two

While NCAA-sanctioned visits are not permitted during the current recruiting dead period, Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian has taken matters into his own hands with trips to Ohio State and Tennessee on consecutive weekends in August.

The 6-6, 235-pound Christian – who is considered the 16th-best tight end and No. 322 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – landed offers from Ohio State and Tennessee during a two-day period in early June, with Day, Wilson and executive director of football relations Tim Hinton leading the charge for the Buckeyes. He then made his first trip to Columbus on Aug. 14, at which time he and his father took an unguided tour of campus and had lunch with freshman cornerback Lejond Cavazos, who is a family friend.

The trip to Tennessee on Aug. 21, meanwhile, was a familiar one for Christian. His father played defensive tackle for the Volunteers under legendary coach Johnny Majors while his mother cheered for the program, and he's been to campus on numerous occasions in the past. Neither is pushing for him to follow in their footsteps, though, which is certainly good news for Ohio State, which missed on another Tennessee legacy (Savannah, Tenn., Hardin County four-star tight end Hudson Wolfe) earlier this cycle.

Christian will now decide between the two programs with plans to announce his commitment on the evening of Sept. 1, and Ohio State holds both the 247Sports crystal ball predictions at this time. The Buckeyes are still looking to add another tight end in the current cycle to pair with the aforementioned Hart, but an early commitment from Christian would no doubt ease the pressure on Wilson.

Depending on what happens with the class of 2021, the Buckeyes will look to add either one or two tight ends in 2022. In addition to Christian, Dickinson, Texas, four-star Donovan Green; Atlanta Westminster School four-star and Penn State commit Holden Staes; and Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star Benji Gosnell are among the players at the position who hold offers from the staff thus far.

#### Nation's Top Defensive Tackle Picks Alabama

Belleville, Mich., five-star defensive tackle

Damon Payne committed to Alabama on July 26 over finalists Arizona State, Kentucky, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State and USC.

The Buckeyes were once considered the favorite to land the 6-4, 297-pound Payne – who is the top-rated defensive tackle and No. 14 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – thanks, in large part, to defensive line coach 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 the Buckeyes' perspective.

Simply put, the communication between Johnson and the tight-lipped Payne dwindled, and Ohio State focused its attention elsewhere.

The Buckeyes hold one commitment on the interior of the defensive line in Streetsboro, Ohio, four-star tackle Mike Hall and still hope to add Oradell (N.J.) Bergen Catholic four-star tackle Tywone Malone to the fold.

#### Offensive Guard Target Chooses Notre Dame

Clarkston, Mich., four-star offensive guard Rocco Spindler committed to Notre Dame on Aug. 8 over finalists LSU, Michigan, Ohio State and Penn State.

The Buckeyes had their fair share of early interest in the 6-5, 315-pound Spindler – who is considered the third-best offensive guard and No. 48 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – but Burton has been ahead of him on their priority chart for some time.

While Spindler's decision has little to no impact on Ohio State moving forward, it does mark yet another significant blow to the Wolverines' in-state recruiting efforts. Seven of Michigan's top 11 prospects have opted to go elsewhere, including Spindler's teammate Garrett Dellinger, a four-star offensive tackle who committed to LSU in June.

#### Other Notes From Around The Country

• Christman accepted an invitation to the 2021 Under Armour All-America Game, which will take place at Camping World Stadium in Orlando on Jan. 7 at 6 p.m. ET and will be broadcast live on ESPN.

He'll join Philadelphia St. Joseph's fourstar wide receiver Marvin Harrison as the only Ohio State commits in the game, though Sawyer has received invitations to both the Under Armour All-America Game and the All-American Bowl and has yet to choose between the two.

The All-American Bowl is set to feature at least nine future Buckeyes, meanwhile, including Hall; Hancock; Henderson; Jackson; Jakailin Johnson; Pryor; Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord; Massillon (Ohio) Washington four-star wide receiver Jayden Ballard; and Ironton, Ohio, four-star line-backer Reid Carrico. That game will be held at the Alamodome in San Antonio on Jan. 9, with kickoff scheduled for 1 p.m. ET on NBC

- Egbuka was expected to visit Oklahoma on Aug. 20 for the "Sooner Summit" an unofficial gathering organized by five-star quarterback commit Caleb Williams but was unable to make his first trip to Norman. Ohio State remains the perceived leader in his recruitment, holding 89 percent of the 247Sports crystal ball predictions.
- Virginia Beach (Va.) Princess Anne five-star cornerback Tony Grimes, who was once among Ohio State's top targets at the position in the 2021 cycle, reclassified to the 2020 recruiting class and enrolled at North Carolina on July 30.
- Philadelphia Neumann Goretti fourstar linebacker Anthony Johnson included Ohio State in his top five schools on Aug. 20 alongside Alabama, Penn State, Rutgers and Texas A&M. Johnson, the ninth-best inside linebacker and No. 156 prospect overall in the class of 2022, landed an offer from the Buckeyes in May 2019.
- Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers committed to Texas on Aug. 14. The No. 1 quarterback and No. 2 player overall in the class of 2022, Ewers landed an offer from Ohio State in June 2018 and has been among the staff's top targets at the position ever since. The Buckeyes will now focus most if not all of their attention on Gardena (Calif.) Junipero Serra five-star Maalik Murphy.
- Ohio State sent out several new offers over the last month, including 2023 Tampa (Fla.) Carrollwood Day unranked offensive tackle Clay Wedin on July 23; 2023 Danvers (Mass.) St. John's Prep four-star athlete Joenel Aguero and 2023 Orlando Timber Creek unranked offensive guard T.J. Shanahan on July 27; 2023 Orlando Dr.

Phillips unranked offensive tackle Payton Kirkland and 2023 Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola unranked defensive end Derrick LeBlanc on July 29; 2023 Jacksonville Trinity Christian Academy four-star athlete Treyaun Webb on Aug. 1; 2022 Williamstown, N.J., fivestar athlete Keon Sabb on Aug. 3; 2022 Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star offensive tackle Gunner Givens on Aug. 10; 2022 Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star running back Damari Alston on Aug. 11; 2022 Charlestown, Ind., four-star offensive tackle Kiyaunta Goodwin on Aug. 13; 2022 Memphis Whitehaven unranked offensive tackle Aliou Bah on Aug. 14; 2023 Mentor, Ohio, four-star defensive end Brenan Vernon on Aug. 15; 2022 Chatsworth (Calif.) Sierra Canyon three-star offensive tackle Kenji Swanson on Aug. 18; and 2022 St. Louis Lutheran North four-star cornerback Toriano Pride on Aug. 19.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out BuckeyeSports. com, free to all BSB subscribers, daily.



## Ohio State's Errors Help Alabama To 16-10 Win

By JIM WHARTON Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Throughout the fall, Buckeye Sports Bulletin will be "playing" its 40th Anniversary football season with recaps of the biggest Ohio State games of each corresponding week in our publishing history. We kick off this feature with the 1986 Kickoff Classic, where the Buckeyes squared off with No. 5 Alabama. Additional features about this game will be posted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Aug. 27.

It was, at least the way Ohio State viewed it, the Mistake(s) at The Meadowlands.

The Ohio State football team made too many mistakes as it opened its 1986 season on a sour note, dropping a 16-10 decision to Alabama in the Chase Kickoff Classic.

"The difference in the game was the mistakes, very costly mistakes – fumbles and a couple of interceptions," said Buckeye coach Earle Bruce after the Buckeyes, leading at one point 10-6, lost their season opener for the first time since the 1978 squad of Woody Hayes dropped a 19-0 decision to Penn State. "When you fumble going in, that's a disaster. We had many opportunities tonight, and we could not convert offensively.

"I don't think that takes anything away from the aggressiveness of Alabama's defense," continued Bruce, who failed to win his opener for the first time in his eight seasons at Ohio State. "They did a good job of defending us and forcing a lot of things that happened. But basically, it's your own mistakes in football that kill you, and it did tonight for Ohio State."

The Buckeyes began their series of miscues in the early going. Senior quarterback Jim Karsatos came out firing, hitting tailback Vince Workman out of the backfield for a nine-yard gain on the first play of the game. Alternating tailback John Wooldridge then picked up two yards for the Buckeyes' initial first down of the year.

But the next play was the kind coaches hate to see. Karsatos, trying to hook up with wide receiver Nate Harris, instead had his pass picked off by Alabama safety Ricky Thomas. The Crimson Tide, taking over at the OSU 40, were in position to take an early lead. They did.

After picking up a first down at the Buckeye 29, Alabama had to settle for a 38-yard field goal by Van Tiffin to take a 3-0 lead less than four minutes into the game.

A 44-yard return of the ensuing kickoff by Jamie Holland had Ohio State in good field position for its second possession.

Workman went right and then cut back over the middle to pick up 17 yards on second down to give the Buckeyes a first down at the Alabama 27. Karsatos, who finished fifth in the country in passing efficiency last year, then hooked up with tight end Ed Taggart over the middle for 11 yards and a first down at the 16.

But two penalties on the next four plays sent out bad vibes to the Ohio State faithful in the crowd of 68,296 in Giants Stadium. A third-down pass for Taggart over the middle was slightly overthrown and an offensive pass interference penalty forced the Buckeyes to try a field goal from the 27.

Freshman place-kicker Pat O'Morrow never got a chance as the snap from center Tom Moore was bad. Holder Cris Carter was drilled for a six-yard loss by the 'Bama defense as he tried to scramble.

After forcing the Tide to punt, Ohio State

next took over on its own 17. The Buckeyes netted a first down at the 41 when Harris made a leaping catch of a pass from Karsatos, somehow survived a hit by 'Bama defender Kermit Kendrick and came down with an 18-yard gain.

Wooldridge and fullback George Cooper combined for 10 yards on one carry each for another first down before one of the stranger plays of the game netted the Bucks another first down. Karsatos stepped up into the pocket and hit wide receiver Everett Ross. After a gain of 10 yards, Ross was hit by Crimson Tide linebacker Joe Godwin. Ross fumbled but the ball went directly into the hands of Carter, who gained another nine yards before being run out of bounds by Kendrick.

That march down the field was wasted when O'Morrow came up way short on a 42-yard field goal attempt. Alabama went ahead 6-0 on its next possession when Tiffin capped a 10-play drive with a 44-yard field goal.

The Buckeyes were forced to punt but defensive back and co-captain Sonny Gordon then stepped in front of a Mike Shula pass intended for tight end Howard Cross and made an interception. A 21-yard return by Gordon had the Bucks in business at the Crimson Tide 45 with 8:20 left in the first half

Three plays later Holland dashed 26 yards to paydirt on an inside reverse. Holland, who did not carry the ball once in 1985 but did show three rushes in 1984, went right, used a crushing block from right tackle Larry Kotterman, cut back to his left, slipped a tackle attempt by Kendrick and slipped into the end zone with Ohio State's first touchdown of the season. O'Morrow converted and the Buckeyes led 7-6 with 7:51 remaining before intermission.

Ohio State had two more possessions in the half, punting once and having the second stopped when 'Bama freshman Vantreise Davis picked off a Karsatos pass for Holland.

The Buckeyes dominated the third quarter. Their first possession ended in a 37-yard field goal by O'Morrow. Karsatos, who finished the evening with 20 completions in 31 attempts for 193 yards, hit on five out of six in the drive. The big plays in the advance were a 10-yard completion to Cooper and a 17-yard pickup on a throw to Carter, the latter's first catch of the year.

Things really looked bright when Alabama's Kerry Goode fumbled the ensuring kickoff and Tom Anderzack fell on it for the Buckeyes. But that possession ended when Cooper, heading over right guard on a first-and-goal at the nine, fumbled. Anthony Smith, a defensive tackle, recovered it for Alabama

Five plays later the Bucks had the ball again when linebacker Chris Spielman leaped to intercept another Shula pass after the Crimson Tide quarterback had avoided strong pressure from Buckeye linebacker John Sullivan.

The Buckeyes punted on that possession but got the ball back two plays later when Gordon recovered a Bobby Humphrey fumble at the Alabama 26. Two false start penalties backed the Bucks up 10 yards and on the second play of the fourth quarter O'Morrow again came up way short on a 44-yard attempt at a three-pointer.

All of those missed opportunities must have sent out signals to Alabama that it could still bounce back. The Crimson Tide did just that.

## **The Numbers Game**

#### Alabama 16, Ohio State 10

Aug. 27, 1986 - Giants Stadium, East Rutherford, N.J.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
ALABAMA	3	3	0	10	16
OHIO STATE	0	7	3	0	10

**First Quarter** 

ALA - Tiffin 38-yard field goal, 11:21.

**Second Quarter** 

**ALA** – Tiffin 44-yard field goal, 12:49. **OSU** – Holland 26-yard run (O'Morrow kick), 7:09.

Third Quarter

**OSU** – O'Morrow 37-yard field goal, 7:40.

**Fourth Ouarter** 

**ALA** – Bell 3-yard pass from Shula (Tiffin kick), 9:33.

ALA – Tiffin 28-yard field goal, 1:02.

**Att.** – 68,296

33,230	Team Statistics	
	ALA	osu
First Downs	17	16
Rushing	12	8
Passing	5	6
Penalty	0	2
Rushes-Yards	50-212	33-123
Passing Yards	83	193
Passes (CompAttInt.)	11-19-2	20-31-2
Offensive Plays	69	64
Total Net Yards	295	316
Third Down Efficiency	4-11	4-12
Punts-Avg.	4-38.2	4-40.0
Fumbles-Lost	3-2	4-1
Penalties	7-55	6-40
Time of Possession	31:27	28:33
	Individual Statistics	

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – ALABAMA:** Jelks 15-68; Humphrey 11-50; Allen 11-43; K. Goode 8-31; Shula 5-20. **OHIO STATE:** Workman 13-38; Wooldridge 10-30; Holland 1-26; Cooper 5-23; Carter 1-3: Karsatos 3-3

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – ALABAMA: Shula 11-19-2-83-1. OHIO STATE: Karsatos 20-31-2-193-0

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – ALABAMA: Allen 4-28; K. Goode 3-28; Bell 2-8; Richardson 1-10; Cross 1-9. OHIO STATE: Workman 6-47; Harris 4-36; Taggart 4-28; Carter 3-56; Cooper 2-16; Ross 1-10. PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – ALABAMA: Mohr 4-38.2-47. OHIO STATE: Tupa 4-40.0-44.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.-Long.) – ALABAMA: Richardson 2-7.5-15. OHIO STATE: Ross 3-5.0-8. KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.-Long.) – ALABAMA: Goode 1-37.0-37; Humphrey 1-23.0-23. OHIO STATE: Holland 4-22.3-44; Workman 1-20.0-20.

**DEFENSIVE FUMBLES RECOVERED BY – ALABAMA:** Smith. **OHIO STATE:** Gordon, Anderzack. **INTERCEPTIONS – ALABAMA:** R. Thomas, V. Davis. **OHIO STATE:** Gordon, Spielman. **TACKLES FOR LOSS – ALABAMA:** Rockwell, Smith, D. Thomas, P. Brown, Gilbert. **OHIO STATE:** 

Spielman (2), J. Sullivan (2), Ridder.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.) – ALABAMA: R. Thomas 6-1-7; Rockwell 6-1-7; V. Davis 3-2-5; Godwin

3-1-4; Smith 2-2-4; Cooper 4-0-4; Jarvis 3-1-4; Slaughter 0-4-4; P. Brown 3-1-4; W Davis 4-0-4; D. Thomas 2-1-3; Robinson 2-1-3; Shepard 3-0-3; Hendricks 2-0-2; Gilbert 2-0-2; Richardson 1-0-1; Braggs 1-0-1; Condon 1-0-1; Mitchell 1-0-1; Holoman 1-0-1; Epps 1-0-1.

**OHIO STATE:** Spielman 11-5-16; Gordon 7-3-10; Kee 6-3-9; Rogan 7-1-8; J. Sullivan 7-1-8; Hilliman 5-1-6; Kumerow 3-1-4; Lee 3-1-4; Brown 3-0-3; Ridder 2-0-2; Higdon 1-0-1.

Shula drove his team 72 yards in 12 plays for its first six-pointer. Shula, who completed 11 passes in 19 attempts for 83 yards in the game, connected with favorite receiver Albert Bell slanting over the middle for a three-yard TD pass with 9:33 left in the game. Tiffin's conversion put Alabama ahead 13-10.

The Tide then tried to clinch the verdict after taking a Tom Tupa punt to start a drive at its own 40. Eleven plays later Alabama had a first-and-goal at the OSU five. But Spielman, voted the most valuable player of the game, dropped first tailback Gene Jelks for a two-yard loss and then Shula for an additional three-yard loss. Shula's pass for Jelks in the left corner of the end zone was long and the Tide settled for a 28-yard field goal by Tiffin for a 16-10 lead with 1:02 showing on the clock.

The Buckeyes, who must regroup for a Sept. 13 clash in Seattle against Washington, gave it a real last-ditch effort.

Karsatos hit Workman over the middle for eight and Carter to the left for 21 and a first down at midfield. After another pass to Workman picked up five yards, Karsatos was sacked by Alabama linebacker Randy Rockwell for a three-yard loss. Eight seconds remained.

The clock ran out as Karsatos tried to hit Carter deep. But Alabama was penalized 15 yards for pass interference by linebacker Derrick Thomas. Since a game cannot end on a defensive penalty, the Buckeyes, now snapping from the 33, got one more play.

Karsatos then hit Carter at the 18 and 'Bama – and Thomas – again was called for interference. There was, again, no time on the clock, but there was another play. One final fling toward Carter was broken up by Alabama's Chris Goode and Britton Cooper.

Maybe the Buckeyes felt they had nine lives at this point.

"I don't know about that," said Bruce. "But the fouls were committed and the penalties were called. I just wish Cris Carter could have made that catch there at the end. Then I would have been all smiles and someone else would have been crying. But it didn't happen that way."

## Loss To Crimson Tide Lessens Award For Spielman

By JIM WHARTON Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Chris Spielman stood in a corner of a crowded interview room deep in the bowels of Giants Stadium in East Rutherford, N.J. An integral force on the Ohio State defense, Spielman tried his best to hide the disappointment he was obviously feeling.

Spielman and his Buckeye mates had just lost a 16-10 decision to Alabama in the Chase Kickoff Classic, the college football season opener. He wasn't a happy young

Informed by this writer that he had been named the most valuable player of the game, Spielman was not overly impressed. That is his nature. To Spielman, a junior out of Massillon, Ohio, the football capital of the Midwest, that type of reward is meaningless when the Buckeyes lose.

In listening to Spielman, it doesn't take long to find out "what are you going to do."

"The MVP award really doesn't mean too much now," said Spielman, who was credited with 16 tackles - two for losses and had one interception as the Buckeye defense did its best to overcome mistakes by the offense against the highly touted Crimson Tide of Alabama.

"Maybe when I'm 90 years old and I'm watching the game on TV I'll say, 'Hey, Chris Jr., I won that MVP award a long time ago.' But it's irrelevant now. We got beat and that's the only thing that matters in college football - winning or losing. Unfortunately we didn't win. What are we going to do? Come back and beat the Huskies.

Not that Spielman, who was also voted the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Buckeye of the Week and who is an impressive physical specimen at 6-2 and 235 pounds, didn't try to beat the Crimson Tide single-handedly. He was, as usual, all over the field, making the first hit on an enemy ball carrier more often than not. He picked off a Mike Shula pass to end one Alabama drive late in the third quarter. He drove Crimson Tide running back Gene Jelks out of bounds

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for a two-yard loss and sacked Shula for a three-yard loss to force Alabama to settle for a field goal with just over a minute left in the game.

But the Buckeyes, given two plays thanks to defensive penalties after time had actually expired, fell inches short of possibly winning the game 17-16.

Three missed field goals, two pass interceptions and one fumble deep in Alabama territory snuffed out several OSU scoring opportunities. It was suggested by one writer that perhaps the defense had reason to get dejected watching the offense sputter.

"I think with some teams it (those offensive misfortunes) can affect their game, said Spielman, a first-team All-Big Ten and honorable-mention All-American last year. "But Ohio State's a unit and if the offense doesn't play well and we lose a game, we all lost a game. If the defense doesn't play well and the offense plays great and we still lose, we all lose. It doesn't affect Ohio

Spielman, a team player from the word go who describes himself as a leader by example, would not think of getting down on his teammates.

Those guys are some of my best friends in the world," said Spielman, who finished second to Pepper Johnson on the team in tackles last fall. "I'd cut my arm off for them right now. We made some mistakes. We made some mistakes - on offense and defense - and Alabama capitalized. We couldn't capitalize on Alabama's mistakes.

"It comes down to execution. They executed well and we did not. What are you

Spielman also did not subscribe to the theory that the Buckeyes were worn down physically in the fourth quarter, a period in

Other Big 40th Anniversary Games

There were several other big games at this time throughout the years. They include: 1995: The Buckeyes knocked off No. 22 Boston College in the Kickoff Classic, 38-6. Eddie George kicked off what would prove to be a Heisman-winning year with 17 carries for 99 yards and two touchdowns and four catches for another 58 yards, and Bobby Hoying was 17 of 26 for 269 yards and a score.

1998: Ohio State traveled to Morgantown for an early-season tilt with No. 11 West Virginia and came away with a 34-17 victory. Michael Wiley and Joe Germaine were big guns for the Buckeyes. Wiley gained 140 yards on 17 carries with a score, and Germaine passed for 301 yards and two TDs. David Boston and Dee Miller each had over 100 yards receiving.

1999: Santana Moss caught just three passes for No. 12 Miami (Fla.) but took one of them 67 yards for a score to lead the Hurricanes to a 23-12 win over Ohio State at another Kickoff Classic. Austin Moherman got the start at quarterback for OSU in the opener and completed 10 of 22 passes for 107 yards and a touchdown. He threw two interceptions and was sacked three times.

which the Crimson Tide overcame a 10-6 OSU lead.

"I don't think we were worn down," said Spielman. "It was just one of those things where Alabama was executing its offense. What are you going to do? What can you do? We're not worn down. We're in good shape. When you've been practicing since August 4th in 90-degree heat, you can't be worn down."

Spielman also did not think Alabama came to life in the fourth quarter.

"I thought they played well in the fourth quarter," he said. "I don't think it was that they came alive. They just capitalized on our mistakes. If we want to be a great football team, we can't make those offensive and defensive mistakes that we made."

And despite the setback, Spielman feels the Buckeyes can become a great football

"I feel we're capable of beating any football team," said Spielman. "Tonight Alabama was a better football team. You've got to give them all the credit - they won the game. I give them credit - we lost. I think we were equally matched and it was a good game. Unfortunately Alabama was the better team."

Spielman, by nature, will growl even harder as he and his Buckeye teammates, after a couple of days off, go about the business of preparing for a Sept. 13 trip to Seattle where they will tangle with Washington. The Kickoff Classic contest will, according to Spielman, be beneficial to the Buckeyes.

"I think it will be a little advantage, yes, that we have one game experience under out belts," said Spielman. "But being that Coach (Don) James is from Massillon, where I'm from, I know he'll be ready to go and I know he'll have his team ready to go.

"What are you going to do? We're going to be ready, also."

This story originally appeared in the Sept. 13. 1986, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.



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## Byars, Spencer Among All-Time Great OSU Backs

By JOE DEMPSEY Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ranking the multitude of great running backs in Ohio State history represents a seemingly impossible task. After all, an Ohio State runner has eclipsed 100 yards in a game on 516 occasions and broken the 1,000-yard threshold for a season 36 times.

Buckeye backs have brought home five Heisman Trophy honors to Columbus including Vic Janowicz, Howard "Hopalong" Cassady, Archie Griffin, who is the only player to win twice, and Eddie George.

Some of the top tailbacks in Ohio State history never won a Heisman or received as much national recognition, yet their former coaches and teammates still regard them among the best of the best.

Although Tim Spencer started just two seasons for the Buckeyes after beginning as a fullback, he ranked second in school history for career rushing yards behind Griffin when he left Ohio State in 1982.

Nearly 40 years later, Spencer still ranks fifth in the program's illustrious history for rushing yards with 3,553. He totaled 2,755 rushing yards in his two seasons as starting tailback.

Former Ohio State linebackers coach/defensive coordinator Fred Pagac, who spent 23 years on the Buckeye staff before 17 years in the NFL, schemed against countless elite backs during his career. As an old-school defensive coach, Pagac always appreciated the toughness of Spencer.

"I think he's one of the best backs that

played at Ohio State," Pagac said. "He was solid, he was strong, he was fast, he was productive, and he was a team player."

When Spencer came to Columbus out of St. Clairsville, Ohio, in 1979 he was an All-American tailback with over 3,000 yards and 50 touchdowns in his prep career. Even though Spencer was expected to be the feature back of the future, the 6-1, 202-pound freshman found himself behind former standout Calvin Murray on the depth chart.

Murray earned the starting spot as a junior in '79, but instead of waiting his turn at tailback, Spencer transitioned to fullback to help the team. Ricardo Volley served as the primary fullback, but Spencer pitched in when needed, totaling 221 yards and two touchdowns on 6.0 yards per carry without a single negative run for the 11-1 Buckeyes.

"High character – that's what Timmy is – he has high character, he's a good person, and I have a lot of respect for Tim," Pagac said. "Tim had great competitiveness, he was very tough, had great strength, and he'd pound it in there."

As a sophomore in 1980, Spencer led Ohio State with eight rushing touchdowns from his fullback spot. He also gained 584 rushing yards and lost only seven for a total of 577 net yards on a 5.3 yards-per-carry average.

Spencer's backup at fullback was Vaughn Broadnax, who joined the team as a freshman in 1980. Broadnax credited Spencer's selflessness for his successful move to fullback, where he helped the Buckeyes finish 9-3.

"When you talk about a teammate making that sacrifice to play fullback instead of getting the glory out of the tailback role, that shows he was a true team player," Broadnax said. "He didn't have to accept moving to fullback, and he did. He did a great job, and in a way, it made him appreciate the job the fullback did more."

After waiting his turn at tailback, Spencer became "the guy" as a junior in 1981. And it did not take long for the talented runner to show he deserved that title.

On Ohio State's first play from scrimmage on the season, Spencer took a handoff from Art Schlichter for an 82-yard touchdown against Duke to set the tone. The Buckeyes went on to beat the Blue Devils 34-13 behind 172 rushing yards and three touchdowns from Spencer.

Spencer helped lead the Scarlet and Gray to another 9-3 season, gaining 1,222 rushing yards and losing only five for 1,217 net yards on the year. He averaged 5.4 yards per carry, and his 12 touchdowns marked a team high. Displaying his versatility, Spencer also caught 23 passes for 210 yards and returned 18 kickoffs for 367 yards as a junior.

Rarely losing yards, Spencer excelled as a senior in 1982. He gained 1,585 rushing yards and lost 47 for a net of 1,538, which marked the third most in school history behind only Griffin at the time.

Spencer averaged 5.6 yards per carry and ran for a team-high 14 touchdowns. He also snagged 13 receptions for 138 yards and one score and returned eight kicks for 146 yards.

Concluding his career with 3,553 rushing yards, Spencer sat at No. 2 on the Ohio State all-time rushing leaders list for 13 years until George passed him. He is currently fifth behind Griffin, J.K. Dobbins, Ezekiel Elliott and George, but he would likely be higher if he had not split carries with fellow tailback Jimmy Gayle.

"If you look at those two years he started at tailback, he pretty much split the load with Jimmy Gayle," Broadnax said. "And to this day I believe he would have had 2,000-yard seasons had he not had to share the load at tailback. He averaged well over 5 yards per carry, but he was splitting tailback duty with Jimmy. He was a fast and strong running back, and he will always be in my top five OSU running backs."

Gayle rushed for 1,914 yards and 20 touchdowns on 400 carries from 1979-82, including 732 yards and nine touchdowns as a junior and 647 yards and six scores as a senior.

Ohio State historian Jack Park considers Spencer one of the best backs in program history and has always contended that he was underrated as a tailback. The Buckeye expert agrees with Broadnax that if Spencer had not split time with a talented back like Gayle, he would rank higher among the all-time greats.

"Spencer would have had more yardage and more touchdowns, and that would have moved him up the charts a little bit more," Park said. "And he probably would have had a little more recognition."

During his Buckeye career, Spencer excelled at gaining positive yards regardless of how the defense was stacked up against him.

He carried the ball 644 times in scarlet and gray, vet lost only 59 yards total.

Although former Ohio State recruiting coordinator/tight ends coach Bill Conley was still coaching prep football at Middletown (Ohio) High School during Spencer's career, he remembers his all-around abilities and knack for falling forward.

"Tim was a big running back, and he was a good pass blocker too," Conley said. "For Tim, the defense knew when he was going to get the ball, and he still got yardage. Timmy Spencer was a reliable guy. If you needed plus-yards, he was going to get you yards. And he had enough speed, he could break some big ones too."

Following Spencer's graduation, another great back took the reins of the Ohio State backfield in Dayton native Keith Byars.

Broadnax was entering his junior season for the Buckeyes when he had a firsthand look at Byars on a daily basis after hearing so much about the prep standout from Dayton.

"When Keith Byars came in as a freshman, I had known him from Dayton Roth High School football, basketball and on the track, and I knew he was a freakish athlete," the 6-3, 248-pound Broadnax said. "When you have a guy that big, that's a little smaller than you, come in and you see his physique, you see his natural ability, and you just say, "Wow."

Like Spencer before him, Byars was a bear to bring down as a runner. He lost only 58 yards at Ohio State while gaining 3,258 yards for a net of 3.200 yards.

While Pagac's former teammate Griffin was known more for his finesse as a runner, Spencer and Byars possessed immense power. Byars came in at 6-2 and 225 pounds as a freshman and added 11 pounds of muscle during his career.

"DBs didn't want to tackle either of those two," Pagac said of Spencer and Byars. "I don't know if I can rank them. That's like if you asked me to rank linebackers – there's a boatload of them. There are a lot of good players, and the best part is, those are good people."

Beyond his physique and natural running ability, Broadnax came away impressed with Byars' mentality as well. Not only did Byars have the physical capabilities to dominate on the field, but he developed into an all-around team player at Ohio State.

"Keith was moved to fullback as a freshman, and I know he didn't like it," Broadnax said. "But I'll tell you what, that experience helped him have a long career in the pros, because when he had to block for someone, he realized that that was for the team. And he became a great teammate throughout his college and pro days.

"But the thing about Keith was once he got going, oh, he was hard to tackle. He really had great balance. Now, he wasn't a shifty guy, but he had deceptive speed. And once he got his speed going, you didn't want to hit those massive thighs as a tackler."

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#### OHIO STATE FOOTBALL

Outside of his dynamic athleticism, Byars brought a diverse set of skills that made him a nightmare for opposing defenses. If teams scripted their defense to stop Byars inside, he could beat them outside, and if they loaded up against the run, he could win in the passing game.

"The thing about Keith Byars was if you ever had to defend him, you had to defend the entire athlete because he was so versatile," Conley said. "He could do everything. He was a great short-yardage back the same time he had the speed and athleticism and agility to make an off-tackle play end up being an 80-yarder.

"His explosiveness, along with his power – that's a tough thing to combat. It was tough for any one person to bring him down, because he had so much power as a runner. And if he pulled away, he could outrun all linebackers, and most defensive backs."

Byars used his rare combination of power and speed to provide Buckeye fans with some of the most entertaining and impressive performances in program history. When Ohio State found itself down 24-0 against Illinois in 1984, the talented tailback led the Buckeyes to an exhilarating 45-38 comeback victory with 274 rushing yards and five touchdowns, including a 67-yard dash with one shoe.

"I felt the shoe slip, and it just popped off," Byars explained following the game. "I wasn't about to slow down to go back and get it. I tried to get to the end zone as quick as possible and hope no one would step on my size 14."

Conley remembers how the entire Scarlet and Gray squad rallied around the junior running back from Dayton, who had put the team on his back.

"Things were looking bleak, very bleak. And then he broke that one, and that was like an energy shot for the whole football team," Conley said. "Everybody's spirits got up and there was no doubt we were going to come back.

"The damn shame about the whole thing with Keith is that if he would not have hurt his foot (the following season), he had the Heisman Trophy hands down. He was the leading guy in the nation going into the season."

Byars was a favorite for the Heisman Trophy after rushing for 1,764 yards and 22 touchdowns with 42 catches for 479 yards and two scores as a junior in 1984. In fact, to many, including Conley, Byars should have won the award over Boston College's Doug Flutie in '84.

Flutie threw for 3,454 yards with 27 touchdowns and 11 interceptions on 60.4-percent passing in 1984. He was most known for one play, however, a 48-yard touchdown to Gerard Phelan on a desperation heave to defeat Miami (Fla.) 47-45.

"There's no doubt, you could ask any college football coach, 'Who would you rather have on your team, Keith Byars or Doug Flutie?' – and not taking anything away from Doug, he was a really good player – I don't think anybody would have taken Flutie over Keith Byars," Conley said. "I think, Flutie, the one play made his career. If that play doesn't make it, he's a good quarterback, but he's not a difference maker like Keith Byars."

Many fans point to Byars' heroic ways against Illinois as a junior when reminiscing on his historic career, yet he had numerous standout games. For example, in 1984, Byars scored four touchdowns in a 45-26 victory against Iowa, including two rushing scores and one receiving touchdown as well as one via his arm.

The prior season, Byars also displayed his versatility against Purdue. While leading the Buckeyes to a 33-22 win, Byars became the first Ohio State player since Ray Hamilton in 1949 to gain 100 rushing yards and 100 receiving yards in the same game.

The Boilermakers had no answer for Byars, who rushed 23 times for 135 yards and two

touchdowns while also adding four receptions for 120 yards in the passing game. He could take a check-down the distance, but his coaches were diligent in planning how to get the ball to their best player.

"He was a guy that you could use in so many situations and so many down and distances, really," Conley said. "The screen pass was big with him out of the backfield. Our quarterbacks at that time were good quarterbacks, but they weren't as mobile as a Rex Kern or some guys later on. So we had to rely on the backs to get all those yards. Every week, every game plan was designed, 'What can we do to get the ball to Keith?'

"If teams liked to play him man-on-man out of the backfield, put like a linebacker on him or something like that, that's an advantage to us. Because he was much more athletic than the linebackers that were going up against him."

Throughout his injury-shortened career, Byars totaled 882 receiving yards and three scores on 72 receptions. During his junior campaign, Byars led the Buckeyes in catches with 42, besting standout freshman wide receiver Cris Carter by one.

Not only was he a mismatch for defenses with the ball in his hands, but Byars developed into a great blocker, in part thanks to the culture at Ohio State as well as his selflessness. In addition to his historic production, what makes Byars one of the best backs in school history is the fact that he had no weaknesses – he could do it all.

"He was a complete running back, probably more complete than any I can ever remember," Conley said. "Because also you have to think about the role the running back played in blocking too, especially pass protection. He was a great run-blocking running back too, and now today, that job often goes to an extra tight end in the game, not the running back.

"First, when you're as big as Keith and as physical as him, I mean he could take on any rushing defensive lineman or linebacker. And so you didn't have to take him out of the game to pass protect. He was complete not just in terms of versatility in scoring points and making yards but his blocking ability."

After Flutie beat out Byars for the 1984 Heisman Trophy, the talented tailback was poised to take the honor home as a senior. Park said Ohio State head coach Earle Bruce had thought Byars was a lock for the nation's top individual award in his final season.

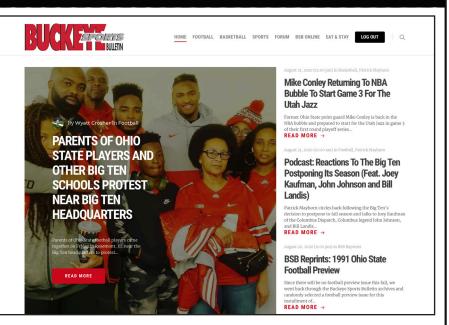
"I know Earle was counting on it, that's for sure," Park said. "Earle loved Keith. He loved all his players, but he told me a couple times, he always felt that Byars didn't ever get quite the recognition he should have at Ohio State. And that's Earle's opinion, and he got a lot of recognition, but Earle thought that he should have been more highly esteemed."

Unfortunately for Byars, Bruce and the Buckeyes, the star running back suffered a foot injury that cost him most of his final collegiate season. Despite the injury, Byars still ranks second in program history with 50 career touchdowns, behind only Pete Johnson's 58. He also boasts the highest all-purpose yards-per-game average in Ohio State history at 203.4 from his junior season, which is 23.1 more yards per game than George's No. 2-ranked average from his 1995 Heisman campaign.

Although his career did not end in Columbus with the prestigious Heisman Trophy, to those who coached him, played with him and watched him. Byars will always be an all-time great.

"He was a great athlete, 6-2, and he had all the skills of a great player," Pagac said. "And that's why he was a great player – he performed. He's one of the Ohio State greats, and I don't know what order they're in, but Keith is a great person, great competitor, great player, and he had the talent and he was a team player."

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## **Buckeyes Secure Pledge From Ohio's Top 3 Prospects**

By JOE DEMPSEY **Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer** 

At the end of Thad Matta's tenure at Ohio State, he faced much criticism for his inability to keep the best high school players in the

Whether it was Nigel Hayes (Toledo) and Terry Rozier (Shaker Heights) in 2013, Luke Kennard (Franklin) and Carlton Bragg (Cleveland) in 2015, or Nick Ward (Gahanna) and Zavier Simpson (Lima) in 2016, Matta missed on many of Ohio's top prospects.

Since arriving in Columbus in 2017, Chris Holtmann has made building relationships with in-state recruits a priority. The members of the 2021 class were just freshmen in high school in his first season, and the strong bonds paid off when the top three prospects in the state committed to the Buckeyes.

The No. 1 recruit in Ohio, Malaki Branham, became the latest member of the 2021 class with his verbal commitment on July 22. The four-star shooting guard from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary represents a big addition. He is the fifth-best shooting guard and No. 27 overall prospect nationally.

Branham joins Garfield Heights fourstar combo guard Meechie Johnson and Crestview Convoy four-star power forward Kalen Etzler, who rank second and third in the state, respectively.

"It shows the younger people coming up after us: 'Stay home, play for your state, enjoy playing for your hometown," said Johnson, who committed on Aug. 13, 2019. "It shows them you don't have to go to the blue bloods or any of those schools. Be a hometown hero at the end of the day, it's plain and simple. It means a lot. It's great for the program and what we're doing. And it's just a good look.

"Us going there also shows the younger people how good of people and coaches that these people are. Our coaches are amazing people from what we've learned and how we've been recruited by them. You've got the three best kids in Ohio going to one school, so it just shows that we're going to do something special for our state and that we want to."

The first commit of the class, Etzler, also credited Holtmann and assistant coach Ryan Pedon for helping secure the state's top three players, which had been a goal for the Crestview standout.

"It feels good, because we had a drawing board of us three hopefully coming to the school," said Etzler, who committed on May 12, 2019. "The fact that we got all three of us to actually go and follow through with our plan feels really good."

Etzler and Johnson teamed up for the first time this summer, thriving in the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) with the Indianapolis Heat. They lost only one game while playing together and won multiple tournaments.

"It was good getting out there with Kalen, getting that good chemistry feel early," Johnson told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "Bonding early and seeing how he likes to play, and him seeing how I like to play, is really a win-win for me playing with Etzy.

The AAU teammates had never seen each other play in person, so the summer was an opportunity for them to build their relationship and gain experience on the floor together. For Johnson, it was great to return to the floor after missing his entire junior season while recovering from a tear to his anterior cruciate ligament.

"He knows coming off that bad of an injury, it's kind of hard to get back into the flow of things," Etzler said of Johnson. "Sometimes vou're a step slower until vou get really back practicing and whatnot. But him taking the time he needed off and being patient really helped him come back, gaining a step and coming back five times stronger.'

Upon his return from injury, Johnson impressed observers after coming back bigger, stronger and faster. The road to recovery was a long one for the Buckeye commit because he took his time and rehabbed for 11 months before reaching 100 percent.

"It's a blessing to be back playing and to be feeling great again," Johnson said. "I love to do this. Since I was a kid, I've been training to play basketball to be a pro and one of the best point guards in the country. And to be back and to be able to show that, everything feels great."

As the nation's No. 5 combo guard and No. 84 overall prospect, Johnson is highly touted yet hungry to prove his ratings to be too low. After spending last year recovering at Willoughby (Ohio) Andrews Osborne Academy, Johnson returned to Garfield Heights for his final season. He learned a lot during his time off, making his health a priority and refining his game in different ways.

Being injured taught me I've got to have patience and take care of my body and take time off and rest," Johnson said. "It also taught me to watch film more and look at the game at a different angle and a different view. Just putting all that together and learning how to take care of my body and stretch more will help me in the future.

Following his ACL injury, Johnson dropped more than 20 spots in the national rankings. Through hard work and dedication to his recovery, Johnson gained valuable perspective.

"I'm trying to be the best I can be," Johnson said. "No matter what you do in life, you won't be perfect. But when it's all said and done, you just want to be able to look yourself in the mirror and say, 'I tried.' All I want to do is look myself in the mirror and be able to say, 'You could have done this better, but you gave it all you got and you tried."

While Branham and Johnson are guards, Etzler is a 6-8 forward who possesses athleticism and an excellent three-point shot. The No. 19 power forward and No. 86 overall prospect in the country creates mismatches for opposing teams with his combination of size, speed, and skill.

'Out on the perimeter when a guard is trying to check me, it's really easy to step back and create some space with my length and shoot over anybody," Etzler told BSB. "And I can potentially take them in the post, even though I don't go in the post often. But it's easy to score over a smaller person and easier to get around them with my length. Taking a big out on the perimeter that is maybe not as fast, it's easy to get around him or cook him up on the top of the key because he can't move his feet well enough.

Making it clear that locking up a commitment from Branham was his top priority as a recruiter since his commitment 15 months ago. Etzler was thrilled when it came to fruition.

"He's a really advanced player," Etzler said. "He doesn't try to do anything too flashy. He just goes out there, has great energy, plays really good defense, early-stage rebounding. And he just gets the job done. He doesn't try to do any flashy dunks or anything, just tries to get buckets.'

One thing that stands out about Branham's game is that he has great strength for a guard. He uses his 6-4, 175-pound frame and physical nature to his advantage, which gives Etzler confidence Branham is prepared for Big Ten basketball.

The fact that he already thrives doing that shows that he'll have no issue at the next level in terms of the physicality," Etzler said. "And he's not really one to complain to the refs or complain in general, so I think he'll do just fine.'

Johnson faced Branham twice as an underclassman at Garfield Heights, remembering how clutch and versatile his future teammate was back in 2018-19.

"He has a great motor," Johnson said of Branham. "I think we'll both play good together from that standpoint just how active we are and how high our energy is. He'll feed off me, and I'll feed off him. He's a great finisher around the basket.

"I remember him knocking down a shot, being a great finisher around the paint. I think that's one of his best attributes, being a great slasher around the paint. He finishes well; he's all around the rim, and he has a great midrange jumper. Malaki can pretty much do everything."

The versatility that Branham possesses is part of what made him such an important target for the Buckeyes, who were "slightly annoying in a good way" when recruiting

St. Vincent-St. Mary head coach Dru Joyce said Branham is the kind of player coaches love because he does not waste movement. Instead of excess dribbling, Branham makes one move and attacks defenders.

Joyce praised Branham's basketball IQ, saying "he has a great feel for the game." As talented and highly touted as Branham is, the Buckeye commit is generally quite quiet. He plays with ferocity on the court, however.

"He's got a fire in him, but he's not a real boisterous kid," Joyce said. "He's more to himself, but he's a high-character kid."

At St. Vincent-St. Mary, Joyce has coached many talented players, including four-time NBA MVP LeBron James. Discussing a future in the pros is not a priority for the high school coach, who instead emphasizes how players can improve.

"I think he has all the tools to be a very, very good college player, and that's all we've talked about." Joyce said. "I know his desire is to play in the NBA like a lot of kids, but we don't talk about that because that's a little beyond where he's been as far as a high school player. I didn't talk about that with LeBron until his senior year, and he's the best player on the planet."

Known for his meticulous work ethic, Branham rose from an unranked freshman to the 27th-ranked overall recruit in the 2021 class. If he continues his upward trajectory, there are no limits to what he can achieve.

Malaki, if he continues to work and put forth the effort and continues to grow, he'll be fine," Joyce said. "He's got to focus on being the best player at Ohio State, being the best player in the Big Ten, and then everything else will take care of itself.'

Although Branham, Johnson and Etzler represent the top three recruits in Ohio, they are not the top-ranked players nationally. Proving people wrong is not a priority for the four-star prospects, who have great confidence in their abilities.

"We just like going out there and try to embarrass people, and I think that will help us as we push forward," Etzler said. "Meechie, Malaki and I don't care about anyone's ranking. That's just a number put on someone's back. We know how we can play, and we'll try our best to break down anybody.

One thing that the members of the Ohio trio has in common is that they all take basketball extremely seriously. Branham is by far the softest spoken one of the class, but although he typically keeps to himself, his words carry weight when he speaks up.

When he committed, I congratulated him and said, 'I'm about to be in the dorm with you, I'm excited, let's have fun.' And he said, 'I'm ready to go to war with you, bro,' Johnson said of Branham. "That's what he said to me, and I haven't played with him. But just from him saying, 'I'm ready to go to war with you,' and we're a year and a half away from going to war, and it's already in his mind, just lets me know we're going to do something special.

"It's easy to talk about it, but when you got somebody and their mind-set is like that, and I know what my mind-set is like, and vou've got players there who are already good and experienced and great coaches, it's up from there. It will be a special thing.'

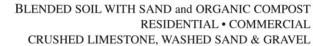
Branham, Johnson and Etzler all had other options during their respective recruitments, yet they all chose to stay home and represent the Buckeyes. Etzler described Ohio State as "the place they need to be," and it's clear the 2021 trio takes pride in representing their state at the next level.

"I'm from Cleveland, I've got the city of Cleveland with me; Malaki's from Columbus but he went to St. V, so he's got Akron and Columbus with him; and then Kalen is from Crestview and he's got his people that are backing him up," Johnson said. "When you put it all together, right there it's just something special. The people of Ohio want to see it. We've got three kids from three different locations all a part of one state. At the end of the day, everybody's going to come together and be a Buckeye fan, because that's where we started.

"We're just trying to add more pieces and get some other people in there to secure the future national championship.'

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## Big Ten, NCAA Eye Bubble For Looming Season

**Mark Emmert** 

Before answering the question of what the 2020-21 college basketball campaign will look like, there's an even more important query: Will there be a season?

Unfortunately, there's no answer at this time due to the enduring and devastating COVID-19 pandemic that shockingly ended the 2019-20 season on March 12 before most conference tournaments could be completed.

## COURT REPORT Craig Merz

Now, more than five months later, the disruptions in the sports world – as minor as they may be compared to the real suffering that exists because of the coronavirus - continue unabated.

The Big Ten presidents set off tremors Aug. 11 when they decided to suspend all fall sports, including football. They were joined by the Pac-12, which went even further by suspending all athletic events until the beginning of 2021.

The NCAA, which seems to be a passenger on college football's Power Five train (ACC, Big Ten, Big 12, Pac-12 and SEC), at least offered some guidance on Aug. 17 as to what the basketball season could be.

Dan Gavitt, senior vice president of basketball for the NCAA, said in a statement that his organization is prepared to move the Nov. 10 start of the season if necessary, and contingency plans have been developed to change the practice date start-ups as well.

"By mid-September, we will provide direction about whether the season and practice start on time or a short-term delay is necessitated by the ongoing pandemic, the statement read.

Ohio State is scheduled to begin the season Nov. 11 vs. Oakland.

OSU coach Chris Holtmann offered his thoughts about a 2021 NCAA Tournament in an interview on the Aug. 13 episode of "The Ryen Russillo Podcast."

"The reality is we'll have a tournament. I really believe that," Holtmann said. "I think we'll have a season, but I think it's going to look completely different."

South Carolina women's basketball coach Dawn Staley is not optimistic about the season starting as scheduled.

"In my gut, do I feel like we're going to start in November? No. I don't," she said to ESPN. "But I do think we'll have a season. When that start date is, I don't know. We continue to not have many answers, but a lot of questions.

On an NCAA call two days later with digital reporter and analyst Andy Katz, Gavitt expounded on what might happen. "We'll be flexible," Gavitt said. "We'll

be nimble and we'll deliver what the country is desperately looking for again, and that's just an incredible March Madness tournament in 2021.

"Our first and primary goal and preference is to have the tournament on the dates that are set, at the venues that are predetermined, but if the virus necessitates a different path, we will adjust accordingly. The health and safety of the

players and the coaches and all the people around the game - the referees and fans will be primary.'

In another interview with ESPN, he offered a path to reaching that goal by suggesting the NCAA Tournament could be held in a bubble a la the NBA, NHL, Major League Soccer and the National Women's Soccer League.

Each has had success in isolating their players from the general public and convening most of their teams in one central location as the NBA and MLS did at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex near Orlando, Fla.

The NHL started its postseason with 12 teams each in Toronto and Edmonton while the women's soccer league went to Utah.

NCAA president Mark Emmert said on the NCAA's website that bubbles for national championships are "perfectly viable in many sports."

He added, "Starting with 64 teams (in

basketball) is tough. Thirty-two, OK, maybe that's a manageable number. Sixteen, certainly manageable. But you've got to figure out those logistics. There's doubtlessly ways to make that

"It's obviously expensive to do that. But we're not going to hold a championship in a way that puts student-athletes at risk. If we need to do a bubble model

and that's the only way we can do it, then we'll figure that out."

Taking Gavitt's tournament bubble idea a step further, many associated with college basketball think the bubble concept can work to some degree in the regular

The thinking is the season could be delayed until after Thanksgiving when most universities have rearranged their class schedules to ensure the students don't return until early January to avoid the spread of COVID-19.

That creates a natural bubble, like football teams and other fall sports athletes enjoyed for their conditioning and training until the rest of the students returned in mid-August.

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo told the Lansing (Mich.) State Journal on Aug. 13 that he was 100 percent confident there would be a season.

"I think there's going to be a vaccine or we're going to get this (under control), and with (in-person classes) ending in November, I think we've got a built-in bubble," he said.

The newspaper also asked Michigan State President Samuel Stanley for his thoughts on a hoops season.

"As a fan of college sports in general, I don't think it's impossible (to do a bubble)," he said. "I think the NBA is showing that there are ways in which you can do this and do it effectively. The question is, how will it adapt to college? And so I think this is something we'll be looking at.'

So many questions. Few answers, but the possibilities are intriguing.

Would the period between Thanksgiving and New Year's be scheduled exclusively for conference games, bubble or not? Maybe that time frame would work for a mix of conference and nonconference matchups?

"The one thing every campus seems

#### **OSU Men's Basketball 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.)

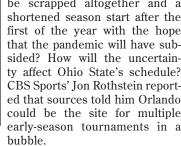
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Malaki Branham	SG	6-4	175	****	Akron (Ohio) St. Vincent-St. Mary
Kalen Etzler	PF	6-8	195	****	Convoy (Ohio) Crestview
Meechie Johnson	CG	6-1	185	****	Willoughby (Ohio) Andrew Osborne

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	_				High School
Bowen Hardman	SG	6-3	160	***	Cincinnati Princeton

to be doing is saving there's not going to be people on campus after Thanksgiving, Kentucky coach John Calipari said on ESPN Radio. "So it probably opens up a door after Thanksgiving that even if we're not having fans that there's going to be a safe campus based on your team is going to be there by themselves.'

Would nonconference games be scrapped altogether and a shortened season start after the first of the year with the hope that the pandemic will have subsided? How will the uncertainty affect Ohio State's schedule? CBS Sports' Jon Rothstein reported that sources told him Orlando could be the site for multiple early-season tournaments in a



Would the Buckeyes end up there for one or two or three tourneys?

OSU is scheduled to play North Carolina in the CBS Sports Classic on Dec. 19 at a site to be determined. Might the Buckeyes play not only the Tar Heels but the other participants - Kentucky and UCLA - somewhere in a bubble?

OSU is also slated for three games Nov. 25-27 in the Bahamas for the Battle 4 Atlantis with the other participating schools being Creighton, Duke, Memphis, Texas A&M, West Virginia, Wichita State and Utah. However, due to the Pac-12 mandate, a replacement is needed for Utah.

With all the talk about play/no play. another concern is whether fans will be permitted to attend. Based on the current coronavirus situation in Ohio, there's a good chance when the Buckeyes play in Value City Arena that there will be spectators but at a greatly reduced number.

The current Ohio Department of Health guidelines limit indoor capacity to 300

#### **Bubble**. Boy

Former Ohio State standout guard Mike Conley (2006-07) of the Utah Jazz left the Orlando bubble on Aug. 16 with good reason. He returned to Columbus for the birth of his son, Elijah Michael Conley, later in the day.

He then flew back to Orlando the next day for a four-day quarantine period, missing the first two games of the Western Conference series vs. Denver, but he was cleared after testing negative for COVID-19 to play in the third game on Aug. 21.

Did he ever. Conley made a career playoff-high seven three-pointers, scored 27 points and had four assists in helping the Jazz defeat the Nuggets 124-87 for a 2-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again: He's a terrific player," Jazz coach Quin Snyder said. "I know how glad our guys were to see him back.

Conley followed that up 26 points and four assists in a 129-127 win in Game 4 on

#### **Big Get**

Holtmann put a bow on the impressive 2021 recruiting class with the commitment of top Ohio prospect Malaki Branham from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary on July 22.

The 6-4, four-star shooting guard averaged 20.2 points, with around seven rebounds and three assists per game as a junior last season. He is ranked 27th nationally in the 247Sports composite and fifth at his position.

He is joined by point guard Meechie Johnson and power forward Kalen Etzler, second and third respectively in the state, to give the Buckeyes the No. 7 class nationally.

For more on Ohio State's 2021 recruiting class, see page 28.

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City Mail check to: Buckeye Boosters, 921 Chatham Li		Meeting with Coaches, at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center

## Harris Joins Staff Ready To Make An Impact

On July 17, Ohio State announced that Simon Harris will be filling the assistant coaching position that was vacated by Carrie Banks after she took the head coaching job at Nebraska Omaha. Harris has been coaching in women's basketball since 2014, but his ties to the profession start long before that, with the origin coming during his childhood.

## DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyaff Grosher

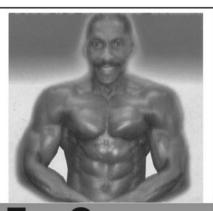
Harris is the son of Larry Harris, a 2012 inductee into the Ohio Basketball Hall of Fame who was born in Cleveland, Ohio, played at Lorain Clearview and spent 27 seasons as an assistant coach, 16 of which were at North Carolina State.

Seeing Larry Harris in practices and on the sidelines of games instilled a passion in a younger Simon Harris that ultimately turned into a career, but at the time, Simon Harris said he was by no means pushed into following in his father's footsteps.

"I've always been very passionate about basketball, and my parents were really good at allowing me to make that own decision for myself, but it was definitely aided in being able to be around Division I basketball literally from day one," Harris told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "It definitely helped guide that decision, but I was very fortunate that my parents never forced anything upon me and let me choose my own path."

Being around so much basketball certainly impacted Harris and gave him the goal to one day become a coach.

"I was very fortunate at a young age to know this is what I wanted to do with my life, so it was really cool to be able to home in and see how he approached it and be around the players and be around some really, really good basketball coaches and kind of take the good and bad from all of that and just be aware and mold what I wanted to do from there," Harris said. "I was



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very fortunate to be in those shoes. It was kind of a blessing just given to you before you even knew it was a blessing."

Even though Harris may have known early on that coaching was a strong passion, his path after playing college basketball at N.C. State was not a move directly from on the court to on the sidelines.

After playing the 2009-10 season for An Cearnog Nua Moycullen in Ireland, Harris returned to the States, and he returned with a plan. Despite not playing football at the high school or college level, Harris joined the Dallas Cowboys' practice roster in an attempt to make it into the NFL.

Harris said the attempt came to life because he thought he was physically capable of competing in the NFL, and when he was given a nudge by his best friend Jay Sonnhalter, who played tight end at East Carolina and was also working out with Dallas, he gave it a shot.

"I always kind of told myself that I could do it," Harris said. "I mean the football coaches here at N.C. State would always mention it. We lived with the football team in our residence while I was in school, and we would always have the conversation. When I got back (from Ireland), my dad literally asked me what I wanted to do next, and I said, 'Oh, let's try the football thing.' I'd heard I was physically capable of doing it and he was like, 'Oh that's great, because I just spoke to two agents about it the other day.'"

Ultimately, Harris got hurt and did not make the Cowboys' roster, but the experience did not come without a few highlights. Most notably, Harris remembers a meeting with Cowboys owner Jerry Jones.

"It was always on my bucket list to meet Jerry Jones, so that was pretty amazing, the phone call and then getting in that room and having that conversation with him," Harris said. "He just knows everything about everybody. It was awesome. Even going in on a free-agent contract into rookie camp, that man treated you like you belonged, and it was amazing."

After a brief stint at two jobs in marketing, Harris finally followed in his father's footsteps and became a college basketball coach, much thanks to a friend from his childhood, former Dayton men's basketball head coach Archie Miller.

Miller, who is now the head coach at Indiana, held a 139-63 record in six seasons with the Flyers and helped get Harris on the staff in 2011.

"It was more just kind of trying to get my footing at a young age, 23, wanted to see what I did," Harris said on testing out jobs in marketing. "I was very fortunate that Archie Miller gave me a call, and he was going to be the head coach at the University of Dayton and offered me that position. I was very, very lucky to get into it with someone I was very familiar with.

"I mean he played for my dad, I played for his dad. My dad and his brother both played at Pitt. So it was just at the time just seeing if I wanted to do something other than coaching, and it proved to me very quickly that I didn't."

Harris spent seven seasons with Dayton basketball but only four with the men's team. In June of 2014, Harris made the shift over to women's basketball under head coach Jim Jabir, and the decision was an easy one for him to make.

"I was actually one of the rare people who actually wanted to coach women's basketball young. I was very fortunate to be around Coach (Kay) Yow here at N.C. State growing up from the age of 9 really into my college career, and unfortunately she passed. When I was about 12 years old, she said something about me coaching, and that always resonated

#### **OSU Women's Basketball Verbal Commits**

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

at Office State. (Star fathings are from the Estivitations.)						
Player	Pos.	Ht.	Stars	High School		
Kaitlyn Costner	PG	5-8	N/A	Mishawaka (Ind.) Penn		
Taylor Thierry	SG	5-10	N/A	Willoughby (Ohio) Laurel		

with me," Harris said.

"Then, my sister went through her recruiting process. She actually played at LIU Brooklyn for two years, and just being around that recruitment and seeing how the game was and seeing how advanced it's become and becoming, I saw a niche there that I think, as a basketball purist, I would love to be a part of.

"When the job opened with Coach Jabir at the time, he kind of went like, 'Hey, would you ever consider coaching women's basketball?' I said, 'Absolutely. I will go grab my stuff and be right back.'"

In his three seasons as an assistant on the Dayton women's team, Harris helped lead the Flyers to three NCAA tournament appearances, a run to the Elite Eight in 2015 and an 87-39 record.

His success led him back to his alma mater, N.C. State, the same college that his father coached at for the majority of his career. There, Harris was a part of two Wolfpack teams that finished with a combined 56-10 record, and both of which finished in the top 10 in the country.

Harris' final games as an assistant coach for N.C. State were three victories in the ACC tournament to win the conference title.

"It's really special just because you grew up around it," Harris said. "Again I mention Coach Yow because she's one of the greatest human beings I've ever been around, but you saw the level that she had it at and it was always the talk of that's where we wanted to get back to. And it was really cool being a part of that, to be able to come down and help Coach (Wes) Moore do that and have that conversation with the young ladies about what it is to be an athlete at that school and how much basketball means there, so it was really cool to be able to just be a part of that."

The success that Harris had at both of his previous destinations caught the attention of Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff, who brought in Harris as Banks' replacement because of his work both within a team and in building a team.

"Tve known him just through the profession over the years," McGuff said. "He's got a great reputation, a high character person, great work ethic, and I just really think he'll really be great with our players and also just recruiting kind of the next wave of kids we're going to need to get to continue to compete at the highest levels. I love to hire people that come from winning programs. I think there's something to that, and he certainly fits that bill. I'm just really excited to welcome him to the program."

Harris also said his previous relationship with McGuff played a factor in his decision to leave the Wolfpack and join the Buckeye coaching staff, but he added that his desire to be more of an essential member of a program was a big piece in his eventual decision.

"Tve always kept in pretty good contact with Coach McGuff," Harris said. "He's become a really, really good ally for me. And now being familiar with a lot of the roster, having recruited a lot of those young women while I was at Dayton, you can really see the way that it's trending. It's more so an opportunity to, again, help a program get back to where they want to be.

"I'm really big on going somewhere that, in your mind, you feel that you're needed more than wanted, and Coach McGuff and I just have always had really good conversations about his vision of what he wants to do. I really, really firmly believe that he's taking those strides to get to that step, and I really just wanted to be a part of it."

Among those Harris is familiar with on the roster are freshman forward Gabby Hutcherson, freshman guard Anyssa Jones, sophomore guards Madison Greene and Jacy Sheldon, senior guard Braxtin Miller and graduate transfer forward Tanaya Beacham from Toledo.

When McGuff looked for a replacement for Banks, there were specific traits he said he was looking for, all of which fit the bill with Harris.

"Just someone who could really impact our players on and off the court and help carry out the mission that we're trying to help our kids develop in a wholistic manner," McGuff said of what he was looking for. "Simon's got great energy. He's got excellent experience at Dayton and at North Carolina State. He's a winner. He's also an accomplished recruiter, and I think he'll help us continue to draw the right kids into the program."

Harris had those characteristics, brings experience with multiple winning teams, has prior experience with a large portion of the roster and has a little bit of NFL experience to bring to the table.

Now, after a wildly successful stint at his alma mater, Harris is back coaching in the state where his father is inducted into the Hall of Fame, and he is hoping to once again follow in his footsteps, now at a new destination.

#### Beacham Joins OSU As Grad Transfer

Ohio State women's basketball added a 12th player to its roster on July 28 with the graduate transfer of Beacham. As a graduate transfer, Beacham will be immediately eligible to play for the Buckeyes in 2020-21, which will be her final year of eligibility.

"We're extremely excited to add Tanaya to the Buckeye family," McGuff said in a press release. "Her talent, athleticism and experience will be a great addition to the program."

Beacham averaged 10.8 points and 5.5 rebounds per game in 31 outings last season at Toledo, starting in 20 of them while also shooting a team-high 58.3 percent from the field. She was also the team captain last season for the Rockets and played in 95 games in three seasons

Her leadership and experience were two of the big reasons that McGuff brought Beacham into this young Ohio State team.

"No question," McGuff told BSB on if her leadership was a key to getting Beacham as a grad transfer. "She's had a lot of experience in college and shown that she's been a leader, and so I think her maturity and leadership will certainly be impactful for our team."

Beacham gives Ohio State five forwards on the roster, with junior forwards Dorka Juhasz and Aaliyah Patty, sophomore Rebeka Mikulasikova and Hutcherson filling out the other four.

## Time At OSU Well Spent For Former Coach Schilling

By PATRICK MAYHORN Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

David Schilling still remembers the one match that he missed during his 21 years as an assistant men's tennis coach at Ohio State. It was Sunday, April 10, 2005. Ohio State was set to face off with Penn State in Columbus, and for the first and only time in his tenure with the Buckeyes, Schilling, known by players and coaches as "Schills," wasn't in attendance.

"It was Penn State, I believe," Schilling recounted to Buckeye Sports Bulletin as he looked back on his recently ended stint at Ohio State. "Yeah, Penn State. And it was maybe 17 years ago, 18 years ago. I guess it was pretty close, Ohio State won 4-3.

"I was a best man in a wedding of my child-hood best friend that I really couldn't miss. So I hustled back from Jamaica and moved on. I would have really felt bad if they weren't able to pull that one out."

"He made it to every match, was out there every match but one match in my entire career," Ohio State men's tennis coach Ty Tucker confirmed to BSB.

Every other match, all 690 of them, Schilling was there, serving as a crucial part of Tucker's powerhouse program. He helped oversee the transformation of Ohio State's tennis program into a national power under Tucker and was there for 600 wins (would have been 601 were it not for that Penn State match), 13 Big Ten tournament titles and a pair of indoor national titles.

He did so, for the final 18 of his 21 years in Columbus, as a volunteer assistant. In that time, Schilling made a point of being a constant for his players and fellow coaches.

"I've got a passion for college tennis, so it wasn't really a matter of keeping up the streaks or whatever," Schilling said. "It was just who I am and what I did. I felt it was important for me to have the kind of impact that I wanted to have on the program, and that there was great consistency and that the players always knew I was going to be there for them and that they could rely on me and not worry about, 'Oh, is Schills going to be at this match or he's going to be at that match?'

"So I built my schedule around Ohio State tennis. That was my priority during the falls, winters and springs."

It makes sense that Schilling played a crucial role in Tucker's program, given that Tucker personally recruited him to Ohio State in 1999 when he took over as the head coach in Columbus. Schilling was a rising star in Ohio tennis at the time. After a playing career at Denison ended in 1989, Schilling served as an assistant at the College of Wooster from 1989 to 1992 and then returned to his alma mater in 1992 through 1994, coaching under Peter Burling, who took over at Denison in 1990.

From there, Schilling was hired at Division III Kenyon College for his first head coaching role, a role he filled admirably. In six seasons, Schilling put up a school-best 87-36 record and won a North Coast Athletic Conference championship in 1995. However, despite a résumé that could have certainly yielded a bigger head coaching gig, Schilling took Tucker up on his offer and became an assistant at Ohio State for three years before moving into a volunteer role to free up room for another staff assistant.

"Dave is a good guy," Tucker told BSB. "I mean he started off as the assistant coach. For the first two years he was the assistant and I needed some more help with recruiting, and he was doing his own thing, because back in the day, 21 years ago, assistant coaching salaries were next to nothing. So I needed more help.

Since it was a full-time job, it was just more of a benefit for him to be the volunteer assistant."

As the years went on and wins became more and more common, Schilling and Tucker developed a coaching rapport that elevated Ohio State's program. Several full-time assistants rolled through the program, including Justin Kronauge, a former player under the two who was hired as an assistant in 2017, but Schilling always served as a constant.

"Obviously, tennis is a nonrevenue sport, but our drive to succeed was second to none, and our passion for Ohio State was second to none," Tucker said of their relationship in a letter to Schilling posted on Ohio State's website. "We spent 500 nights in the same hotel room breaking down scouting reports, videos, strengths and weaknesses, and ripping each other relentlessly."

The two experienced some of the most iconic matches in school history, including those two indoor titles, though Schilling remembers the early success they had even more fondly.

"The early wins were probably a little bit sweeter to some degree because so much was expected of us, that a lot of the wins over the past 10 years have kind of been relieving wins, wins of relief," Schilling said.

"But I will say that they're just moments. They're great wins. I remember Justin Kronauge clinching in 2009 against UCLA in the semifinals, the NCAA, I mean that one will stand out forever. Some great wins over Illinois in the Big Ten finals, some incredible moments there. Going back to our first year, I remember beating South Alabama who was No. 28 or No. 32 in the country. We were an upstart program, beating South Alabama in the old West rec building that we played in – that was special.

"Ty and I both remember beating Indiana State one time, maybe year No. 2, when Brian Boland, the legendary UVA coach who's now at Baylor, was coaching at Indiana State. We went in there and it was two top-20 teams, and we had a really good win in there. So there's so many special wins and little snapshot moments that were incredible."

After all that time in Columbus, Schilling made it very clear that he wasn't interested in the traditional coaching career path. As he explained it to Buckeye Sports Bulletin, there was only one job in the country that would draw

his interest: Denison, and given that Schilling's one-time employer, Burling, was still in charge after a nearly three-decade-long tenure, it seemed unlikely that Schilling would have any reason to leave.

"I always joked that one of the only jobs that I would ever leave Ohio State for, or the only job I would leave Ohio State for was Denison," Schilling said. "I'm a Denison alumnus, so having gone there and then coming back and coaching there while I was in graduate school, it's always held a special place in my heart. Fortunately, Peter had a long career and so the job has never really been opened before."

In March, that changed. Burling announced his retirement on March 24, marking the end of 30 years in charge. Schilling still wasn't planning on leaving Columbus, but he felt he had to do his due diligence.

"When he retired this spring and the job opened up, I thought I should probably look into it and see what all was going on," Schilling explained. "I had lost touch on a day-to-day basis so to speak, and the more I researched it, the more attractive the position had gotten, but it was a very difficult decision.

"I mean, to be honest with you, I hadn't planned on leaving Ohio State and figured I would just retire from Ohio State, but it did kind of catch me off guard when it opened up."

After conversations with Tucker and Burling, Schilling made the decision that he never expected to make. On May 6, he was announced as Burling's successor.

"We are thrilled to welcome David Schilling back home to Denison University," said director of athletics Nan Carney-DeBord in a university statement. "I also had the opportunity to return to my alma mater after a career in coaching, and there is something so special about coming home and being 100 percent invested in a community that you love. I have a feeling that David's love of Denison combined with his coaching prowess will mesh perfectly with our model of competitive excellence."

Those conversations with Tucker and Burling played a crucial role in helping Schilling make the move. Tucker told BSB that he thought the time was right, and Schilling described Burling as very helpful.

"I had regular communications with (Burling) prior to taking the job, and he had

an incredible career at Denison for more than 30 years," Schilling said. "We talked a couple of times a year, and then obviously he's been very helpful and in the onboarding after the job, helping me get to know the lay of the land and the kids and everything from scheduling to budgeting and that sort of thing. He's been incredibly helpful."

While Schilling has moved on from Ohio State and is looking ahead to taking over the program that he played for 31 years ago, he told BSB that the time he spent at Ohio State will stay with him forever, and he sees a bright future in Columbus even past his departure.

"I mean, it meant everything to me, it was a huge part of my life," Schilling said of his time at OSU. "I became very close through the 21 years with Ty and with Justin Kronauge and the other coaches that have come through, and most importantly, all the players that have come through. It's just a huge, significant part of my life.

"I came in, I was the head coach at Kenyon College prior to coming to Ohio State and I came in when Ty took over and the program, let's just say it wasn't where it is today. So, there was a fair amount of work to do and Ty gave me the opportunity, and I'm completely indebted to him for that opportunity, for him allowing me to coach the way that I coach. I've learned so much from him, as well as the other coaches that have come through. Justin Kronauge who played for us, I've learned a ton from him as well.

"It's just such a unique program. The job Ty has done is a first-ballot Hall of Fame coaching career. It's not like he came into a program that had a ton of success prior. He's built everything that's involved with Ohio State, from the program, to the culture, to the facilities – multiple facilities. I think his legacy will show now in three brand-new facilities. It's a mind-boggling career that Ty's had to date, and he's not close to done, I don't think."

With all that Ohio State gave to Schilling, it seems that he gave just as much back. In his letter to Schilling, Tucker called him "Ohio State's hidden gem," and one of the school's "best kept secrets." In his conversation with BSB, Tucker was effusive in his praise of the man he's spent nearly his entire career alongside.

"David Schilling is a wonderful coach who is going to do great things."



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## Big Ten Players Opt Out Of Football Season

Nineteen players from nine different Big Ten schools have decided to opt out of the football season, including some of the conference's top performers.

The biggest names to opt out were Penn State linebacker Micah Parsons, Purdue wide receiver Rondale Moore and Minnesota wideout Rashod Bateman.

A former Ohio State target, Parsons was a consensus first-team All-American, recording 109 tackles (52 solo), including 14 tackles for loss and five sacks with four forced fumbles last season. The Harrisburg, Pa., product is projected to be one of the first defensive players picked in the 2021 NFL draft.

## BIG TEN NOTES Joe Dempsey

After hauling in a nation-high 114 receptions for a conference-high 1,258 yards and 12 touchdowns as a true freshman in 2018, Moore played in only four games before suffering a knee injury as a sophomore.

Bateman caught 60 passes for 1,219 yards and 11 touchdowns, averaging 20.3 yards per reception during his stellar sophomore season for the 11-2 Golden Gophers.

Michigan offensive tackle Jalen Mayfield and cornerback Ambry Thomas, who made 38 stops (30 solo), including three TFL with three interceptions, two fumble recoveries and four pass breakups in 2019, both also declared for the draft. Michigan running back Chris Turner opted out of the season after rushing for 171 yards and one touchdown on 44 carries in 2019.

Michigan State defensive end Jacub Panasiuk represented one of the few bright spots in a forgettable season for the Spartans. The Roselle, Ill., native recorded 34 tackles (20 solo), including 11 TFL, five sacks and three forced fumbles as a junior in 2019. He plans to return to East Lansing, Mich.,



PURDUE FOOTBALL/TWITTER

MOVING ON – Wide receiver Rondale Moore, who caught 12 passes for 170 yards and two touchdowns in Purdue's 49-20 win over Ohio State in 2018, is among the 19 Big Ten players who opted out of the 2020 season.

in 2021

Spartan linebacker Marcel Lewis opted out after appearing in just three games as a freshman in 2019. Michigan State offensive linemen Jordan Reid and Justin Stevens also both chose to opt out.

Northwestern offensive lineman Rashawn Slater will prepare for the NFL draft after opting out, ranking as one of the top offensive tackles in the country.

"I didn't think a winter or spring season allows for optimal recovery or training to have a great rookie year," Slater said. "I talked about it with everyone. Everyone at Northwestern has been extremely supportive. They've had open and honest conversations with me. I can tell they wanted the best for me."

Rutgers wide receiver Everett Wormley opted out after catching five passes in 23 games with the Scarlet Knights.

Maryland had a conference-high six players decide to opt out: defensive lineman Jalen Alexander, defensive back Vincent Flythe, offensive lineman Austin Fontaine, quarterback Josh Jackson, offensive lineman Johnny Jordan and linebacker T.J. Kautai.

Illinois running back Ra'Von Bonner decided to opt out for health concerns but plans to return in 2021.

"Playing football, I feel we're more at risk with the amount of guys we have," Bonner said. "In football you have to touch someone else. You can spread that to family members. That's not what I want. I don't want to not see my family, my sister, my girlfriend."

#### Indiana OL Feeney Suffers COVID-19 Setback

Indiana freshman offensive lineman Brady Feeney, who was seriously ill from the COVID-19 virus in July, spoke out on the topic.

Feeney needed to be rushed to the emergency room with breathing problems. The St. Louis native returned to the team, but he still needed further testing on heart issues, among other things.

"COVID-19 is serious," Feeney said. "I

never thought that I would have serious health complications from this virus, but look at what happened. We need to listen to our medical experts."

Though he had not yet been cleared to practice when the Big Ten postponed the season, Feeney expressed his desire to still play as long as it was safe.

"I want to play, but I truly believe that we need it to be safe. Information on my medical history with COVID-19 is widely available," Feeney wrote in a tweet.

At Indiana, the first round of testing showed that there were zero positive results in the first 187 tests of players, coaches and staff members. The number jumped to 33 total positive tests out of 490, and football workouts were forced to be paused because of multiple positive tests, including Feeney's.

Prior to the Big Ten's decision to shut down practices and prepare for a spring season, Indiana head coach Tom Allen said his players had assimilated quickly to the protocols set up by the medical team, including wearing face coverings during practice.

"We're seeing it every day with our players," Allen said. "There's definitely some concern, and I get that. But the players are now kind of getting in the flow and seeing how it's working actually playing real football with this, and there have been a lot of positives the last few days. I don't know anybody's motives or anything, I just know that our guys feel really good about it, and they're looking forward to moving forward."

#### Iowa Cuts Four Sports Amid COVID Pandemic

The University of Iowa announced it will cut men's and women's swimming and



diving, men's gymnastics and men's tennis.

"We are committed to support and care for the impacted student-athletes, coaches and staff throughout the transition period," Iowa athletic director Gary Barta said in an open letter. "All existing scholarships will be honored through graduation for those student-athletes who choose to remain at Iowa. If a student-athlete wishes to transfer to another institution, we will assist them in every way possible. In addition, we will continue to provide academic and mental health support as requested. The contracts of affected coaches will be honored.

"We are heartbroken for our student-athletes, coaches and staff. We also understand how disappointing this is for our letter winners, alumni, donors and community members who have helped build these programs."

Barta said that the teams that will be cut will have the opportunity to compete in the spring of 2021 if there is a season and if they choose to partake. While other schools have done the same across the country, Iowa became the first Big Ten school amid the COVID-19 pandemic to cut sports programs.

#### Maryland's Locksley Forms Coalition Of Minority Coaches

Maryland head coach Mike Locksley formed a nonprofit organization to address the lack of diversity among coaches called the National Coalition of Minority Football Coaches.

The group will help identify and groom minority college and professional coaches, in addition to developing a list of candidates who should be considered for future job openings. There were 14 Black head coaches in the FBS in 2019, and there are currently three Black head coaches in the NFL.

"When I took the Maryland job last year and looked at the landscape of college football, I thought to myself, 'There's something missing. I'm on the back nine of my career and the pathway to becoming a head coach is still as difficult as when I got into the business in 1992,' "Locksley said. "I wanted to create an organization that would be able to help prepare, promote and produce the next group of coaches coming up through the ranks at every level."

An 11-person board of directors has the responsibility of evaluating and maintaining a qualified list of candidates. The board of directors includes numerous high-profile college football and NFL names, including Alabama head coach Nick Saban, whose staff included Locksley from 2016-18.

The full list of the National Coalition of Minority Football Coaches board of directors includes Chris Grier, Willie Jeffries, Ozzie Newsome, Bill Polian, Oliver "Buddy" Pough, Desiree Reed-Francois, Saban, Rick Smith, Mike Tomlin, Doug Williams and Debbie Yow.

"These are all people that have either

hired head coaches or coordinators or filled upper-level positions throughout their careers," Locksley said. "They all have been at the top of the mountain, per se, in their respective areas, whether winning Super Bowls or national championships or being pioneers, like Debbie Yow and Willie Jeffries. We want to use their experiences to help us formulate and produce the list of qualified candidates, so when people say there aren't enough minorities to fill the positions that have come open over the years, we're going to produce a list of qualified people that shows there are qualified people. What's needed is opportunities."

#### Former Husker Wide Receiver Spielman Transfers To TCU

Former Nebraska wide receiver J.D. Spielman transferred to TCU and was granted immediate eligibility from the NCAA to be able to play this fall.

In three years with the Cornhuskers, Spielman totaled 2,546 receiving yards and 15 touchdowns on 170 receptions. The speedy wideout averaged 15.0 yards per catch and returned one kickoff for a touchdown and two punts for scores.

A former three-star prospect, Spielman initially entered the transfer portal in June after taking a leave of absence for a personal health matter prior to the start of spring ball in March.

Spielman told a Twitter user that he battled depression and anxiety while appearing in all 12 games for Nebraska in 2019. He also said that he played 30 pounds underweight due to "not eating or sleeping."

In an Instagram post, Spielman wrote, "I just want to take a moment to thank true brothers, my family and the Nebraska fans for their abundance of support.

"I know you celebrated our wins beside us and felt our losses just as much as we did. The loyalty in the Sea of Red runs deep. You're much appreciated and very important not only to the Cornhuskers' success but also to my personal success.

"Good mental health is also a key component to my success not only on the football field, but also in life, school and relationships. Focusing on my mental health allows me to understand who I am, what my passions are, and what my purpose is.

"Football has taught me how to overcome obstacles and face adversity. It has helped me become disciplined, determined, and resilient. At the end of the day, please remember life is so much more than football. I am and will always be much more than just an athlete. Every day is a new opportunity. Thank you again to those who have supported me on my journey. I'm forever grateful. Lots of love and go B1G Red."

#### Maryland Transfer Tagovailoa Granted Immediate Eligibility

Taulia Tagovailoa, who transferred from

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Alabama to Maryland, was granted immediate eligibility by the NCAA.

The sophomore quarterback is the younger brother of former Crimson Tide quarterback Tua Tagovailoa, who was drafted by the Miami Dolphins with the No. 5 overall pick in the 2020 NFL draft.

While at Alabama, the younger Tagovailoa completed 9 of 12 passes for 100 yards and one touchdown. The former four-star recruit from Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson ranked as the No. 5 pro-style quarterback and No. 170 overall prospect for 2019.

The young quarterback's tie to Maryland is Locksley, who was a former assistant and offensive coordinator at Alabama, where he helped develop Tua.

The Terrapins offered Tagovailoa a quicker path to the field than the Crimson Tide, who have junior Mac Jones and the nation's top quarterback prospect for 2020 in Bryce Young.

Locksley originally found out Tagovailoa would be joining the Terps under unusual circumstances. The coach was hosting a live show on Instagram while his phone was ringing off the hook and he was talking to Baltimore baseball legend Cal Ripken Jr. on the show

"As I'm in the middle of the show, which starts at 7 o'clock Eastern time here, I just know my phone started blowing up and buzzing and buzzing," Locksley said. "So, I looked down and saw I had a missed call from an 808 (Hawaii) number. And then I was finishing my show, and by the time I finished the show, probably around 7:35 or 7:40, my phone had just blown up that Taulia had said he was coming to Maryland. So, I called him

back and he said, 'Hey, Coach, as a family we've prayed about it and I'm coming to Maryland.' "

#### Former Boiler PG Eastern Transfers To Howard

Former Purdue point guard Nojel Eastern announced his transfer to Howard. Eastern had signed with the Boilermakers as a four-star prospect who was ranked No. 15 among small forwards and No. 69 overall in the 2017 class.

The Evanston, Ill., native originally planned to transfer to Michigan. However, Eastern faced transfer credit issues preventing him from becoming a Wolverine.

"What happened with Michigan is my major, I had about 90-something credits," Eastern said. "When I transferred, they only accepted 48 of those credits, and for me to get into Michigan I needed 60 credits. So, we were trying to do summer classes to try to get in.

"Coach (Juwan) Howard ended up talking to the administration and he said that even if I did take those summer classes, they wouldn't be able to accept those credits."

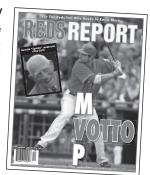
Across three seasons in West Lafayette, Ind., Eastern averaged 5.1 points, 4.0 rebounds, and 2.0 assists per game. After averaging 7.5 points, 5.5 rebounds, 2.5 assists and 1.1 steals per game as a sophomore, the 6-6 guard's scoring and rebounding production dropped to 4.9 points, 4.0 boards per game with 2.7 helpers and 1.1 steals in 2019-20.

Eastern is joining five-star commit Makur Maker, who is the No. 18 overall player for 2020, as the second big addition for the Bison this year.

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## The Writing Was On The Wall For Fall Football

When college basketball tournaments were canceled, we should have seen the warning signs.

When baseball's Opening Day came and went without a single bat cracking, we should have seen the writing on the wall. When there was no Kentucky Derby or Indianapolis 500, it should have told us something.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Washeman

Instead, we kept jumping for that dangling carrot known as hope – hope that there would be college football this fall.

When the Big Ten and Pac-12 announced that they were postponing their seasons until the spring, they became the first (and only) among the power conferences to do so. The MAC and Mountain West earlier made decisions to shut down, and most of Division II and Division III have done the same. Even though we could see the handwriting on the wall, we still clung to the notion that the "big boys" wouldn't do such a thing, that we would still have our fall Saturdays.

But it wasn't to be.

There is logic on both sides of the argument, so I won't pretend that the decision made by the leagues was an easy one, or wrong or right. It's certainly not one I would want to be a part of.

Some fans see it as caving to fear, as cowardice – despite medical experts sounding the alarm that a return to college campuses could make it much easier for players to contract COVID-19. There's also emerging data that long-term effects include myocarditis – which may have played a role in the death of otherwise healthy 27-year-old basketball player Michael Ojo. He was reported to have tested positive but recov-

ered. Reports said he died of a heart attack. Boston Red Sox ace Eduardo Rodriguez is sitting out MLB's season because he's dealing with a heart-related issue stemming from his bout with COVID-19. So there are real reasons to be leery of allowing teams to play.

Even so, you feel so bad for the players, who put in time and effort to get ready for a 2020 season that was already going to be abnormal. When word came that the Big Ten had voted to cancel the season, players took to social media and got #WeWantToPlay trending. Fans retweeted and kept it going, to the point that it looked like the tide had shifted. Maybe the Big Ten WAS going to give it a go.

But it wasn't to be.

Ohio State is one of a handful of Big Ten schools - Penn State, Michigan and Nebraska being the others - that hasn't had a single positive test (or at least any disclosed) since workouts resumed last month. The players see it this way: If our protocols and practices have worked, why should we be penalized? Buckeye coach Ryan Day came out strongly in favor of a fall season, saying, "We cannot cancel the season right now. We have to, at the very least, postpone it and allow us a little bit of time to re-evaluate what's going on. That's the reason why we put this schedule together, to have some flexibility. If we need to take a deep breath, let's take a deep breath. We owe it to these kids to exhaust every single option we possibly can, and then we go from there."

He may not be wrong.

Why should the schools that have done everything right be penalized? Well, for one thing, the schools are worried about liability issues. Everything can be hunky-dory right now, but if Michigan plays Wisconsin and then we find out that both teams had players infected, those teams would need to shut it down immediately. And it would affect future opponents. And if a kid gets sick or, heaven forbid, dies? The backlash and monetary damage that school would suffer would be unimaginable. So I can see

why the presidents did what they did. It doesn't mean I have to like it, though.

I do think the players and coaches stumping to play have a legitimate gripe, and their voices should have at least been heard. They are adults, they know the risks going in, and yet they still want to play. Heck, their parents want them to play. You'd think they would be the most apprehensive group out there, worried that their kids would test positive and then face who knows what kind of recovery time. Yet they were united in their desire to see their sons play football this fall.

But it wasn't to be.

Moving to the spring sounds good in principle, but it's just kicking the can down the road. The likelihood of games happening seems slim. And if they are played, it will take a gameday program to figure out who is playing because the big-time stars will most likely be preparing for the NFL draft. The best course of action would be to just scrap the 2020 season altogether and look forward to 2021.

If the Big Ten and Pac-12 end up as the only Power Five leagues to postpone – which I don't believe will be the case – the 2020 season will definitely have a bit of a "what if?" feel. There would definitely be some big-time games, but to not have Ohio State or Penn State or Oregon – or Oklahoma, should the Big 12 hop the fence it's currently sitting on – would just be odd. And if the other three leagues play in the fall, what is the incentive for the Big Ten and Pac-12 in the spring? There won't be any bowl games or College Football Playoff to shoot for. So what, exactly, is the motivation?

The logistical hurdles involved in spring ball are numerous – though a few have been addressed, namely keeping a year of eligibility whether a kid plays or doesn't. The biggest yet to be answered is will the NCAA allow a one-time easing of the 85 scholarship limit? And how do schools strapped for money pay for the extra full scholarships?

There's also the matter of TV contracts. College basketball dominates ESPN in the spring and is also shown by CBS and Fox. ESPN has the NBA as well, so getting programming juggled around without ticking off someone will be tough. I know that college football would get the nod over March Madness in my house, but that may not be the case for everyone.

The biggest concern would be compacting two seasons into nine months. If teams are playing March to May (or even January to April), they would have very little time off before fall camps for 2021 open in July. Don't give me the "they can just push back the start of 2021" argument. I mean, they can, but there is no earthly reason to affect two seasons if you don't have to. There wouldn't be nearly enough recovery time between seasons, which means injuries would almost certainly increase. And that's why the league honchos saying that "player safety" is the reason for the postponement are being disingenuous.

They know that there are billions at stake if there is no college football. They know that many of their Olympic sports will have, at the least, scholarship reductions, and at the worst, be no more. Money is the big driver here, not player safety. The presidents are hoping the move to spring buys them some time – time for a vaccine to be created, time for them to reconfigure their programs, time for them to just take a

deep breath. They know that the immediate health of their university's sports hang in the balance, and they will do everything in their power to make sure that they don't go the way of the dinosaur. So, yeah, it's not about "player safety." It's about money.

However this all shakes out – and my guess is that many, many college football fans will have a gaping hole in their Saturday schedules – the impact will be felt for many seasons. It was the hope from this corner that we could get just a little semblance of normalcy, that we could cheer on our teams and revel in the chase for the title.

But it wasn't to be.

#### Fields Shows Leadership While Big Ten Office Does Not

Any lingering doubts about Fields' leadership capabilities should have been put to bed when he initiated a petition asking for a fall season. It got more than 300,000 online signatures, and though it made no difference in the decision-making it showed just how much Fields had a handle on things.

He wanted to play but also wanted his teammates to experience a season, too. He felt especially bad for the seniors, who were sort of left in limbo as to whether they would be able to play in the spring. He felt bad for the fans, who wouldn't be able to pack Ohio Stadium and cheer on the home team. He felt bad for the coaches, who put in nearly as much work as the players. In short, Fields wanted to end his Ohio State career with a national championship. That may not happen.

Contrast his initiative with the cowering of league commissioner Kevin Warren. After announcing that the league was shelving the season until the spring, he failed to give answers to questions that were asked, nor did he provide documentation from the medical experts explaining the basis for the decision. Even the Pac-12's punching bag of a commissioner, Larry Scott, released a document explaining to fans what went into the decision-making process. There was none of that from Warren.

He made things worse a few days later when he said that the league vote to move to spring was nearly unanimous – but more than one athletic director said they didn't even know a vote took place. Now, the vote would likely have been with school presidents instead of ADs – which makes zero sense, since the league office is charged with overseeing sports, which are overseen by ADs – so it's conceivable a vote could have taken place without the ADs being aware of it. But even that seems unlikely.

It sounds like Warren had his mind made up early, which begs the question of why he even took input from the schools. Nothing they said was going to change his mind

Warren has gotten off on the wrong foot, for sure, and while it doesn't look good for him going forward, he could rebound from this and make a mark. This decision and the lack of transparency and communication will haunt him for some time, but if the other leagues are forced to cancel at some point during the fall, he may come out looking better than he has.

But he won't look better than Fields, who showed tremendous maturity and leadership in the face of adversity. It's easy to see why OSU fans were excited about the 2020 campaign, especially with that kid at the helm.

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## Football Or No Football, The Show Must Go On

First, to business.

Yes, we will be publishing Buckeye Sports Bulletin this fall. With no football to cover, we will be publishing every other week, starting with the Sept. 19 issue of BSB, set to be mailed on Sept. 15, and running through the holidays. As of now we are not projecting the print schedule out any further, pending any announcements about Ohio State football and if and when it will return. Watch your BSB or go to the BuckeyeSports.com website for any schedule developments.

Many of you have expressed concern as to what we will be covering in lieu of football and other sports action. Let me remind readers that there has not been active competition since March, and we have published what I believe to be interesting and informative issues in the time since. Frankly, I find game coverage among the least compelling stories that we do.

When we started Buckeye Sports Bulletin, just one or two Ohio State football games and a handful of basketball games were televised each year. Game coverage was a critical part of what we did back then. Now, virtually every Ohio State football and basketball game is televised, and comprehensive game coverage is less mandatory with almost everyone having seen the game themselves.

Instead, BSB is built around analysis, historical pieces and, of course, recruiting. These will remain the centerpieces of the paper, along with other interesting story ideas that we come up with along the way.

With limited sports available to attend live or watch on TV, we invite you to sit back, prop your feet up and enjoy Buckeye Sports Bulletin. You might just feel like it's 1986 and you might even remember why you subscribed to BSB in the first place.

#### **Game Coverage Begins**

Speaking of 1986 and the prehistoric days of sports coverage, there will be coverage of football games in BSB this fall. As announced elsewhere in this issue, we will be playing out a BSB 40th Anniversary Season of Ohio State football. Each issue we will be choosing the most important Ohio State football game that was played in the corresponding week in our first 39 years of publication and running stories from the original BSB coverage. We launch the feature with coverage of the 1986 Kickoff Classic, where the Buckeyes would lose to No. 5 Alabama at the Meadowlands.

You may recall that as the game where the Buckeyes, hampered by a variety of miscues, had two additional shots at winning the game after time had expired due to Crimson Tide defensive penalties. Ohio State knocked on the door but couldn't score the needed touchdown, falling 16-10.

In addition to stories of each big game printed in BSB, we will have reprints of stories at our BuckeyeSports.com website, generally as part of our Reprint Thursdays. We have a special treat for this first installment of our 40th Anniversary Season with Patrick Mayhorn doing one of his popular Throwback Film Studies of the loss to Alabama at BuckeyeSports.com. Check it out.

One other note on prehistoric coverage. Here are the first two paragraphs of my column which ran in this space after the loss to the Tide:

"The VCR is a wonderful invention.

"I went back and watched a tape of the Chase Kickoff Classic and decided it was not as bad for Ohio State as I thought it was right after I first viewed the game."

The notion of taping and then rewatching

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

a game was so wild and crazy back then. The notion of me doing it on a VCR was even more wild and crazy for me because when we first jumped into the video recording world, someone convinced us that Beta was the way to go. Bad advice on that one!

That complete column, with my analysis of the game with the Crimson Tide, will be reprinted at BuckeyeSports.com on Aug. 27.

#### To Play Or Not To Play

The debate on whether the Big Ten should or should not have played football this fall has been a spirited one. There are plenty of opinions on the matter throughout this paper. I fell on the "don't play" side of the fence.

My logic was pretty simple. If the virus and its spread were so dangerous that Ohio Stadium had to be limited via social distancing to 20 percent capacity, then how could it be deemed safe for the players to come in close, physical contact with each other in the violent game of football, to say nothing of the congregating in the locker room and on the sidelines.

I know, the players would have been under strict protocols and subject to frequent testing, etc. But there are plenty of others involved in a football game, not the least of which is your opponent, who may not have followed the same strict guidelines as the Buckeyes. There are also refs, support staff, grounds crew, etc., etc., etc., Maybe even media members.

Is the well-being of the well-heeled fans in the stands more important than the well-being of the players? I don't support that.

But I do have some complaints about how the decision was handled. Why announce a conference-only schedule only days before it was announced that there would be no football at all? And if there was going to be a conference-only schedule, why start it on Sept. 3? Wouldn't it have been more prudent to have it begin later in the fall, say on Sept. 26 when Ohio State's first Big Ten game was originally scheduled? This would have given the powers-that-be time to see if the virus numbers stabilized or even came down before making their decision.

But that decision has been made, and it is time for all of us to accept that football is not coming back anytime soon despite the valiant efforts of players, parents, fans and even some athletic directors and school presidents.

The postponement of a football season is pretty much unprecedented. Of course, so is this pandemic, at least in our lifetime.

#### **Big Games By Byars**

Threads on our BuckeyeSports.com Forum sometimes take on a life and direction of their own. Like that old game of "telephone," where participants sit in a circle and someone whispers something into the first person's ear and it comes out from the last person completely different, the topic at the end of a Forum thread might end up completely different from when it started.

Recently, posters somehow drifted into a discussion on "other" big games by Buckeye running back great Keith Byars. The "other" in this case is in deference to Byars' signature game against Illinois in 1984, when he helped lead Ohio State back from a 24-0 deficit to a 45-38 win that proved pivotal in Ohio State's drive to its first Rose Bowl since 1979.

For the record, Byars rushed for a then-

school-record 274 yards that afternoon and scored – count 'em – five touchdowns, including the famous 67-yarder with one shoe, and the game-winner from 3 yards out with just 36 seconds remaining.

But there are some other intriguing games on his Ohio State résumé.

There was the 45-26 win over Iowa earlier that same season when Byars accounted for touchdowns three different ways. He scored on runs of 50 and 7 yards, caught a 14-yard touchdown pass from Mike Tomczak and threw a TD pass to Mike Lanese from 35 yards out.

Or what about the game from his sophomore year in 1983, when he become the first Buckeye since Ray Hamilton in 1949 to record both 100 yards rushing and 100 yards receiving in the same game? Byars rushed 23 times for 135 yards and two scores and caught four passes for 120 yards and a long of 60 in a 33-22 win over Purdue.

The Buckeyes capped off that '83 season with a 28-23 win over Pitt in the Fiesta Bowl. It was Thad Jemison who caught the 39-yard game-winning pass from Tomczak, but Byars helped Ohio State survive a wild fourth quarter with a 99-yard kickoff return to put the Buckeyes on top, 21-14, with 14:21 to play in the game.

Byars' various weapons and variety of big games were the genesis of Joe Dempsey's story in this issue about whether the big back from Dayton and his predecessor in the Buckeye backfield, Tim Spencer, are underrated.

My answer is yes and yes.

I have always held theories on why the two maybe don't get their due.

In the case of Byars, he is held in high esteem by Buckeye fans and maybe even some outside Buckeye Nation. But winning the Heisman after his amazing 1984 season would have put him up there in the pantheon of Buckeye stars. Many speculate that the voters favored Doug Flutie in 1984 because they figured they would vote for Byars when he came back as a senior in 1985. Unfortunately, a foot injury derailed those plans.

"I know Earle (Bruce) was counting on it, that's for sure," Buckeye historian Jack Park said of Byars winning the Heisman in '85. "Earle loved Keith. He loved all his players, but he told me a couple times, he always felt that Byars didn't ever get quite the recognition he should have at Ohio State. And that's Earle's opinion, and he got a lot of recognition, but Earle thought that he should have been more highly esteemed."

As for Spencer, I always felt like he came so quickly after two-time Heisman winner Archie Griffin and Byars followed immediately on his heels, not allowing Buckeye fans enough time to truly savor his accomplishments. Statistically, he was also hampered by the fact he had to wait his turn for two years behind Cal Murray and then had to split carries with Jimmy Gayle, a top-notch running back in his own right, having gained 1,914 career yards, including 732 in 1981 and 647 in 1982, the two years Spencer was the lead back.

Buckeye fullback Vaughn Broadnax has a unique perspective on Spencer, having blocked for many of his 3,553 yards that still leave him fifth on Ohio State's all-time career rushing list. "If you look at those two years he started at tailback, he pretty much split the load with Jimmy Gayle," Broadnax said. "And to this day I believe he would have had 2,000-yard seasons had he not had to share the load at tailback. He averaged well over 5 yards per carry, but he was splitting tailback duty with Jimmy. He was a fast and strong running back, and he will always be in my top five OSU running backs."

Two thousand yards rushing in a season. That's pretty high praise from one of the guys opening the holes for Spencer. That would have been better than 300 yards more than the school record of 1,695 by Griffin (1974) when Spencer capped his Buckeye career.

Tim Spencer and Keith Byars. That's two pretty good running backs right there.

#### **Thank You And Not So Much**

I wanted to thank the many readers who reached out to me after the passing of my father, Jack Moskowitz. By phone, letter and email I heard from subscribers I know, subscribers who I know from speaking to them on the phone over the years but have never met, and total strangers. So many of you were able to capture the essence of my father by recounting stories of your own parents that my tales of Jack brought to mind.

I can report that my family and I are doing well and much of that is due to the outpouring of love and support from people like you. Space would not allow me to acknowledge each of you, but let me again say thank you.

On the other hand, I was a little startled by the calls and letters we received following the June issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin, with its coverage of the football team and athletic department's support of the Black Lives Matter movement and the introduction of Ohio State's new president, Dr. Kristina M. Johnson. I had anticipated feedback, but nothing like some of the vitriol we heard and the number of people who asked to cancel their subscriptions to Buckeye Sports Bulletin because of the coverage.

Let me first point out something that is clearly stated on page three of every issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. We are an independent publication that is not affiliated in any way with Ohio State University. We report the news, and these were two significant news stories that would have been hard to ignore.

I will admit that as journalists, we have a strong investment in the right of free speech, a right that members of the football team and others in the athletic department chose to exercise, just as our angry readers did. As for the new president, I suggest that anyone who questions her selection look at her résumé. I would be hard-pressed to believe that there are many in the country who are more qualified.

And as an added bonus for BSB readers, Johnson has an extensive background in sports. She appeared to come down firmly on the side of those wishing to play football this fall.

"President-elect Johnson and I were totally aligned in our efforts to delay the start of the season rather than postpone," said Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith. "I am so grateful to her for all her efforts in support of our student-athletes and a traditional fall season."

As for those who wanted to cancel their BSB subscriptions, the newspaper business is a tough racket to begin with these days. Throw in a pandemic and the cancellation of football season and it is even tougher.

This is a time when I respectfully request, "Don't shoot the messenger."



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