

Buckeyes Focused On What They Can Control After Cancellation

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Just 15 minutes before he was set to address the team during a weekly meeting on Nov. 11, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day found out the Buckeyes would not be playing Maryland the following weekend due to a coronavirus outbreak within the Terrapins' program.

"I'm just surprised that it happened so quickly," Day said during a teleconference on Nov. 12. "We were getting ready for practice on Wednesday, and it's like, 'We're not playing. How did that just happen?' I guess that's on me. I shouldn't be surprised about anything that happens now."

Three days of preparation for a trip to Maryland went out the window in an instant, so Ohio State quickly shifted focus to the Nov. 21 game against undefeated Indiana.

"Literally, at that moment, I just told everybody, 'We're done with Maryland,'" Day said. "The other coaches were kind of looking at me like, 'OK, so what are we doing, Coach?'"

"We just went out there, had a good practice working on fundamentals, base plays against base defenses. All of our attention went to Indiana."

Already in the midst of a truncated conference-only season due to the ongoing pandemic, the Buckeyes were understandably frustrated when they found out the news.

"It's very, very disappointing," Day said. "The hard thing – it's what I've said about all these teams who have had to go through this – is that when you do everything right and make all these sacrifices and still aren't able to play, it's hard. It's hard to look your team in the face and tell them you're not playing another game. We lost four games on the front end, and now we lose another one. So it's not fun."

Ohio State would have been in favor of simply scheduling a nonconference opponent to replace Maryland, but the Big Ten's Council of Presidents and Chancellors decided this summer to not allow games outside of the conference due to different testing protocols across the country.

"I certainly would be in favor of trying to get it done," Day said of finding a substitute opponent. "But I also under-



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

SWITCHED GEARS – After Ohio State's Nov. 14 game against Maryland was canceled, the Buckeyes quickly turned their attention to a top-10 matchup with Indiana that may very well decide the Big Ten East Division.

stand the complexity of it all."

Instead, the Buckeyes were left with an unexpected open week on the schedule ahead of what is perhaps their biggest game of the season.

"Worrying about things you can't control is not productive," Day said. "So, we're just going to worry about what we can control, and that's going to be about getting better."

As mentioned, Indiana is undefeated and sits an important half-game ahead of Ohio State in the East Division standings. If the Buckeyes win, they'll be in the driver's seat for a fourth straight trip to the Big Ten Championship Game. But if that game is also canceled due to an outbreak in either program, that's where things

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From The Message Board

Following the cancellation of Ohio State's matchup with Maryland, much uncertainty looms over the rest of the college football season. We asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum, as well as staff writers, what would have to happen for Ohio State to be knocked out of consideration for the College Football Playoff? Here are some of the responses:

"Really only two things; a surprise upset, or OSU plays only six games instead of nine. I have some doubts that a 6-0 OSU team would make it into playoffs, especially if they aren't able to win a B1G championship.

"This is a very weird season and there may be no CFP this winter?"

– Terrier Buck

"A surprise upset. At this point I would say Indiana is the main threat against an unblemished record. It's a strange season as we all know, anything could happen."

– PeyoteBuck

"Justin Fields being injured or catching the virus."

– Mcarr

"I'll agree with the others and say that pretty much any loss likely knocks Ohio State out, though I don't see a loss in Ohio State's future with the teams remaining on the schedule and the general quality of the Big Ten this season. An injury to Justin Fields is a worthy consideration as well, but I think Ohio State would still be able to put together an undefeated campaign even without Fields running the show."

– Patrick Mayhorn, BSB

"If the College Football Playoff is interested in having the four best teams, there's nothing outside of a loss that will keep Ohio State out of the playoff. If Ohio State isn't able to play more than six games, as Terrier mentioned above, I think we'll have bigger issues to worry about than who is making a playoff that simply won't be happening at that point."

– Andrew Lind, BSB

From The Pages Of BSB

35 Years Ago – 1985

Devastating. That was the word everybody seemed to dwell on after Wisconsin handed Ohio State a 12-7 upset loss on Nov. 16.

"You just saw a devastating loss to Ohio State University," head coach Earle Bruce said in his postgame press conference. "Wisconsin played an outstanding game of controlling the clock and running a slow offense and picking their way to a victory."

The Buckeyes possibly fumbled away a chance at returning to the Rose Bowl. With Iowa gaining a narrow 27-24 victory over Purdue, the Hawkeyes were suddenly in control. A home-field victory over Minnesota on the final Saturday of the regular season would be enough to send Iowa to the Rose Bowl opposite the Pac-10 champion, rather than Ohio State.

The Buckeyes still had a shot at Pasadena but would need a victory at Michigan on Nov. 23 along with an Iowa loss against the Golden Gophers.

30 Years Ago – 1990

John Cooper claimed his 100th career win as the Buckeyes took out Iowa 27-26 on Nov. 10.

"It's a great day for me to win number 100," Cooper said after the game. "I didn't win, though. Our football team won it. But I'll never forget this one. I've never forgotten my first coaching win, and I'll never forget this one. I guarantee you that."

After the game, Ohio State president Gordon E. Gee and athletic director Jim Jones presented Cooper with the game ball.

"It was not only a great victory for Buckeye football, but it was also Coach Cooper's 100th victory," Gee said. "I was pleased I could be here and be a part of this special day for Ohio State football."

25 Years Ago – 1995

Ohio State's 1,000th college football game proved to be a milestone in more ways than one. The Buckeyes pasted perennial thorn-in-their-side Illinois 41-3 on Nov. 11 with Heisman Trophy hopeful Eddie George rushing for a school-record 314 yards in the process.

"I wasn't aware until someone told me on the sideline I needed 20 yards to get 300," said George, who broke Keith Byars' record of 274 yards set in 1984 against Illinois. "I didn't even know I had broken the record. I was wondering what everybody was screaming about."

His performance shocked the Illini, including defensive coordinator Denny Marcin.

"We probably gave him the Heisman today," Marcin said. "I've been coaching for 32 years, and I've never seen a back do that."

20 Years Ago – 2000

OSU freshman tailback Sam Maldonado reportedly became upset about a lack of playing time and had a heated exchange with running backs coach Tim Spencer after Ohio State's Nov. 4 win over Michigan State.

According to a report from the Dayton Daily News, Maldonado could be heard saying "I'll transfer."

Cooper ended up stopping the argument. Speaking to reporters days later, Spencer said "He's a young guy that made a mistake and it's over and we'll move on. He doesn't understand that you have to earn your spurs."

The 6-2, 215-pound Maldonado had rushed for over 3,000 yards as a high school senior but had made just four appearances as a freshman, carrying 22 times for 50 yards and a touchdown. He had not seen the field since Ohio State played Iowa on Oct. 21.

15 Years Ago – 2005

It was senior day at Ohio Stadium for a 48-7 romp of Northwestern on Nov. 12, but many figured that it may have also been the final home appearance for a pair of Buckeye juniors. Rumors swirled over the status of wide receiver Santonio Holmes and safety Donte Whitner, both draft-eligible juniors projected to be selected early in the NFL draft if they were to depart from Columbus.

That speculation was fueled by Holmes seemingly waving goodbye to the Ohio Stadium crowd during the singing of Carmen Ohio, while both players flanked head coach Jim Tressel.

Holmes had been eligible to leave for the NFL following the 2004 season as well but decided against it, saying that he wanted another run at a national championship. However, after the game, he was much more noncommittal.

"I couldn't really say much about it," he said. "I've enjoyed the time that I've had here. I'll just sit down and evaluate the time after we play Michigan."

As for his wave to the crowd: "It was only a joke for the guys. The first couple of times I was waving at my family. I had a lot of family here today. The second time I was just being a jerk – just going out there and just teasing everybody."

OSU fans made their feelings known, chanting, "One more year!" as Holmes smiled and waved.

Whitner was similarly unclear.

"It comes to my mind sometimes," Whitner admitted, "but I just want to play hard for my fans right now and I want to win a Big Ten title."

10 Years Ago – 2010

For the second time in as many seasons, Ohio State and Iowa played a nip-and-tuck November football game. The Buckeyes came out on top again, but this time, Tressel's team was the one to perform a fourth-quarter rally.

No. 8 Ohio State overcame several untimely mistakes, an opportunistic opponent and a sellout crowd of 70,585 fans at Kinnick Stadium in Iowa City to pull out a 20-17 win and move within one victory of another Big Ten championship.

Quarterback Terrelle Pryor starred for the Buckeyes, fighting through inconsistency to will Ohio State to a win with 10 unanswered points in the fourth quarter, the final blow coming on a 12-play, 76-yard drive capped by a Daniel Herron touchdown scamper. That drive saw Pryor rise to the occasion, picking up 14 yards on a crucial fourth-down run to keep the Buckeyes on the field.

Five Years Ago – 2015

Sophomore quarterback J.T. Barrett was suspended for Ohio State's game against Minnesota on Nov. 7, but his punishment for the citation he received for operating a vehicle while under the influence was far from over.

Barrett, who was cited for the OVI in the early-morning hours of Oct. 31 when his blood-alcohol content registered 0.099, had his day in Franklin County Municipal Court on Nov. 10 and received a punishment typical for a first-time offender. The 20-year-old was fined \$400 and had his driver's license suspended for 180 days.

The quarterback was granted driving privileges to attend class and football practice. Appearing in court alongside his lawyer, Barrett pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor charge and apologized for his actions. Barrett was reinserted into the starting lineup against Illinois Nov. 14, once his team-imposed suspension was lifted, but teammates said it didn't feel like he ever left. The quarterback completed 15 of 23 passes for 150 yards while running for 74 and another score in his return against the Illini.

The police video of Barrett's citation surfaced on the entertainment website TMZ.com on Nov. 12. Barrett was seen interacting with police in a polite manner and denying having anything to drink.

He performed field sobriety tests, and after the quarterback was handcuffed and lauded for his cooperation by the arresting officer, Barrett can be heard on the video saying, "I'm the quarterback at Ohio State." Fellow quarterback Cardale Jones picked up Barrett from the scene.

One Year Ago – 2019

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

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

"I want to thank and express my sincere gratitude to university staff members who worked so diligently and expertly to learn and understand the facts, and then to report these facts to the NCAA as part of our request to have Chase reinstated," athletic director Gene Smith said on Nov. 13. "This is the example of the culture of compliance we have at Ohio State."

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

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 P.O. Box 12453
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 bsb@buckeyesports.com

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PUBLISHER
 Frank Moskowitz

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER
 Becky Roberts

MANAGING EDITOR EMERITUS
 Mark Rea

PRINT PRODUCT COORDINATOR
 Andrew Lind

ASSISTANT PUBLISHER EMERITUS
 Karen Wachsman 1944-1999

PHOTOGRAPHY
 Sonny Brockway Terry Gilliam
 Kevin Dye Josh Winslow
 Andrew Lind

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

ADVERTISING REPRESENTATIVES
 Jan Jager Dave Tebay
 Ron Friedman

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

The next issue (Nov. 28 cover date) will be mailed on Nov. 24.

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OPINION

Plan Of 'Hoping For The Best' Isn't Working

The next time you're thinking about switching careers in the pursuit of money and prestige, think of Kevin Warren.

After building an impeccable résumé that included earning a law degree from Notre Dame, running a successful sports and entertainment agency that bore his name, and becoming the first African-American chief operating officer of an NFL team when the Minnesota Vikings named him to that post in 2015, Warren decided last year that he wanted to blaze another trail by becoming the first African-American commissioner of the Big Ten.

I'd be willing to bet good money right about now Warren wishes he'd stayed in the Twin Cities.

For the life of me, I will never understand why college football thought it had to go by hard-and-fast schedules, pretending 2020 was going to be just like any other season. Lacking any sort of consolidated leadership from the top – proving once again that the NCAA is an organization with money-making as its singular focus – conferences were left to their own devices on how to navigate the season.

Then what happened was a mishmash of some teams kicking off their seasons in September and others deciding to hold off until October. The Big Ten, of course, was the mishmashiest of all, with Warren seemingly leading a parade that didn't know which way it wanted to go.

In early August, the conference shrank its traditional 12-game schedule to a 10-game, conference-only slate with some open dates built in. A few days later, even that shortened schedule was scrapped with Warren announcing that the conference would not play football this fall.

A little more than a month later, after watching other teams kick off their seasons – and presumably staring at empty vaults where the vast sums of television revenue was usually kept – the Big Ten announced that it had changed course once again, this time with an Oct. 24 start date to an eight-game schedule with the league championship game to follow on Dec. 19 in Indianapolis.

Unfortunately, unlike most other conferences, the Big Ten pigeonholed itself into a slate to be played over eight weeks with no wiggle room for games that might fall prey to a virus outbreak among one or more of its teams.

Purdue head coach Jeff Brohm missed the Boilermakers' season opener after testing positive for the virus, and then Wisconsin lost two games on its schedule due to a team outbreak. And now, Ohio State – the conference's best chance at one of the four spots in the big-money College Football Playoff – has lost a game because of an outbreak at Maryland.

At this point, it's difficult to assess blame and pinpoint it to any one person or entity. Anyone who thought the coronavirus would somehow magically disappear was living in a dream world, and attempting to play the game of football during a pandemic was always going to be an exercise of equal parts testing protocol, determination and luck.

But it still doesn't make any sense why college football has to pretend it had hard and fast deadlines for the 2020 season. Why must the Big Ten regular-season end before Christmas? For that matter, why must the College Football Playoff be staged in January? And before you bring up the television contracts, I would wager that a College Football Playoff game scheduled for a Tuesday night in early March would find an eager television partner. After all, CBS didn't have any trouble clearing its mid-November schedule of SEC

football games for The Masters golf tournament.

In the case of college football in general and the Big Ten in particular, it would seem that building contingencies into a schedule would have been more prudent than sailing into the teeth of a storm and simply hoping for the best.

EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Extend The Experience

There is a quote from one of my favorite movies that goes, "(People) want leadership. They're so thirsty for it, they'll crawl through the desert toward a mirage, and when they discover there's no water, they'll drink the sand."

Right now, college football fans are the ones drinking the sand. Just the Nov. 14 weekend alone produced more than a dozen COVID-related cancellations or postponements that involved six ranked teams, including No. 1 Alabama, No. 3 Ohio State and No. 5 Texas A&M.

Anyone with any kind of forward thinking at all realizes this is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. There are going to be more cancellations involving more ranked teams, and if the present schedule remains set in concrete, another of 2020's dubious distinctions will be that it produced the most watered-down champion in college football history.

Leadership could remedy that situation if it would only show itself.

The so-called Power Five conferences run the College Football Playoff, and there is nothing preventing them from adjusting the schedule to fit the current situation.

The NBA and NHL pushed back the end of their seasons. Major League Baseball expanded its postseason field, and the NFL plans to do likewise. Why can't college football follow suit?

"Why are we running toward that hard date of Dec. 20 (for picking the four-team playoff field)," Fox Sports analyst Joel Klatt said recently. "I don't understand whatsoever. Have some flexibility in what's going on. Every other sport in America has allowed a massive amount of flexibility and adjustment to the schedule in order to play a requisite number of games, give the players opportunities, have a champion we can look at and say, 'You know what? That's a true champion.'"

"There's no reason whatsoever the College Football Playoff, owned by the conferences, should say we're going to have a firm date, you have to be done with your conference by Dec. 20 because we're going to put the rankings out and then we play the semifinals on New Year's Day and we have to play the championship on (Jan. 11). That can all be adjusted and should be adjusted.

"No. 1, it will increase the possibility to get the best four teams in the playoffs. Cream always rises to the top, so we can allow for more games if we just postpone the Selection Sunday on Dec. 20. The other part is that we need to allow these kids the opportunity to actually play the contests they opted in to play. Give them the requisite opportunities to increase their stock at the next level."

Not that top-rated players such as Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields need to prove anything more than they already have. After three games and 83 pass attempts, Fields' 11 touchdown passes (against no interceptions)

equals his number of incompletions. He has thrown for 908 yards – more than any other OSU quarterback in the first three games of a season – and his efficiency rating of 222.4 is on target to obliterate the single-season program record of 181.4 he set last year.

But the reason Fields came back was the same reason similar players such as teammates Shaun Wade and Wyatt Davis as well as Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, Alabama offensive tackle Alex Leatherwood and cornerback Patrick Surtain II, and Texas offensive tackle Sam Cosmi came back.

They enjoy playing college football and were willing to sacrifice all that went with playing in this most unusual of seasons to do so. What would be so harmful in extending that experience?

First Time Since ...

Trying to play through a worldwide pandemic has provided the 2020 college football season with more than a few oddities. For example, with regard just to the Nov. 14 week-end slate of Big Ten games:

- Off to a 1-3 start for the first time since 1967, Michigan is reeling after a 49-11 pounding absorbed at the hands of a Wisconsin team that was playing its first game in three weeks following a COVID-forced layoff. The 28-0 half-time deficit was the worst for the Wolverines since Michigan Stadium was built in 1927, and the final 38-point margin marked the worst defeat at home for the Wolverines since a 40-0 loss to Minnesota in 1935.

- Indiana celebrated playing as a top-10 team for the first time since 1969 with a 24-0 victory at Michigan State. It was only the second win for the Hoosiers in their last 12 meetings with the Spartans, and the first shutout in the series for IU since a 10-0 win in 1993.

- * The win moved Indiana's record to 4-0, the first time it has started a Big Ten season with four victories since 1987. And when the Hoosiers moved up to No. 9 in The Associated Press rankings released Nov. 15, it marked the program's highest spot in the polls since playing USC in the 1968 Rose Bowl as the nation's No. 4-ranked team.

- Penn State's early-season stumbles have turned into an unbridled freefall in the wake of a 30-23 loss at previously winless Nebraska. The Nittany Lions are now 0-4 to start a season for the first time since 2001 and need a victory against Iowa on Nov. 21 to avoid an 0-5 start for the first time in program history.

- The Lions are also the first preseason top-10 team to lose their first four games of a season since Pittsburgh in 1984. The Panthers, who had the services of such stars as future Pro Football Hall of Fame defensive end Chris Doleman, future College Football Hall of Fame offensive guard Bill Fralic, and fullback Craig "Ironhead" Heyward on that '84 team, finished just 4-7-1 that year.

- Northwestern scored a 27-20 road victory at Purdue and enjoys its first 4-0 start in conference play since 1996. Current head coach Pat Fitzgerald was a senior co-captain on that '96 Wildcats team and was named Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year for the second season in a row.

- Iowa head coach Kirk Ferentz notched the 99th conference victory of his career Nov. 13 with a 35-7 win against Minnesota. Ferentz's next league victory will make him the first Big Ten coach to celebrate his 100th conference win since Bo Schembechler of Michigan reached the milestone in 1983. The Big Ten's exclusive 100-win club includes only Woody Hayes of Ohio State (153, 1951-78), Schembechler (143, 1969-89) and Amos Alonzo Stagg of Chicago (115, 1896-1932).



Changes To CFP Playoff Possible

With just about every major-college football conference struggling with game cancellations as the coronavirus pandemic continues to devastate the United States, the College Football Playoff could be eyeing a move back from its original planned start date to accommodate rescheduled games, according to Big 12 commissioner Bob Bowlsby. Bowlsby told SiriusXM's "Big 12 This Morning" show on Nov. 13 that the playoff committee has discussed several contingency plans because of the virus.

"We've spent some time talking about that," Bowlsby said. "We haven't come to any closure on that, but there is some latitude to postpone if that need should arise. The same is true for New Year's Six games. Within reason, you can do those things."

"I don't know that I see us playing a championship game in February, but you just never know. These are unusual times, and things that might otherwise not be acceptable have to be considered in this kind of circumstance."

Additionally, The Athletic's Nicole Auerbach

reported on Nov. 13 that a "person with knowledge of Playoff operations committee conversations expects that there would be parameters established for putting any contingency plans into motion, such as a hard deadline to determine whether the semifinal games can take place as originally scheduled."

While Bowlsby spoke pretty openly about the possibility of a change to the playoff – which is currently scheduled for semifinal matchups to kick off on Jan. 1 and the national title to be played on Jan. 11 – Auerbach also reported that CFP executive director Bill Hancock quickly shot down that possibility, at least for the time being.

"Bob answered a question, and people took the answer too far," Hancock told The Athletic. "There is talk about everything and anything, because it's 2020. But none of that is an indication that anything concrete should be expected. The commissioners who will make the decision of course, they support playing the games as scheduled."

While the committee may support playing those games as scheduled right now, a rapid rise in game cancellations and postponements may make that decision quite a bit more challenging. The week of Nov. 14 saw a whopping 16 games canceled over COVID concerns, a high-water mark thus far in the season.

If postponements and cancellations continue at that rate, several top teams, including Ohio State, could be looking at a number of games played that would present a very tough situation for the committee. SEC commissioner Greg Sankey took a similar tack to that of Hancock but did mention that he's open to change if change is required to accommodate such a unique situation.

"The semifinals are on (January) 1st," Sankey said on Nov. 11. "The championship is on the 11th. The reality is if you walk in the back of my building, there's a sign that says be flexible."

"I'm not going to hypothesize about change, but I'm not inattentive to the potential that

Plenty Of News Despite Unexpected Off Week

There may not have been an Ohio State football game the week of Nov. 8-14, but there was still plenty of news and features at BSB's BuckeyeSports.com website. The BSB staff posted stories on football, football recruiting, basketball, basketball recruiting and women's basketball. There were reprints on big games from past issues of Buckeye Sports Bulletin. The staff posted what would have been their predictions if Ohio State and Maryland had played, and we even ran reprints of stories from the 2018 game with Maryland, when the Terrapins took the Buckeyes to overtime, to fill the gameday void.

There's always something going on at BuckeyeSports.com.

The popular staff predictions will return for the Indiana game on Nov. 21, COVID willing. Staff predictions are posted each gameday morning.

Additionally, staff members man the BuckeyeSports.com Forum, interacting with subscribers on the hot topics of the day. Don't forget the live Official Game Thread. If something interesting, troubling or exciting happens in the game, share your thoughts in real time.

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change may need to occur at a number of different levels."

NCAA Releases NIL Legislation

The NCAA unveiled the specifics of its name, image and likeness (NIL) rights proposal on Nov. 13, announcing the official terms of the legislation that was introduced on Oct. 14 by the NCAA Division I Council and will be officially voted on by the council in January.

According to a report from USA Today's Steve Berkowitz, the legislation includes a large number of minute details, ranging from limitations around the kind of endorsements and agreements that athletes would be allowed to make, when athletes become eligible to obtain their NIL rights and the extent to which school-involvement is permitted.

There's also a general statement on the goal of the proposal, within the document obtained by USA Today: "This model would ensure consistency and clarity for prospective student-athletes" and minimize "the risk of prospective student-athletes entering into agreements or relationships before full-time enrollment that could render them ineligible when they become student-athletes."

In the actual legislation, the NCAA has dictated specifically that boosters, agents or anyone interested in entering an agreement with a student-athlete will not be allowed to do so until they are fully enrolled at their university.

Once enrolled, athletes are permitted to profit from endorsements, autographs and providing instructional lessons (working at or running camps) and can use crowdfunding sites to raise money, so long as the money goes to educational expenses. All business activity must be reported to an independent third-party administrator. After their eligibility has ended, athletes will be permitted to sell memorabilia.

However, endorsements that "conflict with NCAA legislation" (like sports betting or banned substances) are not allowed, nor is the usage of institutional marks such as logos. In layman's terms, that essentially means that Justin Fields

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2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Oct. 24	NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	FOX	1-2
Oct. 31	at Penn State*	W, 38-25	ABC	0-4
Nov. 7	RUTGERS	W, 49-27	BTN	1-3
Nov. 14	at Maryland	Canceled	N/A	2-1
Nov. 21	INDIANA*	12 p.m.	FOX	4-0
Nov. 28	at Illinois*	TBA	TBA	1-3
Dec. 5	at Michigan State*	TBA	TBA	1-3
Dec. 12	MICHIGAN*	12 p.m.	FOX	1-3
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship**	8 p.m.	FOX	

* 2019 bowl team

** at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

would not be permitted to advertise a betting site under any circumstances, nor could he advertise a restaurant if he plans to be wearing an Ohio State uniform in the advertisement.

Interestingly, boosters connected to universities will be allowed to participate in this new NIL marketplace, which was previously a question revolving around the proposals, creating the need for that third-party administrator to track who and where the money is coming from.

"Boosters may be the most likely sources of opportunities for student-athletes to engage in name, image and likeness activities," the document says. "Student-athletes should be permitted take advantage of legitimate opportunities, even if the source of the opportunity comes from a booster of the institution."

Lastly, student-athletes may not endorse "an athletics equipment company or manufacturer to publicize (that) the institution's athletics program uses its equipment," and universities will be allowed to prohibit deals that "conflict with existing institutional sponsorship arrangements."

If passed, all of this legislation would go into effect on Aug. 1, 2021. Conferences are permitted to offer amendments until Dec. 15.

Ohio State Still No. 3 In Polls

Ohio State remained firmly entrenched at No. 3 in both major polls after its surprise idle week, sitting behind Alabama and Notre Dame in both the Amway coaches poll and The Associated Press top 25 on Nov. 15.

In the coaches poll, Ohio State landed just ahead of Clemson, Florida, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, BYU, Miami and upcoming opponent Indiana, leaving the top 10 unchanged.

Elsewhere within the Big Ten, Wisconsin followed up the Buckeyes and Hoosiers at No. 12 after a blowout win over Michigan, while Northwestern jumped up three spots to No. 20. Purdue and Maryland also received votes.

In the AP poll, Ohio State checks in ahead of Clemson, Texas A&M, Florida, Cincinnati, BYU, Indiana and Wisconsin. The Hoosiers and Badgers were the only movers within the top 10, up one and three spaces, respectively. Miami (Fla.) fell from No. 9 to No. 12 after a 25-24 win over Virginia Tech.

Northwestern was the only other ranked Big Ten team, slotted at No. 19. Iowa received two votes.

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Continued From Page 5

OSU-IU Draws 'Big Noon Saturday'

Ohio State's matchup with Indiana picked up quite a bit of significance over the past week, both with the cancellation of Ohio State's Nov. 14 matchup against Maryland and Indiana's 24-0 win over Michigan State. Now sitting a game ahead of the Buckeyes at 4-0 on the season and firmly within the top 10 of the Associated Press poll, Indiana presents a real threat to Ohio State's race for the Big Ten East title and a championship-game berth.

With higher stakes comes a higher billing on the marquee, and OSU-IU is taking the top spot in FOX's priorities, as it drew the noon slot for Nov. 21, meaning that it will get the full "Big Noon Saturday" experience that the network has been pushing since the beginning of the 2019 season.

The announcement of the kick time was made on Nov. 9, prior to the cancellation of the OSU-Maryland game. FOX stalwarts Joel Klatt and Gus Johnson will be on the call.

This will be the second of at least three appearances in that "Big Noon Saturday" slot for the Buckeyes this season. Their 52-17 win over Nebraska in week one was featured on the broadcast, as will be Ohio State's final game of the regular season against Michigan on Dec. 12. Indiana has not yet been featured on a "Big Noon Saturday" broadcast, though it did play at noon against Michigan State and drew an FS1 noon broadcast against Michigan the week prior.

Fields, Petit-Frere, Borland Named Players Of The Week

Fields, Nicholas Petit-Frere and Tuf Borland were honored by Ohio State as players of the week following a 49-27 victory over Rutgers on Nov. 7. Fields and Petit-Frere were named co-offensive players of the game, while Borland claimed the title on both defense and special teams after notching six tackles. Entering his third season as a captain, Borland deflected credit in talking to media on Nov. 11, instead praising Ohio State's defensive front.

"Good defensive-line play all comes down to being disruptive, and that's what those guys are," he said. "Those guys come ready to play every week."

For Fields, who went 24 of 28 passing for 314 yards and five touchdowns, this was his second offensive player of the week title of the season.

"I think it's what I was supposed to do," Fields said of his performance.

This was the first such honor of Petit-Frere's career, earned in just his third game as a starter. He's graded out as a champion all three weeks as well.

BSB Podcast Enhances Online Coverage

Buckeye Sports Bulletin now has a podcast to work in tandem with BuckeyeSports.com to keep BSB subscribers informed of all of the latest around Ohio State football, basketball, recruiting and everything else.

The Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast covers Ohio State from all angles, with input from beat writers who cover everything from football and recruiting to men's volleyball and women's hockey, and everything in-between. With BSB's deep Rolodex of former Buckeye players, coaches and college sports analysts around the country, as well as in-house experts Joe Dempsey and Andrew Lind, the BSB podcast has you covered on all things Buckeye, all the time. Staffers Patrick Mayhorn and Wyatt Crosher host with a constantly rotating guest list to get insight and analysis on the latest in Ohio State news.

With Ohio State's 2020 season under way, the BSB podcast has moved to two shows a week: a preview show released at 10 a.m. on the Friday before each game and a recap show released on the following Monday, reacting to all of the action in the latest Buckeye game. Those preview shows feature an in-depth interview with a beat writer who covers Ohio State's upcoming opponent, to provide the best possible insight on the matchup for the Buckeyes.

The show is free for all listeners. To find the show, go to your favorite podcast app or website and type in "Buckeye Sports Bulletin podcast," and click the subscribe button. You can listen on Amazon Music, Apple Podcasts, Audible, Google Podcasts, iHeartRadio, Podbean, Spotify, Stitcher and anywhere else that podcasts are found.

For those of you who are new to the podcast world, the show is also posted at 10 a.m. every Friday on BuckeyeSports.com, as well as in the BSB Fan Forum. The recap shows will be posted every Monday morning, at the same time as the Friday previews.

"It's super rewarding because we're winning games," Petit-Frere said. "It's just a great feeling being a part of that and feeling that I have an investment in how we're winning games."

Fields and Petit-Frere were also named champions on the offense, joined by halfback Master Teague, left tackle Thayer Munford, tight ends Luke Farrell and Jeremy Ruckert and wide receivers Chris Olave, Garrett Wilson, Jameson Williams and Jaxon Smith-Njigba. Defensively, Borland was included as a champion, along with defensive ends Jonathon Cooper, Javontae Jean-Baptiste and Tyler Friday; defensive tackle Tommy Togiai; linebacker Justin Hilliard; cornerbacks Sevn Banks and Shaun Wade; and safety Josh Proctor.

On the scout-team champions list, freshman offensive lineman Jakob James, freshman defensive lineman Darrion Henry-Young and walk-ons Sam Wiglus and Ryan Batsch were all honored for their contributions.

Smith Picked For Olympic Think Tank

Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith was added to a think tank founded by the United States Olympic & Paralympic Committee and Collegiate Advisory Council on Nov. 12. It is designed to "strengthen Olympic and Paralympic sports in the American collegiate system," according to its mission statement.

With Olympic programs dropping around the country as a result of the coronavirus pandemic doing damage to athletic budgets, the think tank will look to establish a sustainable future for those sports to keep programs afloat.

"Our collegiate sports feed the Olympics," Smith said in an interview with The Columbus Dispatch. "When those sports are eliminated, their opportunity to train and compete at the highest level and chase the dream of the Olympics are diminished."

"There's some – not a lot – that come out of the club system and make the Olympics and represent our country. But the collegiate model, that's where the largest number of Olympians emerge from."

"So how do we look at, as we move into the future, the ability for colleges to sustain sponsoring those sports, or should we be looking at a whole different model?"

There are 34 members of the think tank, split up into three groups. Smith will serve in the partnerships working group, along with group chair Greg Byrne, Alabama's athletic director.

Urban Meyer Had COVID-19

Former Ohio State head coach and current FOX analyst Urban Meyer told

Columbus' 10TV on Nov. 11 that he had tested positive for COVID-19 the week prior but had no symptoms and had since recovered. He also confirmed in the interview that his positive test was the reason behind FOX pulling its usual "Big Noon Kickoff" pregame show which features Meyer, Matt Leinart, Reggie Bush, Brady Quinn and Rob Stone, prior to the Nov. 7 slate of games.

"I've just recently gotten over it," Meyer told 10TV. "I was relatively symptom-free. I tested positive and that's why we didn't do the 'Big Noon Kickoff' last week. And the good thing is none of my partners and teammates had it, and we're going to be back at it this weekend."

As he alluded to, the "Big Noon Kickoff" show returned with all five analysts for Nov. 14. Meyer's daughter Gigi Meyer Pruett was also stricken with the virus back in June, though she recovered as well. Both described their run-in with the disease as very difficult.

"I just had a 100-degree fever and body aches," said Meyer Pruett in June. "That went away, and a couple of days after that I started to get this pain in my chest when I would breathe in really deep and I was like, 'That is odd. I've never had this before. What is this?'"

"It's the real deal," Meyer said of the virus. "I've dealt with it. My daughter dealt with it, and it's just something we've got to be aware of."

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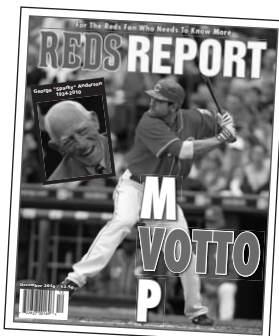
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Beating Hoosiers Important In Big Ten East Race

Continued From Page 1

could get tricky.

"If Ohio State beats Indiana, that would give the Buckeyes a cushion because they'd be the only undefeated team in the division and they'd have the head-to-head win over the Hoosiers," Eleven Warriors senior reporter Dan Hope told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "The only thing that would trip them up is if they don't play Indiana (on Nov. 21)."

If both teams were somehow able to play the remainder of their regular-season schedule in this hypothetical scenario and Ohio State finishes at 6-0 and Indiana finishes at 7-0, the Hoosiers would likely win the tiebreaker based on the record of their cross-divisional opponents.

Indiana's Big Ten West opponents are sitting at 4-1 (Purdue and Wisconsin), whereas Ohio State's cross-divisional opponents are currently 2-5 (Illinois and Nebraska).

"It wouldn't be the fact that the Hoosiers have played more games but that the Buckeyes' non-divisional schedule is really weak," Hope said.

In a scenario where Ohio State beats Indiana but loses a game later in the year, the Buckeyes would still hold the all-important head-to-head win when it comes to the tiebreaker.

"It's all based on number of losses rather than number of wins, so even if Indiana finishes at 7-1 and Ohio State finishes at 6-1, the Buckeyes have that win over the

Hoosiers and would still go to the Big Ten title game based on the head-to-head," Hope said. "The winning percentage is only being used if teams having a different number of losses because they don't want to penalize a team for having a game canceled."

Then again, if Maryland also finishes with just one loss, the lack of a game between the Buckeyes and Terrapins on Nov. 14 comes into play.

"Where it gets confusing is if you end up in a situation where Ohio State and Maryland had one loss and you can't rely on the head-to-head result," Hope said. "You would again fall into the tiebreaker of their non-divisional opponents' cumulative records, and it's more than likely Maryland's non-divisional opponents are going to end up with a better record than Ohio State's, with Northwestern and Minnesota at 5-3 this season."

While those scenarios play out over the next few weeks, another thing to keep an eye on is that the Buckeyes can afford to have only one more game canceled by the virus before they're in jeopardy of not playing the required six games to be eligible for the Big Ten Championship Game.

"The only way that number would decrease is if there were so many games canceled that the average number of games played in the conference fell," Hope said. "While it's six at this moment, that number would drop to two games below whatever the average is."

"But if you assume that doesn't change,



INDIANA FOOTBALL/TWITTER

HOOSIERS ON THE RISE – Led by sophomore quarterback Michael Penix, who has accounted for 11 touchdowns and only three interceptions this season, Indiana is 4-0 in Big Ten play for the first time since 1987.

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COVER STORY

Ohio State must play six games to make it to the title game."

The Big Ten will reportedly allow teams to schedule a new game against a conference opponent if they've both had their original game canceled by their opponent due to COVID-19. So, if the Buckeye are able to get through the rest of the season unscathed, whether it's on the field or in terms of the virus, it's unlikely the canceled game against Maryland will have any impact on their Big Ten or College Football Playoff hopes. After all, they're far from the only program in the country impacted thus far.

"I don't think it has any impact for two reasons," Hope said. "First off, if Ohio State goes 8-0 with a conference championship win, they're clearly going to be one of the four best teams. I'd be shocked if the playoff committee left them out in that scenario."

"I also think we're going to see more games canceled in the coming weeks, so losing one game doesn't really hurt them because other schools are going to find themselves in the same situation sooner than later. Ultimately, it just decreases your margin for error where you really can't lose a game. The fewer wins you have, the less you can afford one loss."

So rather than worry about what may or may not happen in the future, Day is keeping his team focused on the task at hand.

The Buckeyes conducted their regularly scheduled practices during the week and a padded scrimmage at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center on Nov. 14, the Saturday they would have played Maryland.

"We're going to try to start implementing some of the ideas, introducing the offense and defense to both sides of the ball, and just try to do a good job of getting ahead of these guys," Day said. "Anything we do right now is a bonus anyway, which is great, but we also don't want to waste time. We want to make sure we're giving them good, accurate things."

The cancellation also offers a strong reminder of how quickly things can be taken away from the Buckeyes and how important it is for them to follow the proper health and safety protocols.

"This is the first time we've really been affected by it, through no fault of our own, but this is kind of the way it goes," Day said. "This is going to be difficult here moving forward, but we have to continually make sacrifices. We've done that, but at any moment, it can turn sideways. So we've got to stay on it, and it's going to be really, really important. It has to be the No. 1 thing we think about when we wake up in the morning."

"One thing is for sure, though. We don't know what's coming next. What we can do is do a great job today, maximizing getting ready for Indiana."



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COVID Cancellations Spreading Across CFB

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

The week leading up to Nov. 14 games was the worst yet for college football in its struggle against the coronavirus pandemic.

It saw a whopping 16 games canceled or postponed across the FBS ranks including four in the SEC, more than the number of games actually played in the conference over the weekend. Just over half of the games (nine) were postponed rather than outright canceled, presenting the opportunity for a rescheduling – while two others, UCLA-Utah and Cal-Arizona State, just saw the healthy teams (Cal and UCLA) play each other on Nov. 15.

To call it a concerning development may be doing a disservice to the gravity of the situation. With the total from week 11 added in, 63 college football games have now been canceled or postponed on the season, nowhere near a majority but still well above anything that the sport has ever seen before. Cancellations are becoming more frequent with each passing week, certainly due at least in part to the addition of the Big Ten, Pac-12, Mountain West and MAC to active play.

“College football is a great representative of our country at large,” Florida athletic director Scott Stricklin said. “Some weeks, it seems like we’re doing really well with the virus. Some weeks, it’s kicking our rear end.”

Entering the back half of the season, each week seems to be leaning much closer to the latter.

Behind closed doors, university presidents and athletic directors are in a frenzy, trying to keep the season alive, as Yahoo’s Pete Thamel tells it in a Nov. 12 story.

“It’s going to be hard to finish, to be honest,” a Power Five president told Yahoo Sports. “You saw what happened with Maryland and Ohio State (being canceled) and what’s happening in the SEC. The next couple weeks are going to be tricky. The numbers are trending in the wrong direction.”

In that same story, Ohio State athletic director Gene Smith shares similar concerns, having seen his team miss a game for the first time the season after eight positive tests put a pause on all football activities for Maryland.

“Where do we go from here?” Smith asked. “Who knows? No one can project. This is a time of uncertainty.”

Much of the struggle that college football has had in recent weeks was one that athletic directors and associated physicians had been fretting about for months, tied not to pure testing results, but rather to contact tracing. With just one or two positive tests, entire teams can and have been wiped out due to contact that players and coaches had with those impacted.

“The contact tracing is killing us,” Todd Berry, executive director of the American Football Coaches Association, said in October. “All the sudden the coaches are calling me. They tell me that one kid got it and 12 are out (for contact tracing) and none of the 12 even ever had it.”

As it bumps up with those contact tracing

requirements, more of college football is finding itself without enough eligible players to field a team, leading to multiple consecutive cancellations, which happened at Wisconsin after it saw multiple positive tests following its season-opening victory against Illinois on Oct. 24. Quarterback Graham Mertz tested positive for the virus a day later. By Oct. 28, 12 members of the program had tested positive including head coach Paul Chryst, as Wisconsin announced that it would not be playing its scheduled Oct. 31 matchup against Nebraska.

“Our first month of testing and practice, we had one positive (prior to the Oct. 24 game),” Wisconsin AD Barry Alvarez said on Oct. 28. “Since the game, we’ve had 12 positive tests. We just felt with the number of positives in that short a timeline, the chancellor and I felt, ‘We have an issue.’ We need to get our arms around this and control the COVID virus now before it got out of hand.”

A week later, Wisconsin canceled again, this time prior to a battle with Purdue, citing testing numbers once more, with 22 members of the program sitting with positive tests. Add in contact tracing, and it’s likely that Wisconsin was without the manpower needed to play any sort of football game, let alone a competitive one against a Big Ten West challenger.

“I share in the disappointment of our student-athletes and staff,” Alvarez said on Nov. 3. “We have seen a level of improvement in our testing numbers, but not enough to give us confidence to resume normal activities and play our game on Saturday. We will continue to test regularly, take the proper health-related precautions and look forward to getting our team back on the field as soon as possible.”

While positive tests have shut down several programs along with Wisconsin, including Maryland, Florida, all three major military academies and more, the teams on the other side of those matchups are similarly impacted by those cancellations. Specifically in the Big Ten, requirements for playing a certain number of games – currently six, though it drops to five if the average number of games played per team in the conference drops to seven, which looks possible – to qualify for the conference title game now weigh very heavy for the Badgers, who can play only a maximum of six games thanks to those two cancellations.

Nebraska and Purdue – on the other side of those cancellations – now have just a one-game cushion and could see any title hopes (especially for the Boilermakers) dashed with one positive test compounded by contact tracing.

Unfortunately for these schools, there’s very little that can be done about the obstacles in front of them, creating a sense of frustration, specifically for Nebraska and Purdue, which lost crucial shots at the presumed Big Ten West leader.

“I would definitely say there was frustration,” said Erin Sorensen of Hail Varsity, which covers Nebraska sports, of the cancellation. “I don’t think it’s a secret to anyone in the Big Ten and beyond that Nebraska fought really hard alongside Ohio State to see a season of any kind, and to have one of those games canceled, it was like the worst-case scenario in that moment, just because, like I said, they had fought so hard for it. For that first canceled game to be one that included Nebraska, I think it was just a little bit of salt in the wound.”

Those at Purdue seemed to take it a little better.

“You know, it was somewhat in stride, I thought,” GoldAndBlack’s Alan Karpick said of the Purdue reaction. “I mean Jeff Brohm, the fact that he had been through COVID himself, and he was the first coach in the Big Ten to get it. And I think with that, it’s kind of become a known entity and I think it wasn’t a shock just because of what had gone on the week before (with Wisconsin canceling against Nebraska).”

“I thought they took it pretty much in stride. I think they’re frustrated they can’t play. I think they would have liked to have the opportunity to play Wisconsin with its fourth-string quarterback. That didn’t happen.”

To make matters worse for those Big Ten teams down a game despite a clean bill of health, the conference entered the season with rules against scheduling any out-of-conference opponents, even in the case of an in-conference cancellation. Nebraska bumped up against that as it tried to quickly schedule UT-Chattanooga following Wisconsin’s announcement, a move that was quickly shot down.

“Obviously, we saw Nebraska wanted to try to make a nonconference opponent happen. The Big Ten wasn’t OK with that,” Sorensen said.

“Nebraska immediately started looking for the opponent, and I don’t know if that was even cleared by the Big Ten – to even approach anybody else – but we know that they looked for somebody who had as strict or stricter rules than the Big Ten when it came to testing, found Tennessee Chattanooga and thought that could have been a potential fit.”

“They also saw it as an opportunity that if this worked out, it would open the door for other programs, if a cancellation were to happen. Similar to having Ohio State-Maryland canceled, maybe Ohio State could have had the option to go out and find a new opponent. Unfortunately, it just can’t work that way because part of what the Big Ten agreed to when they put this all in motion to have a season was that it was going to be conference only.”

Nonconference games will remain off limits moving forward, but according to ESPN’s Heather Dinich, the Big Ten did decide on Nov. 5 that it will allow teams to quickly reschedule within the conference if two healthy teams are willing to play each other that week after having their games canceled, similar to what the Pac-12 did on Nov. 15 with UCLA and Cal.

“It’s possible we could see more of the scheduling shuffle we saw today in the Pac-12,” Dinich wrote on Twitter. “On Nov. 5, Big Ten presidents and chancellors approved a process that allows two teams without COVID issues that have had games cancelled in the same week to play each other.”

While that news can serve as a positive for healthy teams that would like an opportunity to plan, even if it means a very quick turnaround, it’s hard to imagine that it will serve as a true solution for salvaging the college football season if testing numbers continue to increase. With the pace the sport it is on, it’s hard to know if anything can accomplish that. Those power brokers certainly don’t plan to stop trying, though.

“None of us thought this would be easy, simple,” SEC commissioner Greg Sankey said in a Nov. 11 press call. “The fact we’re here is a tribute to a lot of great work. The challenge ahead is to refocus, elevate that level of discipline and let’s move forward and crown a champion. And that’s the objective and to do it in a healthy way.”

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Wilson Showcases Dynamic Skill Set In Slot

By JOE DEMPSEY
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Although they may want to deny it now, there were doubters when Ohio State's coaching staff moved Garrett Wilson into the slot from his outside spot where he flashed as a freshman.

Those who were concerned about the change pointed to Wilson's first-year success when he totaled 432 receiving yards and five touchdowns, including a 118-yard outing with one score at Michigan.

Through three games, any naysayers have been forced to see the light. Wilson has gained 411 yards from scrimmage (344 receiving) and two touchdowns, while averaging 8.0 receptions per game. Even Wilson, who was the No. 2 wide receiver and No. 20 overall prospect in 2019, admitted his initial trepidation about the transition.

"It wasn't something I was looking forward to," Wilson said Sept. 29. "It was just whatever the coaches wanted me to do, whatever is best for the team, and I was able to do that. I'm definitely excited to be in the slot and get a little bit more balls."

Part of what provided Wilson with peace of mind about moving was what he saw from former teammate K.J. Hill, who set the program record of 201 receptions in that spot.

"To be able to see K.J. last year, that was huge for me and to be able to learn from him. I mean, he's as good of a slot as it gets," Wilson said.

As productive as Hill was in the slot, Wilson is a different player. So why did head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline decide to slide the former five-star from Austin (Texas) Lake Travis into the slot?

"The slot is a good fit for dynamic players, and I view Garrett as a dynamic player," Hartline said. "That position is developing more and more into a wide receiver and is less of a hybrid thing. It's really that you need to be a great wide receiver first and I think that Garrett being a smart, savvy guy who has a good wiggle to him when it comes to releases and operating space, I think he's a great fit for that space."

"At the end of the day, we're always trying to find a way to get the best players on the field. It's not about this position, that position, it's, 'Hey, the best players play.'"

While Hartline was raving about Wilson via Zoom conference with BSB and other members of the media, junior wide receiver Chris Olave walked by.

"Chris Olave in there would be terrible," Hartline joked.

Wilson, who reeled in 204 receptions for 3,359 yards and 55 total touchdowns at Lake Travis, was one of the most touted prospects in the country as a prep player. His highlight-reel playmaking ability made him an attractive target for former head coach Urban Meyer and then-offensive coordinator Ryan Day, and the same skills make him a mismatch nightmare in the slot.

"Having a guy that's very dynamic in the inside is very important," Hartline said. "A guy that's really smart, has the ability to identify space and work around linebackers, and also be tough enough to block linebackers. And to be able to work in space but also take the seam is very important. I think the guy inside, maybe more than any other position, may be asked to do more things."

"But what do you want to do there defensively? Who do you want to put on him? Do you want to have a linebacker in there and have him have to guard him? Or do you want to bring a nickel player in and then you have to say, 'You're tougher than him when running the football and then be able to cover him?' It's just a different animal."

The questions posed by Hartline are the same ones that keep defensive coordinators up at night. Most cornerbacks struggle to stick with Wilson one on one, let alone safeties and linebackers.

Wilson was asked if his eyes light up when he sees what appears to be a mismatch in the opposition's coverage.

"I just have to win," Wilson responded. "No matter who I'm matched up against, I feel like I hold myself to a high enough standard that I feel like I should get open and make myself available to the quarterback and when I'm matched up in the slot against linebackers or safeties, nothing changes."

In the Buckeyes' 3-0 start, Wilson has provided junior quarterback Justin Fields with a reliable and potent playmaker. Through three games, Wilson picked up 16 first downs for the Buckeyes, and his 10 catches of 15 or more yards tied Penn State's Jahan Dotson for the most in the Big Ten. The standout sophomore credits the extra work he put in with Fields during the elongated offseason for his success.

"Overall, just having the extended offseason, I feel like we got to work on so many routes," Wilson said. "Really everything I run, we got a good amount of reps on everything. Justin doesn't miss much, and when he's on target, I've just got to make sure I do my job."

Changing positions can be difficult for anyone, particularly an underclassman like Wilson, who had to do so during an irregular offseason. Wilson gained 129 yards and scored a touchdown on seven catches in his first outing in the slot against Nebraska, making the position switch look seamless in a 52-17 win. His mental preparation made him prepare like a seasoned veteran in his first game at his new spot.

"It's a whole different position, all the intricacies of playing in the slot and stuff like that, but I feel like I'm getting used to it every day," Wilson said. "There's definitely a lot more film to go with it, just to understand the coverages. It's a lot less one-on-one routes and a lot more finding zones and stuff like that. Being able to read coverages and identify that before the play starts. I'd say that's a lot of things that I need to work on and get better at through film."

On the first play of Ohio State's matchup at Penn State, Wilson took the first carry of his collegiate career for 62 yards. Being in the slot gives the 6-0, 193-pound receiver more opportunities to make plays multiple ways. He finished the 38-25 victory with 173 yards from scrimmage, including 111 yards on 11 catches.

Following another solid performance in the Buckeyes' 49-27 win at Rutgers, Wilson averaged 137.0 yards from scrimmage per game through three outings, which was good enough for sixth in the country among receivers.

The talented receiver has not been limited to the slot, however, as he has lined up on the outside like he did as a freshman as well.

"I love that," Wilson said. "What's key to playing receiver is being able to be ver-

satile, play inside and out, and that's something that I wanted to be able to work on in my game. Moving to the slot this past year and then being able to play outside still, I think that's only going to benefit me."

Growing up with NFL aspirations, Wilson understands the importance of possessing a diverse skill set when the time comes for him to go pro. He pointed to the Green Bay Packers' Davante Adams and the Buffalo Bills' Stefon Diggs as a pair of NFL standouts who have helped him mold his game as a complete receiver.

"I put a big emphasis on me being versatile," Wilson said. "When I watch someone like Davante Adams play, they show being able to play inside and out, good releases off the ball, being able to track the ball down the field, and also in the intermediate and in the short game. I want to be able to do all those things, just anything that makes you harder to guard and harder to take away as a defense. I'm focused on trying to improve my whole game."

For his first touchdown of the season, Wilson was actually lined up on the outside at his old spot. He hauled in a 42-yard score from Fields to give the Buckeyes' a 14-7 first-quarter lead against Nebraska. Due to all his extra practice with his quarterback, the versatile receiver knew the play was destined to pay dirt.

"I knew that if the safety did what we thought he would do all throughout film, that I would be getting the ball there," Wilson said. "I knew it was just me matched up on the corner, and once I saw him take an outside step and I went across his face, I knew Justin was going to put it right there. He hit me right in stride, perfect ball."

Wilson is certainly not the biggest player on the field. He is also not the fastest. So what makes him such a dangerous receiving threat?

Wilson credits his basketball background, which began in a church league at age 5 and ended with 21 points per game to earn first-team All-Central Texas honors for the Cavaliers.

"A lot of the receiver skills come from playing basketball for so long," He

explained. "Just handling the ball, going up and getting rebounds, things like that, all translate over to football well."

"Basketball is to this day my favorite sport. The size just didn't bless me. If it were up to me, I probably would be playing basketball, but being 6-0, I decided to make the decision to play football and be a receiver. But I think it has a lot to do with all the success and all these receiver traits, so I owe everything to basketball."

Wilson was good enough to earn Division I scholarship offers as a hoopster, following in his father Kenny's footsteps, who was Davidson's fifth all-time leading scorer when he graduated in 1984.

Day and the Buckeyes are glad Wilson chose to pursue football and the tradition of Ohio State brought the Dublin, Ohio, native back to his home state after playing high school ball in Texas. The 2020 season is still young, but Day has been thrilled with the performance of his new slot receiver.

"The first thing is having more than one weapon really helps when you're game planning," Day said. "Garrett really does have a lot of versatility in his game. He can play outside, he can play inside, he can play big, he can play quick inside. He's got great timing down the field. He's got quite a skill set. We're going to try to find ways to put him in the most advantageous situation."

When Ohio State took down Rutgers, Wilson went over 100 yards receiving for the third straight game, becoming the fourth Buckeye ever to accomplish that feat. He joined David Boston (who did it twice), Cris Carter, and Terry Glenn.

He admitted apprehension to start the season, but the move to the slot helped put Wilson in rarefied air among all-time greats in just three weeks. So, which receiver spot does he prefer?

"I've played outside so long, I think that I'm liking slot a lot more," Wilson said. "I feel like when I'm lined up in the slot, I can get some favorable matchups and take advantage of them. Being more involved with the scheme as well, I think I like the slot."

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Wade Focused On Wins, Not Individual Play

By ANDREW LIND
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Though he was projected to be an early-round pick in April's NFL draft, cornerback Shaun Wade came back to Ohio State for one more season to prove himself as an outside cornerback and improve his draft stock. But through the Buckeyes' first three games, he has seen his fair share of struggles while making the transition from the slot.

In fact, Wade was beaten for two touchdowns by Penn State wide receiver Jahan Dotson in the 38-25 win over the Nittany Lions on Oct. 31 then gave up another score on a jump ball to Rutgers tight end Jovani Haskins in the 49-27 victory against the Scarlet Knights on Nov. 7.

On one hand, Wade knew when he returned to school that the spotlight would be on his play in the secondary with three starters from last year's team in Jeff Okudah, Damon Arnette and Jordan

Fuller off to the NFL. On the other hand, the Buckeyes are 3-0 so far this season.

"Really, all I care about is winning," Wade said during a teleconference on Nov. 10. "At the end of the day, I just want to win. If I play bad and we win (the national title), I'm going to be happy because we won the natty."

Wade – who has recorded a modest 10 tackles this season – could blame his early-season struggles on the lack of spring practice or the strange off-season in which the Big Ten canceled and reinstated the season. But he simply acknowledged he needs to play better, particularly when it comes to breaking up passes instead of going for an interception.

"These last few games, I've definitely been trying to go for the interception. I've been watching my film, just watching myself, and sometimes I just need to go for the pass breakup. Sometimes I get

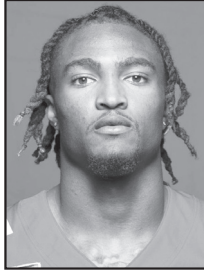
greedy. But at the end of the day, really, it's just my body position and how I jump. I'm jumping back, so learning how to jump into the guys instead of jumping back for the ball."

The 6-1 and 195-pound Wade specifically pointed out Haskins' touchdown reception, as he gave up four inches and 56 pounds and was unable to outreach the tight end for the pick.

"If you see when I jumped, I faded back," Wade said. "When I jumped my body took me back instead of jumping into the player where we can both fight over the ball. We both kind of had the ball and he was a tight end – he's stronger than a defensive back and might take the ball away from you. But if I jump into him, it distracts him. We didn't make any body contact. We both just had hand contact on the ball."

Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs, who recruited Wade out of Jacksonville (Fla.) Trinity Christian but spent the last two seasons with the NFL's Tennessee Titans, is not concerned by Wade's early-season struggles.

"I think that's part of playing cornerback at Ohio State," Coombs said on Nov. 3. "You're going to have to compete on and contest balls. I have no worries about Shaun Wade."



Shaun Wade

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Tight Ends Emerging In Ohio State's Offense

By **ANDREW LIND**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Since it's often discussed during the preseason and never actually materializes on the field, Ohio State fans have long wondered when the tight end will become a prominent part of the Buckeyes' passing attack.

Well, this may finally be the year.

Through the first three games of the season, fifth-year seniors Luke Farrell and Jake Hausmann and junior Jeremy Ruckert have combined for 13 catches for 99 yards and three touchdowns. Ruckert has received the bulk of the targets – ranking second on the team in touchdowns (three) behind wide receiver Chris Olave and third in receptions (nine) behind Wilson and fellow wideout Garrett Wilson.

"It's exciting," Ruckert said during a teleconference on Nov. 11 of the contributions of the tight ends. "It's definitely something to be proud of, but we're not really worried about that. I'm just trying to do anything I can to impact the game. If that's the way to do it, then I'm all-in for that. You can just see how hard our tight ends have worked in every aspect of the game."

"A lot of those catches are based off of how much we impact the run game, a lot of play-action stuff. Things open up through that. It just shows how dedicated our unit is. We just put everything we can into helping the team in any way possible."

There's no doubt Ohio State's passing offense runs through Wilson and Olave, as they've caught 42 passes from quarterback Justin Fields for 632 yards and six scores in wins over Nebraska, Penn State and Rutgers. But the attention they receive in the secondary also provides opportunities for the tight ends to be more involved downfield.

"Having those guys on the outside puts a lot of stress on the defense, so that could be why we're getting more looks," Farrell said that same afternoon. "But I also know the work we've put in in practice and over the course of a game has also put us in that position, too."

Head coach Ryan Day and offensive coordinator/tight ends coach Kevin Wilson have also been extra creative in how they deploy the tight end this season. With two tight ends on the field in 12 personnel, they're able to split one out wide, attach both to the line or even put one in the backfield.

"If you had told me, coming out of high school, that I would be playing a little fullback at Ohio State, I would have looked at you kind of sideways," Ruckert said. "But being able to switch up those looks and being able to go all over I think might play with the defense a little more and give them more stuff to kind of prepare for."

"I didn't think I would ever do that, but it's a cool thing to say that I can."

The Buckeyes have run 213 plays on offense thus far, including 112 snaps with two tight ends on the field. And while their involvement might vary from game to game moving forward, the tight ends are showing they're deserving of receptions at critical junctures.

"I think we have such a deep and talented offense that we can pretty much do whatever Coach Day thinks up," Ruckert said. "Each week is different. We have our base plays that we can run in any game, but most of the plays we run are based off of the team we're playing."

"Every week it changes, and it shows how we good we are at taking the meetings to the field. We only get one shot at most plays, so

we just try to execute it in practice so we can execute it in the game."

Farrell, meanwhile, praised the coaches for their ability to take advantage of all their weapons on the field.

"We obviously love everything that we do, but seeing our guys in the end zone and catching balls is great," Farrell said. "It just speaks to how great of a football mind Coach Day and Coach Wilson are. They scheme better than anybody I've seen. We have complete faith in them to give us a plan every week

that's putting us in a great position to win."

Even with all of the extra attention on the passing game, Ruckert still believes he – and the rest of his unit, for that matter – has room to improve. But he's thankful to have the opportunity to learn from Kevin Wilson, who has a long track record of sending tight ends to the NFL.

"I definitely feel like I've grown a lot as a tight end," Ruckert said. "I'm trying my best to be a complete tight end. I've still got a lot of work to do, but that was my goal coming into

the season. I don't want to just be a one-dimensional guy because that just limits you in a number of different ways."

"Coming in here at 17 years old, I did not expect to be developed like this. It takes time, it takes reps, it takes experience and it takes a different mind-set. You can't just go out there and do everything at once. Maybe you can go to other schools and get away with being a one-dimensional, receiving tight end. But I think coming here was the best decision I could have made."

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Consistency Along O-Line Key For OSU In 2010s

By **WYATT CROSER**
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

BSB is continuing an eight-part series where, in each issue, the staff writers each will come to a consensus on one player or a group of starting players who are deserving of being named the best at that position for Ohio State from 2010-19. Part six is on the five best offensive linemen of the 2010s.

Though there have been players such as Archie Griffin, Cris Carter, Chris Spielman and Chase Young who have excelled at Ohio State in their various positions, the Buckeyes have also had an influx of talented players at the offensive line position, despite them often not being as flashy by nature of the position.

Unlike other positions, finding who the best offensive linemen were can often be difficult, as there are not many clear baseline statistics to use compared to the skill positions, and it won't always be as obvious as someone like Orlando Pace, who was so dominant at the position with Ohio State that he finished fourth in Heisman Trophy voting in 1996.

Bill Landis, writer for The Athletic who has covered Ohio State football since 2014, said that it is a more difficult position to gauge, but that there is one clear attribute that he looks for when he thinks about the best offensive linemen, not just at Ohio State, but anywhere in the country.

"Consistency, probably. It's harder to figure out what exactly good offensive line play looks like," Landis told BSB. "It's one of those positions where you sort of only notice it if a guy's making a mistake. It's a cliché, but the less you're talking about an offensive lineman, the better he probably is, because he's just sort of doing his job. Consistency is probably the biggest key for an offensive lineman, in terms of judging who the best ones are."

The Nominees

Andrew Norwell came to Ohio State at the start of the decade and started 39 out of the 50 games he played. He was good enough to become a first-team All-Big Ten member in 2012 and 2013 and eventually became an All-Pro guard for the Carolina Panthers in 2017.

Jack Mewhort was also on the same first-team All-Big Ten lineup in both 2012 and '13 with Norwell and made the leap to a first-team All-American in his final season with the Buckeyes.

Taylor Decker came to the team in 2012 and started as a true freshman. He made the same leap as Mewhort in 2015, becoming an All-American and first-team All-Big Ten member the year after winning a national title.

Another starter on that 2014 offensive line was Pat Elflein, who ultimately moved from guard to center and became a three-time first-

team All-Big Ten member and a unanimous All-American in 2016. That season, he also won the Rimington Trophy for the best center in college football.

Billy Price had a very similar trajectory as Elflein, as did Michael Jordan. Both started at guard and ultimately moved to center and were ultimately named All-Americans. Price had a bit more success, though, winning the Rimington and becoming one of the key leaders for the Buckeyes through his senior season.

Ohio State's offensive line in 2019 consisted of Branden Bowen, Wyatt Davis, Jonah Jackson, Thayer Munford and Josh Myers, all of whom are worthy of some recognition for their accomplishments last season, and that was proven when they were finalists for the Joe Moore Award, which goes to the best offensive line in the country.

The Discussion

When asked who they believe were the five best offensive linemen (two tackles, three interior linemen) over the 2010s, here is what the BSB staff had to say:

Wyatt Croser: "There have been a whole lot of impressive offensive linemen to come through the doors at Ohio State over the past 10 years, so I expected this to be a difficult group to pick."

"It turned out that I ended up with five very solid picks, even if there were some other members on the line that absolutely deserve recognition. Some of those guys include Munford, who is now a three-year starter with the Buckeyes and has been remarkably solid, as well as Norwell, who transitioned into a phenomenal tackle."

"But my starting five had to be Decker-Davis-Elflein-Price-Mewhort, as each of them found a way to stand out as All-Americans in their time at Ohio State. Decker and Mewhort get the tackle spots, as both were dominant at their positions in the early-to-mid portion of the 2010s."

"After that, it felt like there was a bit of an uprise in Ohio State interior linemen, which was evident through both Elflein and Price. Both players were such consistent forces inside, either at guard or at center, and both winning the Rimington Trophy in back-to-back seasons is truly a feat that should be remembered."

"Finally, though he started for just one season and some change, Davis may be the most talented of the bunch, and his aggression makes him so much fun to watch, while his ability and knowledge of the game allowed him to be one of the most solid pieces on the line in 2019."

Joe Dempsey: "Ohio State dominated the Big Ten across the past decade, and it would not have enjoyed so much success without the performance of the offensive line. J.T. Barrett, Dwayne Haskins, or Justin Fields would not have been able to break so many records without the help of the men in the trenches. The

unsung heroes of the Buckeyes' success will not be neglected by Buckeye Sports Bulletin."

"I would feel comfortable running an offense behind my second-team all-decade line, featuring Munford and Norwell at tackle, which is where Norwell started before moving to guard. In the interior, my second-team line features three standouts who transitioned from guard to center in Myers, Jordan and Price, who is the toughest to leave off the first team."

"Munford may be one of the most underrated Buckeyes I have seen on the beat. It is not easy to find a weakness in his game. Norwell paved the way for the 2013 Ohio State offense that was fourth in the country in red-zone percentage (95.2 percent) and set a program record with 6.8 yards per carry."

"Myers helped lead Ohio State's 2019 offense that ranked fifth nationally at 266.8 rushing yards per game, while Jordan and Price were both All-Americans during their time. Jordan thrived as a true junior in 2018 before heading to the NFL, and Price spent five years in Columbus, winning a national title and the offensive lineman of the year honor for the Big Ten."

"My first-team offensive line consists of Decker and Mewhort at tackle, and Davis, Jackson and Elflein filling the guard and center spots, respectively. Decker's résumé of national champion, All-American and Big Ten Offensive Lineman of the Year speaks for itself. Mewhort was a team captain who became team MVP with an All-America season in 2013, when Ohio State ranked fifth in the country in rushing with 308.6 yards per game."

"Davis thrived as a third-year sophomore in 2019, earning his way onto the Big Ten Network's All-Decade Team by all-around excelling for an offense that finished fourth in the nation in total offense at 529.9 yards per game. The only member of the 2019 line who had more knockdowns than Davis was Jackson, who blew me away with his tenacity as a run blocker for the No. 3 scoring offense in the country (46.9). Elflein was a national champ, a unanimous All-American and the conference's lineman of the year during his dominant tenure."

Andrew Lind: "Decker was one of former head coach Urban Meyer's first wins on the recruiting trail, flipping the offensive tackle from Notre Dame. He started at right tackle for Ohio State's 2014 national championship team then transitioned to left tackle, where he was a consensus All-American and all-conference selection."

"Elflein set the standard for Ohio State guards who move to center, as he won a national title at right guard before becoming the Big Ten offensive lineman of the year and Rimington Trophy winner. If he was unsuccessful in his move, it's unlikely the Buckeyes call on Price and Jordan after him to make the same move."

"Speaking of Price, he is arguably the best interior lineman in Ohio State's storied history. He was not only a two-time All-American at left guard and center, a Rimington Trophy winner

and a national champion, but he also started the most consecutive games in school history (55). That would be an impressive feat for any player, let alone an offensive lineman."

"With only one full season of starting experience under his belt, Davis is probably the most-surprising player on this list. His on-field play warrants the mention, though, since he was a consensus All-American in 2019 and would have likely been a first-round pick had he declared for the draft. If the Buckeyes go on to win the national championship this year, Davis might be able to wrest the title of best interior lineman in school history away from Price."

"Like some of the other linemen on this list, Mewhort was exceptionally versatile. He came to Ohio State as a center, moved to guard and then finished his career at left tackle, where he was named an All-American as a senior. He helped the Buckeyes to an undefeated season in 2012 and a Big Ten Championship Game appearance in 2013."

Patrick Mayhorn: "I'm not going to stray too far from the group here, because I think that the picks here on the offensive line are pretty obvious at just about every position. A case could be made for Norwell at guard, Myers at center or Munford at tackle, but I don't think any of those cases are strong enough for me to pick an upset."

"I'm going with Mewhort and Decker at tackle, Davis and Elflein at guard and Price in the middle at center. Honestly, the only two in this group that I gave serious consideration to picking against are Mewhort and Price, which really speaks to the quality of offensive linemen Ohio State has produced, given that Mewhort was a first-team All-American in 2013 and Price was a unanimous All-American in 2017."

"The other three are much harder to mount any sort of case against. Davis was an All-American in his first season as a starter and almost certainly will be again in 2020, while Decker is one of the best tackles in school history and Elflein won the Rimington Award in 2016."

"In a decade with so many talented Buckeye linemen, the fact that those three – and really the whole group – are able to serve as pretty easy picks really is a testament to their ability and to their contributions in the Scarlet and Gray."

The Choices

Jack Mewhort, T: Mewhort was recruited to Ohio State as a center, ranking as the top center and No. 131 player overall in the country out of Toledo St. John's Jesuit in the 2009 class.

During his time at Ohio State, Mewhort was considered one of the most versatile linemen, not only in the country, but in college football, with the ability to play at all five positions on the line. He started out his collegiate career inside but ultimately moved to left tackle for the 2013 season, where he became first-team All-American by ESPN and second-team All-American by Walter Camp.

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In 2012 and 2013, both years when Mewhort was named to the All-Big Ten first team, Ohio State ranked in the top 10 in rushing offense, placing at No. 10 (242.3 yards per game) in 2012 and moving up to fifth (308.6 yards per game) on the ground in 2013.

Those were the first two seasons with Meyer at the helm of the Buckeyes, and Landis said that, although he was not around to cover those teams, he has been told after the fact that those early Meyer offensive lines were especially dominant in the run game.

"I do remember folks talking about just how physical those teams were. And the 2013 line, I think, in particular kind of set the standard for whatever came after that," Landis said. "If you go back and look like that, even though the passing offense started to take a step forward in 2013, that offense was still very much powered by Carlos Hyde and Braxton Miller on the ground, and that was certainly the case in 2012, and I don't think you do any of that without the guys up front.

"Braxton gets a lot of the headlines, and rightfully so because he's one of the most electric players in the history of college football, but I'm not sure he does a lot of that stuff without the five guys they have in front of them."

Mewhort was able to take his talents to the NFL level, getting selected in the second round, pick No. 59 of the 2014 NFL draft to the Indianapolis Colts. He started 30 games in his first two seasons with the Colts, but knee issues cost him a large portion of games, and he would make only 15 more starts before announcing his retirement in 2018.

Taylor Decker, T: Decker was another recruit out of the state of Ohio, but unlike Mewhort, he was recruited as a tackle, ranking as the No. 19 offensive tackle and No. 163 prospect overall in the 2012 class. He was also listed by the 247Sports Composite Rankings as the ninth-best prospect in the state, with Decker coming from Vandalia (Ohio) Butler.

After playing in all 12 games during his freshman season, often on special teams, Decker started all 14 games on the offensive line for the 2013 campaign. His debut as a starting tackle came in an Aug. 31, 2013, matchup against Buffalo, in which the Buckeyes defeated the Bulls 40-20.

But the game cast some doubt on the young Decker for his questionable performance, though in hindsight, it is very reasonable why he allowed 2½ sacks on the day.

"I didn't watch his first start of his career where he was a right tackle in 2013," Landis said. "But I know, like everyone tells the story that he went out there and he did not look particularly good against Buffalo. Everyone was nervous and thought like, 'Oh, man, this Taylor Decker kid, I don't know if he has it.' And then it turns out he was blocking (later five-time Pro Bowler and three-time All-Pro defensive end) Khalil Mack that day, so I think it's understandable that a first-time starter might struggle with Khalil Mack."

Decker ultimately settled into his spot at right tackle for the 2013 offense, helping Hyde and Miller each surpass 1,000 yards and 12 touchdowns on the ground during a 12-2 season. That level of success went over to the 2014 season, when Decker swapped over to right tackle and made second-team All-Big Ten.

"At least of the offensive linemen that I've covered since 2014, I'm not sure if there's been a more consistent one than Taylor Decker," Landis said. "There's been very good ones and other All-Americans and some national award winners. But from the second that Taylor took over at the starting left tackle in 2014 through the end of his career, I can't really recall one instance where I thought to myself, 'Oh man, Taylor Decker really struggled that game or struggled on that series.' He was just so steady, in addition to being very talented, and very

detail-oriented and intelligent."

His efforts continued through the national title season and into 2015, when Decker was named first-team All-Big Ten and was a consensus All-American. That year, despite not making it back to the championship, Ohio State finished No. 11 with 245.2 rushing yards per game and ninth with 5.6 yards per rush.

Decker's efforts earned him a first-round selection, No. 16 overall by the Detroit Lions in the 2016 NFL draft, where he has stayed throughout his professional career.

Pat Elflin, G/C: Elflin was not a highly regarded prospect coming out of high school, ranking just inside the top 1,000 (No. 998) overall for the 2012 class, and he was listed by 247Sports as the 55th-best offensive guard and No. 61 prospect in the state of Ohio, coming from Pickerington North.

He redshirted his first season at OSU, missing out on a 12-0 inaugural season under Meyer due to a foot injury. But in 2013, Elflin found his way onto the field, playing in all 14 games, mostly as a reserve player, and, through some surprising circumstances, became a starter in one of the most important games of the season.

Against Michigan, Ohio State offensive lineman Marcus Hall was one of three players ejected for a fight in the second quarter, along with Buckeye receiver Dontre Wilson and Wolverine linebacker Royce Jenkins-Stone. But Hall was not satisfied with the ejection, showing his displeasure by putting up two fingers of the middle variety in the air for the Michigan fans to see as he walked off the field.

Hall missed the rest of that game and was suspended for the Big Ten Championship Game against Michigan State the following week, and Elflin was his replacement for both games.

He played well, so well that starting center Cory Linsley called Elflin's play "un-freaking-believable" in a postgame interview following Ohio State's win over the Wolverines.

"Let me tell you something. Pat Elflin, that's a guy right there. He's going to be a heck of a player," Linsley said. "When Marcus got thrown out, I can't tell you, I've never felt like that in my life. I was in total and utter shock and awe. Pat came in and Pat did one. I can't wait for him to grade champion, go up there and we'll all clap him up and just see the smile on his face and it's going to be amazing."

Following his impressive efforts late in 2013, Elflin became a full-time starter in 2014, but not at one position, first starting out at left guard before moving to right guard by the fourth game. His efforts in his third-year sophomore season were enough to garner first-team All-Big Ten honors, the first of three of those awards Elflin would earn in his career.

Elflin stayed at right guard in 2015, garnering some second-team All-American honors before making a switch over to center in 2016, when he became a unanimous first-team All-American and a winner of the Rimington Trophy. He was selected in the third round, No. 70 overall by the Minnesota Vikings the following offseason.

"He was versatile, and I guess versatility can get lost a little bit when you're talking about center and guard because they're not all that different, but he made that transition pretty seamlessly," Landis said. "Whatever you did with Pat Elflin, like it didn't really seem to faze him, whether that was inserting him unexpectedly as a young guy in 2013, flipping his position in 2014 and ultimately moving into center, he just kind of took it all in stride."

Billy Price, G/C: Price, like Decker, Elflin and Mewhort, was an in-state prospect, with Price ranking as the No. 211 prospect overall in the 2013 class out of Youngstown Fitch. Price was recruited as a defensive tackle before making a move over to the offensive line during his redshirt season.

And just like that, Price became a starter on

the 2014 offensive line at right guard – swapping spots with Elflin after week three and then playing the rest of the season at left guard – an offensive line that helped Ohio State on a path to win a national title behind an unlikely run through the Big Ten Championship Game and College Football Playoff.

Landis said that the 2014 offensive line was not always a strong point for the offense throughout the season, but by the end of the year, they were one of the best in college football and were a big reason for the Buckeyes making their surprising run to a national title.

"They had a really rough start to that year, and by the end of it, I think it's fair to say that they were the best offensive line in the country. And they had to go through a lot of growing pains to get there," Landis said. "Playing a tricky defense against Navy in the opener and getting beat up a little bit and then losing to Virginia Tech and a complicated defense the way they did really kind of forced them to jell in a way that was really impressive, and then by the end of the year made them great. So that's why I always say that I think that's the best line I've covered just because of the transformation they made."

Price started every game once again in 2015, earning third-team All-Big Ten honors with an offense that struggled to move the ball through the air but gashed teams on the ground, primarily with running back Ezekiel Elliott, who finished his final season at Ohio State with 1,821 yards and 23 touchdowns on the ground.

It was much of the same story in 2016 for Price, but without Elliott in the backfield. He again started every game for Ohio State at guard and became a second-team All-American in the process. Then, in 2017, Price made the same swap over to center in his fifth-year senior season that Elflin had, moving over to center.

He had the same success as Elflin as well, becoming a unanimous All-American and giving Ohio State back-to-back Rimington winners for the first time in program history. Along with the on-field success, Price was also the leader on the offense for that 2017 team and was a major voice for Ohio State throughout the season.

"He was a big factor on the line," Landis said. "He made the same switch that Pat made to center. He was an All-American at two different positions, which is really impressive. The thing about Billy that stood out I think maybe more than everyone else we're talking about is the fact that he sort of welcomed being a spokesman for the team and kind of put that on his shoulders."

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Wyatt Davis, G: Unlike the names listed above, Davis was not a local product and came to Ohio State with much higher expectations. Davis was a five-star prospect out of Bellflower (Calif.) St. John Bosco and was the top offensive guard and No. 24 overall prospect in the 2017 class.

After redshirting in 2017, Davis found time on the field in every game for 2018, but none of it was significant until late in the year, when guard Demetrius Knox fell to an injury, leaving Davis as the starter for the Big Ten Championship Game against Northwestern as well as for the Rose Bowl against Washington.

"I was surprised that he didn't play earlier," Landis said. "He only started his redshirt freshman year because Demetrius Knox got hurt. It's kind of crazy. It makes you curious what would have happened maybe if Knox didn't get hurt and Davis had to wait, really until the start of the 2019 season to get his feet under him and start playing in a significant way. I think getting those last couple games in 2018 really helped him."

Davis built on that late-season experience and became a starting guard in 2019, helping lead an offensive line that was a finalist for the Joe Moore Award. LSU won that award, but Davis still brought home plenty of hardware, earning first-team All-Big Ten and consensus All-American honors.

Along with the rest of the line, Davis helped clear the way for running back J.K. Dobbins to break Ohio State's single-season record with 2,003 rushing yards, and he helped make time and space for Fields to amass 51 total touchdowns and become a finalist for a Heisman Trophy.

Davis' time is not done with Ohio State, as he eventually opted to play this season after previously opting out when there were more unknowns as to when the Big Ten would actually play college football.

The 6-4, 315-pound junior came back to try to win a national title, and there is a strong chance he is off to the NFL next season. But even with just one year as a full-time starter under his belt during the 2010s, Landis said what Davis did last year was truly special and may be something that we had not seen at all from an Ohio State lineman this past decade.

"I think of all the guys who we're talking about here, at least since I started covering the team in 2014," Landis said, "I think Wyatt is probably the most consistently dominant player they've had on the offensive line."

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Indiana Marches Into Columbus Flying High

By PATRICK MAYHORN
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

In 1982, after snapping a 34-game losing streak with a 31-6 win over Northern Illinois, Northwestern head coach Dennis Green reportedly said, "Now we know how to win. Now the players feel like they can be good!"

Northwestern fans seemed to feel the same way, because they tore down the goalposts after the win. Those Wildcats would come out victorious in two more games in 1982, finishing with a 3-8 record that was just as good as 11-0 for the downtrodden program. Green was named the Big Ten Coach of the Year.

Indiana never reached the kind of depths that Northwestern of the late-1970s and early '80s saw, but the Hoosiers know a thing or two about unthinkable long streaks of misfortune on the gridiron. On Nov. 7, Indiana snapped a 24-game losing streak against Michigan dating back to 1987, knocking off the Wolverines 38-21 to improve to 3-0 on the season.

That win helped the Hoosiers blow the dust off another lengthy drought as they jumped into the top 10 of The Associated Press top 25 poll at No. 10, their highest ranking in the eyes of the AP voters since 1967, when they finished the season fourth. It was also the first top-10 appearance for Indiana since 1969.

While the 1969 season ultimately had IU finish with a paltry 4-6 record, 1987 seems to be on the minds of quite a few Hoosiers in 2020. It's easy to see why, because after all, the parallels are fairly striking. That 1987 team was led by a defensive minded coach – Bill Mallory – much like current head coach Tom Allen, revered for his defensive acumen and recruiting ability.

The 1987 Hoosiers started their season 6-1, featuring that win over a ranked Michigan squad as well as a program-altering victory over a team that was, at the time, ranked with-in the top 10. Of course, in 1987 that opponent was No. 9 Ohio State, which came out on the wrong end of a 31-10 beatdown. Afterward, Buckeye head coach Earle Bruce dubbed it the darkest day in program history.

"I've known about Ohio State football since I was a freshman here in 1949," Bruce said. "This is the darkest day in Ohio State football since I have been associated with it."

The modern equivalent of that win for Indiana came in the season opener against then-No. 8 Penn State when quarterback Michael Penix found the end zone by millimeters on an overtime two-point conversion to give IU a 36-35 win.

Perhaps the most striking similarity between the teams is the rhetoric coming from those head coaches. Mallory spoke frequently of the importance of building a winning culture and maintaining momentum,

and Allen has frequently followed in those footsteps. After knocking off the Buckeyes, Mallory told reporters that Indiana had been building confidence and was excited to finally show off its improvement to the world.

"We didn't come in here to lose, and this is a great confidence builder," Mallory said. "Now the people will understand that Indiana plays some great football."

When Indiana beat Penn State, Allen was captured giving an impassioned speech to his players in the locker room with a nearly identical tenor, both in bravado and in message.

"What do we talk about, man? It's about believing and just playing for 60 minutes and beyond," Allen said in the video, which was posted to his Twitter account. "Whatever it takes. We made mistakes. We're going to get a whole lot better between this week and next week. But you found a way to win, you didn't stop believing. You've got to believe."

"I'll tell you what. Since the first day I stepped foot on this campus, I believed. I believed Indiana could do what we just did on this field. I believed it, and I never quit talking (about it). I've been made fun of, I've been mocked. I never cared! Because you know what? The best is yet to come for Indiana football!"

His excitement is easy to understand. After beating Michigan State 24-0 on Nov. 14, Indiana is off to just its fifth 4-0 start in school history and will head into Columbus with that top-10 ranking well-intact and legitimate odds at a Big Ten title and even a playoff berth if it can pull off a huge upset against the Buckeyes.

Any efforts of that sort will start and end with Penix, the lanky sophomore quarterback. After a redshirt freshman campaign that saw flashes of brilliance between nagging injuries that held him out of seven games, the Florida native has taken major steps forward in 2020 and looks to be very comfortable early in the season.

"Michael has been really great," wide receiver Ty Fryfogle said. "We have been progressing each and every week, and that is what is scary for us. The passing and the offense is getting better each and every week. I feel that we need to keep progressing."

"He is a great quarterback. He is a great person on and off the field. I am really happy for him and the progression he has made coming off of an injury. Overall, I am just happy for him and excited for the future."

Penix is not without help in the Indiana offense, specifically because of the group of pass catchers around him. Indiana boasts three longtime contributors on the receiving end of those passes in wide receivers Whop Philyor and Fryfogle as well as tight end Peyton Hendershot. Philyor leads the team in receptions (24, tied for first with Fryfogle) while Fryfogle leads in yards (424) but all three are dangerous weapons for Penix.

Get To Know ... Indiana

About Indiana

- **2020 Record:** 4-0.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 8, Defense 9, Specialists 1.
- **Head Coach:** Tom Allen, 5th year at Indiana, 22-20.
- **Series History:** 93rd meeting; Ohio State leads 75-5-12
- **School Facts:** Location – Bloomington, IN.; Enrollment – 43,710; Nickname – Hoosiers; Colors – Crimson, White; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Memorial Stadium (Surface, FieldTurf; Capacity – 52,626).

Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Stevie Scott	88	319	3.6	5
Sampson James	26	84	3.2	0
Tim Baldwin	3	18	6.0	0

Passing	Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Michael Penix	91-150	60.7	1,070	9-3

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Ty Fryfogle	24	424	17.7	4
Whop Philyor	24	287	12.0	1
Peyton Hendershot	14	89	6.4	3

Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 33.8
Rushing Yards Per Game – 95.3
Passing Yards Per Game – 267.5
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 362.8

2020 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Oct. 24	PENN STATE	W, 36-35 (OT)
Oct. 31	at Rutgers	W, 37-21
Nov. 7	MICHIGAN	W, 38-21
Nov. 14	at Michigan State	W, 24-0
Nov. 21	at Ohio State	12 p.m.
Nov. 28	MARYLAND	TBA
Dec. 5	at Wisconsin	TBA
Dec. 12	PURDUE	TBA
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship Week	TBA

Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo-Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Micah McFadden	20-10	30	4.5-22	2.0-19
Devon Matthews	15-6	21	2.0-6	1.0-3
Tiawan Mullen	14-7	21	3.5-25	2.5-24
Reese Taylor	17-3	20	4.0-24	1.0-13
Jamar Johnson	14-6	20	2.5-4	–
Cam Jones	10-3	13	2.0-10	1.0-9
Jaylin Williams	9-2	11	1.0-4	–
Jerome Johnson	6-4	10	2.5-14	2.0-14
James Miller	5-5	10	–	–

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Jaylin Williams	3	50	16.7	0
Tiawan Mullen	2	2	1.0	0

Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 19.3
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 111.0
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 209.8
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 320.8

Running backs Stevie Scott and Sampson James are involved as well. Indiana's rushing attack struggled early in the season, gaining just 41 yards against Penn State, but has seen improvement since then, picking up 109 yards against Rutgers, 118 against Michigan and 113 against Michigan State. Penix will likely throw on the majority of offensive snaps, but this is not a team without a rushing attack.

"It is always an emphasis, and it is always something that is important to us," offensive coordinator Nick Sheridan said of the running game. "It is easy when you evaluate the run game to say that the offensive line is an issue, but that is not always the case. It is a collective effort. The coaches are making sure that the plays that are being run are putting our players in the best chance to be successful relative to the box count, the front or the pressure that you are going against, so it starts with us."

It is a team, however, with some issues up front. Inexperience on the line led to a brutal showing against the Nittany Lions. Indiana allowed three sacks and six tackles for loss. But like the rushing attack, Indiana has seen improvement up front as the season has progressed.

"I thought our offensive line got better," Allen said after Indiana's win over Michigan. "That to me is the key. We had a good week in preparation with them and challenged them, and I have been hard on them and calling them out. There are still pressures and we've got to do better. But I just felt like that they strained harder, longer than we have in the past and stayed on their blocks and executed better, communicated better. Time creates that and also, it's leadership. It is leadership in that room from Harry Crider, one of our captains that has been here for many years and thought he did a great job getting his teammates ready."

Defensively, Indiana operates primarily out of a 4-2-5 system, which Allen used to build a top-10 defense when he was the defensive coordinator at Ole Miss in 2014. Indiana's defense is not quite on that level, allowing 19.3 points per game so far, but this is a group that likes to play fast and aggressive, led by

junior linebacker Micah McFadden.

"We are just so confident," McFadden said of the defense. "There is a lot of talk throughout the sideline. Once they score or something like that, everybody is just clutch it. We are on to the next play, we are going to make more plays, and there is just a whole lot of communication out there. We definitely play as one, and we just feed off of each other making plays."

Up front, Indiana's defensive line is without a true playmaker, with defensive tackle Jerome Johnson serving as the primary leader of the group, though he has just two sacks on the season.

The strength of the defense is in the backfield, especially at cornerback where sophomore Tiawan Mullen has developed into one of the nation's top cornerbacks after breaking into the starting lineup as a true freshman in 2019. He's joined in the backfield by junior Jaylin Williams and former safety Reese Taylor, who has moved into a nickel role for the Hoosiers, along with safeties Jamar Johnson and Juwan Burgess and linebacker/safety hybrid Bryant Fitzgerald, who splits time with Taylor.

Indiana leans heavily on man coverage in the backfield, looking to force turnovers and mistakes with an aggressive approach while blitzing heavily to make up for a defensive line lacking in star power.

Whether that will pay off against Ohio State is obviously yet to be seen, but it's been a very successful strategy for defensive coordinator Kane Wommack and the Hoosier defense through four games, generating 10 interceptions.

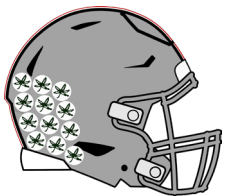
"When we played man (coverage) we were on them and we stayed on them," Wommack said after IU's win over Rutgers. "To me a lot of credit to the takeaways we got, and certainly the sacks and the simple pressure that we got on the quarterback pretty much all game, is a credit to what those guys are doing on the back end."

"Certainly they are gifted, but their skill is really honed in right now. They are doing a good job of communicating with each other off of rubs and picks and those things as well."

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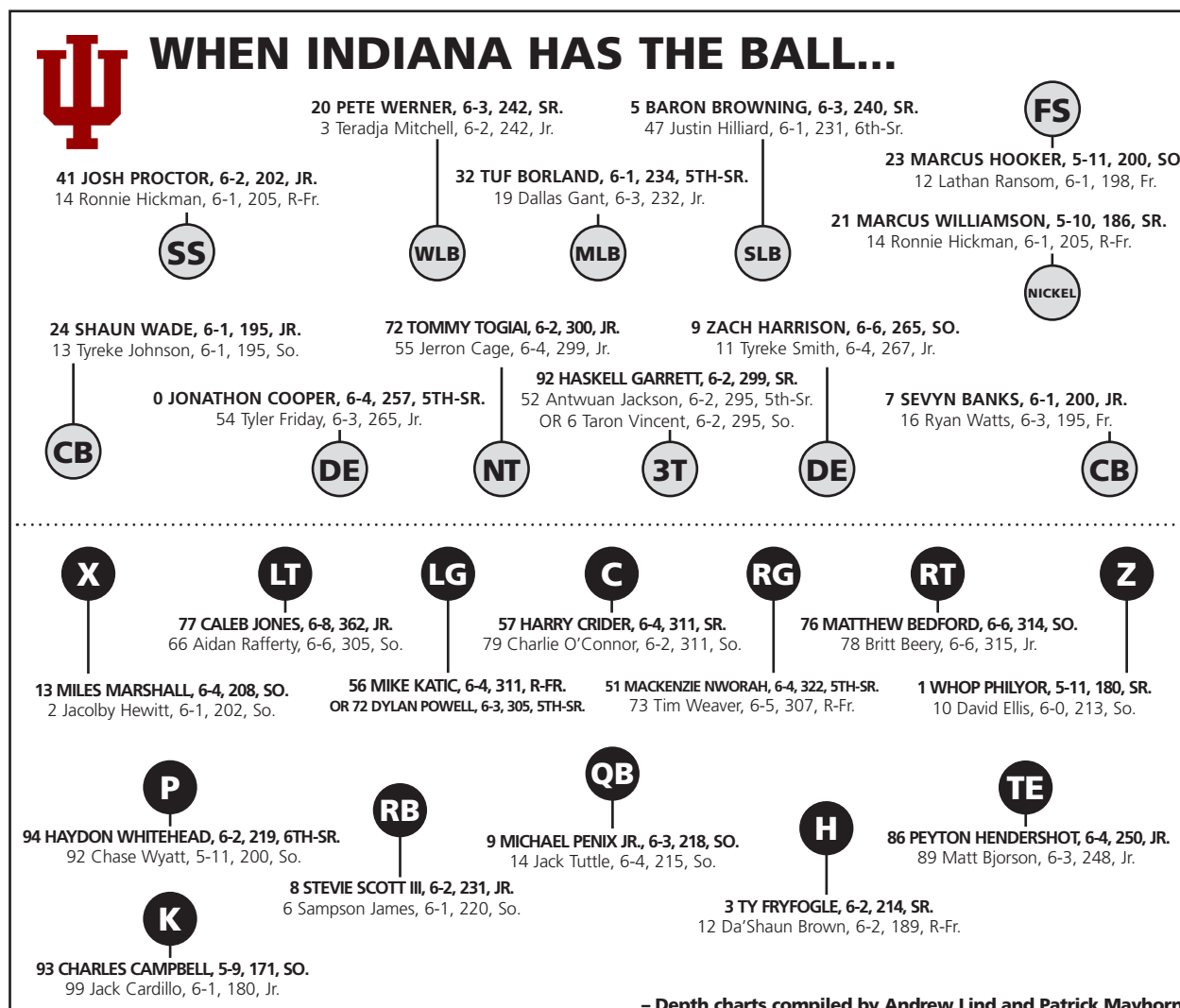
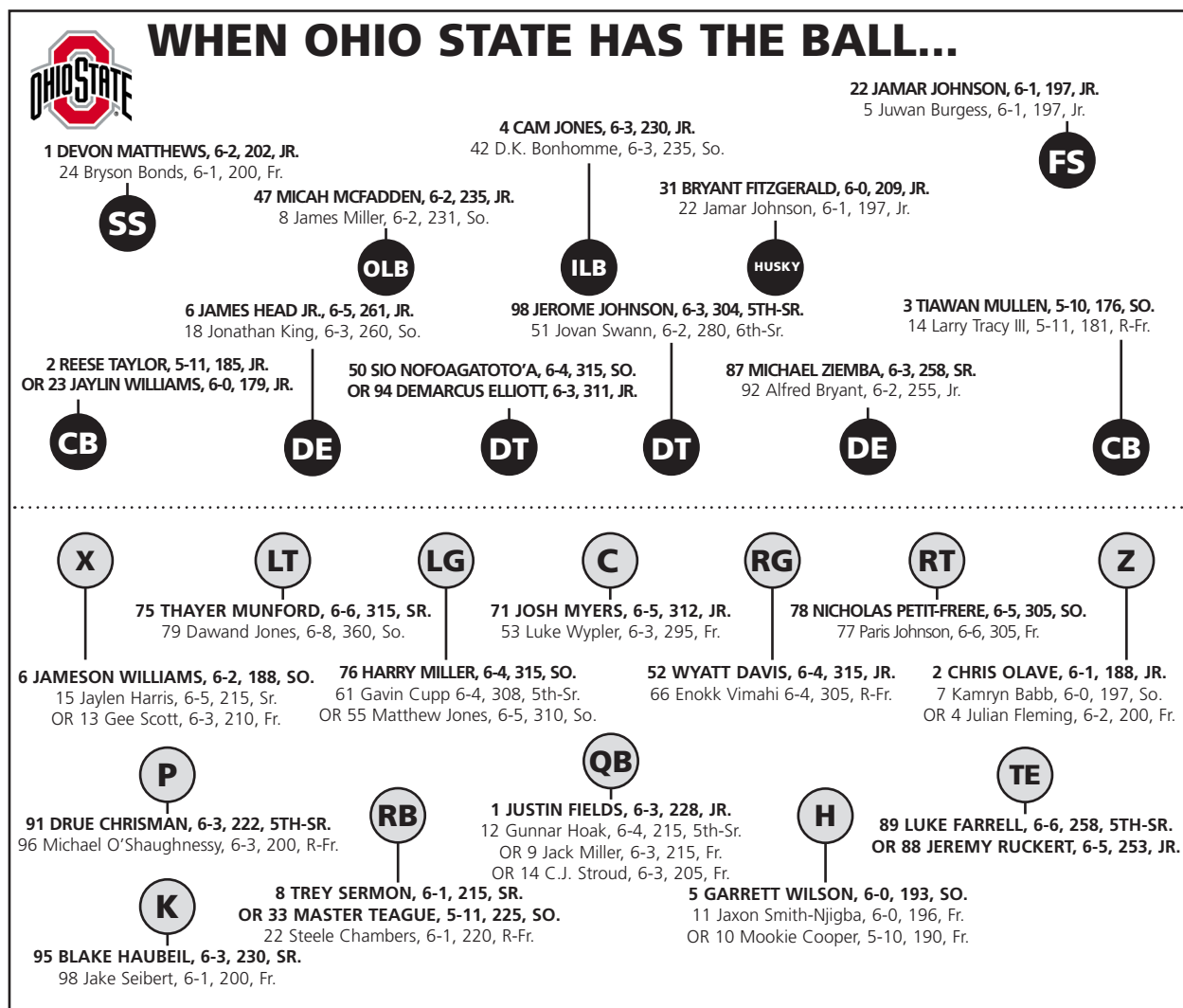


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Projected Depth Charts



- Depth charts compiled by Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn

How We See It

OHIO STATE RUSH OFFENSE VS. INDIANA RUSH DEFENSE

A refresher course is needed after the Nov. 14 game at Maryland was canceled due to positive COVID-19 tests in the Terrapins' program. Ohio State was good but not the customary great fans expect from the rushing attack during the 49-27 win against Rutgers in the most recent game of Nov. 7. The Buckeyes had 203 yards on a 5.5 yards per carry average, but 38 came from a fake punt run by Steele Chambers. Master Teague (211 yards, 4.5 yard per rush, four touchdowns this season) and Trey Sermon (172, 4.8, no TDs) have been sharing the duties, and quarterback Justin Fields has added 57 yards (2.1, two touchdowns). Indiana's rush defense is getting better. The Hoosiers allowed Penn State 250 yards on 52 carries (4.8), but Michigan ran only 18 times for 13 yards (0.7). In the 24-0 win vs. Michigan State on Nov. 14, the Hoosiers yielded 60 yards on a 2.5 average. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INDIANA RUSH OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

Stevie Scott has been the top ball carrier for the Hoosiers, but he's not the focal point of the offense. After grinding for 84 yards on 23 totes (3.7 average) against the Spartans, his season totals are 319 yards (3.6) with five touchdowns. The Hoosiers gain 95.3 yards per game on 2.7 yards per attempt. The Buckeyes are allowing 131.7 yards a game. The goal for Ohio State is to stuff the run and force third-and-long so pressure can be applied to quarterback Michael Penix Jr. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. INDIANA PASS DEFENSE

As a reminder, Justin Fields has been stupendously good (72 of 83 for 908 yards, 11 touchdowns, zero interceptions with a completion rate of 86.7 percent). The duo of Garrett Wilson (24 catches, 344 yards, 14.3 average, two touchdowns) and Chris Olave (18, 288, 16.0, four touchdowns) has been unstoppable, but Fields has plenty of other options, including tight end Jeremy Ruckert (nine, 60, 6.7, three TDs). The pass protection, prone to holding penalties, had an extra week of practice to improve. Micah McFadden and Jerome Johnson each had two sacks, and the Hoosiers grabbed three interceptions vs. an inept Michigan State offense. Indiana has at least two picks in five straight games. If not for Fields, this might be a push. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

INDIANA PASS OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

Penix will win or lose the game with his arm and brain. He entered the MSU game having thrown one interception but tossed two in the first half. The first came under duress, and the second was a poor decision deep in Michigan State territory that ended the Hoosiers' perfect record of scoring in the red zone this season (18 for 18, 14 touchdowns). Penix was 25 of 38 for 320 yards with two TDs and those two interceptions vs. the Spartans. He targeted Ty Fryfogle 15 times, and the receiver had career highs in catches (11) and yards (200) along with two TDs. Whop Philyor gives the Hoosiers an excellent one-two punch, and Peyton Hendershot is a quality tight end. The OSU secondary is unproven, and not going against Maryland rifle arm QB Taulia Tagovailoa as a precursor to Penix could prove to be detrimental in the long run. **EDGE: INDIANA**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Having an extra week may allow OSU kicker Blake Haubeil time to heal. He hurt his groin during the Oct. 31 Penn State game and was unavailable vs. Rutgers when freshman Jake Seibert made all seven extra points but did not attempt a field goal. Punter Drue Chrisman almost always gives the Buckeyes an advantage, and the punt return defense won't get fooled by a trick play such as the lateral that allowed Rutgers to score. Indiana's Charles Campbell has made 7 of 8 field goals with a long of 52 yards. **EDGE: EVEN**

INTANGIBLES

Rutgers impressed with its enthusiasm and aggressive play calling in the face of a resounding defeat to the Buckeyes. Indiana has more energy, talent and swagger than the Scarlet Knights. The Hoosiers have all the momentum coming into Columbus, and when the regular season concludes, Indiana will likely be viewed as Ohio State's toughest opponent. That's something Buckeye fans can't wrap their heads around. **EDGE: INDIANA**

STAFF PREDICTION

There is no way to predict how an unexpected open weekend will affect the Buckeyes other than with one fewer game to impress the College Football Playoff selection committee the pressure mounts every quarter the Buckeyes don't dominate. The Hoosiers have come close to upsetting OSU with vastly less talent than the 2020 edition so this will be a true test. It's a shame it will be played in an empty Ohio Stadium. **OHIO STATE 48, INDIANA 30**

Bruce Fired After Buckeyes Fall To Iowa At Home

By KEN HALLOY

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. The following is coverage of Ohio State's stunning last-second loss to Iowa in 1987, a loss that proved to be the final nail in the coffin for Earle Bruce as Ohio State's coach. He was fired shortly thereafter. Additional features about the game and subsequent events will be posted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Nov. 19.

The hate mail will end. Earle Bruce has been fired.

The Big Ten's winningest coach during his tenure was informed of his dismissal by athletic director Rick Bay the afternoon of Nov. 15, shortly after Bruce declared at his weekly postgame conference:

"I'm staying at Ohio State. I like my job. I'm going to prepare and work hard this week on Michigan," said the glossy-eyed coach with his wife, Jean, at his side. "I'm going to stay and prepare this team next year through the winter and through the summer so we can have a Big Ten championship next year."

There is no next year for Bruce, only the Michigan game, his last as the Buckeye coach. Bruce's nine-year record stands at 80-26-1.

Bruce has led the Buckeyes to four Big Ten championships, and all of his eight teams played in bowl games. Ohio State and Nebraska are the only Division I schools in the nation to win nine or more games each of the past eight years.

Bruce's overall record of 126-60-1 ranks him in the top 15 nationally among active major college coaches.

The firing, ordered by university president Edward H. Jennings, was intolerable to athletic director Rick Bay. In protest, Bay resigned.

"I'm resigning based on philosophical differences with the administration," he said.

Jennings issued only a written statement, giving no reason for Bruce's dismissal.

"The president informed me he was under pressure to make a coaching change and that we had to do that," Bay said. "Earle Bruce, as

a result of this action, after the game against Michigan, will no longer be the head football coach here at Ohio State."

There was speculation that the board of trustees was behind the decision, though trustees president Edmund Redman, in an interview with WCMH-TV, denied a vote to fire Bruce was ever taken. Redman said the decision was solely Jennings' though he said he did agree with the president's action.

"The public image of Coach Bruce was not as good as it might be," Redman said.

Jennings appeared briefly on WBNS-TV, giving no reason for the decision.

"Speculation on why he was fired would be inappropriate," Jennings told WBNS. "I'm the president of the university. Yes it (the decision) was mine."

Only two days before the Iowa game Jennings urged fans to "support your Ohio State team Saturday."

Jennings said he will recommend to the board that the university honor the remainder of Bruce's contract. Bruce is in the second of a three-year pact.

Bay said the morning after the Iowa game he had heard of no private meetings held by the board of trustees to discuss Bruce's job. So what was the source of pressure to fire Bruce?

"I don't know that," Bay said. "I'm assuming some of that came from there but I don't have any relationship with the board of trustees. I am not privy to the pressures that were brought to bear on the administration."

Bruce said he was told by members of the board and Jennings that no vote or group discussion about this job ever occurred.

"I have to believe that the athletic director and the president have said that no vote was taken. I believe them to be truthful, honorable men," Bruce said at the luncheon.

At day's end, only Bay stood by Bruce's side.

It was rumored those pressures for Bruce's firing might have come from rich donors to the university. Regardless, Bay said the loss to Iowa, Ohio State's fourth, was the final blow to Bruce's career.

"The whole thing was building and in my own views, the detractors were just waiting for an excuse. And 9-3 wasn't a big enough excuse. It wasn't quite justifiable," he said. "But when we got to four losses, including one to Wisconsin, a poor showing against Michigan State ... three in a row, the detractors had an excuse."

Bay met with the media at a press conference at 4:30 p.m. Bay said Jennings phoned him at 11:30 a.m. and informed him of the decision to fire Bruce. During that same hour Bruce delivered his above declaration at the luncheon. Bay and Jennings then met at 1:30 to discuss details. Bay then went to the new athletic facility to inform Bruce.

"It's probably the darkest day in Ohio State University history," Bay said. He admitted the timing was poor, pathetic for all intents and purposes. The Buckeye football team, riding a three-game losing streak, was beginning preparation for its biggest game of the year. Furthermore, Bruce had no knowledge of his impending firing while speaking at the luncheon.

"Certainly it's poor timing," Bay said. "The president called me and said the decision had been made and he wanted to wait until after the Michigan game (to make it public). I asked him if there were a number of people who knew about the decision and he said that was true. And I knew there was no way to keep that under wraps."

Bruce, remaining the professional he professed himself to be throughout the wake of

Other Big 40th Anniversary Games

In addition to the game which sealed Earle Bruce's fate as Ohio State football coach, there was an epic battle the week of Nov. 14-20, when No. 1 Ohio State faced off against No. 2 Michigan in 2006. We will be recapping that game in the Nov. 28 issue of BSB. There were some other games of note this week in BSB's history. They include the following:

1983: No. 8 Michigan converted two Buckeye turnovers, including the ill-fated fumblerooski play, into fourth-quarter touchdowns to defeat No. 10 Ohio State, 24-21. The TDs offset two touchdowns by Keith Byars and a 10-reception, 123-yard day for John Frank.

1984: Ohio State clinched the Rose Bowl berth with a 21-6 victory over Michigan. The Buckeyes held a narrow 7-6 lead midway through the fourth quarter when Mike Lanese made a twisting catch to convert a third-and-12 and set up a touchdown. The Buckeyes would tack on another TD late in the stanza.

2003: Mike Nugent atoned for a blocked field goal at the end of regulation with a 36-yard field goal in overtime to give No. 4 Ohio State a 16-13 victory over No. 11 Purdue. With the game tied at 13, Ohio State recovered a fumble at the Purdue 29 with 1:36 to play, but the Boilermakers were able to block Nugent's game-winning attempt.

the losing streak, informed his players and then held the first practice for the Michigan game.

Players would not comment as they left the practice facility afterward. Bruce later appeared with a police guard at each side. He appeared emotionally drained.

"What can you say about it? All you can say is I think they have a right to fire a person, but I think it's very poor timing – right before the Michigan game. I don't think that's quite fair. They can do it any time, but not before the Michigan game," a distressed Bruce, dressed in suit and tie, said as he was deluged by reporters.

Michigan seemed the pervasive thing on his mind.

"We're a fine group of athletes that will play hard – daggone hard."

Bruce admitted his firing caught him by surprise, though he had heard rumors and had knowledge of a story appearing in the The Columbus Dispatch Sunday, Nov. 14, indicating his job was in jeopardy. "How would I have an inkling? I heard all positive vibes about them (board of trustees) not having any meetings and there not being a decision and I ... I'm a Buckeye."

Bruce offered no apology for his time spent as the Buckeye coach.

"I'm kind of proud of what I've done here – daggone proud of not only what I've done on the football field, but what I've done in the classroom for our kids getting their education. I'm daggone loyal to Ohio State."

"I love this football team. I love Ohio State," Bruce concluded as he got into his car and drove away.

The decision has met with disagreement by most fans in the Columbus area. A telephone poll by WCMH-TV, in which 12,000 people replied, revealed that 90 percent opposed Bruce's firing.

Bruce also received support from students and members of the OSU band who appeared at his Worthington (Ohio) home the same night and applauded his efforts as coach.

At the press conference, Bay said he couldn't begin to justify the decision, nor would he try.

"It's been a mystery to me. Coach Bruce has been under fire at one point or another in the time I've been here (since 1984)," Bay said. "I know that he's not totally popular in some quarters. I think that would be true of anybody that's (coaching) here."

Bay also said Bruce was not given proper credit for his record and love for Ohio State.

"I think he's done a whale of a job, and has won nearly 75 percent of his games. His record is among the very, very best in the country. Furthermore, and most importantly, he's done it with integrity," Bay said. "His graduation rates for our players have been good. The program is extremely well respected. I don't know

what more you could ask of any coach.

"My heart goes out to Coach Bruce and the entire football staff. I think it's a great staff. It's a shame. It's a dark day for Ohio State."

The search for Bruce's successor was not discussed in the meeting with Jennings, Bay said.

"I have no idea about the process and I'll have no part of it," he said.

Bay said the entire situation made him feel almost guilty that he talked Bruce out of accepting a lucrative offer to become coach at the University of Arizona after the Cotton Bowl. Fearing Bruce might accept the offer, Bay asked Jennings to renegotiate Bruce's contract. Jennings refused. That rejection said something right there, Bay said.

"I think it was a commentary on where the coach was, in the minds of people. In some ways I feel badly now about having tried to convince Earle to stay here," Bay said. "Earle let me off the hook on that one today when we talked about it. He said he wanted to stay here and not go to Arizona. He felt strong about this team."

Bruce's assistants are also out of jobs. Quarterbacks and receivers coach Tom Lichtenberg walked out of the athletic complex with a tired, dazed look on his face.

"I'm 47 years old and I've never been through something like this because I've always done a good job every place I've gone," said Lichtenberg, who is in his 22nd year of coaching. "I gave up a good job (as assistant athletic director at Iowa State) to come with Earle Bruce – who's a great guy. Now here I am out in the cold with a wife and kids, but I'll find something. God's been good to me in a lot of ways."

Practice for Michigan went on as usual, he said.

"I thought we had a good practice today for Michigan, and that's the name of the game right now," Lichtenberg said. "That's the job we have to do and other than that I'd rather not say anything."

He did offer one more sentiment for Bruce.

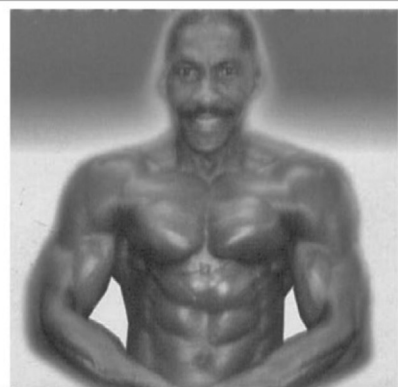
"As good a coach as Bruce is and as fine a person as he is, you can't find a chink in his armor. I've never coached with a guy who is a better person."

Earlier in the day in Ann Arbor, Michigan coach Bo Schembechler joked, "Tell him (Bruce) not to worry. I'll take the athletic directorship at Michigan and I'll hire him."

"Bo would have a good choice," Bay replied when hearing of Schembechler's comment.

"He's an established, top-notch coach, certainly," Schembechler said. "One of the best in the country. It's ridiculous. What do you have to do?"

This story originally appeared in the Nov. 21, 1987, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.



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Hawkeyes Score Winning Touchdown In Final Seconds

By KEN HALLOY

It was not supposed to end this way – not for the Ohio State seniors playing their last game in Ohio Stadium. In fact, the story-book ending had been set up perfectly.

The Ohio State offense, which had bordered on boredom most of the season, meshed together a crisply executed 75-yard, 16-play touchdown drive to give the Buckeyes a 27-22 lead with only 2:45 to play.

That's where the defense, the mainstay of the Ohio State football team this season, was supposed to take over. Despite being riddled for 425 yards to that point, guys like Chris Spielman and Eric Kumerow would thwart Iowa's last-ditch effort with a blazing pass rush, and perhaps a sack or two.

It never happened. On fourth-and-23 Iowa quarterback Chuck Hartlieb's 28-yard touchdown pass to tight end Marv Cook, with six seconds left, left the Buckeyes with their third consecutive defeat of the season. The play capped a 64-yard drive.

It was also the third straight home defeat for the Bucks. Ohio State's final home win in 1987 was Oct. 24, a 42-9 thrashing of Minnesota.

"I still can't believe it," said OSU quarterback Tom Tupa. "We really believed we would win today. We did up until that last play. I guess the word is disappointment. The whole team played great. It's that last play. It's frustrating. It seems whatever can go wrong to our team, will."

OSU coach Earle Bruce was just as baffled. Only a day earlier at the dedication of the new indoor athletic facility Bruce declared, "Watch tomorrow. We've got something to build, to prove."

But some 30 hours later, Bruce's bulldog eyes showed helplessness.

"I just don't understand it myself – how we can lose like we do, but we can lose," he said.

There could be no faulting Tupa on this day. Tupa ended his Ohio Stadium career in splendid fashion. Maligned as an inept quarterback but hailed as a punting cannon much of the season, Tupa completed 13 of 22 passes for 216 yards, including three touchdown passes. He threw two interceptions, but scrambled, avoided pressure and ran well most of the sunny afternoon before another full house.

The Buckeye offense racked up 383 yards, using a variety of offensive sets ranging from a one-back to the robust formation.

"I thought Tom Tupa played exceptionally well today," Bruce said. "He did a good job, got the ball in the end zone. (The) last drive was a magnificent drive to go ahead, 27-22."

That drive, which absorbed 6:21, was probably the offense's best of the year – an Ohio State-style drive.

"We were talking on the sidelines saying we have to put the ball in the end zone," Tupa said. "The guys in the huddle were all ready to go. We knew we could move the ball on them because we did pretty much the whole game."

"Going into the game Coach Bruce wanted to keep them off guard with different sets. So we tried a couple of new sets and kept shuffling new people in and out of the game to keep them off balance."

Tupa even did what coaches and fans have urged all season – run with the football. On a crucial third-and-8 on the final

drive, Tupa picked up 13 yards to the Hawkeye 28-yard line. He dropped back and was chased left out of the pocket. Finding no receiver open, he scampered down the left sideline and leaped forward near the down marker, sacrificing his body in the process, before picking up the final five yards.

"I pretty much knew I was going to run after I went left. I knew where the down marker was and I had to get there," Tupa said. "That's all there is to it. I just did my job."

Tupa did his job all day. He threw a 24-yard TD strike to a middle-cutting Everett Ross to give Ohio State the game's first points with only five minutes erased from the first quarter. A little less than a quarter later he threw a 60-yarder for six points to Ross. Ross picked up the final 32 yards after making the catch near the right sideline.

In the third quarter Tupa fired a bullet to freshman tight end Jeff Ellis, who was making his first career start for the injured Alex Higdon, for 20 yards and a touchdown in the front left corner of the end zone. Ellis caught the pass with his left foot in the end zone and the other out.

"It was a flood route and Jeff ran a flag on it and the other receiver (Ross) ran the in-route," Tupa explained. "I looked at the in-route, and the defender went with the in-route. Jeff was open."

And he was thrilled with his first collegiate touchdown.

"It's the greatest feeling I've ever had playing football," said Ellis, who totaled four catches for 44 yards. "Tom made a great throw. He made it happen. It would have been almost impossible to drop that pass."

Ellis' TD catch completed a 10-play, 60-yard drive.

"When we needed a drive we got it," Tupa said. "That was a good sign of us working together. But you can't blame the defense for giving up that last score. They saved us all season. It's still a team game and it always will be for us. I don't feel any different now than I did when the offense didn't play well."

Ironically, it was Tupa the punter, the nation's best with a 47.4 average going into the game, who ran into trouble against the Hawkeyes. With the Buckeyes leading, 21-15, with 11:40 to play, Tupa had his punt blocked when the line broke down in its protection at the Buckeye 42.

Tupa almost punted initially, but declined when he sensed the pressure. He then side-stepped one defender to the right, faked one punt attempt and then tried a second time. The ball was deflected and caught by Iowa's Mike Burke and returned seven yards to the Ohio State 37-yard line.

"I don't really know what happened," Tupa recalled. "I tried to get off the punt, but that didn't work. I was really surprised to be under that kind of pressure. That's the way things have gone for us, though."

Iowa scored a touchdown seven plays later and took a 22-21 lead. The Buckeyes then retaliated with their last TD drive, before Iowa had its Hail Mary answered at the end. Tupa couldn't get that play out of his mind. It reminded him of the old school yard bomb.

"It looked like a timing play because when he (Hartlieb) threw the ball, the tight end was still running down the field. You could tell he wasn't trying to lead him with the ball, so he just threw it behind him

The Numbers Game

Iowa 29, Ohio State 27

Nov. 14, 1987 – Ohio Stadium; Columbus, Ohio.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
IOWA	3	12	3	14	29
OHIO STATE	7	7	7	6	27

First Quarter

OSU – Ross, 24-yard pass from Tupa (Frantz kick), 10:08.

IOWA – Houghtlin, 39-yard field goal, 7:34.

Second Quarter

OSU – Ross, 60-yard pass from Tupa (Frantz kick), 11:19.

IOWA – Harmon, 50-yard run (pass failed), 9:10.

IOWA – Houghtlin, 41-yard field goal, 3:14.

IOWA – Houghtlin, 22-yard field goal, 0:00.

Third Quarter

OSU – Ellis, 20-yard pass from Tupa (Frantz kick), 6:14.

Fourth Quarter

IOWA – Hudson, 1-yard run (Houghtlin kick), 9:11.

OSU – Snow, 14-yard run (run failed), 2:45.

IOWA – Cook, 28-yard pass from Hartlieb (Houghtlin kick), 0:06.

Att. – 90,090

Team Statistics

	IOWA	OSU
First Downs	22	17
Rushing	9	8
Passing	12	9
Penalty	1	0
Rushes-Yards	36-156	47-167
Passing Yards	333	216
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	20-37-1	13-22-2
Offensive Plays	73	69
Total Net Yards	489	383
Third Down Efficiency	5-15	9-17
Punts-Avg.	5-43.0	7-42.3
Fumbles-Lost	4-2	3-1
Penalties	2-15	6-56
Time of Possession	28:24	31:36

Individual Statistics

RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.) – IOWA: Harmon 21-151; Hudson 7-18; Bayless 2-12; Hartlieb 6-(-25).

OSU: Snow 27-96; Cooper 11-27; Tupa 4-21; Workman 4-21; Price 1-2.

PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD) – IOWA: Hartlieb 20-37-1-333-1. **OSU:** Tupa 13-22-2-216-3.

RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.) – IOWA: Cook 9-159; Flagg 4-88; Watkins 3-60; Harmon 2-15; Hudson 1-6; Bayless 1-5. **OSU:** Ross 4-123; Ellis 4-44; Workman 2-28; Cupe 1-9; Snow 1-7; Koch 1-5.

PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long) – IOWA: Cook 5-43.0-46. **OSU:** Tupa 6-49.0-65; TEAM 1-2.0-2.

PUNT RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – IOWA: Marciano 2-15; Burke 1-7. **OSU:** Ross 3-33.

KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Yds.) – IOWA: Stewart 2-36; Harmon 1-35; Davis 1-0. **OSU:** Snow 4-36; Workman 2-40.

FUMBLE RECOVERIES – IOWA: Thomas. **OSU:** Gurd, Ridder.

INTERCEPTIONS – IOWA: Quest, Hanks. **OSU:** White.

TACKLES FOR LOSS – IOWA: Team. **OSU:** Spielman (2), Kumerow (2), M. Sullivan, McCray, Holliman.

TACKLES (Solo-Asst-Tot.) – IOWA: Puk 4-13-17; Quast 6-9-15; Haight 1-10-11; Burke 3-7-10; Schuster 1-6-7; Keppy 0-7-7; Thomas 1-5-6; Sistrunk 2-3-5; Hanks 3-2-5; Burt 1-2-3; C. Clark 1-2-3; Berrie 2-0-2; Mott 0-2-2; Walkins 1-0-1; Ja. Pipkins 1-0-1; Wright 0-1-1; Hess 0-1-1; Cotton 1-0-1; Hook 1-0-1; Foster 1-0-1; Reilly 0-1-1. **OSU:** Spielman 6-7-13; Kumerow 6-3-9; Gurd 6-3-9; M. Sullivan 1-7-8; Dumas 3-4-7; Pelini 2-3-5; McCray 3-2-5; Jackson 1-3-4; Holliman 1-3-4; Ridder 1-3-4; White 1-2-3; Peel 0-3-3; Bell 1-1-2; Isaman 1-1-2; Thomas 0-2-2; Kacherski 0-2-2; Showalter 0-2-2; D. Smith 0-1-1; Uhlenhake 0-1-1.

PLAYERS IN THE GAME – IOWA: Mott, Berrie, Keppy, Haight, Koepfel, Schuster, Thomas, Burke, Ridley, Puk, Foster, Quast, Wirth, Batterson, Hanks, Brown, Burt, Hess, Sistrunk, Hook, Wright, Ja. Pipkins, Watkins, Alexander, Schmitt, Divis, B. Anderson, Poynton, Wester, Cook, Flagg, C. Clark, Ward, Palmer, Hartlieb, Early, Harberts, Marciano, Harmon, Bayless, Goodman, Stewart, Saunders, Hudson, Bass, Cotton, Houghtlin. **OSU:** Ellis, Koch, Lickovitch, Staysniak, Coles, Beatty, Uhlenhake, Tom Moore, Zackeroff, H. Brown, Moxley, Zizakovic, Cupe, Ross, Waggoner, Tupa, Powell, Snow, Price, Cooper, Matlock, Boddie, Workman, Siegenthaler, Frantz, O'Morrow, Kumerow, Craig, Holliman, MacCready, M. Sullivan, Kacherski, Thomas, Showalter, Coleman, McCray, Isaman, Gurd, Ridder, Hoak, Spielman, Keenan, Jackson, Bell, White, D. Smith, Dumas, Peel, D. Brown, Pelini.

The tight end knew when to stop and turn around. Then he scored."

Perhaps it was a fitting ending, considering the tough luck the Bucks have faced this year.

"I wouldn't say it's fitting, more like frustrating. They just made a great last play," Tupa said.

That's the way Bruce perceived it, as well. Still, a 5-4-1 record elicited only sour words when Bruce was asked to describe his feelings.

"Naturally, when you lose, how can I come in here and say I feel good? What

would you expect me to be, some idiot? I'm not," Bruce said. "I have feelings like anyone else. We just lost a heartbreaking football game on the last play of the game – one in which we fought and fought and fought."

"I'm deeply disappointed for our football team, our coaching staff and our fans who supported us. That's all I have to say."

A final word from Tupa.

"This season has been amazing. I guess I've seen it all now. I wish I hadn't."

This story originally appeared in the Nov. 21, 1987, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.

Late-Season Slide Led To Bruce's Firing In 1987

By WYATT CROSHER
 Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

In addition to reprinting our coverage of Ohio State's biggest games each week in celebration of Buckeye Sports Bulletin's 40th anniversary, we will periodically publish new stories where we look back at the specific games and talk to former players and coaches from those teams.

Ohio State came into the 1987 season following a 10-3 record in 1986, the first season to not end with a 9-3 result since the Buckeyes went 11-1 in 1979. That 1979 season was also the first for head coach Earle Bruce, who had amassed a strong record and remained consistent, but that consistency had not resulted in any years close to championships since his debut.

In '86, the Buckeyes got an extra victory thanks to a 28-12 win over Texas A&M in the Cotton Bowl that was ultimately sealed when linebacker Michael Kee took an interception return 49 yards for a touchdown with 2:49 to go in the fourth quarter.

"He had been so successful, had a great Cotton Bowl victory the last game of the season before, beat Texas A&M, and Earle was offered a job at Arizona and turned it down to stay at Ohio State," said Bill Conley, BSB columnist and former Ohio State assistant under Bruce from 1984-87. "We were co-champions of the Big Ten that year, so his record was really good, and nobody thought that his job was in jeopardy."

The 1987 season started out with promise. The Buckeyes won their first two games against West Virginia and Oregon before tying No. 4 LSU 13-13 on the road then traveling to Champaign, Ill., to take down Illinois.

But then, the first misstep: a 31-10 loss to Indiana at home. The team recovered and won its next two games, but then began the downward slope of the rest of the season. First, a 13-7 loss, again at home, to No. 20 Michigan State, then a 26-24 loss to a Wisconsin team that came into the game with a 2-6 record.

"The team did not play well at all," Derek Isaman, junior linebacker on Ohio State's 1987 team, told BSB. "We had a fantastic team that

just did not produce anything."

Those two losses led Ohio State into a home matchup with Iowa, with the Buckeyes holding a 5-3-1 record and no strong momentum, while the Hawkeyes came in the winners of three straight. That did not matter early on, with Ohio State going up 14-3 early in the second quarter off a 60-yard touchdown pass from quarterback Tom Tupa to wide receiver Everett Ross with 11:19 to play in the first half.

But Iowa battled back before it headed to the locker room, with running back Kevin Harmon breaking a run for 50 yards to the end zone to cut it to 14-9 after a failed two-point conversion. Hawkeye kicker Rob Houghtlin then kicked a pair of field goals to give Iowa a 15-14 halftime lead.

The teams exchanged touchdowns in the third and fourth quarters, with Iowa holding a 22-21 advantage with 9:11 to play after a 1-yard score by running back David Hudson. Ohio State responded with a 16-play, 75-yard drive that included a conversion on fourth-and-1 from the Iowa 44-yard line by running back Carlos Snow. Snow also capped off the drive on a 14-yard rush into the end zone to make it 27-22.

The drive lasted 6:21, giving the Hawkeyes just 2:45 to respond with a score of their own and retake the lead.

"The game was really kind of a sloppy game by both teams," Conley said. "There were some interceptions and some fumbles by both teams, so in that way, there were a lot of mistakes. It was just a back-and-forth type of deal. I think we felt pretty good the whole game that we were OK."

Iowa started with the ball on the 36-yard line and moved swiftly to the Ohio State 30 before nearly blowing its chance at a comeback at all. After a Hawkeye holding, Ohio State defensive lineman Ray Holliman forced a fumble on quarterback Chuck Hartlieb, but the Hawkeyes recovered, losing 11 yards on the play. That led to a second-and-31, but Hartlieb found tight end Marv Cook for a 27-yard gain before finding Cook again on a fourth-and-3 to keep the drive alive.

The next set of downs featured more potential peril for the Hawkeyes, with Hartlieb getting sacked on first down, Harmon losing 5

yards on second and Hartlieb missing a pass on third down, leading to a fourth-and-23 for the ballgame with 16 seconds left at the Ohio State 28-yard line.

Hartlieb, once again, threw the ball in Cook's direction, and Cook grabbed his ninth reception on the day, beating Sean Bell to make the catch then run it the rest of the way to regain a 29-27 lead. Ohio State would get the ball back with three seconds to go, but Tupa's desperation heave was intercepted, and the Buckeyes fell for the third straight game.

"They hit a pass to the tight end, and the guy was covered, our guy had it covered, and it was kind of a back-shoulder pass," Conley recalled. "The guy had to turn around and catch the ball, it was on their sideline over there, and he made the catch and took it in for a touchdown. It was very crushing because that was the third loss and we had a big game coming the following week against Michigan, who was playing really good that year. So we knew we were going to have our hands full, and it was just unusual for Ohio State to lose three games in a row."

Isaman said the loss was a difficult one, but one that seemed to fit with the narrative of the 1987 season as a whole.

"It was a tough season for everyone," Isaman said. "That whole year was full of things like that that we got beat on. There wasn't leadership out on the field, there wasn't leadership in the coaching, and we just did not fire up for each game, so we had a terrible year."

The Monday after the game, with the Buckeyes now boasting a 5-4-1 record, Bruce was fired. The decision led to the resignation of athletic director Rick Bay, who disagreed with the decision sent down by university president Edward H. Jennings.

"I'm resigning based on philosophical differences with the administration," Bay said in a press conference following his resignation. "I had told the president earlier when we were discussing all these rumors that I could not be a part of that. I understood people were trying to do the right thing, and I had to do what I thought was the right thing."

Bruce's firing came as a surprise to everyone inside that Ohio State locker room, with Conley saying that the timing of the news

– less than a week before the Buckeyes were set to travel to Ann Arbor to face rival Michigan – was what specifically angered him.

"I mean everybody was in shock, and the timing was terrible," Conley said. "The Monday before the Michigan game, I mean it was wrong, it was terrible, it was uncalled for, and everybody was just in a state of shock."

"Rick Bay was a great, great athletic director and great supporter of the program and great supporter of Earle. He knew that what happened was wrong, and he stuck to his guns and cost him his job, but he wouldn't fire Earle because he knew it wasn't right."

Isaman said that the shock did not just stop at the coaching staff but went through the entire roster, despite what was considered by most to be a down season after the three-game losing streak.

"As far as him and his job, we never, as a team, I don't recall anything as far as that," he said. "That just came out of the blue when he came to us on Michigan week and told us he's been let go. Everyone in that room was surprised about that, as far as I know."

Despite the unfortunate circumstances and despite being let go, Bruce was allowed to coach in Ohio State's final game of the season against the Wolverines, who came into the matchup with a 7-3 record and three-game winning streak in head coach Bo Schembechler's 19th season at the helm.

Despite his job being lost and the distractions from outside the football world, Conley said that Bruce treated the game against Ohio State's largest rival as if it was any other Michigan week.

"The great thing was about how well Earle handled the situation. I mean obviously he was very emotional and everything, but he told us it was going to be work as usual, you have to beat Michigan," Conley said. "We just worked really hard that week, the kids worked hard. We didn't have a bad practice, and you know the story about the headbands and all that stuff, so the kids really came to play. They played their hearts out."

The headbands Conley is talking about were headbands that had "EARLE" written across them that were worn by all the Ohio State players.

"We all put those Earle headbands on, if we didn't have it on our head, we had it on our neck," Isaman said. "That was a motivation for the team. Everyone was fired up to win for Earle."

The extra motivation helped Ohio State break out of the losing slump, and a 26-yard field goal by kicker Matt Frantz with 5:18 to play was enough for the Buckeyes to defeat Michigan 23-20 in Ann Arbor, sending off Bruce with a victory as he was carried off the field in Michigan Stadium.

Bruce ended his time at Ohio State with an 81-26-1 record, the second most in program history to Woody Hayes (205) at the time he was fired and the fifth-most wins in program history to this day. But following that 81st victory, Conley said there was hope that maybe Bruce could still return to get win No. 82, 83 and so forth, but instead his tenure remained over at the end of the season.

"It was very emotional because I think we all thought maybe, as coaches, if we come back and have a good game to win, maybe they would possibly even change their mind and let Earle stay, but it didn't work out that way," Conley said. "The kids obviously were on a mission, not only just to beat Michigan, but a mission to show their support of the coaching staff and especially Earle."

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Dead Period Extended?

According to a report from CBS Sports' Dennis Dodd, the NCAA Football Oversight Committee has recommended the ongoing recruiting dead period be extended through April 15, 2021.

RECRUITING OUTLOOK Andrew Lind

The NCAA Division I Council is set to approve the recommendation at its Nov. 18 meeting, which means coaches will not meet in person with prospective recruits for more than a year.

The council first implemented the dead period in March due to the worldwide coronavirus outbreak but extended it through the end of the calendar year at its most recent meeting in September.

As for how the news impacts Ohio State, both Sammamish (Wash.) Eastside Catholic five-star defensive end J.T. Tuimoloau and Steilacoom, Wash., five-star wide receivers Emeka Egbuka hoped to take official visits before making their respective college decisions. Now, Tuimoloau will be forced to make the biggest decision of his life without ever stepping foot on campus. Egbuka, on the other hand, has been to Columbus twice, but not since he attended the Buckeyes' 38-7 win over Wisconsin in October 2019.

Neither prospect has announced a commitment date, but Egbuka is expected to sign with a school during the early signing period on Dec. 16-18, while Tuimoloau will likely hold off until the traditional National Signing Day on Feb. 3.

Of course, they could follow the lead of 2021 Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central

three-star offensive tackle Zen Michalski and 2022 Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian, who each took a trip to Columbus this fall on their own dime and subsequently committed to Ohio State. But if not, the Buckeyes can only wait and see if they've done enough to secure their commitments from afar.

Roster Management Not A Concern For Day

In early October, Ohio State head coach Ryan Day acknowledged the difficulties that come with recruiting during the pandemic, most notably how the extra year of eligibility the NCAA granted to current players would impact the roster well into the future.

But fast-forward a few weeks and Day feels confident the scholarship numbers will eventually work themselves out.

"As we project it out, we actually don't think we'll be over 85 scholarship next fall with guys moving on to the NFL and with different guys graduating," Day said during a conference call with reporters on Nov. 10. "I think we're going to be in a good place. I think we've got a good handle on it."

As mentioned, the NCAA Division I Council approved a proposal earlier this summer that grants all fall student-athletes an extra year of eligibility regardless of whether they play this season or not. And while returning seniors won't count against next year's 85-man scholarship limit, the decision will likely have an impact on how many players programs take in future recruiting classes.

"There's a little bit of unknown there as some guys may try to come back, some guys may not," Day said. "It's a little bit imperfect, but I think for the most part, we have a good handle on it. I don't think we'll be much over 85 going into the fall. I could be wrong, but that's what we're planning and forecasting out."

Continued On Page 22

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The screenshot shows the Buckeye Sports Bulletin website. At the top is a navigation bar with links: HOME, FOOTBALL, BASKETBALL, SPORTS, FORUM, BSB ONLINE, EAT & STAY, and a LOGIN button. Below the navigation bar is a large featured article titled "OHIO STATE STILL NO. 3 IN THE POLLS" with a sub-headline "Ohio State remained firmly entrenched at No. 3 in both major polls after its surprise idle week, sitting behind Alabama..." and a "READ MORE" button. To the right of the featured article are three smaller article teasers: "2022 Virginia Five-Star Offensive Tackle Zach Rice Includes Ohio State Among Top Schools", "BSB Reprints: 2018 Ohio State At Maryland", and "Luke Fickell Is Finding His Voice At Cincinnati". Each teaser includes a date, time, and a "READ MORE" link.

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OSU Football Verbal Commitments

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

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jayden Ballard	WR	6-2	175	★★★★	Massillon (Ohio) Washington
Denzel Burke	CB	6-0	189	★★★★	Scottsdale (Ariz.) Saguaro
Reid Carrico	LB	6-3	225	★★★★	Ironton, Ohio
Ben Christman	OG	6-6	299	★★★★	Richfield (Ohio) Revere
Jantzen Dunn	S	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
Zen Michalski	OT	6-7	288	★★★	Floyds Knobs (Ind.) Floyd Central
Jesse Mirco	P	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
Tyleik Williams	DT	6-3	330	★★★★	Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued a verbal commitment to play football at Ohio State.

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Jyaire Brown	CB	5-11	165	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West
Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	235	★★★	Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona
Benji Gosnell	TE	6-4	225	★★★★	Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry
C.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	OT	6-5	340	★★★★	West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West

Five-Star Prospects List OSU Among Top Schools

Continued From Page 21

Day Not Worried About Having Too Many QBs

Over the last year or so, the transfer portal has become a revolving door for quarterbacks who have failed to win the starting job at their former school. So it's probably fair to wonder if one of Ohio State's talented freshman quarterbacks, whether it's Jack Miller or C.J. Stroud, will eventually look for another opportunity elsewhere.

The same could be said for 2021 Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep five-star quarterback Kyle McCord, who is set to arrive on campus in January and hopes to compete as a true freshman for the starting spot likely vacated by Justin Fields. Or perhaps 2022 Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star signal-caller Quinn Ewers, who is widely predicted to commit to the Buckeyes after backing off his pledge to the home-state Longhorns on Oct. 28.

Does that mean the Buckeyes might be looking to add a lower-ranked quarterback for depth purposes? Day doesn't think so.

"When you come to Ohio State, you come here to compete," Day said on Nov. 10. "And if you don't want to compete, this probably isn't the right place for you. If a quarterback is coming here, they're coming here to be in the Heisman Trophy conversation, to win a national championship and be a first-round draft pick. If they can't beat out the guy who's here, how are they going to go become a Heisman Trophy winner and a first-round draft (pick)? The guys who come here, they want to be great, they love Ohio State and they understand what they are getting them-

selves into.

"If someone's coming here to be the backup, they're probably not going to make it anyways. If they are coming here, they are coming here to play. We want guys who want to play. While it makes sense, it's just it's not realistic, even though it is a concern because only one quarterback plays."

Day believes his track record of developing quarterbacks will help Ohio State land the best quarterbacks year in and year out.

"You're learning about drop-back passing, you're learning about progressions, you're learning about protections and all those types of things," Day said. "I think that's one of the big reasons why these guys love being here as a quarterback."

Commit Sets Receiving Record

Speaking of McCord, his teammate, four-star wide receiver commit Marvin Harris, became the Philadelphia Catholic League's all-time leader in career receiving yards in St. Joseph's Prep's 42-0 win over Philadelphia Roman Catholic on Nov. 7.

The 6-3, 190-pound Harrison – who is considered the 21st-best receiver and No. 115 prospect overall in the class of 2021 – caught seven passes for 97 yards and two touchdowns in the victory, bringing his career total to 2,467 yards. The previous record-holder was former Notre Dame and current Houston Texans receiver Will Fuller.

"I had no idea until I came off the sideline and one of my coaches told me," Harrison told Eastern PA Football's Joseph Santoliquito after the game. "I didn't even hear the announcement, either. The goal is the same,

too, winning a third straight state championship. This season was a little scary. We didn't think we were going to have a season.

"If I look back on this year, I'll remember the obstacles we overcame. We didn't even have a place to practice because of the (pandemic protocols). We want to do something no other prep school has done and that's win three straight state titles."

Harrison also tied Philadelphia La Salle's Jimmy Herron, who now plays baseball in the Colorado Rockies' organization, for the league record with 33 career receiving touchdowns. He can take sole possession with a score in the Hawks' first-round playoff game against Souderton, Pa., on Nov. 20.

Virginia Tackle Reveals Top Eight

Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackles Zach Rice listed Ohio State in his top eight on Nov. 14 alongside Florida, LSU, Miami (Fla.), North Carolina, Notre Dame, Oklahoma and Virginia.

The 6-6, 282-pound Rice – who is considered the second-best offensive tackle and No. 29 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – landed an offer from the Buckeyes in April. He's never been to campus but talks regularly with Day, offensive line coach Greg Studrawa, defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs and graduate assistant Kennedy Cook, as well as some of Ohio State's current players, including freshman offensive tackle Paris Johnson.

After missing out on some of their top targets at the position in the current recruiting cycle, offensive tackle will be one of the Buckeyes' top priorities in 2022. The

staff already holds a commitment from West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star Tegra Tshabola, but other names to keep in mind include Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens; Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth; Charlestown, Ind., four-star Kiyaunta Goodwin; and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner.

NFL Legacy Puts OSU Among Top Schools

Argyle (Texas) Liberty Christian four-star safety Cristian Driver listed Ohio State in his top 12 on Nov. 6 alongside Alabama, Florida, LSU, Michigan, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Oregon, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and Wisconsin.

The 6-1, 180-pound Driver – who is considered the 12th-best safety and No. 202 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – is the son of former Green Bay Packers wide receiver Donald Driver. Though he picked up an offer from the Buckeyes and former co-defensive coordinator Jeff Hafley in May 2019, he has been in contact with Coombs and safeties/special teams coach Matt Barnes in recent months.

It's still too early to project how many defensive backs Ohio State will take in 2022, but other names to keep in mind at the safety position include Williamstown, N.J., four-star Keon Sabb; Las Vegas Bishop Gorman four-star Zion Branch; and Des Moines (Iowa) Southeast Polk four-star Xavier Nwankpa.

Buckeyes Named Top Suitor For DE

Philadelphia Imhotep Institute Charter five-star defensive end Enai White narrowed

A Look Back At Recruiting From The Pages Of BSB

30 Years Ago – 1990

The Ohio State recruiting trail had not gone through Youngstown, Ohio, recently, but the 1991 recruiting cycle was proving to be a different story.

While the Buckeyes had just two Youngstown natives on the active roster in 1990 – defensive backs Mark Pelini and Bryan Cook – Ohio State looked primed to add a few more as it was courting a number of prospects from the area.

Chief among them was defensive back Deollo Anderson of Youngstown Ursuline, one of the best high school players at his position in the nation, ranked No. 3 nationally by SuperPrep.

Anderson was known to like Notre Dame, Ohio State and Michigan and hoped to visit all three shortly after the end of the college football season, which was rapidly approaching.

Joining him on the list were a pair of his teammates, offensive lineman Matt Emch and nose guard Jamar Fordham, both of whom were looking very closely at the Buckeyes.

25 Years Ago – 1995

Ohio State had a number of players visit for its win over Illinois on Nov. 11, including one highly rated running back from Florida on an official visit.

Jerry Westbrook, a running back from Boca Raton (Fla.) Pope John Paul II, played in a game on Nov. 10 and then flew to Columbus on the morning of Nov. 11 to make an official visit to the OSU campus.

Westbrook was rated a blue-chip prospect by all major publications at running back, but some outlets said he could play tight end or even defensive end at the next level, thanks to his 6-3, 215-pound frame.

He told BSB that he had narrowed down his choices to OSU, Illinois, Florida, Florida State, Miami (Fla.) Auburn and Notre Dame.

20 Years Ago – 2000

Ohio State was planning its first battery of official visits for the Michigan weekend Nov. 17-19.

It seemed likely that St. Louis University School linebacker Matt Sinclair and Fort Scott (Kan.) Community College wide receiver Chris Vance would make visits, along with several other top Buckeye

prospects.

Included in that group was the Fort Lauderdale (Fla.) St. Thomas Aquinas duo of Dominick Anderson, a running back, and Jomo Fagan, a wide receiver, though potential playoff commitments put those visits in jeopardy.

Not expected to attend was La Quinta, Calif., linebacker Michael Craven, rated the nation's No. 1 linebacker prospect by Rivals100.com, who had to cancel his visit to attend a national awards ceremony.

15 Years Ago – 2005

Ohio State's recruiting for the class of 2006 was in a bit of a holding pattern. With the coaching staff focusing on closing out the season on the right note, the Buckeyes were not paying much attention to extending offers or setting up large official visit weekends.

But with nine commitments to a class expected to number around 20, things were expected to heat up at some point, likely after the Thanksgiving holiday. Several Ohioans looked to be candidates for late offers, and Youngstown Cardinal Mooney's Derrell Johnson appeared to be near the top of that list.

Johnson drew interest for quarterbacking top-seeded Mooney to a deep playoff run in Ohio's Division IV, pulling his team all the way to the regional finals. He attracted offers from West Virginia, Iowa, Purdue, Cincinnati, North Carolina and Eastern Michigan.

"As time goes on, schools are getting a little bit more eager, and that's a good sign," Johnson said. "But I'm not focused on that. We're trying to get to the big show."

10 Years Ago – 2010

Curtis Grant continually put his recruitment on the back burner throughout his senior season, but that did not stop the nation's No. 3 outside linebacker from identifying the schools most interested in him.

The 6-3, 215-pound athlete from Richmond (Va.) Hermitage said he received weekly phone calls from Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Michigan, Ohio State and Virginia. Of that group, he had taken unofficial visits to see everyone except the Buckeyes and Wolverines.

That had the chance to change once his season ended.

"I've been to all of them except Ohio State and Michigan," he said.

"I want to go up there and check those guys out. Hopefully I can sit down and think about it and see if I can take officials to those schools."

Five Years Ago – 2015

Despite being listed at 6-5, 290, there was skepticism about Leipsic, Ohio, offensive guard Gavin Cupp's size. Cupp attended camps to quell the skeptics and show that he could play with the best players in the region. It worked.

He received an offer from Michigan State in April and then committed to the Spartans in May. To keep refining his skills, Cupp didn't stop attending camps after announcing his commitment. He attended Ohio State's Friday Night Lights camp. When MSU found out, it pulled Cupp from its list of commitments.

"I think when the whole Michigan State thing went down, obviously, there was some frustration and moments of doubts in terms of, 'What did I do? Is this going to pan out?'" said Leipsic head coach Andy Mangas.

Fortunately for the offensive lineman, the Buckeyes liked what they saw and offered him a scholarship less than a week after Michigan State broke ties with him.

One Year Ago – 2019

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

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

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

He was set to make the trip with his good friend 2020 Charlotte (N.C.) Providence Day four-star defensive lineman Jacolbe Cowan, who had committed to Ohio State on Oct. 4.

ASK AN ANALYST

With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

The coronavirus pandemic has put virtual visits and Zoom calls at the forefront of the recruiting process for both coaches pursuing players and prospects wanting to learn more about a school. Do you anticipate this trend continuing once the dead period is lifted, or is it simply a matter of making the most of a bad situation?

"I definitely think the virtual visits will continue moving forward. There will obviously be a major push for those in-person visits once things open back up, but instead of just texting and calling, these virtual conferences seem to be a much more impactful method of building relationships with prospects and giving them an idea of what things are like at these respective schools."

Aside from the obvious answer of quarterback, since coaches often like to see them throw in person before offering, what position (or positions) is/are most impacted by the extended recruiting dead period and why?

"Probably the offensive and defensive linemen. You want to see how they move in person and get a real idea of height and weight, which is virtually impossible to tell on film. Ohio State defensive line coach Larry Johnson specifically is adamant about wanting to work with guys before being ready to take them."

Which of Ohio State's committed prospects from the class of 2021 are flying under the radar, whether it's from a national ranking perspective or when simply compared to other players in their class?

"Bowling Green (Ky.) South Warren four-star Jantzen Dunn is a tremendous run-and-jump athlete that I think could be a big-time free safety. I dare not compare anyone to Malik Hooker, but he has that type of basketball background with size, athleticism and range and could bring a unique skill set to that position."

Ohio State offered a scholarship to Arizona

State freshman and former Akron Hoban four-star running back DeaMonte Trayanum but ultimately chased higher-rated prospects in the 2020 cycle instead. After seeing him rush for 84 yards and two touchdowns in the Sun Devils' season opener on Nov. 7, do you think the Buckeyes regret not making him more of a priority?

"It's probably too early to know if that is going to be a miss that comes back to haunt them, but it was certainly an encouraging start for Trayanum. However, it's worth noting that getting on the field early at Arizona State isn't the challenge that getting on the field early at Ohio State is."

"Ultimately the Buckeyes have a group of backs coming off major injuries, and certainly the hope would be that these guys improve as the season goes along. Given what Ohio State has coming in the 2021 class, I don't think it will be too big of a storyline moving forward."

his list of more than 40 scholarship offers to 13 schools on Nov. 9, his birthday, listing Ohio State with Alabama, Clemson, Florida, LSU, Miami (Fla.), Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Oregon, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas and USC.

The 6-5, 230-pound White is considered the second-best defensive end and No. 25 prospect overall in the 2022 recruiting class, after he recorded 51 tackles, 10 tackles for loss and eight sacks for the Panthers in 2019 – his first season at the position after he transitioned from wide receiver.

The Buckeyes extended an offer to White back in May, and he's maintained contact with defensive line coach Larry Johnson in the months since. He plans to visit campus for the first time once the dead period comes to a close.

Ohio State is still searching for its first commitment along the defensive line for the class of 2022, but White – who reminds the staff a lot of sophomore Javontae Jean-Baptiste – is among their top priorities. Other targets include Opa Locka (Fla.) Monsignor Pace five-star end Shemar Stewart; Baltimore St. Frances Academy four-star end Derrick Moore; Greensboro (N.C.) Grimsley four-star tackle Travis Shaw; Columbus (Ga.) Hardaway four-star tackle Mykel Williams; and Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star tackle Caden Curry.

Five-Star End High On OSU

Though he's never been to campus, Alabaster (Ala.) Thompson five-star defensive end Jeremiah Alexander included Ohio State in his top 11 on Nov. 10. Also listed were Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Louisville, LSU, Oklahoma, Ole Miss, Penn State, Tennessee and Texas.

The 6-2, 235-pound Alexander – who is considered the top-rated defensive end and No. 11 prospect overall in the class of 2022 – committed to Alabama in March but reopened his recruitment on Oct. 27.

Alexander does not hold an offer from the Buckeyes at this time but has been interacting with several 2022 commits on social media, including Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks and Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough. He's also been in contact with Larry Johnson and defensive line assistant Nick Sebastian.

Ohio State has not signed a recruit from the state of Alabama since Montgomery defensive lineman Donte Wheat in 1981.

Texas Receiver Drops Top Nine

Lewisville, Texas, four-star receiver Armani Winfield named a top nine on Nov. 12 of Arizona State, Auburn, Florida, LSU, Ohio State, Penn State, Texas, Texas A&M and USC.

The 6-2, 180-pound Winfield – who is no relation to former Buckeyes defensive back Antoine Winfield – is considered the 12th-best receiver and No. 72 prospect overall in the 2022 recruiting class. He picked up an offer from Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline in January and is good friends with freshman wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba and freshman cornerback Ryan Watts, who have done their best to fill him in on what campus is like since he's never been to Columbus.

"They tell me about the culture there," Winfield told 247Sports director of recruiting Steve Wiltfong. "You can see what they're doing and what they're trying to build. The receiver corps there is very strong, and they're

always going to have a great quarterback."

In addition to their interest in Winfield, the Buckeyes are also the presumed favorite for 2022 Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton.

Other Notes From Around The Country

• Bowling Green, Ky., three-star tight end Jordan Dingle committed to Kentucky on Nov. 13. Dingle, the 19th-best tight end in the class of 2021, landed an offer from Ohio State during a one-day camp in June 2019 and took

a pair of unofficial visits last fall.

• 2021 Oak Park, Mich., four-star defensive tackle Rayshawn Benny pledged his services to Michigan State on Nov. 9. The Buckeyes offered Benny in April 2019, though they were recruiting him as an offensive tackle.

• Ohio State extended a scholarship offer to 2023 Kissimmee (Fla.) Osceola defensive tackle John Walker on Nov. 12.

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Michigan State's Izzo Tests Positive For COVID

Tom Izzo, the Hall of Fame men's basketball coach for Michigan State, tested positive for COVID-19 on Nov. 9 with a daily antigen test, and a polymerase chain-reaction test confirmed the presumptive positive.

"This morning I tested positive for COVID-19," Izzo said in a statement. "Although I have some minor symptoms, I remain in good health. I've been extremely diligent for many months now, wearing my mask in public and around the office, while adhering to social distancing guidelines. I've been racking my brain, trying to figure out if there was a time where I let my guard down for just an instance. And while I haven't identified any area of exposure, what I have determined is that this shows the power of the virus. You'd be hard-pressed to find a coach who's taken more precautions than I have, following all the protocols put in place by our medical team, and yet I still contracted the virus."

BIG TEN NOTES

Joe Dempsey

"Technology will allow me to stay connected with my staff and our players, and I'll have plenty of time to watch film. I'll listen to our outstanding medical staff and follow their directions and take all the steps necessary to return as soon as possible."

Following guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Big Ten, Izzo can return to team activities with his team on Nov. 17, marking the end of a 10-day isolation period following his initial symptoms, which Izzo first experienced on Nov. 7.

Izzo, who has won four national Coach of the Year awards, thanked everyone for supporting him during this time before urging others to stay safe while COVID-19 runs rampant.

"I appreciate the support from my family, my team and the Michigan State fan base, but if I could ask for one favor, I'd urge everyone to continue to listen to the medical experts and follow their advice," Izzo said. "I'm proof that no

one is immune, but I still believe that there are steps everyone can take to reduce their chances of contracting the virus."

Illinois RB Ra'Von Bonner Enters Transfer Portal

Ra'Von Bonner opted out prior to the season due to concerns about COVID-19, and after Illinois' third game, he entered the transfer portal.

The Illini running back told the Chicago Tribune he did not have a guarantee he would have a roster spot next season as a graduate student, adding that he felt his decision to opt out would be held against him.

"I didn't really think there was opportunity for me back at Illinois," Bonner said. "There was uncertainty if I could even come back to the team because they didn't have to accept me back as a graduate student."

"I just want to play ball. I want to play where a coach actually plays me as much as I should be played. It's not a knock on anyone else."

Bonner, who is seeking a program that will use him as a featured back, is working on his second master's degree at Illinois while taking online classes from his hometown of Cincinnati. The former three-star prospect from Cincinnati Sycamore cited his asthma and the fact that he did not want to risk his or ailing family members' health.

"I'm not really wanted back there," Bonner said. "I knew the risk when I made the decision. It's not a thing that surprised me."

Bonner said a teammate told him that Bonner's future was brought up, and a coach replied, "Return where? Not here." The tailback declined to call out the coach because he wanted to protect his friend who shared the information with him.

Illinois head coach Lovie Smith was offended by what Bonner had said.

"I don't know exactly what we did that was wrong," Smith said. "I don't buy that (from) him. We don't treat our players that way."

"I feel real good about how we treated Ra'Von and any other athlete who's come through our program. To insinuate anything else, we have a problem with it."

Following Smith's press conference, Bonner reiterated his message and added that his coach had urged him to cite social unrest as his reason

for opting out instead of COVID-19 concerns in the summer.

Bonner, who is an athlete representative on the Big Ten's Anti-Hate and Anti-Racism Coalition and the president of the campus group EMPOWER (Enlightened Minorities Pursuing Opportunities Where Everyone Rises), totaled 822 rushing yards with 11 total touchdowns in three seasons at Illinois.

Penn State's Journey Brown Retires Due To Heart Issue

Journey Brown, Penn State's standout running back, had his career cut short after he was diagnosed with a heart condition forcing him to "medically retire from the game of football."

The fourth-year junior tailback had not played for the Nittany Lions yet this season due to his condition, which is known as hypertrophic cardiomyopathy. Penn State head coach James Franklin said the condition was discovered through a routine COVID-19 test in September but was not related to the coronavirus.

Brown took a redshirt in 2017 and barely played as redshirt freshman before emerging as the Nittany Lions' leading rusher as a third-year sophomore in 2019 with 890 yards and 12 touchdowns on 6.9 yards per carry.

"I can still remember the first time I truly fell in love with the game I've been playing since fourth grade," Brown wrote in a statement. "Back then it was a game I played for fun, but when I was a sophomore in high school, my life changed, and I fell in love with football, all I could think of was when can I play, how can I get better, what can I do to be a better teammate, and at that moment, football became less of a game for me and more of a lifestyle."

"That lifestyle put me in position to be blessed to have a chance to play football at Penn State. My first year here was rough at times, but when you love the game of football as much as I do, you put your head down and work through scout team, lion's den and the waiting and watching. I finally had the opportunity to showcase what I was born to do and, hopefully, set myself up to achieve my lifelong dream of playing in the NFL. Unfortunately, the dream will never be realized."

Brown cannot play football, but his love for the game is still strong. Franklin said that Brown has been serving as an assistant running backs coach while traveling with the Nittany Lions this year.

"Journey is one of the most popular and respected players on our team," Franklin said. "The entire organization is rallying behind Journey and his family. We need Nittany Nation to do the same as I know we will. Journey has handled this unbelievably well, and I know he'll be extremely successful in whatever he decides to do."

Michigan DE Hutchinson Needs Surgery On Leg

Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson will require surgery after suffering a leg injury during the Wolverines' 38-21 loss to Indiana on Nov. 7. Hutchinson suffered a fracture, according to head coach Jim Harbaugh, though he did not give details as to how long the standout end will be out.

A solid pass-rusher and run stopper, Hutchinson is one of Michigan's best players on defense. Hutchinson's father, former Michigan offensive lineman and current emergency room doctor Chris Hutchinson, said the recovery time for the injury is four months.

"He's worked so hard, he's put so much into it and was playing really good," Harbaugh said, "but I know he'll come back stronger, faster, better. It's just the way he is."

"This is not something that's going to be a

BIG 2020 Standings

East Division

	W	L	Pct.
Indiana	4	0	1.000
Ohio State	3	0	1.000
Maryland	2	1	.667
Michigan	1	3	.250
Michigan State	1	3	.250
Rutgers	1	3	.250
Penn State	0	4	.000

West Division

	W	L	Pct.
Northwestern	4	0	1.000
Wisconsin	2	0	1.000
Purdue	2	1	.667
Iowa	2	2	.500
Nebraska	1	2	.333
Minnesota	1	3	.250
Illinois	1	3	.250

Nov. 13 Score

Iowa 35, Minnesota 7

Nov. 14 Scores

Nebraska 30, Penn State 23
Indiana 24, Michigan State 0
Illinois 23, Rutgers 20
Wisconsin 49, Michigan 11
Northwestern 27, Purdue 20

Ohio State at Maryland, Canceled

Nov. 20 Game

Purdue at Minnesota, 7 p.m.

Nov. 21 Games

Indiana at Ohio State, 12 p.m.
Michigan State at Maryland, 12 p.m.
Illinois at Nebraska, 12 p.m.
Wisconsin at Northwestern, 3:30 p.m.
Iowa at Penn State, 3:30 p.m.
Michigan at Rutgers, 7:30 p.m.

detriment to his career. He's young, he'll heal fast, and he'll come back even better, stronger and faster."

The Dearborn (Mich.) Divine Child product had 15 tackles (nine solo) and two quarterback hurries through three games. In his career, the junior end has tallied 98 tackles (48 solo), 11½ tackles for loss and 4½ sacks.

Top Performers Across The Big Ten Conference

Illinois quarterback Isaiah Williams threw for only 104 yards in the Illini's 23-20 win against Rutgers, but the redshirt freshman gained 192 rushing yards and scored a touchdown. Williams is the performer of the week in the Big Ten because he led Illinois to its first victory after being thrust into action due to starter Brandon Peters testing positive for COVID-19.

Indiana senior wide receiver Ty Fryfogle reeled in 11 receptions for 200 yards and two touchdowns in the Hoosiers' 24-0 victory at Michigan State. Hoosier sophomore cornerback Tiawan Mullen had two interceptions without allowing a reception on three targets, adding three tackles (two solo) in the shutout.

Northwestern senior wide receiver Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Bowman thrived in the Wildcats' 27-20 victory over Purdue, hauling in eight catches for 86 yards and three touchdowns.

Purdue junior running back Zander Horvath deserves credit for his performance in the loss to Northwestern. The 6-3 tailback, who was a zero-star linebacker recruit, tallied 100 receiving yards on nine catches, along with 21 rushing yards.

Wisconsin running back Jalen Berger gained 100 yards from scrimmage in the Badgers' 49-11 victory at Michigan. The true freshman tailback amassed 87 yards and his first career touchdown on 15 carries and added two receptions for 13 yards.

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Holtmann Signs Three Ohioans In Class Of 2021

With the 2021 class of Malaki Branham, Kalen Etzler and Meechie Johnson having signed their letters of intent the week of Nov. 9, Ohio State men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann is eager to see how the trio of in-state prospects will eventually contribute to the program.

COURT REPORT Craig Merz

"We've got some guys that I really feel confident are going to be able to step in and help us," he said during a Zoom call with the media on Nov. 11. "We have some perimeter needs that we need to address with the graduation of C.J. (Walker) and a couple of perimeter players getting older."

He will not have to wait long for help to arrive in one instance because Johnson, a 6-2, 185-pound four-star point guard from Cleveland Garfield Heights, announced Nov. 8 that he has reclassified to the 2020 class. He will enroll at Ohio State in December and is expected to play shortly thereafter.

The move was made to add depth at the position after Utah State transfer Abel Porter was forced to retire earlier this month because of a heart condition. Holtmann approached Johnson about joining the Buckeyes because at the time it was unknown if guard Jimmy Sotos, a transfer from Bucknell, would be eligible this season.

Holtmann considered adding Johnson or a graduate transfer with immediate eligibility.

"Not every high-school kid or graduate transfer could do it, but if there was the right opportunity, we wanted to do it," the coach said. "We wanted to make it happen. The date around mid-December was what we were looking at both for a high-school player or someone else."

As it turned out, Sotos after having his eligibility for this season denied the first time, won an appeal to play in the 2020-21 season.

Johnson was the No. 76 overall prospect nationally and second in the state to future teammate Branham. Johnson did not play last season because of a knee injury.

As for the other '21 signees, Branham (6-5, 190) is the No. 4 shooting guard and the No. 28 overall prospect in the nation from Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary, the same school that produced LeBron James. In the aborted 2019-20 season Branham averaged 21 points, seven rebounds and three assists per game.

"Malaki comes from a storied Ohio high school program and will come in ready to make an impact as a Buckeye," Holtmann said in a release. "His best days as a player are ahead of him."

Etzler (6-8, 200), the first to commit, is the No. 21 power forward and No. 98 overall recruit in 2021 from Convoy (Ohio) Crestview. His uncle is Doug Etzler, who played for the Buckeyes from 1992-95. As a junior last season, Etzler averaged 17.9 points per game.

"His combination of skill and athleticism stood out from the beginning of the recruiting process, and he has worked hard to continue his development," Holtmann's release said. "We see value in his versatility and love his passion for the Buckeyes."

Two For '22

Holtmann is already at work on the 2022 class, and on Nov. 13 he got commitment No. 2 from Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston Porter

Senior's Roddy Gayle, the No. 54 overall prospect in 247Sports' top 150 for 2022. The 6-4, 195-pounder is the No. 7 shooting guard nationally and the top recruit in New York. He chose the Buckeyes over Georgetown, Marquette, Pitt, Syracuse and UConn.

"I love Ohio State," he told 247Sports. "I took a visit there last year when they played Michigan, and I just love the atmosphere and the facilities that they have. Also, during this time, I built a great relationship with all of the staff members."

He liked how the coaches set a plan for him to be successful at Ohio State.

"I think when they sat me down and we did a Zoom call and they told me how they want to utilize me when I got to the program, I think that made it special for me," Gayle said.

He joins Cincinnati Princeton three-star guard Bowen Hardman (6-3, 160) as the 2022 commits for the Buckeyes.

Scheduling Nightmares

With everything that usually goes into preparing for the season, Holtmann was saddled with another unexpected responsibility.

With the start of the season looming, the Ohio State men's basketball coach was trying to plug a three-game gap created when the Buckeyes pulled out of the season-opening Crossover Classic in Sioux Falls, S.D., from Nov. 25-27 because of COVID-19 concerns.

At the time of BSB going to print, Ohio State had four nonconference games: home games vs. Morehead State (Dec. 2), Alabama A&M (Dec. 5), Notre Dame on Dec. 8 as part of the ACC-Big Ten Challenge and the CBS Sports Classic matchup vs. North Carolina on Dec. 19 in Cleveland.

"I would say it's probably been right now about 70 percent of my work, days and nights," Holtmann said of scheduling issues. "At this point it kind of has to be head coach to head coach when you're talking about scheduling games to expedite the process. I'm hoping we will have some clarity to it."

With the expected 20-game Big Ten schedule still to come, Ohio State is three games from the 27-game regular-season cap allowed by the NCAA for this delayed and shortened season caused by the pandemic.

Schools are permitted a maximum 25 games unless they participate in a three-game, multi-team event (MTE), making two of the games exempt. OSU would have been at 27 with the Crossover Classic, but Holtmann said discussions with OSU football team physician Dr. Jim Borchers, who was instrumental in the Big Ten's return to play with new COVID-19 protocols after initially canceling fall football, convinced him to withdraw.

"I think we made the right decision," Holtmann said. "Dr. Borchers had a real conversation with me last week about the positivity rate in South Dakota, and I appreciated him."

Holtmann said Ohio State may host an MTE with at least two games for each participating school, which is allowed by the NCAA, to give the Buckeyes a minimum of 26 games. Plus there could be another addition along the way.

"I don't think we're going to play 27 games, but I'm putting a 27-game schedule together," Holtmann said.

"I do want to play 27 games as opposed to what some programs are doing in terms of playing 25. We want to play 27. I think that's important for our group, so that will mean we'll have to do some sort of exempt event whether that's here or someplace else."

"We've had some great ideas about some potential matchups. But we just haven't been able to have a unified agreement on the

OSU Men's Basketball Signees & Verbal Commits

Players in the class of 2021 who have signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Malaki Branham	SG	6-5	190	★★★★	Akron (Ohio) St. Vincent-St. Mary
Kalen Etzler	PF	6-8	200	★★★★	Convoy (Ohio) Crestview
Meechie Johnson	PG	6-2	185	★★★★	Garfield Heights (Ohio)

Players in the class of 2022 who have issued verbal commitments to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the 247Sports composite rankings.)

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Stars	High School
Roddy Gayle	SG	6-4	195	★★★★	Youngstown (N.Y.) Lewiston Porter
Bowen Hardman	PF	6-3	160	★★★	Cincinnati Princeton

game yet."

The reality is he and other schedule makers are at the mercy of the virus. Jeff Goodman, basketball analyst for Stadium, noted Nov. 14 that he had polled 250 Division I men's programs and 29 had paused activities (including the eight Ivy League schools that had all winter sports canceled) while 65 at some point this preseason had at least one shutdown of 14-plus days due to COVID-19.

Rocky Road

As the Ohio State football team learned, you can do the right things and take all the safety measures possible yet still be affected by COVID-19. The Buckeye footballers had their Nov. 14 game at Maryland canceled because of an outbreak among the Terrapins players.

Holtmann knows firsthand what this new normal is like. He missed part of an intrasquad scrimmage Nov. 10 while awaiting a second COVID-19 test after the daily rapid test in the morning returned as a possible positive. The second, a more comprehensive polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, was negative and he returned to coaching.

"It's life as we know it," he said. "There is going to be interruptions and struggles in a normal season. We expect that. We've had practices where we've only been able to practice six or seven guys not because of necessarily positivity but because of following all the necessary protocols of contact tracing."

On The Mend

Holtmann provided updates on guard Musa Jallow (ankle) and Harvard graduate transfer Seth Towns (knee), who have been recovering from surgeries.

"Everybody is relatively healthy – or at least compared to where they were. They have taken steps forward," Holtmann said. "Musa and Seth are the two guys who are out of live action right now."

"They are able to do some limited contact drill work, but neither guy is able to do live-action work."

Towns has missed the past two college seasons following a knee injury playing for Harvard in 2018 and a subsequent follow-up procedure in January 2020. Jallow did not play in the 2019-20 season because of ankle issues.

"I don't have a specific timeline on Seth and Musa," the coach said. "At this point, I could speculate that Musa is closer to returning than Seth. I think the timeline on Seth is still very much – I would say he's at least a month away from getting into live action in terms of practice stuff."

The good news is forward Justice Sueing is full-go for practice. While sitting out last season after transferring from California, he had foot surgery in January.

"When you see him move, he's tested out as our best athlete," Holtmann said. "When you see him move, he's a guy who is a good 6-7. He's got good ball skills. His shooting has continued to improve."

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Juhasz, Buckeyes Get Buzz In Preseason Talk

Ohio State junior forward Dorka Juhasz was selected by the coaches and the media as one of the 10 players on the preseason All-Big Ten team on Nov. 11.

Juhasz, who finished last year on the All-Big Ten team, ended the 2019-20 season as Ohio State's leader in points (13.2 points per game) and rebounds (9.4 rebounds per game) for the second straight season, improving her numbers in both of those categories from the year prior. She shot 47.6 percent from the field and 39.6 percent from three.

DOUBLE DRIBBLE Wyatt Crosher

The third-year forward out of Pecs, Hungary, was one of four unanimous selections on the coaches ballot, along with Rutgers guard Arella Guirantes, Michigan forward Naz Hillmon and Northwestern guard Lindsey Pulliam. Showing the parity at the top of the conference, Guirantes and Hillmon split the preseason All-Big Ten Player of the Year honors for the coaches, while Pulliam was selected by the media.

The coaches and media again agreed on which five teams would be the top five in the Big Ten for the 2020-21 season, but they did not share the same ranking.

Still, both polls had Indiana atop the conference following a 24-8 season in 2019-20. Both also had Ohio State coming in fifth place in the 14-team conference, a position that would be a slight step up for the Buckeyes after finishing with a 21-12 record, including an 11-7 record in the Big Ten, good for sixth place.

Aside from the Hoosiers and Buckeyes, Maryland, Michigan and Northwestern were also placed in the top five, with those three teams ranking No. 2, 3 and 4 by the coaches, but No. 3, 4 and 2 by the media, respectively.

Maryland and Northwestern shared the Big Ten regular-season title with a 16-2 conference record before the Terrapins defeated Ohio

State 82-65 in the Big Ten tournament finals. Michigan went 10-8 in the Big Ten last season, good for seventh place. The Wolverines fell to the Buckeyes 66-60 in the tournament semifinals.

The same 10 players were selected on the all-conference team by both the coaches and media: Indiana guard Grace Berger, Northwestern guard Veronica Burton, Michigan State guard Nia Clouden, Iowa forward Monika Czinano, Guirantes, Hillmon, Juhasz, Maryland guard Ashley Owusu, Indiana guard Ali Patberg and Pulliam.

We Mostly Agree, Big Ten Polls

I was one of 14 media members to vote in the preseason All-Big Ten awards, and I ended up with pretty similar teams and players to the rest of the conference, which I suspect came due to a year of knowledge on the beat that helped me choose with more than just raw numbers.

Overall, I had the same five teams and nine of the same 10 players on my ballot.

My Top Five Teams:

1. Indiana
2. Northwestern
3. Ohio State
4. Michigan
5. Maryland

When picking the top teams in the conference, I focused primarily on the returning core members of each team in the Big Ten over the potential of new players who are coming in as freshmen or transfers, despite those additions obviously being incredibly important.

That distinction is why Maryland falls to No. 5 on this list despite winning the Big Ten tournament a season ago. The Terrapins lost five of their top six scorers from 2019-20, a whole lot of production to make up from an impressive 28-4 campaign.

Michigan and Ohio State are very much in the same tier for me, with both teams bringing back a large chunk of their rosters after successful seasons a year ago. I like Hillmon and guard Amy Dilk a whole lot for the Wolverines and think they will be among the best in the conference for their junior seasons, but the Buckeyes bring back an entire starting five

OSU Women's Basketball Signees

Players in the class of 2021 who have signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Ohio State. (Star ratings are from the ESPN rankings.)

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

that was almost entirely underclassmen, and I think that cohesion will be important in such a chaotic year.

The Big Ten should have a bunch of teams fighting for the top five, but Northwestern and Indiana stand out as the two best teams for me. The Wildcats won a share of the regular-season title in 2019-20 and bring back Pulliam, one of the best players in the country, for her senior year, as well as another major contributor in Burton.

But Indiana has almost every single contributor back from last season and is a roster loaded with talent, with veteran guards Patberg and Berger leading the way. This feels like a now-or-never year for the Hoosiers, and I think they have the pieces to end at the top of the Big Ten.

My Preseason All-Big Ten Roster:

- Grace Berger, Indiana
- Veronica Burton, Northwestern
- Monika Czinano, Iowa
- Arella Guirantes, Rutgers
- Naz Hillmon, Michigan
- Dorka Juhasz, Ohio State
- Ashley Owusu, Maryland
- Ali Patberg, Indiana
- Jasmine Powell, Minnesota
- Lindsay Pulliam, Northwestern – Player of the Year

The Big Ten is loaded with talent that is spread across a wide variety of teams, and that was made clear when I picked 10 players on eight different teams within the conference.

As mentioned above, Pulliam is an elite scorer and was one of the best players in the NCAA last season. She fell just short of the Player of the Year honor last season to Iowa's Kathleen Doyle, and I think this year she will bring it home.

The player most likely to challenge Pulliam in my eyes is Patberg, especially if she does lead Indiana to the top record in the Big Ten. Also firmly in the conversation for Player of the Year last season was Guirantes, who should be right back there again and is on a Scarlet Knights team that I had just outside my top five.

For my Ohio State selection, Juhasz is a double-double machine who has improved in each of her first two seasons, and her remarkably efficient three-point shooting has made her a true offensive threat anywhere on the floor. I think that one of the Buckeyes' starting guards – Madison Greene, Braxtin Miller and Jacy Sheldon – could step up and make this top 10, but they could run into the same issue as last season and distribute the wealth too much to get recognized.

The lone change I had from the 10 players selected by both the media and coaches alike was Powell, who turned a down year record-wise with the Gophers into a breakout freshman campaign, finishing with 12.1 points, 3.1 assists and 3.0 rebounds per game while also second on the team with 44 steals. Minnesota may not compete for the conference title, but I expect a big statistical year from Powell with the Gophers.

Buckeyes Rank No. 20 In Preseason AP Poll

Ohio State found itself in more polls this

week, and in a similar position as the men's basketball team, ranking No. 20 in the Associated Press top 25 preseason poll on Nov. 10, a day after the men's team was placed at No. 23.

Despite more success than expected in 2019-20, Ohio State was never ranked within the top 25 but did end the season receiving 10 AP votes, good for No. 27 in the country. Those votes came after the Buckeyes pulled together a string of three wins in the Big Ten tournament, making it all the way to the championship game before falling to top-seeded Maryland.

That season-ending hot streak, along with the return of all five starters from the season prior, including Juhasz, likely led to Ohio State placing within the top 25.

Ohio State is one of five conference teams ranked in the AP top 25, along with Maryland at No. 12, Indiana at No. 16, Northwestern at No. 17, and Michigan at No. 25. Rutgers received one point in the rankings, placing No. 36.

Two Guards Make It Official On NSD

Nov. 11 was not only a day for Big Ten conference polls, it also was national signing day in the college basketball world, and Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff officially brought in his two signees for the 2021 class in guards Kaitlyn Costner and Taylor Thierry.

Costner transferred from Elkhart (Ind.) Central High School over to Mishawaka (Ind.) Penn for her junior season after averaging 16.1 points, 2.9 steals and 2.6 assists per game. In her sophomore season at Elkhart, she shot 59.7 percent from the field and 44.7 percent from three.

The 5-8 point guard committed to Ohio State back on Aug. 5.

"I'm extremely excited to add Kaitlyn to our program," McGuff said in a video on Twitter. "She's a great kid and she's going to bring a tremendous amount to our program. She's got super high character, she's incredibly fast, quick, explosive off the dribble. I think she's going to be a terrific fit in our style of play, and I can't wait to get her here."

Thierry comes to the Buckeyes from Laurel High School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, and committed to Ohio State on July 7. She is a 5-10 guard who averaged 16.6 points, 8.1 rebounds, 3.1 assists and 3.7 steals per game in her junior season while shooting 55.2 percent from the field.

"We're extremely excited to add Taylor to the women's basketball program here," McGuff said in a Twitter video. "She's a great Ohio kid who's got a world of potential. Her best years are certainly still ahead of her, and I can't wait to get her here so we can really help her develop. I know she's going to have a great impact on our program."

The additions of Costner and Thierry would give Ohio State 12 players on its roster for the 2021-22 season, pending the potential of transfers either in or out of the program. The only players set to depart from the team after this season are Miller and graduate transfer forward Tanaya Beacham, though that is not fully certain with potential eligibility rule changes due to COVID-19.

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Bristow Ready To Develop During Redshirt Season

By WYATT CROSHER
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Hevynne Bristow has played basketball for most of her life, but her first memory with the sport is not necessarily a positive one.

"I was playing in the house with my dad, I was I want to say 5 maybe, and we lived on the first floor, so we played basketball in the house," Bristow told Buckeye Sports Bulletin. "I had this glass case of a bunch of candles and cups, and I missed the shot, and it broke like three glasses in there."

Fortunately for Ohio State, that destruction of her family's glasses did not stop Bristow's passion for the sport, and over a decade later, she is now part of the Buckeyes' roster after transferring into the program from Providence on May 29.

Following that glass-shattering incident, Bristow continued to play basketball through her teenage years, but she said that there were a few years that she did not have the same passion for the sport, especially in her first year at a high school that did not have a basketball team.

"I kind of lost it a little bit, but I was always playing," Bristow said. "There was never a time where I didn't play. It was just, it became not as serious for a few years. My freshman year of high school, I went to a school that didn't have basketball, so that kind of threw me off, and then I transferred back to a school that had basketball, so I just picked it right back up."

Bristow ultimately transferred over to the Brooklyn Community of Arts and Media (BCAM) in New York and became an impact player, tallying over 1,500 points, 1,000 rebounds and 500 assists during her high school career.

When asked by BSB about what moments stand out throughout her high school career, Bristow listed two specific plays that she thought were the highlights of her time at BCAM, where she also became a top-100 recruit according to All-Star Girls' Report.

"It was a block," she recalled. "It was a fast-break and I ran and I like grabbed it out of her hand while she was going up, so it wasn't even a block. I just snatched it out of her hand in the

air. The second one was my junior year, I always wanted to make a half-court buzzer-beater, and I finally made one before halftime.

"(The half-court shot game) was a crucial game to me because I had strep throat and I had a sinus infection that day. I was not doing well."

Her efforts at BCAM earned her recognition at the collegiate level, but Bristow said she had her sights set on schools in the New York area "because I never was far away from home, so I wanted to stay on the East Coast." That led her to Providence, which she said was the best option of all the East Coast teams.

While with the Friars, Bristow played in 29 games during her true freshman season, starting three times and scoring 2.7 points and grabbing 2.2 rebounds per game while shooting 37.0 percent from the field. She also added nine assists, eight blocks and a pair of steals in 9.0 minutes per game.

Providence as a team went 13-19 and 3-15 in the Big East Conference, but Bristow said that she learned more about herself and what she will be able to do outside of the game during her lone season with the Friars than anything that she learned on the court.

"It was really a lot of off-the-court skills," Bristow said, "how to deal with problems and how to put myself in situations that I'm not comfortable in and succeed at the same time."

But Bristow decided to call it quits with Providence after one season and enter the transfer portal. It was not a decision that came easily, she said, but one that was pushed by the situation in the world around her.

"It was definitely corona, I'm not going to lie," Bristow said. "I was going to go back to school after spring break and push out the postseason workouts and see how things were going to go, but corona stopped that and I was just talking to so many mentors and they were just like 'You only have four years, technically, on the court, so you just can't waste time,' and I knew that, in my heart, I wanted to transfer. So I just stuck with my gut and I decided to transfer."

This presented an opportunity to Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff, who ended up

losing four players to transfers during and after the 2019-20 season in guards Kierstan Bell (Florida Gulf Coast), Janai Crooms (Michigan State) and Kaelynn Satterfield (Xavier), as well as forward Aixa Wone (Georgia Tech).

McGuff was aware of Bristow for what she did prior to her time at Providence and said that he thought she would be a great asset to have for the type of offense that the Buckeyes like to run.

"I saw her in AAU, and I think she's a good fit in our system," McGuff told BSB. "She can play in an up-tempo system. She's a really good athlete, and she's got a great motor and plays hard."

Bristow ultimately made the decision to join the Buckeyes at the end of May, becoming the first transfer into the program for the 2020-21 season. She said that she felt the fit at Ohio State was right, and she appreciated the team's mind-set of not simply looking at what the school needs but also putting her at the forefront of the process.

"A lot of schools were talking to me, but out of all the schools, I felt like Coach McGuff and the staff here, they just had my best interests along with the school's best interests," Bristow said. "They didn't just put the school first."

Though Bristow is joining a completely new team this season, she is not going into a roster that she is entirely unfamiliar with. She comes to Columbus with Kateri Poole, a freshman guard from Bronx (N.Y.) South Shore.

The former five-star prospect played with Bristow in AAU and said she is excited about what the 6-1 guard brings to the table with the Buckeyes.

"Back then, Hevynne was new to the team, but we kind of connected very fast because she's a player that wants to play," Poole told BSB. "She has a dog in her, and she's taking off this year, but she still wants to work and she pushes everybody every day in practice. So knowing that we have that relationship, we just were able to share it with everybody else."

Bristow is indeed taking off this year, as Ohio State has announced that they will not seek immediate eligibility and that Bristow

will redshirt for her second collegiate season. For many players, this might present a mental hurdle to get over, but Bristow has taken it in stride.

"It's hard, but at the same time, she felt comfortable with the concept of kind of committing to just having a year of improving her overall skill set and learning what we do," McGuff said. "I think it's going to be beneficial. She's got a lot of talent. She's got a lot of raw talent that I think we can help her really grow this year."

The former Providence guard agreed with McGuff and said that it was actually a selling point of hers to be able to sit out a season in order to develop under a redshirt year.

"That was a strong reason why I came here, so I'm mentally prepared to just get better and work on skills that held me back from progressing last year," Bristow said. "That's really why I came here. They were like 'We want you to redshirt. If that's what you want that's what we want,' and I was like 'That's perfect,' so I could work on my game, get in shape physically to play in the Big Ten, which is way different conditioning I need."

Ohio State may not get the contributions from Bristow this year as it attempts to improve on an impressive 21-12 season that ended in the Big Ten tournament championship game, but the sophomore guard will be waiting in the wings to help what is still a young team in 2021-22, where she might have the same eligibility after a year impacted by COVID-19.

Regardless, Bristow is ready to make an impact off the court this season, and she would be anything but upset if the team is able to make a run through the Big Ten and into the NCAA tournament during her redshirt campaign.

"As a team, of course the goal is to win a championship, and I'm not even joking," Bristow said. "It's not these clichés. Oh, of course every team says 'We have the chance,' but we really do have the chance to win the Big Ten and go to take the dance. So that's my goal."

"On the court it's just to help as much as I can. Even if it's this year and we win, I just want to help from a different perspective because I'm on the bench and I see things people can't."



Hevynne Bristow

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Bucks Hope To Net Results With Nappier In Goal

In the pre-COVID-19 pandemic era, if the Ohio State men's hockey team had been told they would be practicing at the same time as the best golfers were teeing off at The Masters in Augusta, Ga., it would have been a cause for celebration.

The Masters in normal times is held the second weekend in April, as is the Frozen Four to crown college hockey's Division I national champion.

OSU advanced to the national semifinal for

IN THE CREASE Craig Merz

a second time in its history in 2018, lost in the first round of the NCAA tournament the following season and in March 2020 was poised to make the tournament for a school-record fourth consecutive season until everything was halted due to the coronavirus.

Jump ahead eight months and the pandemic shows no signs of abating, but The Masters was played Nov. 12-15 as the Buckeyes prepared for their delayed season-opening series Nov. 23 and 24 at Minnesota.

With so much that is not normal, Ohio State head coach Steve Rohlik will rely on something that is – the goaltending of senior Tommy Nappier.

The tenth-ranked Buckeyes (20-11-5, 11-9-4 Big Ten last season) lost through graduation their top two scorers and three of their best defensemen, but Nappier will be the backbone and a major reason OSU tied Notre Dame for third of seven teams in the conference coaches' preseason poll.

"Tommy Nappier's in the net, and that's what I've got to count on right now," Rohlik said in a Zoom press conference on Nov. 10.

Nappier, the 2019 Big Ten goaltender of the year as a sophomore, was named to the conference's preseason second team. He is OSU's career leader in goals-against average (1.92) and save percentage (.934).

He is a constant when everything else is in a state of flux.

Under normal circumstances, the Buckeyes' season would have started Oct. 9. There would have been nonconference games to ease into the rigors of the 24-game Big Ten schedule and fans would have been in attendance.

Instead, the Big Ten is following the path set by football by playing only conference games except for each school hosting four games each vs. independent Arizona State (more on that later). In a further nod to the continuing uncertainty, only the dates for 10 games through December have been released.

Of course, even with stringent COVID-19 protocols, nothing is guaranteed.

"Everything's changed," Rohlik said. "I think for me it's important to have great people around you, my staff and everybody, to adjust. I think flexibility has been the big word around here. You have to be flexible because of this fluid situation. It has been a lot different, but in the same sense our mentality has been the same.

"We've just adjusted with our schedule on ice, off ice and doing what we can do with our guys to continue to try to keep everybody safe while we're doing this, so it's been a learning process.

"As soon as you think you know everything, you get knocked back down. I think we've done a pretty good job over the last few weeks of implementing what we need to, but it's certainly been a different year."

Rohlik is grateful that there is a season. When the Big Ten announced on Aug. 11 that there would not be fall sports, including football, he knew there was a possibility that hockey, although technically falling in the winter sports category despite an October start, could be in serious jeopardy.

Fortunately, that decision was reversed a month later, paving the way for hockey to start in November.

Rohlik and his staff kept the players' morale up throughout the ordeal with numerous Zoom meetings, and he reached out to

the conference coaches and those in other leagues to see how they were handling things.

"Zoom and I are pretty good friends right now," Rohlik said. "I can't wait to leave Zoom behind here pretty soon and get back to some normality, but it's certainly been the opportunity to reach out to a lot of people to try to get through this situation."

He's learned a lot about himself through the process.

"Communication is key with everything," he said. "Sometimes you take for granted the communication you have with these guys every day and all of a sudden that face-to-face, or in person, contact is not there but there's certainly other ways, and it forces you to communicate in a better way."

Coming And Going

It's especially important to send clear messages with eight newcomers to the program to replace the eight departed seniors.

The most notable to leave were forwards Tanner Laczynski and Carson Meyer, each of whom signed an NHL contract after the 2019-20 season.

Laczynski joined the Philadelphia Flyers organization. He had 143 career points (48 goals, 95 assists) and last season he led the Buckeyes with 34 points (11-23) in 36 games.

Meyer signed with the hometown Blue Jackets at the conclusion of four college seasons, the first two at Miami (Ohio). He put in his name in Buckeye lore when he had a five-point, four-goal game against Wisconsin on March 6 in a 9-1 thrashing in the 2020 Big Ten tournament.

Meyer had 31 points (17-14) in 35 games last season, and in two seasons with the Buckeyes he totaled 26 goals and 27 assists for 53 points in 71 games.

Captain Ronnie Hein was fifth in points his final season when he produced 17 points (8-9) in 35 games. The other senior forwards were Miguel Fidler with five points (1-4) and Sam McCormick with four (1-3).

The top-scoring defenseman among the seniors was Matt Miller, who scored five times and had 17 points. Gordi Myer netted 14 points (5-9), and Wyatt Ege notched four goals to go along with eight assists.

Ohio State has added five freshmen and three transfers to plug the holes, although replacing the production of Laczynski and Meyer won't be easy.

Stopping The Puck

Nappier (6-3, 220) was a Big Ten honorable mention in 2019-20 when he was 17-10-4 with a 2.04 GAA, .932 save percentage and three shutouts to give him eight in his career, fourth best in program history. The St. Louis native was voted the team MVP last season.

Sophomore Ryan Snowden (6-3, 205)

played five games, starting four and was 3-1-1, 2.52, .905 last season. He made his debut on Nov. 23 at the start of the third period at Penn State when Nappier got injured and stopped all 15 shots for a 4-3 win.

Snowden made 27 saves at Michigan State a week later for the 3-1 win in his first career start.

The lone career game for senior Evan Moyse (6-2, 180) from Olmsted Falls, Ohio, was 32:56 of mop-up duty against Bowling Green on Oct. 26, 2018, when he stopped 11 of 13 shots.

Nappier will get the bulk of work, but Snowden has proved to be a capable backup and will look to be the starter for the 2021-22 season.

Forward Thinking

Without Laczynski, Meyer and Hein, the burden of scoring will fall to juniors Quinn Preston and Gustaf Westlund, each named as a preseason honorable mention in the Big Ten.

Both had 26 points last season to tie for third on the team. Preston (5-11, 182) was fourth in the Big Ten with 15 goals and scored in nine of the final 12 games. He has 40 (20-20) career points.

Westlund (6-0, 175) rebounded from an injury-plagued freshman season to post 12 goals and 14 assists. He tied for first in the league and tied for 10th nationally with four game-winning goals. He has 45 career points (17-28).

Senior Austin Pooley (6-2, 210) was alternate captain last season and will provide leadership again. He was named captain on Nov. 13 with Preston, Westlund and senior defenseman Grant Gabriele the alternate captains.

Pooley switched from No. 14 to 12, the same number worn by his father, Perry, at Ohio State from 1981-84. Austin last season set career highs in assists (nine) and points (12).

The other senior forwards are Eugene Fadyeyev (5-11, 170) and Colin Peters (6-0, 185). Fadyeyev has increased his playing time each season from five games as a freshman to 32 last season when he garnered all five of his career assists. He has two career goals.

Peters had a goal and an assist in 22 games last season despite missing 13 games with an injury. He scored his first OSU goal against Wisconsin in the first game of the 2020 tournament.

Junior forward Matthew Jennings (5-8, 173) was named the team's co-most improved player last season after receiving the same honor the year before. He had two goals and an assist in 29 games after playing four games as a sophomore.

Tate Singleton leads the sophomore forwards. He is an energetic player who doesn't mind mixing it up despite his size (5-9, 177).

Singleton tied for fourth in points among Big Ten freshmen with 17 points (6-11) while



Tommy Nappier

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playing all 36 games. In the 9-1 win over Wisconsin in the Big Ten tournament, he had three assists and was a plus-5.

Jaedon Leslie (6-1, 187) from St. Albert, Alberta, missed the first 12 games of his freshman season because of an injury. He still managed seven points (4-3) and a plus-6 in 15 games and had points in six of the final nine games, including the overtime winner to clinch the quarterfinal series vs. Wisconsin.

Rohlik is excited to see how Singleton and Leslie respond to expanded responsibilities.

"We need everybody to step up, and certainly they did at the end. As freshmen when you step into this level, most times it's a learning curve, and that was true with those two players," the coach said.

"You saw the contributions that they brought to us as the season went on. Tate is such an energy player. You need that. He can be anywhere in your lineup, and I think Jaedon with an injury early last year set him back a little bit, but as the year continued to progress, his game progressed.

"I'm looking to him to play up the middle where we need some centers and lean on him a little bit more. I would suspect that both players will take a leap this year."

Matt Cassidy had no points in 15 games with Quinnipiac in 2018-19 before playing for the Youngstown (Ohio) Phantoms junior hockey team in the United States Hockey League and garnering 36 points (19-17) in 49 games.

Mark Cheremata (5-11, 185) joins the Buckeyes following a stint with the Dubuque (Iowa) Fighting Saints (USHL) last season where he collected 43 points (18-25) in 48 games. In 29 games for Boston University the previous season he had three assists in 29 games.

Dalton Messina (5-11, 195) played 10 games with no points last season as a freshman. Kamil Sadlocha (5-11, 185) is a sophomore whose lone career point in 21 games was a goal vs. Mercyhurst last season.

Michael Gildon had a goal and two assists in eight games as a freshman in 2019-20 before an injury sidelined him for the rest of the season.

The freshman forwards are Joe Dunlap, Patrick Guzzo and Travis Treloar.

Dunlap (6-0, 185) is from Windham, N.H. He had 28 points (11-7) for Fargo (N.D.) Force (USHL) last season. Guzzo (6-3, 198) is a Marysville, Mich., native who played for the Waterloo (Iowa) Black Hawks (USHL) last season and got 24 points (12-12). Treloar (5-11, 177) also played in the USHL, for the Lincoln (Neb.) Stars, and put up 14 goals and 35 assists in 48 games last season. He was born in Kalmar, Sweden, but lists Fredrikstad, Norway, as home.

Being Defensive

The defense has five returnees, a transfer and two freshmen.

Gabriele (6-2, 197) is an example of being brought along slowly in a program that has had depth on defense for years. He did not get into a game as freshman, played 24 as a sophomore and last season did not miss a game when he had four goals and nine assists.

He will anchor the defense along with sophomore Layton Ahac, a third-round pick (86th overall) by the Vegas Golden Knights in the 2019 NHL draft.

Ahac (6-2, 195) tied for second on the team with a plus-10, which was third among all Big Ten defensemen. He had three assists in 36 games.

Junior Ryan O'Connell (6-1, 185) had a

goal and six assists in 29 games last season. He was drafted 203rd by the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2017.

Big things are expected from sophomore C.J. Regula (6-3, 205), whose progress was stymied when he missed 12 games with a neck injury after being checked into the boards early in the season at Wisconsin. He had three assists in 23 games.

James Marooney (5-9, 165) is a sophomore from Chaska, Minn., who played 13 games and earned his lone career point with an assist vs. Minnesota on Jan. 24.

Sophomore Dominic Vidoli (6-0, 190) played six games for Boston University in 2018-19 before leaving. He went to the Sioux City (Iowa) Musketeers (USHL) and played there last season when he appeared in only 19 games and had three goals and 13 assists.

Freshman Ryan Dickinson (6-3, 205) hails from Brighton, Mich., the same hometown as Gabriele. Dickinson played the past two seasons for the Shreveport (La.) Mudbugs of the junior North American Hockey League, where he combined for 33 points (6-27) in 98 games.

The other frosh defenseman is Evan McIntyre (5-10, 174) from Oakville, Ontario. He played for Penticton in the British Columbia Hockey League last season and recorded six goals and 23 assists.

"With the limited amount of time that we've truly had and for the amount of players that we've lost over the last couple years, just like any year, this is going to be a different personality," Rohlik said. "It's a new group. Our goals continue to stay the same. We're going to be competitive. I like the snapshot of our group."

The Schedule

It's not an easy start for the Buckeyes with games at Minnesota Nov. 23 and 24.

The Golden Gophers have been tabbed the best team in the conference and return 93.0 percent of their goal-scoring and 87.2 percent of their points. Both games will be on the Big Ten Network (8:30 p.m.)

The Buckeyes' first home series is Nov. 28-29 vs. Michigan State followed by Wisconsin visiting Value City Arena on Dec. 3 and 4. OSU's games at Notre Dame Dec. 12 (7 p.m.) and 13 (5 p.m.) will be on NBCSN.

OSU completes the schedule to date with home games vs. Arizona State Dec. 17 and 18. Of the first 10 games, there are two each on Sunday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday and single games on a Monday and Tuesday.

Arizona State is in the role as an unofficial member of the conference for this strange season. It's a win-win.

With most conferences playing league-only slates, the Sun Devils as an independent were desperate for games. The Big Ten wanted more than just playing conference games so Arizona State agreed to employ the Big Ten's COVID-19 protocols and will play all 28 games vs. the seven conference schools on the road. The games will not count in the standings.

"They have taken a big leap so they could play games and have a season, and we felt they would work out well with our schedule," Rohlik said.

The conference tournament will return to the one-weekend, single-elimination format used during the first four years of Big Ten hockey with all seven teams involved at a site to be determined.

The tournament will be held March 18-20 and will consist of six games (three games on Thursday; two games on Friday; and the championship game on Saturday). In recent years, tournament games were held on campus.



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OSU Lost Not Only A Game, But An Opportunity

It looks like 2020 won again.

When this pandemic started, there was so much uncertainty about everything – especially sports. Pro leagues halted campaigns midstride before recalibrating and finishing up. The NBA and NHL operated in “bubbles” and were able to award championships, and Major League Baseball, after a few fits and starts, ended up with an excellent World Series and a champion of its own.

THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

College sports was a bit more up in the air, with leagues first canceling, then walking it back to delaying the start, to finally playing games. And the games that have been played have been glorious. Any Saturday with college football is something to be treasured, especially in a season such as this.

There was always the specter of a massive outbreak, of a week where a ton of games would be postponed or canceled. This was that week. A total of 16 games were scratched, the most in a single week of the 2020 college football season. Among those scratches was Ohio State.

At least Ohio State wasn't just sitting around. Ryan Day put the Buckeyes through their paces with an intense Nov. 14 practice, all in hopes of being a finely tuned machine for the upcoming showdown with unbeaten and division leading – yes, you read that right – Indiana. The Hoosiers won again, smacking Michigan State, and have played the Buckeyes tough before succumbing in recent seasons. It's rare that anything other than the Michigan game is the biggest on the schedule, but Indiana has managed to do that. This is the best (and maybe last) chance for Ohio State to stumble, so it needs to be on point.

When the revamped Big Ten schedule was released, there was also the concern about flexibility. The league left zero wiggle room, and it certainly looks as though there will be a different number of games for different teams.

Wisconsin has missed two opportunities, Purdue has missed one, Ohio State has missed one. Others have missed none. It was a terrible system from the start, and the league was its own worst enemy.

Had the original schedule been left alone, things would have been fine. There were off weeks built in, and it would have been much easier to reschedule games so that everyone played the same number. Instead, we're left with this jigsaw puzzle that has some pieces missing. A terrible way to operate.

If the Big Ten was forward thinking – I'll give you time to stop laughing – it would have instituted a rule that said a team that had to cancel a game due to outbreak automatically received a loss, and the opponent that was affected received a win (assuming it did not also have an outbreak). This way, every game would be accounted for, and teams would have worked harder to keep their players under control.

There were reports circulating in the days after the postponement of the OSU-Maryland game that the Terrapins did not properly handle protocols – not administering PCR test after positive antigen tests. That's supposed to be part of the testing protocol, but it sounds as though Maryland didn't follow it. In the days after the postponement, Maryland coach Mike Locksley said that his team was operating with a business as usual approach, as if its Nov. 21 game with Michigan State will be played.

Even the testing has come under scrutiny after a number of players – OSU's Justin Hilliard included – tested positive and were not supposed to play, but the follow up showed it to be a false positive. And if the CDC has recommended 14 days of isolation, why on earth was Wisconsin's Graham Mertz forced to sit out 21 days? Just about every step the league has taken has been wrong, or has at the very least looked clumsy.

If a loss was automatically given to a team that didn't follow protocols or had an outbreak, you can bet that coaches would be more diligent about things. Because wins and losses equal money. Postponements and cancellations mean nothing.

It isn't only the schools affected, but the big picture. Ohio State will now have one fewer data point for the College Football Playoff committee, so it will have a weaker case when compared

to Notre Dame or Alabama or teams that have played eight or nine games without a blemish. The most OSU can play now is eight, and that matters in this highly abnormal season. Which is why every game should be accounted for in the win-loss column.

It could also affect the Heisman Trophy chances of Justin Fields, who if things hold true is going to have fewer chances than Mac Jones or Kyle Trask to impress voters. Sure, he may put up otherworldly numbers, but when the other guys have better numbers because they've played more games, it means there's a good chance that Fields will be shut out of an award for which he is more than deserving.

It isn't so much sympathy toward the Big Ten as it is anger, because all of this could have been avoided. The league has a ton of smart people, and they could have easily formulated a Plan A and Plan B, with the ability to revert to parts of one or the other should an outbreak occur. Instead, the league sat on its hands while others played, didn't give any kind of leeway in terms of rescheduling missed games, and now is in a precarious position. I'm looking forward to the end of the season, when an unbeaten Alabama and Notre Dame and a one-loss league champion Oklahoma State are all in the CFP, and OSU gets overtaken by a 10-0 Cincinnati or BYU. OK, so that probably won't happen. But if it did you know the league would scream to the high heavens about it, saying how unfair it was.

And the league would have no one but itself to blame for rolling out one of the worst approaches to the season.

Congrats, Big Ten.

You'd better hope everything else falls properly from here on out.

Big Ten Woes

While there is a part of me that chuckles each time Michigan and Penn State loses, there's also something that says it's probably better for the league if those usual powerhouses are good.

The Big Ten is way down this year, sitting roughly third in the eyes of one unofficial observer.

The SEC has its usual perch at the top, but the ACC has been a surprising second. The one-season addition of Notre Dame has helped a lot, but there are good to very good teams all over that league.

You can't say the same about the Big Ten.

Ohio State is the only truly elite team, while Indiana, Wisconsin and Northwestern are all solid to very good. After them? Mostly mediocrity.

The fact that the Wolverines and Nittany Lions are struggling – and that Indiana and Northwestern are unbeaten and ranked – shows just how upside-down college football is in 2020.

They are nice stories but really don't help the profile of the conference.

As for U-M and Penn State, they have arrived at this point via different paths.

Michigan has recruited fairly well but has

done zero development or coaching up of its players. It has never found a quarterback in Jim Harbaugh's tenure, and this year things have gotten worse as the Wolverines look completely unprepared and fail to adjust to their opponent on a weekly basis. The 49-11 loss to Wisconsin was as bad as Michigan has looked in ages, and for the first time all season Michigan looked like it quit. That's the biggest indictment someone can make about a team, so if it doesn't turn around quickly you can bet the radio shows in Ann Arbor and surrounding areas will be fraught with anger and consternation.

Don't be shocked if Harbaugh decides to go back to the NFL after this season, especially if the Wolverines finish the year with one or two victories.

Penn State's journey to winless has been quite different. The Nittany Lions were seen as the chief contender to Ohio State's East Division crown, but when linebacker Micah Parsons decided to opt out of the season, the gap got just a little bit wider between the two teams.

Just before the season Penn State learned it would be without running back Journey Brown for an undetermined length of time, which later turned out to be forever as Brown had to retire from football due to a recently discovered heart ailment. Backup Noah Cain was injured early in the season, the receiving corps is young and so far not very good, and the quarterback situation has been a disaster. There were high hopes for Sean Clifford, even though he was mostly average a year ago, and those haven't materialized.

One has to wonder whether Penn State would be in this position had it not lost to Indiana in the opener in controversial fashion. A loss like that can play with your mind, especially when you know you were the better team. Sports is so much mental, and it's quite possible that Penn State was kicking itself and feeling sorry for itself after that game. And that has manifested itself on the field, where the team has turned the ball over and failed to consistently mount scoring drives.

Would the higher-ups fire James Franklin if Penn State does the unthinkable and goes 0-8? Probably not.

This season will likely be considered an outlier by most ADs and presidents, so a downturn will be given a pass. Maybe coaches who were already on hot seats get whacked at the end of the year if their teams underachieve, but coaches who entered 2020 on stable footing almost certainly will keep their jobs no matter how bad their record is.

That said, I wouldn't be shocked if Franklin at least listens to overtures from other schools in the offseason. He was rumored to be high on the list at USC last season when it looked like Clay Helton was going to be shown the door. Franklin's “innovative offensive mind” makes him a coveted commodity in the offseason, and even though he has time remaining on his PSU deal and hasn't expressed any desire to leave, his name will no doubt be in the coaching headlines once the 2020 season ends.



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Plenty Of Questions Remain Around 2020 Season

I want to ask some questions of you. They are probably questions that we can't answer completely right now, but with no game to recap this week due to the cancellation of the game with Maryland, I have the space and the reason to ask.

1) Do you think the Big Ten should have stuck to its decision to cancel or further postponed the 2020 football season?

2) If the SEC and the other major conferences had canceled their seasons at that time, do you think the Big Ten, even with more detailed protocols, would have reinstated the season?

3) Should fans have been allowed into Big Ten stadiums on a limited (perhaps the 20-25 percent capacity discussed), socially distanced basis?

4) If Ohio State wasn't expected to have a team equipped to challenge for the national championship, do you believe Buckeye fans, team members, parents, coaches, administrators, etc. would have been as aggressive in leading the charge to play football this fall?

My responses:

1) It's too early to tell if this was a right or wrong decision. If things continue the way they have so far, I would say the pandemic has been a nuisance, but there is still the possibility of having a relevant regular season, Big Ten championship (I love the format where all teams play on Championship Weekend) and playoff.

However, things seem to have taken a turn for the worse recently, with more and more important cancellations. If things continue in that direction, causing more and more chaos, the answer will probably start to lean more toward the Big Ten should have stuck to its guns.

2) There is no question in my mind that the Big Ten (and the Pac 12, for that matter) thought the other major conferences would follow their lead and cancel/postpone their seasons. Once other conferences kicked off and there was minimal disruption, the pressure on the Big Ten ramped up. Suddenly, the conference powers-that-be came up with protocols that they were able to deem acceptable. I keep hearing my mother (I know you are reading this, Faye) telling a younger me, "If Peter Grove (my best friend and now brother-in-law) jumped off a cliff, would you?"

Was the Big Ten following suit and jumping off the COVID cliff the right decision? See answer No. 1 above.

3) This is one most of you will probably disagree with me on, but my answer would be "No." This is a super-spreader event waiting to happen. You could easily socially distance 20-25,000 people in a 105,000-seat stadium. But how do you control their walking to the stadium from the parking lots, walking on the concourse, buying concessions (some possible control there), using the restroom, etc. And tailgating would have to be out, which would diminish the experience for many.

4) Buckeye fans are Buckeye fans. Having Ohio State football in the fall is as much a part of their lives as Thanksgiving or Christmas. Football players love football and would want to play. Potential pro prospects and their stage parents would want the chance for improvement and NFL exposure. And the administrators would want the revenue. So yes, I think there would have been a desire for football, either way.

The fact that the Buckeyes might be as good as we think they can be (still a little hard to tell after three games) just makes wanting to play more compelling.

But if things keep heading in the wrong direction, the quest for the championship could

THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

become so convoluted that the asterisk attached to the 2020 national title would make Roger Maris' asterisk seem minor.

In closing, as I wonder what direction the season is heading, I think of something Columbus Dispatch columnist Rob Oller recently wrote:

"What happens when players from programs out of contention decide, 'Hey, enough of this bubble stuff. With little to play for we're hitting the bars and enjoying college life.'"

Each week, more teams are out of contention. Is the worst yet to come?

I certainly hope not.

End Of The Bruce Era

For the second week in a row, there were two games worthy of being included in BSB's 40th Anniversary football season, where we recap the biggest game from each corresponding week in our first 39 years. During the week of Nov. 14-20, Iowa scored a stunning last-second win over Ohio State that prompted the firing of Earle Bruce in 1987. And in 2006, Ohio State participated in one of those "Games of the Century," when the No. 1-ranked Buckeyes hosted No. 2 Michigan.

As the self-appointed commissioner of the 40th Anniversary season, I decided to feature both significant games. The OSU-Michigan battle will be recalled in the Nov. 28 issue of BSB.

As for the 1987 Iowa game, the Buckeyes had already lost two games in a row and three on the season (Ol' 9-3 Earle's quota). The Buckeyes, trailing in the fourth quarter, put together an impressive and time-consuming drive to take the lead, 27-22, with just 2:45 to play.

The Hawkeyes marched up the field in a last-ditch effort to win the game, converting a fourth-and-3 along the way. But the Buckeye defense put them in a seemingly insurmountable predicament with a fourth-and-23 at the OSU 28 and just 16 seconds to play.

Iowa quarterback Chuck Hartlieb looked to tight end Marv Cook. Sean Bell had Cook well covered at the 8, but Cook made the catch. Bo Pelini and David Brown were in position to make the tackle, but they didn't and suddenly Iowa had the win and soon thereafter, Bruce, in his ninth season at Ohio State, was out of a job. It had been that type of season.

Buckeye receiver Everett Ross summed up the game and the season to that date with an interesting quote.

"In a way, it almost seems we do everything right," Ross tried to explain. "But in the long run, it seems like we can't do anything right. No matter how hard we try, how good we play, or how bad we play, the outcome is always the same."

The painful loss overshadowed a fine performance from Ross, a junior from Columbus Eastmoor, who had four catches for 123 yards and touchdowns of 24 and 60 yards.

Quarterback Tom Tupa, who was 13 of 22 passing for 216 yards and three scores and engineered what looked to be the game-winning drive, was able to keep his sense of humor after the disappointing loss, which continued a disappointing season.

"This season has been amazing," Tupa said. "I guess I've seen it all now. I wish I hadn't."

There was no humor for Bruce. Just pain.

"Naturally, when you lose, how can I come in here and say I feel good? What would you

expect me to be, some idiot? I'm not," Bruce said after the game. "I have feelings like anyone else. We just lost a heartbreaking football game on the last play of the game – one in which we fought and fought and fought."

"I'm deeply disappointed for our football team, our coaching staff and our fans who supported us. That's all I have to say."

Even the best of football teams lose games, sometimes in strange ways like the Buckeyes did against Iowa. It happens. But it is what happened next that makes this loss so significant in Ohio State football history.

The Columbus movers and shakers had been unhappy with Bruce for some time. And Buckeye fans, fatigued of the 9-3 records and Bruce's stubbornness on offense as football was changing around him, were also starting to turn up the heat on the coach who had replaced the legendary Woody Hayes.

"The whole thing was building and in my own views, the detractors were just waiting for an excuse," athletic director Rick Bay said. "And 9-3 wasn't a big enough excuse. It wasn't quite justifiable. But when we got to four losses, including one to Wisconsin, a poor showing against Michigan State ... three in a row, the detractors had an excuse."

University president Edward Jennings acted swiftly, firing Bruce at the start of Michigan week. Bay resigned in protest.

To this day I believe that there would have been little uproar if Bruce had been fired after the season. But Michigan week was truly sacred back then, and the actions of the university suddenly coalesced Buckeye Nation behind Bruce.

"What can I say about it?" Bruce asked after being informed of his termination. "All you can say is I think they have a right to fire a person, but I think it's very poor timing – right before the Michigan game. I don't think that's quite fair. They can do it anytime, but not before the Michigan game."

Of course, Bruce – who finished with a 5-4 record against Michigan, all against the legendary Bo Schembechler – started his march to Buckeye icon status with his team's hard-fought victory over the Wolverines in Ann Arbor in his final game as coach.

"The great thing was about how well Earle handled the situation," former Buckeye coach Bill Conley told our Wyatt Crosher for the story that appears on page 20 of this issue. "I mean obviously he was very emotional and everything, but he told us it was going to be work as usual, you have to beat Michigan. We just worked really hard that week, the kids worked hard. We didn't have a bad practice, and you know the story about the headbands and all that stuff, so the kids really came to play. They played their hearts out."

"It was very emotional because I think we all thought maybe, as coaches, if we come back and have a good game to win, maybe they would possibly even change their mind and let Earle stay, but it didn't work out that way," Conley continued. "The kids obviously were on a mission, not only just to beat Michigan, (but also) a mission to show their support of the coaching staff and especially Earle."

Staff Rises To Occasion

Bruce's firing and Bay's resignation on BSB deadline created one of the bigger challenges in our first 39 years of publishing – right up there with an ill-timed massive computer failure

and a power outage caused by, of all things, a hurricane.

Still, the staff at the time did a really good job of covering the story and getting the paper out on time.

I had this simple note in this space in the Nov. 21, 1987, issue of BSB:

"If this edition of BSB seems somewhat disjointed, if some of the stories seem out of date or out of place, please understand that the late breaking nature of the Bruce-Bay story caused us to do some quick changing around at the very last moment."

It looks like I never thanked the entire staff, led by assistant publisher Karen Wachsmann and associate editor Ken Halloy, for their yeoman effort. The content of the paper stands up well, even after 33 years have passed.

Nancy Darsch Remembered

BSB columnist and longtime women's basketball beat writer Mike Wachsmann gave me some grief because I didn't mention the passing of former Buckeye basketball coach Nancy Darsch in my column last issue.

Truth be told, I had kind of an up-and-down relationship with Darsch. When it was good, it was really good, and when it wasn't – well it wasn't. And in reality, it was Mike who dealt with her daily for all those years.

One thing about her. If you were looking for warm and fuzzy in a coach, she was not your coach. I think in her later years with Ohio State, that personality hurt her on the recruiting trail, which ultimately led to a decline in her record.

"I was a little bit afraid of her in the beginning," Mike admitted, "because she kind of had that East Coast mentality being from Massachusetts, like, you know how New Yorkers aren't afraid to say what they're thinking, and it may hurt your feelings."

But let's look at Nancy Darsch's place in Ohio State women's basketball history.

Ohio State has had only five coaches in the modern era of women's basketball, including Darsch. Two of them, Tara VanDerveer and Jim Foster, are in the Women's Basketball Hall of Fame, and the Buckeyes' current coach, Kevin McGuff, may someday be enshrined himself.

But of all those successful coaches, only one has led the Buckeyes to the Final Four, and that was Darsch in 1993.

Some will say that Darsch only made it to basketball's pinnacle because of the presence of Katie Smith, one of the greatest players at the college, pro and Olympic levels in women's basketball history.

But it was Darsch who was able to recruit Smith – who could have gone to any college power of her choosing – out of Logan, Ohio. More importantly, Darsch was able to quickly integrate her phenom and her fellow freshmen into the program without alienating the veteran players, which enabled the Final Four run.

"The freshmen got a lot of playing time, and there were seniors on that team who could have had their egos bruised by that," Wachsmann said about that Final Four year. "And I think Nancy pretty much nipped that in the bud early by saying, 'Look, these kids can play, they're going to play, and everyone needs to just accept that we're all going to play as a unit.'"

The Buckeyes made it to the national championship game, and there it took a superhuman effort by Sheryl Swoopes for Texas Tech to defeat the Buckeyes by two points and take home the title.

While some Buckeye team in the future may make it to the Final Four, Darsch will forever be the first coach to lead Ohio State that far, and for that reason her name will always be etched in Ohio State women's basketball history.

FOR ATHLETES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

A concussion is a brain injury that affects how your brain works. It can happen when your brain gets bounced around in your skull after a fall or hit to the head.

CONCUSSION SYMPTOMS

- Headache, nausea vomiting, balance problems, dizziness double or blurred vision, sensitivity to light or noise, feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy, memory problems, confusion, just not "feeling right" or "feeling down".

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I THINK I HAVE A CONCUSSION?



REPORT IT. Tell your coach, parent, and athletic trainer if you think you or one of your teammates may have a concussion. It's up to you to report your symptoms. Your coach and team are relying on you. Plus, you won't play your best if you are not feeling well.

GET CHECKED OUT. If you think you have a concussion, do not return to play on the day of the injury. Only a health care provider can tell if you have a concussion and when it is OK to return to school and play. The sooner you get checked out, the sooner you may be able to safely return to play.

GIVE YOUR BRAIN TIME TO HEAL. A concussion can make everyday activities, such as going to school, harder. You may need extra help getting back to your normal activities. Be sure to update your parents and doctor about how you are feeling.

WHY SHOULD I TELL MY COACH & PARENTS ABOUT MY SYMPTOMS?

Playing or practicing with a concussion is dangerous and can lead to a longer recovery.

While your brain is still healing, you are much more likely to have another concussion. This can put you at risk for a more serious injury to your brain

GOOD TEAMMATES KNOW: IT'S BETTER TO MISS ONE GAME THAN THE WHOLE SEASON

<http://www.odh.ohio.gov/concussion>



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