

## Ohio State Hopes To Play At MSU Despite Pause In Team Activities

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Although reports of a coronavirus outbreak in the Ohio State football program overshadowed the Thanksgiving holiday, the Buckeyes posted photos from practice and a movie trailer to social media that made it seem as if the game against Illinois would be played as scheduled on Nov. 28.

But about an hour after that video was shared, the university announced the game was canceled and that the program was shutting down team activities due to an increase in positive cases.

The decision was made on the evening of Nov. 27 – roughly 10 hours before Ohio State's flight was set to depart for Champaign, Ill. – in an effort to give Ohio State a chance to play its last two regular-season games, which includes a trip to Michigan State on Dec. 5 before the rivalry game against Michigan on Dec. 12.

"We made a decision last night to pause because our positivity rate reached a concerning level," athletic director Gene Smith said on Nov. 28. "We did not reach the Big Ten protocol thresholds, but the positivity rate was concerning enough where we felt we needed to pause and try to find a way to mitigate its spread and continue to ensure the safety of our student-athletes."

As mentioned, the Buckeyes were not forced to cancel the game by the Big Ten's agreed-upon protocols. In order for that to happen, the team's test positivity rate (described as the number of positive tests divided by the number of tests administered over a one-week period) must be greater than 5 percent and the population positive rate (number of positive individuals divided by the total population at risk) must surpass 7.5 percent.

Ohio State team physician Dr. Jim Borchers said the program exceeded the latter following its round of testing on Nov. 27, with more than 7.5 percent of the 170 Tier-I individuals – which includes players, coaches and other staff members – being positive.

The Buckeyes have not passed the test positivity rate, however.



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**BLACK FRIDAY** – Head coach Ryan Day was among those in the Ohio State football program who tested positive for coronavirus on Nov. 27, leading the Buckeyes to cancel their game at Illinois the following day.

"We put those thresholds in place to provide some guidance," said Borchers, who served as co-chairman of the Big Ten's return-to-play medical subcommittee. "The expectation was that as institutions were seeing numbers that would approach those thresholds, they would be making decisions to pause."

"That's exactly what should happen. It shouldn't be a hard and fast to just go play at all costs. That's exactly where we arrived Friday afternoon."

The first positive tests in the Ohio State football

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## From The Message Board

***Ohio State has not been dominant as many expected or as dominant as it was last year, so we asked readers on the Buckeye Sports Bulletin Fan Forum if they think the Buckeyes have proved they're worthy of the College Football Playoff thus far. Here are some of the responses:***

"Yes. They are far and away one of the top-four teams. If they can somehow make it, they will prove that. Their offense is one of the most if not the most dynamic in the entire league."

– Tiffin Buckeye

"My first thought based off of what I have seen so far would be no. But if not us, then who? I know our defense has been suspect, but I cannot think of four other teams in the country that have a better overall team than the Buckeyes. So, I guess my answer would be yes, although I don't think we would be a threat to win it."

– bstu9

"I've wondered from the beginning how teams would be judged and ranked with different numbers of games played. Concretely, I have some doubts if 4-0 would let any team qualify for a four-team CFP. OSU is undoubtedly one of the four best teams

in the country. At this point, I think the bigger question is whether there will be a CFP? If there is, it will be considered suspect or fraudulent."

– Terrier Buck

"Not yet. We need more experience (games) to clean up defense and special teams. From what I've seen, I don't think we could defeat Alabama, Clemson, Notre Dame, Texas A&M, Florida, or Cincy."

– R1TBDBITL

"I need another look at that secondary before I can give a definitive answer. Was the Indiana game a fluke or is the pass defense that bad? But this may not have anything to do with the four best teams, but who the four REMAINING teams are."

– Poster That Harley Built

## From The Pages Of BSB

### 35 Years Ago – 1985

Earle Bruce was offered his eighth straight one-year contract to continue as football coach at Ohio State.

"I think it's ridiculous to have to make a position statement on Earle," athletic director Rick Bay said. "He's my football coach, no reservations whatsoever. He and his staff have done an outstanding job.

"I don't call it a contract. They are letters of reappointment. They are computer letters. They are cranked out automatically. The only way they are not is if I want to make a change or a coach resigns."

Although Bay would have liked to be able to offer coaches multiyear contracts, Ohio law forbade him from doing so.

"We should have multiyear agreements," said Bay. "It puts us at a slight disadvantage from a recruiting standpoint. Some recruiters use it against us."

### 30 Years Ago – 1990

All a person had to do to gauge Ohio State senior quarterback Greg Frey's reaction to the Buckeyes' 16-13 loss to Michigan was to look at his face.

Frey, 0-3 as a starter against Michigan, was visibly shaken after the game. He kept his head down and searched for just the right words to describe his feelings about his final game in the Horseshoe.

"It's certainly not the way I wanted to go out," he said. "We wanted to go for the win, no question. What else can you do? They called the right defense and stuffed it.

"It's a good play, mainly because they weren't expecting it. They just guessed right."

The play in question, called "Four Dive," was called with the Buckeyes facing fourth down and inches at the OSU 29 with 1:38 remaining in the game.

It appeared to be an option play, but both OSU head coach John Cooper and offensive coordinator Jim Colletto indicated Frey was to fake to the fullback and fall forward for the first down. Michigan sniffed it out, and Frey was stopped short of the first-down marker.

### 25 Years Ago – 1995

Ohio State's dream season, complete with visions of the Rose Bowl and a national championship, turned into a nightmare Nov. 25 at "The Big House." Unbeaten and untied, the second-ranked Buckeyes went into Ann Arbor, Mich., looking for a win in order to lock up the school's first Rose Bowl berth in 11 years.

Instead, Michigan tailback Tim Biakabutuka rushed for 313 yards – the most ever by an Ohio State opponent – as the 18th-ranked Wolverines upset the Buckeyes 31-23 and knocked them out of the Rose Bowl hunt.

"I've never been as disappointed as I am right now," said Cooper, whose team fell to 11-1 overall and finished second in the Big Ten behind Rose Bowl-bound Northwestern (10-1, 8-0).

"I'm disappointed not only for my coaches, but I'm probably more disappointed for the senior football players on this team. They've never been to the Rose Bowl. I've been to the Rose Bowl, and it's a great experience," Cooper said.

### 20 Years Ago – 2000

There had been speculation that a couple of Buckeyes would not return for the 2001 season. Reports surfaced that junior cornerback Nate Clements was considering an early jump to the NFL, while freshman running back Sam Maldonado threatened to transfer after a postgame spat with running backs coach Tim Spencer. But recent comments seemed to indicate that both would be staying put.

"I'm coming back, as of now," Clements said. "You don't hear me saying that I'm leaving. I'm just focusing on football. I haven't really thought about it."

Maldonado admitted that he was frustrated with his situation at OSU after serving as a reserve in 2000 but did not plan to leave.

"I'm not going anywhere," Maldonado said. "I said (I would transfer) but I'm not serious about it. I'm a Buckeye."

### 15 Years Ago – 2005

With Troy Smith slinging the ball all over the field, Ohio State rallied to beat Michigan, 25-21, and capture a share of the Big Ten championship.

The Buckeyes trailed 21-12 halfway through the fourth quarter, but Smith threw a touchdown pass to Santonio Holmes and then hit Anthony Gonzalez with a long pass down the sideline to set up Antonio Pittman's game-winning touchdown run. The Buckeyes' quarterback finished with his first 300-yard passing game and for a second year in a row did not throw an interception against the Wolverines.

When Penn State beat Michigan State later on the same day, the Nittany Lions and Buckeyes officially became co-champs.

### 10 Years Ago – 2010

Eight days after Ohio State wrapped up the 2010 regular season with another victory over Michigan, the Buckeyes learned their postseason fate. After going 11-1 and earning a share of a record-tying sixth straight Big Ten title, they would have the chance to put to rest a streak that had dogged the program since the days when Woody Hayes patrolled the sidelines.

The No. 6 Buckeyes would face 10-2 Arkansas on Jan. 4 in the Sugar Bowl, providing an opportunity for Ohio State to claim its first ever bowl victory against a team from the Southeastern Conference. Nine OSU squads before them had tried and failed.

The perception that Ohio State couldn't beat an SEC foe was not lost on Buckeye players.

"Of course it's constantly heard, and you can't really escape it in today's society with all the media, shows like 'SportsCenter' and Twitter and Facebook," said senior safety Jermale Hines. "It's something that's always with us."

### Five Years Ago – 2015

When Ohio State students gathered to take the annual plunge in Mirror Lake on Nov. 24, tragedy struck.

Austin Singletary, a third-year student from Bellbrook, Ohio, died in the early-morning hours Nov. 25 after reportedly breaking his neck following his first jump in the lake. A preliminary autopsy report from Franklin County Coroner Anahi Ortiz showed that the 22-year-old Ohio State junior fractured his C-5 vertebra.

It appeared the tradition that had been around for more than 20 years would come to a sobering conclusion.

"In spite of significant efforts taken to make this event a safer one, this tragedy has occurred," a statement from the university read. "We must come together and acknowledge that while this is a student-led tradition that has been passed down through the years, we cannot risk another tragedy. University leadership strongly agrees that we will work with our campus community to end this annual event."

The campus pond had been used as a place to celebrate in some capacity since the late 1960s, but the Mirror Lake Jump as it was constructed began spontaneously when jubilation and anticipation for the upcoming Michigan game led a parade of students to jump into the lake in 1990.

### One Year Ago – 2019

For the second weekend in a row, Ohio State sophomore quarterback Justin Fields was down on the turf clutching his knee as athletic trainers rushed to his side.

The Buckeyes were ahead 35-16 in the third quarter when Michigan defensive end Aidan Hutchinson bull-rushed tight end Luke Farrell into Fields, and backup Chris Chugunov was forced to enter the game as Fields limped to the medical tent on the sideline.

Ohio State's medical team quickly got Fields – who revealed after the game that he had suffered a sprained MCL late in the Nov. 23 win over Penn State – outfitted with a bulkier brace than the fabric version he was already wearing and back in the game after just seven plays.

"That was a big topic through the week," Fields said after the 56-27 win over the Wolverines. "I told the trainers that I was just going to try the smaller brace, just to have more mobility. They told me if anything happened in the game, they were going to bring the bigger brace out just in case. That's exactly what happened."

Fields wasn't hampered by the bigger brace, which he compared to those worn by offensive linemen, as he rolled left and threw a 30-yard touchdown pass to freshman wide receiver Garrett Wilson on his first play back.

"I thought it was a magical moment," said head coach Ryan Day. "I thought it was a Heisman moment, for him to go down, take that injury, puts the brace on and then come back out and make a throw that we didn't design that way."



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No. 4	Oct. 31	No. 10	Dec. 12
No. 5	Nov. 7	No. 11	Dec. 19
No. 6	Nov. 14	No. 12	Dec. 26

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

The next issue (Dec. 12 cover date) will be mailed on Dec. 8.

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## OPINION

# COVID Outbreak Puts OSU's Season On Brink

Had 2020 been any normal kind of year, Ohio State would have played Michigan on the Saturday after Thanksgiving, perhaps helping usher Jim Harbaugh out of Ann Arbor and directing him 45 miles to the east where the NFL's Detroit Lions are suddenly in need of a new head coach.

But 2020 is anything but a normal kind of year, so instead of playing the Wolverines – and presumably beating them for the ninth straight year and 18th time in the last 20 meetings – the Buckeyes stayed home and played a waiting game after COVID-19 finally infested the Woody Hayes Athletic Center, causing the cancellation of the OSU-Illinois game scheduled for Nov. 28.

What is clear is that the virus has now cost Ohio State a full one-quarter of the eight games in 2020's truncated regular-season schedule. What appears much murkier is where the Buckeyes go from here and how they get there.

Gene Smith, the longtime director of athletics at the university, held a video news conference just about the time OSU should have been kicking off at Illinois and, along with head coach Ryan Day and team physician Dr. Jim Borchers, tried to provide answers about how the team will proceed. Rather than providing concrete answers, however, the teleconference simply invited more questions.

Smith began by trying to explain why the program decided against traveling to Illinois, saying, "The positivity rates were concerning enough that we felt we had to take a pause to mitigate the risk (but) we did not reach the Big Ten threshold."

If the team didn't reach the Big Ten threshold, then why was the game canceled? And if that Big Ten threshold is an arbitrary threshold, why was it put in place at all?

Later, Smith added, "We want to continue to focus on the health and safety of our players. We want to do what we can to possibly give them a chance to compete next weekend. It's not about the Big Ten Championship Game or the (College Football Playoff) or how many games we need to play. It's about the health and safety of our student-athletes and giving them a chance to possibly play next week."

Possibly play next week? I thought Big Ten policy required any player testing positive for the coronavirus to miss at least 21 days of team activity and then undergo cardiac screening before being cleared to return. Wasn't that the case when Wisconsin quarterback Graham Mertz tested positive following his team's Oct. 23 season opener? If the Buckeyes had enough positive tests to merit cancellation of the Illinois game, how is it possible to even consider playing at Michigan State?

Apparently the Big Ten threshold that Ohio State failed to reach was the one concerning players having to be away from the team for 21 days. Otherwise, Day would not have told reporters, "They'll be out for 10 days in self-isolation, then it becomes the protocol in getting back to shape, and part of that is the cardiac MRI to make sure they are clear of myocarditis."

A summation of the comments from Smith and Day would seem to indicate that although the Buckeyes did not meet the Big Ten threshold for automatic cancellation of the game, the number of positive tests was trending upward. Therefore, a cancellation now might prevent an escalation of positives and thereby prevent cancellation of future games.

Obviously, the paramount concern is the health and safety of the players and coaches. But there was always going to be a certain amount of smoke and mirrors attached to the protocols throughout college football. Take a

look at any map that tracks COVID-19 cases throughout the country, and then tell me how some teams have been able to play as many as 10 games while others have managed only three.

## EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK Mark Rea

Ohio State has never in the past been forthcoming about injuries and other player information during the best of times, and it certainly isn't going to be any more so now regarding how many positive tests have been logged other than Borchers offering there are "no trends and no clusters among the team." He did admit positive tests in all three groups tested – players, coaches and support staff – but added there was no pattern or specific group hit harder than any other.

Whether this 2020 college football season should have been played at all will be debated for a long time to come. The Big Ten probably had it right back in early August when it announced a 10-game, all-conference schedule that could have been spread out over as many as 15 weeks. That was the one that had many Ohio State and Michigan fans up in arms because the teams were slated to square off against one another on Oct. 24 rather than the traditional regular-season finale. Raise your hand if you would have preferred that scenario to the situation in which we find ourselves today.

But as pretty much the entire calendar year of 2020 has taught us, we're stuck with what we're stuck with, and we should probably be thankful that, with a lethal pandemic still ravaging this country, we've had any football at all.

## What Have We Learned

What we have learned about the Big Ten over the past six weeks is that no conference team – other than Ohio State, and it has a couple of major flaws – has any business being in the College Football Playoff discussion.

Missing out on the tournament means the conference misses out on the estimated \$6 million-plus that goes with earning one of the four playoff berths. But despite Smith's assertion that player safety trumps the final number of games the Buckeyes play, why did the conference decide to go ahead and try to ram through a 2020 season beginning in mid-October?

When someone says it's not about the money, it's usually about the money.

What about Indiana, you might ask? The feel-good story (at least in Bloomington) is that the Hoosiers this year have been ranked higher in the national polls than they have been in more than 50 years. But Ohio State exposed them as a one-trick pony. Find a way to shut down IU's passing game and you shut down IU. The Hoosiers average just 102.3 yards per game on the ground, an attack that ranks 12th in the Big Ten and 118th in the country.

The rest of the East features four Jekyll-and-Hyde teams with two victories each – Maryland, Michigan State, Rutgers and the dumpster fire formerly known as Michigan – with Penn State in the division basement. The nation's No. 8 team in the preseason rankings finally won a game after beginning the season with a program-record five straight losses. The last time the Nittany Lions began a season with a 1-5 record was 1897 when

such powerhouse opponents as Gettysburg, Dickinson and Bloomsburg Normal were on the schedule.

Wisconsin? Who knows? The Badgers have played only three games in six weeks and, if the original rule holds, won't be eligible to play in the Big Ten Championship Game because they won't have appeared in at least six games by the time the title contest is played.

That leaves Northwestern and Iowa to contend for honors in the West. The Wildcats can't run the ball with any kind of consistency, and the Hawkeyes don't knock your socks off in any facet of the game.

Minnesota features the Big Ten's leading rusher with Ibrahim Mohamed averaging 163.4 yards per game, but the Gophers are tied for next-to-last in the league with only four touchdown passes in five games. Meanwhile, Purdue couldn't beat Rutgers, and Illinois couldn't beat Purdue.

Elsewhere, the honeymoon is most definitely coming to an end for head coach Scott Frost in Nebraska. The Blackshirts defense is nothing but a distant memory, the team is getting a reputation for dirty play, and Frost is the biggest whiner this side of Harbaugh.

The Cornhuskers have one of the most loyal (and nicest) fan bases in college football, but it remains curious how or why they ran off guys like Frank Solich and Bo Pelini.

Solich was as vanilla as Pelini was salty, but at least they produced results. During the 22 seasons since Tom Osborne retired following the 1997 national championship run, Nebraska has had 14 seasons during which it posted nine wins or more. Solich and Pelini combined to produce 12 of those nine-win seasons in just 13 years. The other eight seasons under Bill Callahan, Mike Riley and Frost have produced only two.

## Stats & Stuff

I love obscure statistics and records like the one about Ohio State owning a 346-1-1 record in games during which the Buckeyes have scored 35 or more points. The only blemishes on that slate are a 35-35 tie with SMU in 1978 and a 40-35 loss to Clemson in the 2014 Orange Bowl.

Here's another. The single-game record for the lowest rushing total by an OSU opponent is minus-29 by Northwestern during a 35-6 win by the Buckeyes in 1969. Northwestern QB Maurice "Maurie" Emerson Daigneau III had a rough afternoon that day to say the least. He fumbled four times, was intercepted twice and sacked nine times (although the NCAA did not recognize sacks as an official statistic until 2000). All told, Daigneau finished the game with a net rushing total of minus-100 yards. I don't know if that's an NCAA record, but it should be.

Two years later, Daigneau got his revenge. On his way to being named the first-team All-Big Ten quarterback in 1971, Daigneau threw for only 85 yards and was intercepted three more times, but he tallied four important first downs on four quarterback sneaks and led the Wildcats to a 14-10 victory in Ohio Stadium. Since that win, Northwestern has lost 16 straight games vs. the Buckeyes in the Horseshoe.

Lastly, Justin Fields has thrown for 1,208 yards so far, the most by any Ohio State quarterback through the first four games of a season. In fact, only three other QBs have thrown for as many as 1,000 yards for the Buckeyes through the first four games of a season – Dwayne Haskins (1,194 in 2018), Art Schlichter (1,047 in 1981) and Bobby Hoying (1,029 in 1995).





### Big Ten Game Average Dipping

Concerns around reaching the six-game minimum required to compete for the Big Ten championship game have increased significantly in Columbus after Ohio State was unable to take on Illinois in its fifth game of the season.

Now needing to play two more games to hit that requirement, it appears as though the Buckeyes will need to begin to worry about being left out of the title game.

Even if the Buckeyes are unable to finish out the season and hit that six-game mark, all may not be lost for OSU. Although right now the requirement for Big Ten championship qualification is six games played, that number can change if there are enough games canceled across the conference in the final three weeks.

According to the ESPN writer Heather

Dinich, "If the average number of Big Ten games falls below six, then teams must play no less than two fewer conference games than the average number of Big Ten games played by all teams to be considered for the league championship." In other words, if the Big Ten has 38 or fewer games played at the end of the season (5.43 games per team, which rounds down to five), the minimum games requirement would suddenly become three, making the Buckeyes eligible again.

However, triggering that reduction seems unlikely at this point. The Big Ten has had six games canceled through six weeks, putting it on pace to play 50 of its 56 scheduled games (7.14 games per team) if there are no more cancellations on the season.

For this to matter for Ohio State, it would have another game canceled, moving that number to 49, which means that the Buckeyes would need 11 more games canceled in the final two weeks of the year.

With 13 games (assuming Ohio State loses one more game but plays one more), that would require a lot of chaos within the Big Ten.

It would also require some tough conversations for Ohio State head coach Ryan Day, who talked on Nov. 12 about the difficulties of having a game canceled.

"The hardest thing is looking at a team in the eye that has done everything you have asked them to do and they can't play," Day said. "I mentioned that when Nebraska wasn't able to play (against Wisconsin). Someone asked, 'What happens when that happens to you?' And like I said, I feel awful. I do. I feel awful for this team. But there is nothing we can do about it."

### Follow The Status Of The Football Team, MSU Game

Readers who want to keep up on the status of the Ohio State football team and its scheduled game with Michigan State on Dec. 5 will want to check the electronic BuckeyeSports.com, free to all subscribers, regularly. The Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff will be monitoring the situation and posting updates regularly.

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

Should the game with the Spartans be played, the staff will return with its predictions the morning of the game.

The BSB staff also provides electronic recruiting coverage, other daily stories and updates, as well as presenting reprints from the Buckeye Sports Bulletin archives on BuckeyeSports.com. We will be featuring reprints covering games from our 40th Anniversary Football Season as part of our popular Reprint Thursdays this fall.

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, should the game be played. If something interesting, troubling or exciting happens in the game, share your thoughts in real time.

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"I can tell you that when you're preparing for a team, there's really just not a lot of time in a day to be dealing with these kinds of things. So I leave that up to (athletic director) Gene (Smith) and President (Kristina) Johnson to have those conversations."

Day also said that if Ohio State did find itself on that six-game edge, as it does now, he would be in favor of the Big Ten potentially revisiting its game requirements.

"Well, there hasn't been any conversation because this is the first time it's kind of come up," Day said. "I think maybe as we get closer, there will be more conversation. I don't know. Again, these are the things that, right now, I don't even really have time to talk to Gene about much. Because there's nothing that we can do about it at all."

"But I do think as we get closer, if we're not able to play X number of games, then I

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## 2020 Ohio State Football Schedule

Date	Opponent	Result/Time (ET)	TV	2020 Record
Oct. 24	NEBRASKA	W, 52-17	FOX	1-4
Oct. 31	at Penn State*	W, 38-25	ABC	1-5
Nov. 7	RUTGERS	W, 49-27	BTN	2-4
Nov. 14	at Maryland	Canceled	N/A	2-2
Nov. 21	INDIANA*	W, 42-35	FOX	5-1
Nov. 28	at Illinois*	Canceled	N/A	2-3
Dec. 5	at Michigan State*	12 p.m.	ABC	2-3
Dec. 12	MICHIGAN*	12 p.m.	FOX	2-4
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship**	12 p.m.	FOX	

\* 2019 bowl team

\*\* at Indianapolis (Lucas Oil Stadium)

think at that point that we maybe need to revisit it. And one of the things that I think we've done a decent job of is being flexible here. And we have to continue to be flexible as things move along and just make the right decision, whatever that might be in any situation. The fact that we changed the policy for testing positive on game day – now we've got a PCR test that allows someone to play (if the antigen test turned out to be a false-positive) – that's something that is the sign of good leadership, and I think and I hope that we will continue to do that."

### Coombs Considering New Options At DB

New Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs had very little in the way of a grace period in his first stint as a defensive coordinator at any level. The energetic former defensive backs coach earned plaudits from Ohio State fans during his first run with the Buckeyes and generated plenty of excitement when he returned to Columbus in January, but the honeymoon phase appears to be done.

Against Indiana on Nov. 21, Ohio State allowed quarterback Michael Penix to toss

for 491 yards and five scores, including several huge gains down the field, primarily to wide receiver Ty Fryfogle.

"The glaring issue was the big plays, and one of the things about this defense is that it's designed to avoid big plays," Day said on Nov. 24. "That's really the idea of this defense is to make you work your way down the field. There were a few things there that we have to get fixed. I'd rather not get into too many details at this point, but yes, we have to get a couple things changed."

For the fix to those big-play woes, Coombs is still searching. Ohio State has leaned heavily on man coverage through five games and is seeing its defensive backs struggle with those assignments.

"There's constant questions about how we're doing things. You're always evaluating what you're doing and how you're doing it," Coombs said on Nov. 24. "That's exactly what we're doing. Most of the things are execution-based, but we've got to make sure we're doing things that are the best for everybody that's on the field."

"We have to fix the big plays, there's no

Continued On Page 6



JOSH WINSLOW

**POSSIBLE REINFORCEMENTS** – Ohio State defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs said he might make changes in the secondary, which could mean increased playing time for freshman cornerback Lejond Cavazos.

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Continued From Page 5

question about that.”

In Coombs’ view, the fix to those problems could be any number of things from a scheme change, a tweak in how Ohio State teaches its defenders, to even just a basic personnel change, so long as potential replacements are capable of playing within themselves and avoid trying too hard to make big plays.

“I think that as the season continues to progress, we would certainly like to play more guys and to have more opportunities for guys to play,” Coombs said. “I’ve always believed that. And so we’re constantly looking for those opportunities to get more guys on the field.

“I think sometimes we press, we look to make a bigger play than what exists for us in the structure of our defense, and it’s

really important that I do a better job of coaching that and making sure that we all understand we don’t need to go, necessarily, make all the plays. We need to make sure that we’re not chasing something that’s not there that creates a big play.”

### Master Teague Says He’s A ‘Home-Run Hitter’

Ohio State sophomore running back Master Teague earned praise from FOX analyst and former USC Heisman winner Reggie Bush following his breakout performance against Indiana.

“I thought this game was your coming-out party, man,” said Bush. “I thought this was the game where we got a chance to learn about Master Teague.”

Teague took the opportunity, which came during an interview session with Bush, to describe himself as a player. He said that while he has not yet had many chances to do so, he feels that he does his best work as a big-play back or a home-run hitter.

His 41-yard touchdown against the Hoosiers was his longest rush of the season so far.

“This is something that I haven’t been able to show as much, but I’m a home-run hitter,” Teague said. “I can break those long ones. I’ve got the speed for that. So that’s, I think, one of the things that people don’t really notice or haven’t recognized. I’m trying to show that more.

“And I think, as we get rolling – because we have to get rolling – it’s going to show in my game because I can run fast. I’m one of the fastest players on the team, so I could definitely show that.”

He also took the chance to praise Ohio

### 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.

State’s run blocking up front, which had a rough start to the season but is rounding into form according to Teague.

“It’s definitely, I think, improving every week,” Teague said. “The offensive line did a great job. We had a hard week of practice, running hard, running behind our pads, blocking.

“So right now, overall, I feel good about it. Of course we’ll go back to the film, see little nuances we can assess and get fixed and work on. But overall I feel good.”

### Ohio State Falls To No. 4 In Coaches Poll

Without a game to play on Nov. 28, Ohio State fell from No. 3 to No. 4 in the Amway coaches poll but stuck at No. 3 in the Associated Press top 25, released on Nov. 29.

In the coaches poll, Ohio State dropped behind Clemson, which beat Pittsburgh in resounding fashion, 52-17. The top two of Alabama and Notre Dame remained in place after Alabama demolished Auburn 42-13 and Notre Dame beat North Carolina 31-17.

Florida, Texas A&M, Cincinnati, BYU, Miami and Georgia check in behind the Buckeyes in an otherwise unchanged top 10 in the coaches poll. Indiana (No. 11), Northwestern (No. 17), Wisconsin (No. 19) and Iowa (No. 24) represent the Big Ten along with the Buckeyes. No other conference team earned votes.

In the AP poll, Ohio State sits ahead of the Tigers but behind Alabama and Notre Dame. Texas A&M is No. 5, followed by Florida, Cincinnati, BYU, Miami and Indiana.

The Buckeyes and Hoosiers are joined

by No. 16 Northwestern, No. 18 Wisconsin and No. 24 Iowa as Big Ten representatives.

### Ohio State No. 4 In Playoff Poll

Ohio State checked in at No. 4 in the first College Football Playoff rankings of the 2020 season, released on Nov. 24.

The Buckeyes trailed Alabama and Notre Dame, which ranked No. 1 and No. 2, respectively.

Clemson – which lost to the Fighting Irish and did not play on Nov. 21 against Florida State due to COVID-19 – ranked third.

Ohio State was one of five Big Ten teams in the rankings, with Northwestern (No. 8), Indiana (No. 12), Wisconsin (No. 16) and Iowa (No. 24) coming in behind the Buckeyes.

This top-four ranking is a drop for Ohio State from last year’s opening CFP rankings, in which the Buckeyes ranked first, ahead of LSU with Alabama and Penn State rounding out the top four.

In the seasons before, Ohio State started the playoff rankings placed at No. 10 in 2018, sixth in 2017 and 2016, third in 2015 and No. 16 in 2014, the season it won the national title.

### OSU-MSU Another Noon Kickoff Time

If Ohio State is able to take on Michigan State as scheduled on Dec. 5, it will do so at noon for the third time this season, with a fourth scheduled for Dec. 12 against Michigan. Unlike those other noon games, this one will be broadcast on ABC rather than FOX or FS1.

The Buckeyes will be looking for their fifth straight win over the Spartans and

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eighth straight victory in East Lansing. Michigan State's last win in the series came in 2015, a 17-14 upset win over No. 2 Ohio State in Columbus, while the Spartans have not beaten the Buckeyes at home since 1999.

After a 29-20 victory over previously unbeaten Northwestern, Michigan State sits at 2-3 on the season. For a full preview of Ohio State's matchup with the Spartans, see page 20.

### Big Ten Championship Draws Noon Kick

The Big Ten Championship Game will kick off at noon, the conference announced on Nov. 28.

The game, which is set for Dec. 19 at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis, traditionally kicks off at 8 p.m. It will now be part of FOX's Big Noon Kickoff coverage.

Ohio State currently sits atop the Big Ten East Division at 4-0, but the cancellation of its game at Illinois means the Buckeyes must play their final two games of the season at Michigan State and against Michigan to be eligible to play in the Big Ten Championship Game.

Northwestern is in control of its own destiny in the Big Ten West Division, meanwhile. The Wildcats are 5-1 and have a head-to-head victory over Wisconsin, the only team in their division with one loss. With Wisconsin unable to qualify for the Big Ten championship after having three games canceled so far, it seems to be a likely opponent for the Buckeyes during Big Ten championship week if they're unable to play against either Michigan State or Michigan to end the regular season.

### CB Lejond Cavazos Sheds Black Stripe

Ohio State officially added another freshman to the fold on Nov. 24 as Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy cornerback Lejond Cavazos shed his black stripe. He's the 24th member of Ohio State's 2020 class to earn that distinction and the 27th player to lose his stripe this season.

"I want to thank God and my family," Cavazos told his teammates in a video posted to Twitter.

"And shoutout to BIA (Best In America, Ohio State's nickname for its defensive back room) – they're making me a lot better. And

Zone 6 (the wide receivers room) also. I want to say shoutout to (defensive coordinator Kerry) Coombs. Appreciate you for bringing me in. And go Bucks."

Cavazos came to Ohio State as a four-star prospect, ranking as the No. 352 player and No. 26 cornerback in the 247Sports composite rankings. With Cavazos off the board, defensive lineman Jacolbe Cowan, who has been dealing with an injury, is the last remaining freshman with a black stripe on his helmet.

### Buckeyes Name 19 Champions Against IU

Ohio State named 19 champions and five players of the game after its win over Indiana. Leading the team as players of the game were wideout Garrett Wilson and tight end Luke Farrell on offense, defensive end Jonathon Cooper and linebacker Pete Werner on defense and safety Josh Proctor on special teams.

Wilson and Farrell were joined as champions on the offense by Teague, wide receiver Chris Olave and linemen Thayer Munford, Harry Miller, Josh Myers, Wyatt Davis and Nicholas Petit-Frere.

Defensively, defensive tackles Haskell Garrett and Tommy Togiai; defensive ends Tyreke Smith, Tyler Friday and Zach Harrison; linebackers Tuf Borland and Baron Browning; and cornerback Shaun Wade all joined Cooper and Werner.

Lastly, walk-on quarterback Jagger LaRoe, freshman offensive lineman Josh Fryar, walk-on defensive tackle Zaid Hamdan and walk-on linebacker Trayvon Wilburn were all named scout-team players of the week for helping the Buckeyes prepare to take on Indiana.

Borland, Cooper, Farrell, Munford, Petit-Frere, Togiai and Wilson are the only four-time champions on the roster.

### Don't Forget First-Class Upgrade

With the Michigan game – with any luck – coming up, we continue to suggest that readers consider upgrading their BSB delivery to first-class mail for football season. The holiday mail season is here, which is sure to add delays.

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# Buckeyes Focused On Health Of Student-Athletes

Continued From Page 1

program showed up on Nov. 26, and the Buckeyes immediately moved to virtual team meetings.

They also conducted noncontact practices for the remainder of the week, with trash cans acting as opposing players and everyone wearing a mask or gaiter instead of a helmet.

"It was a practice on paper, but we weren't running and sweating and those things because we had to keep our masks on the entire time," head coach Ryan Day said. "We didn't go body against body."

Before that last round of testing on Nov. 27, Ohio State was still planning to play against the Illini.

The Buckeyes even adjusted their travel plans as they awaited the results and planned to arrive at Illinois at 8:11 a.m. for an 11 a.m. local kick.

"But as we continued to test into the evening, the numbers got to the point where it became clear that we couldn't promise – first and foremost – that we would be putting our players on a plane and would be healthy and ultimately have a clean field on Saturday," Smith said.

"Could we have played? Sure. Was it the right thing to play? No."

Ohio State does not release testing information to protect the privacy of its student-athletes, but asked if there was a specific cluster or pattern to the spread,



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both Borchers and Smith said there was not.

"It really wasn't until yesterday when we did testing and enhanced testing yesterday that we really got to a point where it became very clear that we needed to pause," Borchers said, noting the Buckeyes essentially had no cases in the program prior to Nov. 26. "I want to be clear we never reached a threshold where we couldn't participate or practice until (Friday) afternoon. This is not something that was going on Tuesday. This was something that happened later in the week."

Ohio State's indefinite pause of team

activities puts the Dec. 5 game against Michigan State in jeopardy, but Smith is hopeful the Buckeyes will be able to return to action in the coming days in order to play.

"Our objective now is to continue to focus on the health and safety of our players and to make sure that we provide an opportunity to potentially come back to compete next weekend," Smith said. "The tactics and strategies that we will put in place is all with an effort to ensure their safety and possibly give them a chance to compete next weekend. That

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is our primary focus.”

It's worth noting, though, that both Maryland and Wisconsin had to cancel two consecutive games earlier this season due to a coronavirus outbreak in each program.

The Badgers missed games against Nebraska on Oct. 31 and Purdue on Nov. 7, while the Terrapins missed games against Ohio State and Michigan State on Nov. 14 and 21, respectively.

So in order for the Buckeyes to avoid the same fate, the program's population positivity rate must decrease in the days leading up to their planned trip to East Lansing.

“I think we need to continue to test and see that there's no more positives that occur,” Smith said. “We need to make sure that working with our conference office that they're comfortable with what we're doing.”

“Obviously, we'll have a number of student-athletes who wouldn't have an opportunity to compete because they would be still quarantined, but the main thing is to watch our (population) positivity rate.”

“We know where we are right now. We need to see if we have more and make sure that the young men who have been negative continue to be negative.”

There was no definitive timeline for when Ohio State could resume practice and other team activities at the Woody Hayes Athletic Center.

“We're going to have to go day-by-day,” Smith said. “See where we are today. We'll test again tomorrow and we'll see what we have with tests tomorrow, so it's going to be day-to-day. I wish I could say it's going to be Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday. I really can't. There's too much uncertainty here. We just have to look at each day and see what we've got.”

Borchers also refused to speculate on the potential resumption of team activities but said they'll make data-driven decisions with the hope of returning the players to competition as quickly as possible.

“We have said all along we'll be driven by the data that we have, and we'll look at the data and we'll make decisions based on the data that we have,” Borchers said. “We'll try not to forecast what that data will be, because that gets us into trouble. We'll use the data that comes out of our process and make the best decisions moving forward as we move into this next week.”

Day, who was among those who tested positive and would not be able to coach against the Spartans because of the Big Ten's 10-day quarantine period for coaches, believes the team could return to practice as late as Thursday and hold a walk-through on Friday before playing the Spartans on Saturday. In the meantime, he'll conduct meetings with the team and coaching staff while in isolation.

Defensive line coach Larry Johnson would serve as acting head coach in Day's absence and become the first black head coach in Ohio State football history.

“I know Larry is doing a great job and so are the other assistant coaches with the team. We're communicating in a day-to-day, hour-to-hour operation,” Day said. “We'll just continually communicate to our guys to make sure we're all on the same page with where we're at.”

Players who have tested positive for coronavirus, meanwhile, will not be able to participate for 21 days, which means Ohio State will be shorthanded against the Spartans and Wolverines. But the Buckeyes, who already had the game against Maryland canceled, cannot afford to miss another game if they want to play in the Big Ten Championship Game on Dec. 19.

The Big Ten requires teams to play six regular-season games to be eligible for the title game, unless the total average across the conference falls below six games, and the cancellation of one of the final two games would put Ohio State at a maximum of five games this season. (For more on the conference policy on cancellations, see Insider on pages 4-7.)

That's not Smith's primary focus at this time, though.

“It's not about the Big Ten Championship Game,” Smith said. “It's not about the College Football Playoff. It's not about

those things. It's about one thing: the (student-athletes') health, their safety and making sure that each day we give them a chance to possibly play next weekend.

“That's our focus, 100 percent.”

#### Change To Big Ten Protocols?

No other conference is as strict as the Big Ten when it comes to players who tested positive returning to action. And with Ohio State set to be without an unspecified number of players for the remainder of the regular season due to the required 21-day absence period, Smith was asked if the conference should reconsider that rule.

“I understand that question and understand that people are thinking about that, but that's not where we are,” Smith said. “My concern today is making sure our players get fed. Making sure that if they need a sports psychologist's help, they get that.”

“I get the question. I'm very sensitive to that. But the last thing on my mind is (possible changes to the protocol).”

When the Big Ten's Council of Presidents and Chancellors agreed in August to resume the season after initially postponing fall sports, they instituted the 21-day rule as an extra precaution to allow testing for myocarditis and for a player to regain his conditioning after time away.

But many have questioned the decision in the months since, including former Ohio State head coach Urban Meyer, who believes the policy puts teams at a competitive disadvantage when compared to other conferences.

Smith did not rule out such conversations taking place in the future, however.

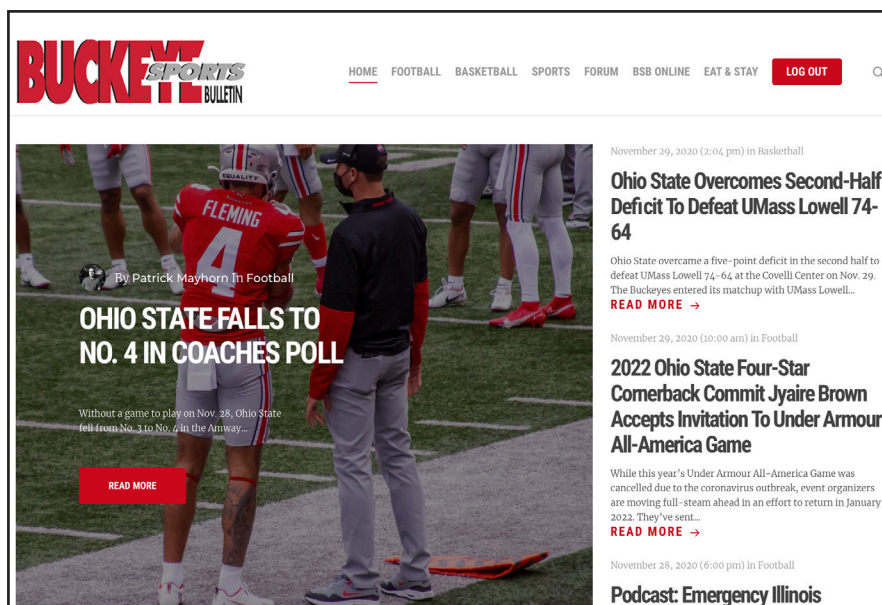
“Might that come up later at some point? No question. But right now, I haven't even thought about it,” Smith said. “I want to make sure Ryan's got what he needs. I want to make sure the young men that have tested positive have what they need. I want to continue to talk to our doctors and others about whatever enhanced protocols we move forward with to give them a chance to possibly play Michigan State.”

*For updates on the football team's status and the status of the Dec. 5 game with Michigan State, check the electronic BuckeyeSports.com daily.*



Dr. Jim Borchers

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## MIDTERM EXAMS: OFFENSE

# OSU's WRs Shine Bright

By **JOE DEMPSEY**  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State has reached the halfway point of its shortened season, so the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff doled out midterm grades to each unit of the football program following Ohio State's 42-35 victory over Indiana on Nov. 21.

We will begin by evaluating the Buckeye offense, which ranked is tied for seventh in the nation in scoring at 45.3 points per game and No. 7 in total offense at 535.3 yards per game through four matchups. The vaunted Ohio State offense jumped on their first four opponents early, outscoring them by 78 points in the first half (108-30).

Here is a look at the Buckeye offense, position group by position group. Statistics are through the first four games unless otherwise noted.

### Quarterback

Through three games, it would have been difficult to give junior quarterback Justin Fields any other grade than an A+. The 2019 Heisman Trophy finalist continued his excellent play to start his second season in Columbus, throwing 11 touchdowns passes and tallying only 11 incomplete passes in the Buckeyes' first three victories.

In his fourth game, Fields did not find the same success. The talented dual-threat quarterback threw more incompletions (12) than he had all season, and he matched his career interception total with three picks against the Hoosiers.

"He's his worst critic," head coach Ryan Day said of Fields. "He's really hard on himself, and that's what makes him great. He's very, very competitive. We just talked about, in some of those situations, not forcing the action and not trying to do too much with it. In a game like that, we knew that there were going to be big plays, but we also knew that they were going to get home on some things. You can't make bad plays worse, and that did happen a little bit in the game.

"He could have made some better decisions, throwing the ball away and ditching it. But that's hard. He's so competitive, and then he also made a bunch of plays with his feet as well. That's hard for him to let go sometimes, but that's part of playing quarterback and I know that he's looking to get better in that area."

Despite his interceptions and a few sacks where he held the ball too long against Indiana, Fields still threw for 300 yards and two touchdowns and put together his best rushing performance as a Buckeye. Fields carried the ball 15 times for 78 yards and one score, which would have been 10 attempts for 101 yards without the five sacks he took.

"He's strong. He's powerful. He's really athletic," Day said. "That's the give and take. There have been so many great things, the scramble run for a touchdown. There have been extended plays, there have just been so many great plays. And then there were a couple (not great plays) there. I know if he has those back again that he's going to make the right decision.

"He's tremendously talented, and now he's acquiring the skill it takes to be a great quarterback. And I believe he's the best quarterback in the country."

After the Buckeyes' first three wins against Nebraska, Penn State and Rutgers, Fields was tearing through the Big Ten at a historic pace. The reigning Big Ten Offensive Player of the Year had totaled 11 touchdowns on 86.7-per-

cent passing plus two more scores on the ground, and he had not faced much adversity at all.

The aggressive Hoosier defense constantly blitzed Fields in game four, and the standout signal caller faced his first true adversity of the season. In general, Day does not like to see any turnovers, but he said the miscues will only make his quarterback better.

"As a team and as the head coach, we do not want this to happen" Day said. "But if we're talking about him individually and his development and his growth, adversity is a very, very good thing. Look back on the great quarterbacks, when it comes very easy to them and they just roll through everything and the minute they hit adversity, then the things get hard. Anytime you go through some adversity along the way, it really helps in his development. But I certainly don't want to see any more of those."

One of Fields' go-to targets, junior wide receiver Chris Olave, expressed confidence in his quarterback's response to the atypical performance.

"Justin's the hardest critic on himself, so we all know he's going to bounce back," Olave said of Fields. "He has the highest standards for himself, so we're not worried at all about him. We've just got to keep getting better this week and perform."

"He's going to be the same. He just had a couple mistakes on a couple plays, but he's going to bounce back better than ever."

Day discussed how Fields' ability to extend plays with his legs either as a passer or as a runner compares to NFL standouts Kyler Murray and Russell Wilson. A large part of the Buckeyes' success has been due to their success on third downs, ranking fifth in the country by converting 54.4 percent of the time.

Ohio State fifth-year senior tight end Luke Farrell said Fields' skill set gives Day and offensive coordinator Kevin Wilson endless options as play callers.

"It opens up any possibility, and it just gives Coach Day and Coach Wilson free rein to do whatever they want, having complete confidence in Justin that he'll get the job done," Farrell said. "And his production has spoken for itself on that."

As for Ohio State's backups, only true freshman quarterbacks Jack Miller and C.J. Stroud have seen action. Miller rushed for a touchdown in the final minutes of the season-opening win over Nebraska, while Stroud made a brief appearance in a kneel-down situation at the end of the victory against Rutgers.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A-**

### Running Backs

Despite facing criticism for a lack of consistent production in their first three games, the Buckeyes ranked No. 1 in the Big Ten in rushing yards per game (233.3) after an excellent outing against Indiana and also ranked No. 16 nationally through four outings.

The flak Ohio State's rushing attack faced through three games exemplifies the high standards set in Columbus. The Buckeyes were averaging 208.7 rushing yards per game on 4.8 yards per carry in those first three contests, but they were knocked for not consistently connecting on solid gains on the ground.

The Buckeyes stepped up their ground game in their toughest matchup of the season when the then-No. 9 Hoosiers came to town. Ohio State ran for a season-high 307 yards on 50 carries for a 6.1 average, much to fourth-year junior center Josh Myers' pleasure.

"It was just something that we kept coming back to, and it was something that in this game we had to rely on a little bit more," Myers said.



"The holes were there, we were hitting them, we were flying around."

Third-year sophomore tailback Master Teague rose to the occasion against Indiana, rushing for a career-high 169 yards and two touchdowns on 26 carries. The highlight of Teague's day came on a 41-yard scoring burst where he flashed his big-play ability.

"That's one part of my game that I do have, and I have that capability of being a home-run hitter, but I just haven't been able to do that yet, so I was glad I was able to do that today," Teague said.

Through four games, Teague's six rushing scores tied him for the second most in the Big Ten, and his 95.0 rushing yards per game ranked third.

Beyond Teague, Oklahoma transfer Trey Sermon has provided running backs coach Tony Alford with depth in the tailback room, along with redshirt freshman Steele Chambers.

Sermon has been the primary backup to Teague, averaging 58.0 rushing yards per contest through four games and gaining 5.2 yards per carry. Chambers ran the ball against only the Huskers and Scarlet Knights, but he boasted an average of 9.8 yards per carry on eight attempts.

In the first three games, Teague averaged just 3.7 more carries per game than Sermon. In Ohio State's win over Indiana, however, Teague toted the rock 26 times to just nine for Sermon on his way to a career day. The Murfreesboro, Tenn., native said he did not need the lion's share to succeed, but he still saw its benefits.

"I got into a good groove," Teague said. "However that would have looked like, I feel like I would have still produced. Overall, I felt like I got into a good groove and was able to make plays and help the team win and come to a victory, so I feel good about that."

Though the first three weeks did not live up to the Buckeyes' high standards, Teague and his teammates elevated their game against Indiana, signaling an upward trend.

"I think it's improving every week," Teague said. "Overall, I feel great about it. It's a blessing."

**BSB Midterm Grade: B-**

## Wide Receivers

During the past several years, Ohio State has run a deep rotation of wide receivers to keep them fresh and get talented players on the field.

Through four games, Olave and sophomore standout Garrett Wilson had proved to be too good to take off the field. The dynamic duo averaged a combined 225.5 receiving yards and 2.0 touchdowns per game.

The Buckeyes' starting wide receivers have been on the field more this year, which is exactly what Olave wanted when he entered his junior campaign.

"I was ready for this," he said. "I wanted this, this year. I wanted to take a lot of snaps, take a lot of reps this year and try to be the best for my team."

Olave responded to the extra playing time well, averaging 6.5 receptions for 97.3 receiving yards and one touchdown per game through four games.

Wilson, whose average of 145.0 yards from scrimmage per contest ranked fourth among wide receivers nationally, also expressed his satisfaction with a high snap count.

"Being on the field you can definitely feel your groove once you get going," Wilson said. "When you're in your groove, the only thing that can really take that away is getting taken out of the game and cooling back down. Being able to get a feel for the game and stay in there, and then also know that I can count on the backups to come in and take my place and not miss a beat, that's a big thing for our offense."

Ohio State wide receivers coach Brian Hartline still sees plenty of room for improvement in his standout wideouts.

"Chris and Garrett have got to continue to improve," Hartline said. "They cannot play game eight as they did in game three, or we will not be where we want to be. Everyone is a part of that, and we all have to continue to make strides."

Hartline's remarks exemplify the sky-high expectations that have been built around being a wide receiver in Columbus. Olave and Wilson embrace the standard, and Wilson expressed the utmost confidence in his teammate's development.

"Chris never has a bad practice," Wilson said of Olave. "He's always consistent. He never drops anything. That's the biggest thing with Chris. He's always the same, always consistent with the way he plays."

Outside of the top two targets, sophomore Jameson Williams reeled in five receptions for 78 yards and one touchdown, while freshman Jaxon Smith-Njigba snagged six catches for 17 yards and one score, and freshman Julian Fleming had one 13-yard catch.

"They're all stepping up," Hartline said. "They're all doing a good job. There's not necessarily one in particular that needs to do more. We've got to continue to do what we're doing at a high level. And when the plays come to us, we've got to make the play. We've got a competitive excellence. We've got to continue to do that. That's got to build."

Though he had not received many targets, Williams serves as a dangerous deep threat. Smith-Njigba provides Fields with a sure-handed option and made a highlight-reel touchdown grab in his collegiate debut.

Fleming, who was the No. 1 wideout in the nation for 2020, did not see much action through four games, only making the one catch and dropping a pass. But he made his mark in game four against the Hoosiers despite not making any receptions. On a Fields' interception, Fleming chased down Hoosier cornerback Jamar Johnson and stripped the ball from behind to regain possession.

"That's the huge play of the game," Olave said. "And Julian's a big-time player. Big-time players make big-time plays in big-time games. Julian is a guy that I trust a lot and I want to see him ball. So making a play like that in a game like that is huge, and that's what he did."

Overall, Ohio State's wide receiver unit had been excellent through four games, highlighted by incredible consistency from Olave and Wilson.

**BSB Midterm Grade: A**

## Tight End

Ohio State's tight ends are the unsung heroes of one of the most dynamic offenses in the country. They rarely receive the ball or much recognition, but the Buckeye tight ends are important parts of the offense, particularly as blockers.

Every year, a running theme in training camp is whether the tight ends will be more featured in the passing game. When the offense is producing among with the nation's best, however, it is difficult to argue that the team should switch it up.

"We joke around in the tight end room a lot about it, but there's not really much you can say when you're putting up this amount of points and our offense is so versatile and we have so many different weapons," said junior tight end Jeremy Ruckert. "You obviously want the ball, but as you can see, our offense is doing well. And being able to contribute the little that we do, it's fun to be a part of."

Even if they are not thrown to as much as some of their Big Ten counterparts, the Ohio State tight ends still have an impact on the game. In addition to displaying his improve-

ments as a blocker, Ruckert began the season on a hot streak as a receiver.

No tight ends recorded a catch against Indiana, but Ruckert had already tallied nine receptions for 60 yards and three touchdowns through three games. Farrell added three catches for 26 yards, and fifth-year senior Jake Hausmann rounded out the group with one 13-yard reception before suffering an undisclosed injury.

Overall, Farrell has been quite impressed with what he has seen from Ruckert after the junior tight end took a big step forward during the elongated offseason.

"It's incredible what he's done just in one offseason," Farrell said of Ruckert. "He's taken the governor off and he's kind of just taking those swings that he needs to take. And that just helps everybody else build up our confidence and challenges us to do the same. It's been great."

**BSB Midterm Grade: A-**

## Offensive Line

Without the stellar, albeit somewhat inconsistent, play of the Ohio State offensive line, the Buckeyes would not possess one of the most potent offenses in the country.

Offensive line coach Greg Studrawa's group earned a spot on the midseason honor roll for the Joe Moore Award, which recognizes the best offensive line unit in college football annually. The committee specifically credited fourth-year junior guard Wyatt Davis, who returned after an All-America sophomore season.

Before the Buckeyes' top-10 showdown with Indiana, Day expressed confidence in his offensive line.

"They've been good, they've been solid," Day said. "When you look at the first three games, there were three different styles of defense. First off, in protection, they've done very well. Justin's had a really good pocket to throw in. That's part of the equation here, too. Justin's poise in the pocket has a lot to do with the fact that he can stand in the pocket. So I think they've done a really good job in protection."

"And the run game, too, when you grade them out, they haven't been perfect, but they've been solid, they've been good. They've been practicing really, really well. Overall, they've been playing solid."

Davis is a team captain, as well as Myers, and they lead the group along with senior tackle Thayer Munford, who is a three-year starter. That trio continued their steady play from 2019 through the first four games this season.

Third-year sophomore tackle Nicholas Petit-Frere and sophomore guard Harry Miller are first-year starters, and they both have settled into their spots well with a few minor hiccups along the way.

"Everything is about improvement," Petit-

Frere said. "Josh and Wyatt are older guys, and they will always improve and keep it going. Harry and I are both the new guys, and we have the struggles of sometimes having bad days and sometimes having good days, but just trying to improve. There's no problem with us trying to get better."

Miller experienced some underclassman struggles against Rutgers, picking up three penalties in the first half of the Buckeyes' 49-27 victory. Petit-Frere had no worries that Miller would bounce back even better after his minor setback.

"Harry is such a hard worker," Petit-Frere said. "He puts in so much time and effort off the field. He's one of the guys who watches the most film that we have here. He studies the hardest and he plays with great grit and determination, so that's something I carry as well, and I think he's going to keep performing well and keep doing the things he needs to do to get better."

Ohio State's offensive line stepped up its game against Indiana, paving the way for a 607-yard performance in the 42-35 win. Kevin Wilson, who works closely with the line as offensive coordinator, has been thoroughly impressed with the development of Petit-Frere, who was the No. 1 tackle in the nation for 2018.

"He's gotten his weight where it needs to be," Wilson said of Petit-Frere. "He's very smart. He's smart enough that now he's learning how to think where he's not overcomplicating the game. He's starting to play with confidence. He's got a little look in his eye that when it's time to play, he flips a little switch and he's got that look of a guy that likes to get after it. I've been impressed with the start he's been off to."

The Buckeyes allowed five sacks against the Hoosiers after giving up seven in the previous three games. Indiana blitzed nearly every play and often brought more players than Ohio State could block, while Fields took a few sacks where he could have thrown the ball away.

Overall, Myers left the game against the Hoosiers impressed with his less-experienced teammates and their ability to handle the tall task of the advanced Hoosier blitz packages.

"They've been in the program long enough and have seen over the years how teams play us on defense," Myers said. "It's really nothing new. Now, the numbers of players that they brought on blitzes might have been a little different, but in terms of getting blitzed, it happens to us constantly."

"They're starting to get pretty used to that. And they did a good job picking them up, so I'm just proud of those guys. I think I could credit a lot of our blitz pickup to just our preparation during the week and spending extra time together watching the film and making sure we're covering everything before we go into the game."

**BSB Midterm Grade: B**



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# OSU's Defense Hampered By Struggling Secondary

By ANDREW LIND  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State's defense was nothing short of spectacular in 2019, allowing just 259.7 yards and 13.7 points per game on the way to the College Football Playoff. But through four games this season, the Buckeyes are surrendering a whopping 389.5 yards and 26.0 points per game.

On one hand, a statistical drop-off is understandable. Ohio State's defense lost three first-round picks in defensive end Chase Young and cornerbacks Jeff Okudah and Damon Arnette, while defensive tackles DaVon Hamilton and Jashon Cornell, linebacker Malik Harrison and safety Jordan Fuller are now playing on Sundays, as well.

On the other hand, the expectations in Columbus remain as high as ever. And if the Buckeyes are going to once again compete for a national championship, the defense must improve, and fast.

In Ohio State's most recent game, Indiana quarterback Michael Penix threw for 491 yards and five touchdowns. It was the fourth-most passing yards ever in a game against the Buckeyes, though they still won by a score of 42-35.

Hoosiers senior wide receiver Ty Fryfogle was Penix's primary target on the afternoon, hauling in seven passes for 218 yards and three scores. That was also the second-most receiving yards ever surrendered in a single game by Ohio State.

Rather than place the blame on his players, though, first-year defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs looked no further than himself.

"I have to do everything better," Coombs said during a teleconference on Nov. 24. "Whatever you see on the field is a reflection of what you've taught and how you've taught. When any player at any position makes a mistake, as his coach, you should take that personally, and I do.

"Those are things that I have to fix and that I have to do a better job. When we make a mistake, that's my fault. It's something that I didn't coach well enough."



COURTESY OF THE OHIO STATE DEPT. OF ATHLETICS

**LONE BRIGHT SPOT – Cornerback Shaun Wade recorded his first career pick-six in Ohio State's 42-35 win over Indiana on Nov. 21.**

Head coach Ryan Day echoed those sentiments to an extent but also noted how well the team is playing the first half of games. After all, the Buckeyes have led all four games by an average score of 27.0-7.5 at halftime, only to ease their foot off the gas in the second half and let their opponents back in the game.

"I really think, after four games, we can do a great job of identifying issues that are kind of holding us back, address them and get better," Day said on Nov. 24. "There are a lot of good things going on, and I don't

think we're that far away.

"I think we can improve scheme, personnel and coaching, and it starts with practice today. We have to go out there and get those things fixed and make sure we're not giving up big plays and we're forcing teams to go down the field. That's the No. 1 thing for this defense."

Day also mentioned the lack of fans in the stands as one reason the Buckeyes might be struggling defensively, though he refused to use it as an excuse.

"If you're home, having 110,000 people screaming and yelling on third down and on a pick-six and those types of situations, it gives you energy, it gives you momentum," Day said. "You think back to the (2017) Penn State game, there were a few false starts because they can't even hear the cadence. We're hyping up the crowd and they're going crazy, and that's just not here right now."

With that said, the staff of Buckeye Sports Bulletin followed the coaching staff's lead in assessing each unit of the defense individually before handing out midterm grades below. Statistics are through the first four games unless otherwise noted.

## Defensive Line

Ohio State is in unfamiliar territory without a star defensive end drawing most of the offense's attention. But still, the defense has played well using an extensive rotation on both the interior and end of the line to wear opponents down.

The Buckeyes are allowing just 98.5 yards per game on the ground, the second fewest in the Big Ten (Wisconsin, 67.3 YPG), and have 11 sacks on the season. But eight of those sacks came in the first two games, including all of junior defensive tackle Tommy Togiai's team-leading three sacks.

Now, it may seem like the lack of pressure in Ohio State's two most-recent wins attributed to coverage issues in the secondary, but Coombs is not really concerned about the defensive line's play.

"I think we're getting very good pressure," Coombs said. "We'd like for pressures and knockdowns to finish in more sacks, but (opposing quarterbacks) have done a good job of standing in there and getting rid of the ball just before the sack. I think we have a lot of guys that can rush the passer, and I think they're putting a lot of pressure on the quarterback."

Fifth-year senior defensive end and team captain Jonathon Cooper, who was recently named by Pro Football Focus as the highest-graded defender in the Big Ten this season through the Indiana game, agreed with Coombs' assessment but noted they're working harder than ever to reach the quarterback before he releases the ball.

"We have to figure out how to get home faster," Cooper said "I feel like we're getting pressure, but we're trying to be one second faster, a step faster so that we can get a sack or get that ball out. We have to look at the film critically and figure out what we can do better.

"I feel like people aren't really seeing the type of defensive line we have because of the stats and stuff like that. But I couldn't be more proud of my guys. We just have to keep going."

Day was also adamant the statistics don't tell the full story when it comes to evaluating the defensive line's play thus far, mentioning defensive ends Zach Harrison, Tyreke Smith and Javontae Jean-Baptiste and defensive tackles Haskell Garrett, Taron Vincent, Antwan Jackson and Jerron Cage among those who have stepped up to fill the massive void left by Young.

"I think they're getting a lot of hits, hurries and knockdowns," Day said. "They are pushing the pocket and getting pretty good pressure. Certainly, we want to get sacks. That's a huge deal. It's such an energy boost for our team. So those guys are going to continually work on how they can get more sacks and get to them faster, but I think they're doing a decent job of putting pres-

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sure on the quarterback.”

**BSB Midseason Grade: A-**

### Linebackers

Over the past few seasons, any conversation about fifth-year senior linebacker Tuf Borland involved his captaincy. He is, after all, just the second three-time team captain in school history, joining former quarterback J.T. Barrett.

But this year, things are different.

“He’s playing the best ball of his career,” Cooper said.

Borland’s improved play has overshadowed the leadership qualities. He’s tied with Baron Browning for second on the team in tackles with 19, trailing only Pete Werner with 24.

“The way he comes out to practice, the way he shows up every single day and the way he approaches every single rep is incredible,” Werner said. “When you put that much time and effort into the little things, you’re going to see great things on the field. He’s been playing great, and it’s great playing with him.”

Together, that trio might be the most-improved unit on the defense.

The proof? Sixth-year senior Justin Hilliard and talented juniors Dallas Gant and Teradja Mitchell have played a combined 171 snaps this season, whereas Borland, Browning and Werner have been on the field for a total of 581.

“The three linebackers are playing really well,” Coombs said. “We’ve tried to manipulate and use them in different schemes because you hate to take those guys off the field. Without giving away too much, we’re going to try to continue to enhance what we can do with them.”

Browning, who moved to his natural position of outside linebacker, is flying around and looking much more comfortable in his role.

“Anytime he’s on the field, he’s making plays,” Borland said on Nov. 24. “It’s a credit to the work he’s continued to put in over his time here. I’m so happy for him and how he’s playing.”

Werner, meanwhile, isn’t playing as much in coverage as he was last year. That’s allowed him to blitz more, resulting in 2½ tackles for loss and one sack.

“I think, personally, I’m playing at a high level right now,” Werner said that same afternoon. “I credit that to the coaches and other players for pushing me and keeping me on the right path. But it’s not about me, it’s about the team. Obviously, we have to focus on our defense and get everything right. When we have a big-time lead at half-time, we have to keep that energy and keep that passion that we had in the first half.”

Borland agreed.

“The one thing we can’t do is point fingers,” Borland said. “This is a collective problem. Each unit and each person has to take accountability, learn from what’s happened in the past and just find ways to

get better.

“We haven’t been able to put a full game together. Some really good plays and some not-so-good plays, but those mistakes are all correctable. The coaching staff and the players are really working to get those addressed. We’ll see in the next few weeks how teams try to attack us.”

**BSB Midseason Grade: A**

### Defensive Backs

Though many expected Shaun Wade’s move from the slot to outside cornerback to be an easy transition and bring stability to a secondary breaking in three new starters, that hasn’t been the case.

The Buckeyes rank 117th in the Football Bowl Subdivision in passing yards allowed per game (291.0) and have allowed four plays of 50 or more yards this season.

Wade was actually responsible for one of those plays, surrendering a 56-yard touchdown reception against Indiana’s Fryfogle. He’s allowed three additional scores, including two in the win over Penn State on Oct. 31. Even so, the staff believes they have the right personnel and that there’s still time to correct the issues that plague the secondary thus far.

“I think sometimes we press or look to make a bigger play than what exists for us in the structure of our defense, and it’s really important that I do a better job of coaching that and make sure we all understand that we don’t need to make all of the big plays,” Coombs said. “We need to make sure that we’re not chasing something that’s not there that, in turn, creates a big play.”

“There were four plays (against Indiana) in particular that are egregious. When you watch those, it doesn’t make you feel good. But there are so many good things. There’s no question the focus ends up being on those ones that don’t go well. Those are the ones that have gotten all of our attention. Those are fixable errors that have to be fixed.”

Day believes the defense is designed to limit big plays, with four down linemen rushing the passer, linebackers who excel in coverage, corners who play man-to-man and a single-high safety. But Fuller’s absence, in particular, is glaring.

“Jordan was really good for us,” Day said. “He was just reliable. He tackled well. He got everybody lined up. He was probably underappreciated a bit when he was here.”

In his place is sophomore Marcus Hooker, whose older brother, Malik, had arguably one of the best seasons of any defensive back in Ohio State history. He’s played well in some situations, picking off a pass in the win over the Nittany Lions, but has also let receivers get behind him at times.

“That position is very, very important,” Day said. “He’s the one that has to keep it all in front of him. He’s in charge back there. Marcus has had some good moments, but he’s also been a little inconsistent. We’re

addressing some of the things he needs to get better at, and we’re going to look at a bunch of different (personnel) combinations, see what’s best and get this thing fixed.”

With junior Cameron Brown out for the season due to an Achilles injury, the Buckeyes notably lack experience at cornerback. Only Wade and junior Sevn Banks saw action on the outside in the win over Indiana, while senior Marcus Williamson and Josh Proctor – who is listed as a safety – manned the slot. Hooker, meanwhile, played every snap at the single-high safety position.

Both Coombs and Day said they’d like to get others playing time but noted you can’t ease someone into the secondary like you might be able to elsewhere.

“We’re constantly looking for the opportunity to get more guys on the field,” Coombs said. “It’s easy to substitute an interior lineman to get them experience, but it’s much harder on the islands of the secondary to do that. If a defensive lineman steps to the wrong gap on something, that’s one issue. If a secondary player makes a mistake, it can result in points.

“We’re practicing a lot of depth but we’re not playing a lot of depth. Some of that is a function of how the second halves have gone, too.”

The lack of spring practice and nonconference games has stunted the development of the younger players, particularly redshirt freshman safeties Ronnie Hickman and Bryson Shaw, as well as early enrollee freshman cornerbacks Lejond Cavazos and Ryan Watts.

“The body of work behind it is a little bit of an unknown,” Day said. “In a big game, you’re more hesitant to put them in.”

That means the secondary has reached a crossroads halfway through the season. Either Coombs and Day trust younger players to contribute or those already on the field need to step up.

“I think that we have the right stuff in,” Day said. “We just have to execute a little better. And if we do that, I think we’re going to be in good shape. I don’t think there’s been anything schematically where you look at it and you’re like, ‘Well, that’s not good.’ I think, schematically, we’re right where we need to be. We just need to execute better.”

**BSB Midseason Grade: C**

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# Special Teams Unit Off To Surprisingly Rocky Start

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Coming into the season, it was expected that the special teams units would be among the most steady on the whole team with a pair of seniors – punter Drue Chrisman and kicker Blake Haubeil – leading the charge after strong collegiate careers to this point.

The biggest question mark on either of those units was who would be the new long snapper after Liam McCullough's departure, a position that safeties and special teams coordinator Matt Barnes said on Oct. 14 would be taken over by another veteran presence, fifth-year senior Bradley Robinson, giving the Buckeyes a full unit of some of the most experienced players in the program. Robinson beat out Liam's brother, Roen McCullough, who is a third-year sophomore.

"Right now, Brad Robinson is our starting long snapper," Barnes said. "But just like any other position, they're not set in stone and ultimately we're going to make sure we've got the guy out there that gives us the best opportunity to win."

But the special teams units, generally, have not been up to the expected level of play across the board, and while injuries have been the cause of some of the issues, other areas, like in the return game, are just not as explosive as thought possible considering the talent of the players in the room.

The following are BSB's midterm grades for the special teams, with statistics through four games.

## Punt Block, Field-Goal Block

Through four games, Ohio State has not been able to block a punt or a field goal after blocking three through the first half of last season. The pressure on opposing punters or kickers has also not been noticed in the results, as opponents are averaging 45.5 yards per punt and have made all four field-goal attempts, including one from 50 yards by Penn State distance kicker Jordan Stout at the end of the first half of a 38-25 Buckeye victory.

That 45.5 yards allowed per punt num-

ber is eighth-worst in the Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS), and the Buckeyes are one of 10 teams in the country to not have forced a field-goal miss after multiple attempts.

The lack of defensive end Chase Young may be the reason for the decline at this position from a season ago, but both Sevn Banks and Chris Olave, the other two kick blockers from 2019, are still on the team and could make an impact there later in the year.

**BSB Midterm Grade: C-**

## Punt Team

Chrisman may not have quite reached the highs he had from his 2018 season, but the Ray Guy Award watch list regular has been as consistent as always, for the most part, this season.

The fifth-year senior punter is averaging 42.0 yards per punt with a long of 52. Those numbers are slightly down from a year ago (44.3 yards, long of 61), but Chrisman has often had to punt from midfield this season, and he is doing a much better job of avoiding punting the ball into the end zone, getting a touchback just once compared to 18 inside the 20-yard line on 46 punts in 2019.

And even that lone touchback was due to a misplay by Robinson on downing the ball inside the 5-yard line while Olave was also down there in coverage to potentially make the play.

Olave, despite all his success at wide receiver this season, still takes pride in his role on special teams, and he said that is largely due to the trio of fifth-year senior wide receivers who were at Ohio State when Olave was a true freshman.

"That's just how I was raised," Olave said. "I feel like when I first got here, I had older guys in the room that showed me the way – Terry McLaurin, Parris Campbell, Johnnie Dixon – so they set that example and I just followed it. Now I'm here in my third year as the old guy, and I want to pass that down to the younger guys, too."

What has not been as up to par is the punt-return defense, which has had to face only three returns on the season but has allowed 80 total yards on them for a horrid 26.7 yards allowed per return, second worst

in the FBS.

Most of those yards came on a 58-yard touchdown return by Rutgers wide receiver Bo Melton off a lateral across the field that had a variety of missed tackles along the way.

**BSB Midterm Grade: B-**

## Kickoff Return Defense

The Buckeyes have faced 10 kickoff returns from opponents through four games and have allowed just 166 yards on them, with that 16.6 yards allowed per kickoff return number ranking No. 14 in the FBS.

The longest return Ohio State has allowed is 26 yards, and Haubeil and fourth-year junior kicker Dominic DiMaccio have combined for five touchbacks on 31 kickoffs, with DiMaccio having the lone kickoff that went out of bounds.

Because of Ohio State's high-powered offense, this unit has been on the field early and often through four games, and they have been very solid through the first half of the season.

That success, according to fourth-year junior wide receiver Chris Booker, comes from the return defense seeing a wide variety of plays in practice.

"We try to prepare for everything," Booker said. "They throw so much stuff at us in practice, so whatever we get in the game, whatever you see, we probably already got it in practice. So, it's just always trying to be prepared and keep your guard up and make sure that you know your job and how to do your job. And if every guy on the field does their job, we'll be fine."

**BSB Midterm Grade: A-**

## Punt, Kick Return

Coming into the season, Barnes said he was excited at the amount of talent Ohio State had as potential returners and that there would likely be chances for multiple players to flash in both the kick and punt return game.

"We have a myriad of guys who are trying to get experience," Barnes said. "You know COVID has really changed the depth and just how you view your roster and things like that, and in the back of your mind these days

is always, 'Well what if something happens in this room and these three guys can't go,' so you try to develop as many guys as you can and have some different guys from different position groups that can help you at those spots in case something goes awry. It will likely not be one guy the whole season. We'll try to get some different guys some opportunities."

To put it simply, Ohio State has been underwhelming in the return game through its first four matchups. Starting with kick returns, the Buckeyes have six returns for 75 yards for a disappointing 12.5 yards per return average that is the second worst in the FBS to only Texas A&M, who has just three kick returns for 30 yards.

Fifth-year senior Demario McCall has taken four of these six returns for 60 yards, boasting a slightly better average than the team total, which is bogged down by a return of four yards by Garrett Wilson and a return of 11 yards by Xavier Johnson.

The punt return game is only better by comparison with how bad the kick returns have been, with Ohio State racking up 36 yards on five returns this season, with that 7.2 yards per return ranking 67th.

Wilson has the bulk of those punt returns (three) and the vast majority of the yards (32), while freshman wide receiver Jaxon Smith-Njigba has just 4 yards on his two attempts, though Barnes said he is excited for the potential that Smith-Njigba holds in the return game.

"Jaxon is just so smooth and has just unbelievable ball skills," Barnes said. "He's a guy that I think can really help us at returner, and anything involving the football as it comes to kicking game, I think that's where he would really be great."

**BSB Midterm Grade: D+**

## Field Goal, PAT

Let's start with the positive side of this unit: Ohio State has made all 25 of its extra-point attempts this season, making it one of 61 programs that can say that.

But the good news for the field goal, PAT unit stops there, though it's not all the fault of the unit. Haubeil, a reliable kicker last season who hit 13 of 15 tries in 2019, including a long of 55 yards against Northwestern, injured his groin and has not played since missing an attempt from 20 yards out in the Penn State game.

Haubeil's replacement that game was DiMaccio. While he hit on all three point-after tries, as well as a 22-yard field goal, he also missed from 23 yards out, giving the Buckeyes a total of six easy points against the Nittany Lions.

"Missed field goals were just ridiculous," Ohio State head coach Ryan Day said on Nov. 2, two days after the win over Penn State. "Those are chip shots. There's some things in the special teams that we have to clean up for sure."

The next game, freshman kicker Jake Seibert took over the reins on field goals and extra points while DiMaccio manned kick-offs, and Seibert hit on all seven point-after attempts in the win over Rutgers. But against Indiana, Seibert missed his lone field-goal try from 44 yards, three points that could have been key to securing what ended up being a one-possession victory.

That leaves Ohio State at 2 for 5 on the season on field-goal attempts, tied for the sixth-worst success rate (40 percent) in the FBS.

**BSB Midterm Grade: D+**

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# BSB Staff Discusses Impact Of OSU's Virus Outbreak

*Following the cancellation of Ohio State's Nov. 28 matchup with Illinois, the Buckeye Sports Bulletin staff came together for an in-depth discussion via Zoom.*

*Wyatt Crosher, Joe Dempsey, Andrew Lind and Patrick Mayhorn pondered the Buckeyes' chances of making the College Football Playoff, the prospects of playing again in the regular season, the Big Ten's 21-day return-to-play procedure, the legitimacy of the COVID-riddled 2020 campaign, and more.*

*The discussion took place before Michigan State upset Northwestern. While we have attempted to edit the roundtable to reflect the results of that game, some inconsistencies may remain. Also, much of the discussion is based on the assumption that Ohio State would not have enough games played to qualify for the Big Ten Championship Game.*

**Patrick Mayhorn:** If Ohio State were to get another one of its games canceled, it would then miss the Big Ten Championship Game. Do you think that, under that circumstance without a Big Ten Championship Game, Ohio State would still make the playoff?

**Wyatt Crosher:** It will certainly get interesting, is what I would say. Do I think they could still make the playoff? Absolutely. I think it may come down a little bit less to their own fate than normal. Ohio State would still be, what, 4- or 5-and-0 and they'd still have a win if they play in the Big Ten championship week, against

Wisconsin probably.

So they would still have a route to the playoff, but they might need Notre Dame to beat Clemson again. I think it gets more interesting, but I think Ohio State definitely can still make the playoff. It's just not a 100 percent lock like it may be if Ohio State played their full schedule in the Big Ten.

**Joe Dempsey:** I think they definitely could still make it without a Big Ten championship. Like Wyatt said, it's going to be interesting, though. That would likely mean that Indiana and Northwestern would face off for the Big Ten title, and Ohio State would likely play Wisconsin in the second-place game. If that game were to be played, then that could help boost the résumé for Ohio State, which would presumably still be undefeated.

So I don't think that missing another game will completely eliminate the Buckeyes because they've handled their business when they've actually played. The committee can still see them as one of the top four teams even if another team might have a better résumé. So that's where it's going to get tricky, I think, is how much they'll weigh the talent that Ohio State has vs. maybe another team with more wins.

**Andrew Lind:** In kind of echoing what you guys said, I think it's important to note that from a résumé standpoint, a win over Wisconsin is always going to look better than a win over Northwestern. The only way Northwestern is going to make

the College Football Playoff is if they happen to beat Ohio State. And if they're not given that opportunity, then that ultimately doesn't matter.

If Ohio State does have the Michigan State game canceled because of a carry-over of what's going on, Ohio State is presumably going to end the season with Michigan and Wisconsin, and those two things, I don't think that's something you should undervalue. They're going to look at it and say, "Well, they have an important rivalry win, they have a win over Wisconsin," which most people think is still a better team than Northwestern despite the result head to head. So if you end up with those two résumé boosters to end the season, you're still going to be 5-0 with wins in those games and Indiana, who could presumably win the Big Ten as well.

So, like I said, those are all résumé things. Then it ultimately comes down to whether the committee is worried about picking simply the four best teams or going off their résumés. And if it's the former as they've mentioned in their meetings, as they've said, they're trying to figure out the four best teams. As you see how the rankings were this past week, Ohio State was at No. 4 despite the fact they've played half as many games as everybody else. No other team is going to get that benefit of the doubt other than Ohio State. So if there's one team that's going to be able to make it despite not winning their conference, despite having the fewest number of games, it's definitely Ohio State.

**PM:** I think that my answer depends largely on how the playoff committee is going to view deserving vs. name brand vs. what we're assuming is a really good Ohio State team, but what I don't think we've seen is a really good Ohio State team quite yet. I think if it's going off of deserving, then Ohio State probably doesn't get in because its résumé is little better than Northwestern's. Northwestern would have wins over the same ranked teams in Indiana and Wisconsin whereas Ohio State would have fewer games played and wouldn't have – even if it's a bizarre Big Ten Championship Game – Ohio State wouldn't have that Big Ten Championship Game.

I think that if we're assuming – and I am going to assume this – that the committee is going to go off of assumptions and gut feelings about Ohio State rather than true résumé, I think Ohio State can still get in. If this becomes a situation where the decision is being made entirely on résumé, Ohio State is I think in kind of a bad place. And so I think Ohio State gets itself into a situation in those circumstances where it probably needs to throttle Wisconsin in that faux Big Ten Championship Game if it wants a truly definitive spot in the playoff.

There are other paths – and we can talk about that now if you guys don't have anything else on this – that I think could get Ohio State to the playoff, but it sort of depends on the actual parameters that the committee is setting, and we don't really know anything about those because they've never been especially consistent.

**AL:** I think it's important to note that there are those other things that could happen – Clemson losing again then you'll have a two-loss Clemson team, you'll have Notre Dame and Alabama who presum-

ably finish undefeated – but then you would be looking for two spots vs. maybe coming down to an undefeated Ohio State with no Big Ten title. There are so many things that could happen that it's hard to speculate.

**PM:** We can kind of get into that. As you said, it's a little bit hard to speculate, but what do you think that a, say, 5-0 Ohio State team that misses both Michigan State and Michigan after this and then plays Wisconsin in the champions week, what do you think that Ohio State team would need to get into the playoff? Who else would need to lose?

**WC:** I'll start off by saying that if Ohio State comes out and beats Wisconsin, maybe not like 2014 but very handily, I don't know if they'll need anybody to lose because I think Ohio State holds a lot of weight, like you guys were saying. If they come out and look like the team that a lot of people thought they were, I don't know if they'll need anything.

But let's say they win close and they're a 5-0 team with a win over Wisconsin but maybe not super-handily, I think that likely Clemson-Notre Dame rematch that's going to happen will be big because if Clemson beats Notre Dame, they're going to put both those teams in, and Alabama I'm expecting to run the table. And then you have some interesting questions. Does Cincinnati get a chance? I'm less likely to think Cincinnati gets a chance though they've looked very strong just because of the conference they're in.

And then you look at one-loss Texas A&M now, who wouldn't get into the SEC championship but has a decent résumé. They beat Florida. Their only loss is to the top team in the country. So you might need someone like Texas A&M to lose a game. I think if Ohio State only had five wins and it wasn't super impressive against Wisconsin, I think there are cases for other teams to get into that other spot. But I think the first one is if Clemson can lose to Notre Dame again, that would open up two spots in the playoff that aren't really decided, and that would leave much more of a door for Ohio State to get in, almost regardless of how they win.

**JD:** Yeah, I agree with Wyatt here. It's going to be very interesting. There are going to be a lot of debates come decision time for the CFP. It's hard to envision Clemson losing twice to the same team in the same year just because of how good they've been in the past few years, so that's going to make it even trickier if Notre Dame and Clemson both have one loss and the impressive résumés they have with beating each other. I think Ohio State definitely has a chance at 5-0.

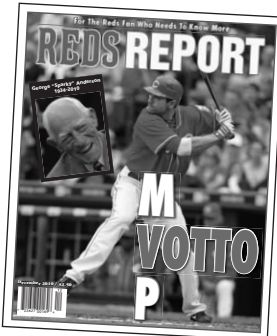
Obviously they're going to hope to play more games than that to give them a stronger case. But I think if they're undefeated, it's going to be hard to put a one-loss team regardless of their résumé or their status as conference champion. It's pretty unfortunate for the schools like Cincinnati or Northwestern, who may have one of the best years in their entire existence and still not be considered worthy of a top-four spot with a chance to play in the College Football Playoff. It's going to be interesting to see. We're going to have a lot of talking-head debates about this for the next few months, I can foresee, but I think as long as Ohio State keeps winning, they'll be in.

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**AL:** I definitely agree with that. From a standpoint of if Ohio State finishes undefeated, we've already talked about how the name brand itself carries so much weight. And if everything continues to fall as chalk, if you will – if Alabama finishes undefeated, if Notre Dame goes through and beats Clemson again, that effectively removes Clemson from the conversation. And Ohio State at that point might even finish third in the College Football Playoff rankings.

But where the issue then comes in is if Alabama happens to lose to Florida in the SEC championship, if Clemson beats Notre Dame in the ACC championship, then you have all of these host of one-loss teams that all have an argument for going. Does a one-loss Alabama with no conference title but still played for a conference title outweigh an undefeated Ohio State team that didn't play for a conference title and didn't play as many games?

So from an Ohio State standpoint, you just want everything to fall in a way that is a presumed final, if you will. You have Alabama at No. 1, Notre Dame at No. 2, Ohio State at No. 3 and then a bunch of one-loss teams looking for that fourth spot.

Ultimately, like I said and like the committee said, they're not putting a ton of weight into how many games are played because really, ultimately, there's nothing you can do about that. Everybody's going to play an uneven amount of games, and it's important to note how those teams are still good despite the fact that they didn't play, if that makes sense. That ultimately favors Ohio State.

Like I said, if they finish with wins over Michigan and Wisconsin or even if they don't play Michigan because Michigan isn't very good, if they beat Wisconsin handily, they're still going to say, "Look, we did what we can. We were only given these games to play or could only play these games and we took care of business when we did." At the end of the day, they're 5-0, and if you have a bunch of one- or two-loss teams, you can't really put them over Ohio State.

**WC:** Yeah, what I was going to say is I think that Alabama-Florida potential SEC championship is a good one that I didn't mention, because if it doesn't go Ohio State's way and Florida and Clemson won in those two conference championships, it could be two teams from each of those conferences, which is not a fun thing to think about, just in general. Just not very fun to have that lack of variety.

**AL:** And I don't think Texas A&M is going to get the benefit of the doubt. They are right now because they lost to No. 1, but if it comes down to it, they got beat by roughly 20 points in that game, so it's not as if they had a close game like Clemson did against Notre Dame when they lost.

**PM:** Yeah, and there's not really a place for another quality win in that Texas A&M schedule. I don't think that Texas A&M is going to be a huge concern for Ohio State, and I think I agree with some of the other sentiments shared where the easiest path here for Ohio State – I mean, the easiest, easiest – is to blow Wisconsin out of the water. I think that if Ohio State can crush Wisconsin, then anything else happening above it is not going to matter a ton. But if Ohio State is not able to do that for whatever reason, not just a football reason, then I think the most obvious path is one where Notre Dame beats Clemson. I think that pretty easily gets Ohio State in, and I don't know who that other spot

goes to. I think that is the easiest scenario for Ohio State.

**PM:** Cancellations aside, do you guys think that based just purely on résumé, on merit, has Ohio State proved itself a playoff-worthy team so far this season? Wyatt, we'll open up with you again.

**WC:** I think this is a really interesting question because Ohio State almost always has the talent to be a playoff-worthy team, and so far, I would say a little bit of yes and no. I think yes because I think so far there's only been two teams, unequivocally, you have to put in the playoffs so far, and that's Alabama and Notre Dame. So maybe by default, I think Ohio State could still be a playoff-worthy team at this point in the season, but they haven't done anything like last year, for example, when they were just destroying everybody on the schedule. They haven't done anything yet this year where I've been just completely blown away, like, "This has got to be a top-four team. They look so talented, they look so ready to compete with those two teams."

And some of their schedule, they haven't played any tough teams except Indiana, which they beat by seven. That Penn State win doesn't mean much of anything now because of how poorly Penn State has played since. So some of it is because their schedule hasn't been very difficult. If I just look at how Ohio State has played, I just haven't been able to put them in that top tier of teams like I usually can, whereas I think Notre Dame and Alabama have done things to separate from that group a little bit. So I think they may still be a top-four team, but they haven't been one of the very best teams in the country.

**JD:** Yeah, this is a tough question for me because I spend so much time, like we all do, focused on Ohio State athletics. If I'm not covering Ohio State football games, I'm probably writing about it or editing something or covering men's basketball. So my perspective has been so locked in on Ohio State that I miss a lot of the other games just by default. I think how talented Ohio State is, if it is undefeated, then it always has to be in the argument for being playoff-worthy.

Wyatt brings us some good points about they haven't really proved it yet. Indiana was a good team, though, and it wasn't pretty, but they still won and put up 42 points and 600 yards. They haven't hurt themselves too much in my mind, but maybe they haven't been up to Ohio State standards per se.

But I think if they played Northwestern, I'd pick Ohio State. If they played some of these other teams that are on the bubble, I would still lean toward Ohio State winning those games. So in that sense, I think they are up there in that playoff-worthy discussion. But I had to admit at first that I haven't seen all of Texas A&M or Florida's games, so it's hard for me to compare them directly. But I think as long as they continue to win, they can control their destiny in some sense.

**AL:** I think from the standpoint of them being playoff-worthy, it depends on whether you look at the rest of college football as a whole or if you're just judging them individually. Because if you look at the offense, the offense is 100 percent playoff-worthy. It's going to be difficult for teams to stop them on a consistent basis. If you look at it that way, they are.

Defensively, you obviously see flaws. You say, "Well obviously, that's not a championship defense." And you go

through and you look at every other team besides Alabama and maybe Notre Dame, you say to yourself, "OK, well every team is flawed." Clemson doesn't have as much talent at wide receiver as they normally do. They've obviously struggled a bit in terms of consistency without Trevor Lawrence. Texas A&M, as I mentioned, got blown out by Alabama. Florida is probably the only other team that I would group in with Ohio State in terms of being so much better offensively than they are defensively.

So it's kind of one of those things where you see the top tier, you can group Ohio State in with that group offensively, not defensively. And then you see everybody else. So are we judging Ohio State individually in saying they're worthy of making it to the playoff, or are we comparing them to other teams? Does that make sense?

**PM:** I think I have sort of a similar view where there are two paths to look at this from. Mine is less with the teams that Ohio State is being compared to in terms of talent and more in résumé, and I think I talked about this a little bit earlier. I don't think Ohio State has a top-10 résumé.

I don't think Ohio State is anywhere near the best if we're just talking about where we think Ohio State will be in the middle of December when they're making this call. There aren't really all that many impressive wins on this schedule. I think beating Indiana, as you guys mentioned, is good and Ohio State obviously needed to do that. Beating Wisconsin would be good. But Ohio State beat three bad teams and didn't look especially impressive in two of those games, Penn State and Rutgers. And I don't think that there's a ton that can be taken from that.

And when we're comparing that to a team like Florida or Texas A&M or Clemson – even moving down to someone like Northwestern or Cincinnati, whatever it might be – I think, and this is certainly not popular in the Big Ten specifically, I don't think there's a huge difference between what Cincinnati has done and what Ohio State has done in terms of the teams that they've beaten. The bottom of the Big Ten is bad. It's really, really bad. And so I think if you're looking at it in terms of résumé, Ohio State doesn't have much of a case here.

So it kind of depends on what your definition of worthy is. If we're talking about talent, Ohio State's obviously worthy of the playoff. But if we're going on merit, something that is earned or drawn through its production on the field, I haven't seen anything from this Ohio State team that makes me think that it's playoff-caliber, at least not any more so than Cincinnati or Northwestern or Florida, Texas A&M, whoever it might be. Even somebody like USC, if there's going to be an undefeated team coming out of the Pac-12, they also won't impress, but Ohio State has not impressed so far this season.

So I think that there's a lot of – and this is fair to do because we know how talent works in college football – but I think there's a lot of assuming based on talent that Ohio State is a really, really good team, but so far we've only seen a good team from Ohio State. So that's sort of where I stand on this.

**AL:** It kind of makes you wonder, though, if a regular season is even needed in some situations because does the college football playoff committee automatically say, "You know what? These teams are just – unless something completely

unexpected happens – does Alabama automatically ..."

**WC:** That's why Georgia's in the top 10.

**JD:** (laughter) Always.

**AL:** That's a fair thing to point out, because if it comes down to Ohio State vs. Cincinnati, I hate to say it for Cincinnati fans, but they're not making it.

**PM:** Yeah.

**WC:** Yep.

**AL:** Because Ohio State fans are going to say they might have the same record, but they're full of five-stars vs. three-stars. So that will obviously give Ohio State the benefit of the doubt.

**PM:** I think that's the way to view it. Like earlier, when we were talking about will Ohio State get in, probably. But who is more deserving? If we're just going off assumptions or talent, there's no need for a regular season. Just announce the playoff in August. Just say, "Well, it's Alabama, Ohio State, Clemson and Georgia again, just like it was the last five years."

**AL:** Just rotate Georgia and Oklahoma every other year.

**PM:** (laughter) Yeah. Moving back to Ohio State specifically and some more cancellation stuff, do you guys expect that Ohio State will play another regular-season game this year, because right now it seems like things are not good for the Michigan State game next week and then it's more up in the air about Michigan on Dec. 12. What would you expect for Ohio State moving forward?

**WC:** Obviously this is very difficult to speculate because a lot of things could happen and Ohio State is not necessarily the most open program as far as what these numbers are looking like (laughter). Dr. Jim Borchers did say that they were over the 7.5 percent positivity across the population. So that's not just players. I'm going to have to go with what I've seen from other teams in the Big Ten that have had to cancel, and that's been that they canceled one game and then one the following week but then they were able to play the third. Obviously Ohio State's situation could be different. I don't know that. So if I were to guess, I would say that they'll miss Illinois and then Michigan State, but then they will play against Michigan.

**JD:** I'm not sure about this one either, but I sure hope they play just because that would mean that the team got back healthy and so did their opponents. I think Gene Smith said it well today when he was saying, "Everyone's questioning whether we'll play enough games to make the Big Ten title or whether we'll play enough games to make the College Football Playoff, but this is a serious situation and it's about getting the players and coaches healthy and back to where they can perform normal activities and get back to football again." So I really don't know. I think they will play again, but it's all so up in the air this year.

**AL:** I'm going to be a little more optimistic in my answer just based on what Gene said today about how they're going to monitor it and try effectively to play. The fact that they took the steps they did – they didn't have to cancel the game against Illinois; they did so because they were worried about setting a clean field and making sure there wasn't a bigger spread. If they're being kind of ahead of the game, if you will, and they're trying to give them a chance to play, I would say

Continued On Page 18



# Big Ten's 21-Day Absence Period Called Into Question

Continued From Page 17

that it's probably 50-50 at this point if they play at Michigan State.

I fully expect them to play against Michigan just based on the precedent that's been set with Wisconsin and Maryland that you miss one game because of it and one additional game as you work through the isolation period, myocarditis testing and those kinds of things to make sure that the players are back. But I fully expect them to play the Michigan game and effectively the third-place game in the Big Ten championship week because they wouldn't be eligible, but I would say it's probably 50-50 on Michigan State.

**PM:** I think that the crucial piece of information here from that press conference was Dr. Borchers saying that Ohio State was not required to do this, that it was a school choice made in conjunction with the Big Ten but that this was not Ohio State going over the required threshold needed to shut things down by rule.

That sort of changed my view on this because I thought if it was bad enough to merit the automatic shut-down, then I did not see a way for Ohio State to play against Michigan State and I thought that things would look pretty bad against Michigan. But if this was an in-house decision made to try to keep things under control as best as possible, then I would imagine ... my assumption right now is that the Michigan State game will be canceled and then Ohio State will likely be back against Michigan.

One of the crucial things with this, and something that kind of determines who Ohio State will have in that game when it does inevitably return against Michigan or Wisconsin – would not matter as much

against Wisconsin – but the Big Ten's 21-day isolation period, and this has been a hot topic of late. Gene Smith said in the press conference specifically that the Big Ten will not be bringing this down to 14 or 10 days or whatever it is that people wanted, but it's still worth discussing here. Do you guys feel that the Big Ten's 21-day isolation period required for players who test positive is too long? Is it just right? Is it too short? Where do you stand on this, Wyatt?

**WC:** This one where I don't want to come off like I'm trying to be a medical expert because obviously that is not my field. If they thought that 21 days is required to make sure the safety of the players is all there and that they can test for myocarditis – that is a legitimate concern – then I can't say, "Oh, they 100 percent should make it shorter," you know what I mean? I don't know enough on the subject to say, "This is definitely far too long." The only thing I can say is that I know other conferences are not doing this, and I don't know if that's had any impact on them as far as the safety and health of players.

So maybe it is a little too long, but I can never blame the conference for trying to be overly safe when it comes to COVID-19 and the spread and the safety of the players long term. So I can't be too hard on the Big Ten if maybe this is a little too long because I know what their intention was at the end of the day. So I guess that's my answer that I think maybe it's a little too long, but I'd rather them be over-safe than not safe enough, if that makes sense.

**JD:** Yeah, I agree with that. This is a tough question, and it only comes up if you're trying to play a sport during a pandemic, so not very normal circumstances

for anything (laughter), which is why I think they erred on the side of caution.

Remember, we almost didn't have a Big Ten season at all, and this was one of the big things that allowed us to have a season, is the medical experts recommended, "Yeah, they need 10 days isolated and then there needs to be this 7- to 10-day period where they're getting acclimated back to playing." Dr. Borchers provided some clarity on this today. He was talking about how there's testing during that week, and a big part of that is making sure that no one is experiencing any cardiovascular effects from Covid, which I guess are pretty rare but can happen and can be fatal for athletes. So I think that's the big thing is they're looking for myocarditis to make sure that didn't come up, and then once they're cleared with that, they can keep going.

It is interesting that other places are only doing, what, 10-14 days? So I think that's why people are kind of like "What's the deal? Why does the Big Ten need an extra week?" So I get where that's coming from, but I understand why the medical experts recommended that at the beginning of the year and that's why they've stuck with it through so many cancellations.

**AL:** I think it's important to remember too that when the Big Ten decided to come back, or we can go back even further than that and say when the Big Ten decided to cancel in the first place, they were seeming to do it out of caution, an abundance of caution more than any other conference was.

So when you look at it like that and you say, "OK, well, the CDC might recommend 7-10 days where the Big Ten

says 10 days plus the extra myocarditis testing and all of that just to make sure that everything is OK," the Big Ten is just going above and beyond when it comes to that. It ultimately comes down to whether or not you think it is necessary or whether it truly is necessary, and you can make an argument either way.

So do I personally think it might be too much? Twenty-one days is a long time. It's three games unless you happen to have played on a Friday night like Wisconsin did and happen to be OK and get all their players back for that third game. Ultimately, it just comes down to the Big Ten is being overly cautious. Is it the wrong thing to do? That's hard to say. Do I personally think it might be too much? Yes, but it's not my call.

**PM:** I'll take kind of the coward's way out with my answer here and say that if I was making this call, I would just go with whatever the CDC is recommending. I don't know what that is off the top of my head. I think it might be a little bit less than what the Big Ten is going with. There are a lot of medical experts involved with this decision, and ultimately they know more about this than I do. Twenty-one, as you said, Andrew, it feels long to me, but I also don't know enough to make a strong argument for or against it. I think in general, it's probably fine, at least in my view. I trust Jim Borchers more than I do my own opinion on this. I don't have a ton of strong thoughts on the isolation period.

**AL:** I think the one thing to add to it – I want to just amend my answer a little bit – is if we're looking at it from a standpoint of everything is flexible and fluctuates and we don't know how everything goes – even the CDC went from 14 days originally to now it's 7-10 days – does that mean that the Big Ten should also be flexible in what it does and change as it goes along? Does the Big Ten have to hold itself to that 21 days and say, "We're going to forge ahead with this because that's what we said in the beginning," or does the Big Ten recognize that and say, "You know what, maybe we can relax this a little bit."

It's really no different from the rule that if you miss two games you're ineligible for the Big Ten championship. Well, that was a great idea until everybody seemed to be missing games. Really? Should a one-loss Indiana who got beat by Ohio State deserve to go because they played two more games? It's just kind of one of those things where the Big Ten should be flexible, but at the same time I understand why they want to stick with what they set in the beginning.

**WC:** Patrick, you said the CDC guidelines ... I know at least that Ryan Day said that's what he has to follow. It's 10 days of isolation and if you don't have symptoms for 24 hours, you're good to go back. I don't know if there's anything that the CDC has added with athletes and myocarditis, that I don't know. But I know that Ryan Day at least has to follow the CDC guidelines.

**AL:** Yeah, the coaches just have to follow the CDC guidelines. The players have to be tested extra because they're playing, they're physically exerting themselves in a way that the coaches wouldn't typically be. So I think there is that important thing in there where they have to go through the seven days of myocarditis testing and make sure they don't have any additional



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## OHIO STATE FOOTBALL ANALYSIS

issues. So the Big Ten has added that in there to kind of absolve themselves, if you will, of any additional issues that could come from a player potentially returning to action and then something happening.

**JD:** You brought up a good point, Andrew. I'm just thinking out loud here. The thing about the 21 days, I wonder if they're worried that if they went back on it, that would be unfair to the teams like Wisconsin and Maryland who had to sit out 21 days already. You know what I mean? Their season was interrupted by that. So if they're like, "Oh, Ohio State's Ohio State, so we're making it 14 days," that might rub the conference the wrong way.

**AL:** Yeah, the issue is that they didn't address it before this happened to Ohio State, because Ohio State being the golden goose, obviously, it's something that if they do change it, then everyone is just going to be like, "Oh, they're bending the rules for Ohio State," when the reality of it could be "Hey, we should have gotten ahead of this and said, hey, things are adjusting in the real world. Maybe we should too," before Ohio State was even involved.

**PM:** Last question here. Do you think that this season is legitimate, or will it have an asterisk on it at the end because of how few games some teams have played, Ohio State specifically but this has been an issue everywhere? Wyatt, do you feel that this is a college football season that in 2030, in 2040, we'll look back on the college football reference page and see that, yeah, the 2020 season, that was a real college football season that we should use to take things from?

**WC:** Well I certainly think that we'll be looking back at the 2020 season for a long time. I don't know if it will be good reasons or not, but it's going to be remembered certainly. Again, this is a tough one. For a long time, I never really thought of it as an asterisk. You have games. You have players on the field. Yeah, they're shorter seasons, but they're still playing the games, you can still see the talent. I had no problem labeling it as a legitimate season.

But, man, there has been a lot of ... stuff ... that's gone on that isn't just foot-

ball as far as Covid cases, as far as teams having to cancel games, postpone games, delay games, whatever you want to say depending on the conference.

I still think that the winner of the national championship, it's going to go down as a national title for whoever gets it. I don't think that enough has happened where I can say, no, this team didn't actually win it. But I think it's going to come with a "well, Ohio State only played five games" or "well, every team was dealing with everything and maybe this team just dealt with the medical stuff better and didn't have a lot of cancellations or players gone." I think there are going to be a lot of "well this happened but if this happened" sort of situations where people are going to make it less legitimate. It's still a national title at the end of the day, but it's definitely not a season that's just going to go down as just another normal season in college football, not by any stretch of the imagination.

**JD:** I agree with that. I think that they're still playing games, there's still presumably going to be a national title, so I think all of those things will still stand. Someone will win the Heisman Trophy and earn it for their season. I think an asterisk kind of gets a negative stigma attached to it, but if a team's record is 12-0 every year or 10-2 and then it's 5-0, they might have to put an asterisk there to explain why they only played five games that year.

So I think it probably will have an asterisk, but what that means is just based on your perception because they're still playing games, they're still presumably going to have conference championships and a College Football Playoff, and all of the Power Five conferences at least are involved in the season and have a chance. So I think it's still legitimate from my perspective, but like Wyatt said, we'll be talking about it for a while. It will be an interesting thing to look back on for historians, like, "Can you believe this happened?" But I think it still holds merit looking down the road in 2040.

**AL:** I think it's interesting too from the standpoint of how many titles do you see a school like Alabama claim when they only played an eight-game season, didn't have

a playoff, didn't have a bowl game where they beat another undefeated team to prove that they were the best team in the country that year? So from that standpoint, I don't see very much of a difference.

And then, as I talked about before, you know, we could very well see Alabama, Clemson, Ohio State and one other school, and how is that any different from what we expected the season to be if COVID wasn't a thing and we played a full 12-game schedule and got to that same point? So at the end of the day, the result might be the exact same thing as what it would be if circumstances were normal.

Then on top of that, I know a lot of people kind of discredited the NBA bubble playoffs just because there weren't fans in the stands or because they didn't have to go on the road and face hostile environments in the playoffs or anything like that. But at the end of the day, the Lakers won like everyone expected them to. That is ultimately how I see this season as well. Ohio State might play five games, Alabama might play nine, Clemson might play 11, but at the end of the day, if those same schools are the ones fighting for a championship, how does that matter? Like I said, effectively it would be as if you just started out the season with those teams and had them play for it like we thought they were all along.

**PM:** I think that's probably right. I think that putting an asterisk on it and saying that no, this shouldn't matter is probably incorrect, because I do think that there are legitimately impressive teams this season, teams that deserve some sort of recognition. The national champion and the Heisman winner should still be recog-

nized as they usually would.

I think if there's any asterisk on this season, it should probably be one that just says there needs to be a little more nuance when looking back at this season, specifically on the bottom side of the sport where you have teams like Penn State that is, as we record this right now, winless. And I think that's kind of bizarre and probably wouldn't have happened in a normal season where every player is playing and there aren't COVID opt-outs and things like that. You have to look into the details further when looking at things like that, but at the top spots, for teams that have stayed relatively healthy, for teams that are roughly what they would have been anyway, those teams should still be getting the kind of acknowledgement and still be able to do the kind of celebration that they would do in a normal championship season. I think that ultimately, the final results aren't going to be all that different even if the path to get there was wildly, wildly different.

**AL:** That's the point that I agree with. I don't think that it has to be at the top. But Penn State is a great example. Penn State presumably would have played three nonconference games to begin the season. They would have probably won all three of them. And if you're looking historically and someone points out, "Oh, this is the first time ever that Penn State has started the season 0-5," well yeah, because it was a different circumstance than it was before. So I think that those situations are where it's important to put the asterisk, but not in who wins it because you still have clearly done enough to win it in the first place.



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# Michigan State Looks To String Together Wins

By PATRICK MAYHORN  
Special To Buckeye Sports Bulletin

Michigan State and its first-year head coach, former Ohio State defensive assistant Mel Tucker, enter a Dec. 5 bout against the Buckeyes just escaping a serious offensive slump. After opening the season with 27 points against both Rutgers and Michigan, Michigan State scored just seven total points against Iowa and Indiana in back-to-back weeks on Nov. 7 and Nov. 14.

"We have to figure out what we can do with the guys that we have, and when the holes are there, we have to hit them," Tucker said. "If they're not there, then we have to figure out why. Can we run those plays, or do we have to come up with something else? At the end of the day, it's a very simple game."

MSU was able to break that streak with a crucial 29-20 victory over Northwestern on Nov. 28, but it is still searching for consistency entering the final stretch of the season.

The Spartans have also been plagued by turnovers throughout the season, coughing up the ball seven times in week one against the Scarlet Knights and 15 times overall (3.0 times per game).

Michigan State is also still without a true starter at quarterback after Tucker made the decision to bench former starter Rocky Lombardi against Indiana after a shaky start to the game (3 of 7 passing for 21 yards and two interceptions). However, backup Payton Thorne didn't exactly wow in his place, completing just 10 of his 20 attempts for 110 yards, though he did toss just one interception.

Lombardi got the nod against the Wildcats but completed just 11 of his 27 pass attempts for 167 yards, two scores and an interception.

Despite Lombardi reclaiming his starting job against Northwestern, Tucker claims that the battle is ongoing, so Ohio State will likely prepare for both signal callers.

"Everyone's got to compete," Tucker said. "It doesn't have anything to do with what you've done in the past. It's what you've done most recently and you're only as good as your next play. That's the world we live in; that's the nature of our game and our existence."

There's a similar situation at running back. True freshman Jordon Simmons nabbed his first career start against Indiana, but he carried just five times for only 15 yards. Connor Heyward, who started last season and entered this year as the starter, carried five times for 27 yards but did so off the bench. Heyward returned to the starting role against Northwestern and had his best game of the season, rushing 24 times for 96 yards.

In all, the man on the starting line doesn't likely matter too much for the Spartans. Tucker indicated that ball carriers will continue to split time, meaning that Simmons, Heyward and Elijah Collins should all tote the rock against the Buckeyes.

"Right now, we're probably not going to have just one guy carry the whole load. And we never really wanted it to be that way initially," Tucker said. "We're going to share the load at running back with those guys."

Simmons' story is one that meshes with a larger ethos of Tucker's program. The Spartans have undergone a bit of a youth movement this season, slotting in underclassmen at several key positions without established or productive upper classmen available. Simmons fills that role at running back, but freshman receiver Ricky White may be the most impressive new face so far. Or he was against Michigan, at least.

In that game, White hauled in eight passes for 196 yards to help slay the Wolverines.

However, he's caught just two passes on the season outside of that game. Many of those targets go to another youngster, red-shirt sophomore Jayden Reed, who is seeing his first career snaps this season and has taken advantage. He leads the team in receptions (22) and has drawn praise from his head coach.

"He's young and he's learning," Tucker said of Reed. "He practices hard, he plays with toughness. He's a consistent performer. You know what you're going to get from him day in and day out in terms of his effort, and how he goes about his practice and things like that. He's certainly a guy that we look to get the ball to because the key to it is finding ways to get the ball to your playmakers."

The offensive line, on the other hand, has been noticeably devoid of both youth and of playmakers. Michigan State has struggled to keep its quarterback upright so far this season (nine sacks allowed) and is averaging just 98.0 rushing yards per game. Tackles A.J. Arcuri and Kevin Jarvis and guard Matt Carrick have been constants up front, but instability at left guard and center has proved problematic for the Spartans. Despite that, Tucker spoke confidently of the group earlier in the season and appears to be seeing improvement with increased reps as the season wears on.

"(Offensive line coach Chris Kapilovic) is an outstanding offensive line coach/run game coordinator," Tucker said. "He breathes confidence into those guys, really preaches technique and fundamentals. They really bought in to what he teaches

## Get To Know ... Michigan State

### About Michigan State

- **2020 Record:** 2-3.
- **Team Information:** Offensive Formation – Spread; Defensive Formation – 4-2-5; Starters Returning – Offense 7, Defense 4, Specialists 2.
- **Head Coach:** Mel Tucker, 1st year at Michigan State, 2-3.
- **Series History:** 49th meeting; Ohio State leads 33-15-0.
- **School Facts:** Location – East Lansing, MI.; Enrollment – 49,809; Nickname – Spartans; Colors – Green, White; Conference – Big Ten (East Division); Stadium – Spartan Stadium (Surface, Grass; Capacity – 75,005).

### Top Offensive Players

Rushing	Att.	Net	Avg.	TD
Connor Heyward	52	179	3.4	0
Jordon Simmons	42	147	3.5	0
Elijah Collins	32	56	1.8	0

Passing	Comp.-Att.	Pct.	Yds.	TD-INT
Rocky Lombardi	79-146	54.1	1,057	8-8

Receiving	Rec.	Net	Avg.	TD
Jayden Reed	22	252	11.5	3
Jalen Nailor	16	379	23.7	2
Connor Heyward	13	61	4.7	2

### Team Offensive Stats

Points Per Game – 18.0  
Rushing Yards Per Game – 98.0  
Passing Yards Per Game – 233.4  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game – 331.4

### 2020 Schedule

Date	Opponent	Time/Result (ET)
Oct. 24	RUTGERS	L, 38-27
Oct. 31	at Michigan	W, 27-24
Nov. 7	at Iowa	L, 49-7
Nov. 14	INDIANA	L, 24-0
Nov. 21	at Maryland	Canceled
Nov. 28	NORTHWESTERN	W, 29-20
Dec. 5	OHIO STATE	12 p.m.
Dec. 12	at Penn State	TBA
Dec. 19	Big Ten Championship Week	TBA

### Top Defensive Players

Def. Leaders	Solo-Ast.	Tot.	TFL-Yds.	Sacks
Antjuan Simmons	22-31	53	6.5-14	1.0-4
Noah Harvey	22-15	37	4.5-11	–
Xavier Henderson	17-11	28	1.0-2	–
Jacob Panasiuk	11-14	25	2.5-13	1.0-8
Chase Kline	10-14	24	–	–
Tre Person	20-3	23	1.0-10	1.0-10
Michael Dowell	17-3	20	–	–
Shakur Brown	13-5	18	–	–
Naquan Jones	9-7	16	4.0-5	–

Interceptions	No.	Yds	Avg	TD
Shakur Brown	5	107	21.4	0

### Team Defensive Stats

Points Per Game Allowed – 31.0  
Rushing Yards Per Game Allowed – 132.0  
Passing Yards Per Game Allowed – 238.2  
Total Offense Avg. Per Game Allowed – 370.2

from a technique standpoint and just an attitude in how we need to play our front."

Up front defensively, Michigan State has leaned heavily on rotation through five games, especially at tackle. Naquan Jones and Jacob Slade fill the starting roles but share plenty of reps with Dashaun Mallory and Jalen Hunt, younger players who have come on strong in 2020.

"It's important (to have) four guys that you can rotate inside that can go in there and be productive and play those positions, play the game the way it needs to be played," Tucker said. "And that's important because when you can rotate four guys inside and you can keep guys fresh and then they can play hard each and every snap and when they need a blow then you can get them out and get another guy in and you don't get drop-off. That's very important to see guys develop in a way that we feel confident that we can have a solid rotation inside."

There's less of a rotation on the outside because of star defensive end Jacob Panasiuk, but players like Drew Beesley, Jack Camper and Michael Fletcher do get plenty involved, primarily in the spot opposite Panasiuk.

"That's the expectation for a senior, and Jacob Panasiuk, he always has the ability to make plays and started off from the beginning of the game," defensive line coach Ron Burton said. "Use of his hands is what's big for him in his pass-rush ability, but he had some plays in the run game that really helped us and started to kind of spark the defense from start to finish."

At linebacker, Michigan State boasts just two starters, Antjuan Simmons and Noah Harvey, but Simmons is an All-America candidate and one of the top linebackers in the Big Ten. He has 53 tackles through five games and does a little bit of everything for Michigan State's defense.

"You know what you're going to get from him, day in and day out," Tucker said of Simmons. "He is a relentless competitor. He loves football and he cares about his football team."

However, the senior linebacker has been hobbled of late. He was limited in Michigan State's Nov. 7 loss to Iowa and still seems to be less than 100 percent.

"Obviously he's our leader on defense and obviously he's a playmaker," Tucker said. "He gave us what he could give us (against Iowa), and when he was out there he was going. When he was not out there, he was not able to go."

"He played hard while he was out there, and that's what it is."

The backfield has struggled with an increased focus on varied coverages from Tucker. After years as a quarters defense under the tutelage of Mark Dantonio, a shift to a more multiple look out of the 4-2-5 formation has presented challenges for a young group. Safety Xavier Henderson has flashed talent but struggled with consistency, while Michigan State has yet to find a solid contributor at cornerback.

Nickelback Shakur Brown has been the brightest star of the group so far, with 18 tackles and five interceptions on the season.

"He's a talented young man," Tucker said of Brown. "There are things that he needs to do better to improve. We've been working on those things. He's been working on those things. His approach to the game – when you do that, and you improve – at that position, you are going to get an opportunity to make plays."

While Brown has impressed, he has not been without flaw. A coverage mistake against Indiana's Ty Fryfogle allowed a 65-yard touchdown pass in MSU's Nov. 14 loss to the Hoosiers that Tucker alluded to following the game.

"You have to be very, very efficient because at a corner position especially, or the safety position you might only be at the point of attack seven or eight times in a game – when it really matters," said Tucker. "If you give up a play, is that a winning performance or not? Has he made strides? Yes. Does he need to continue to make strides in technique and fundamentals? Yes."

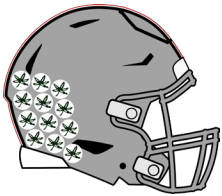


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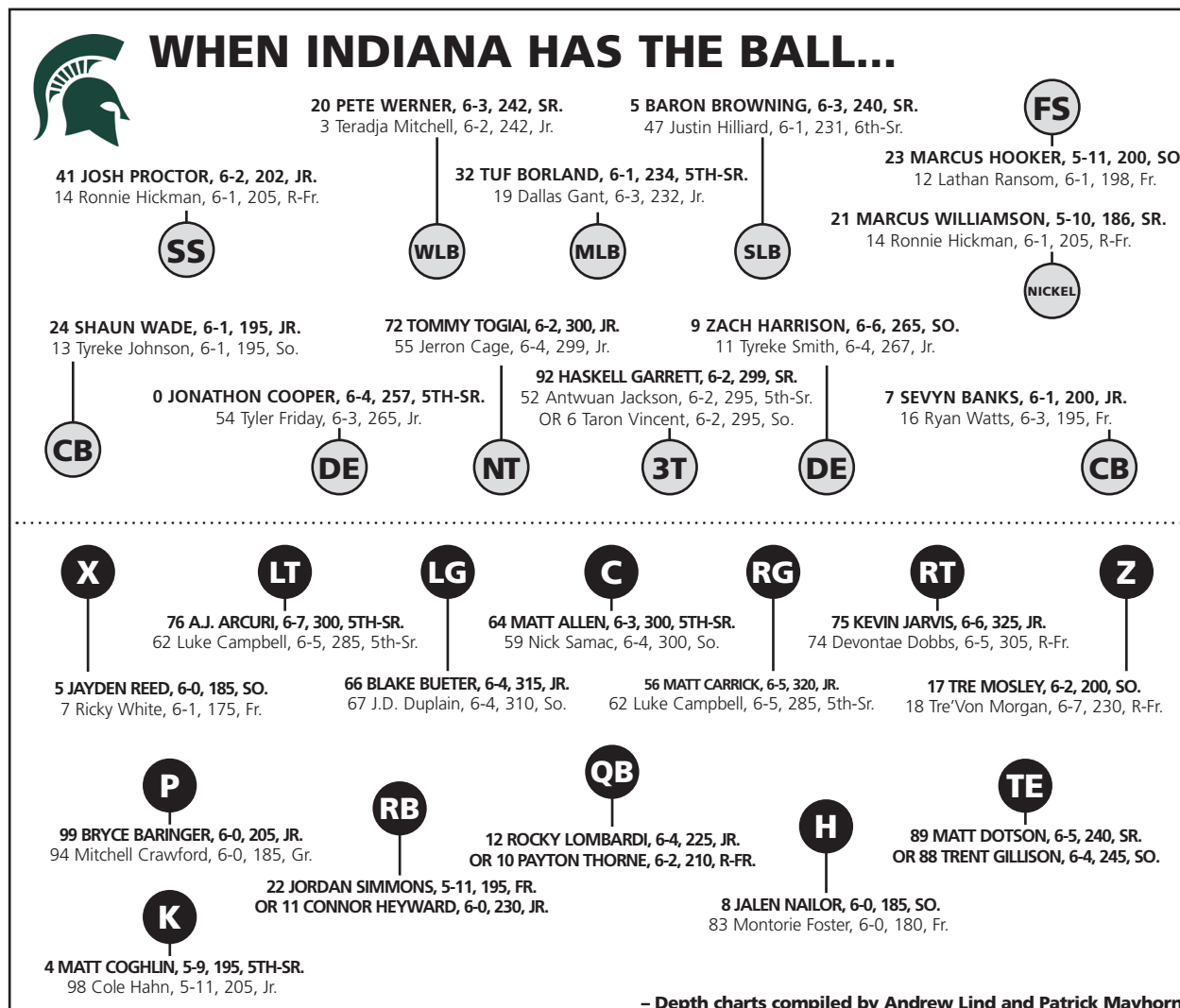
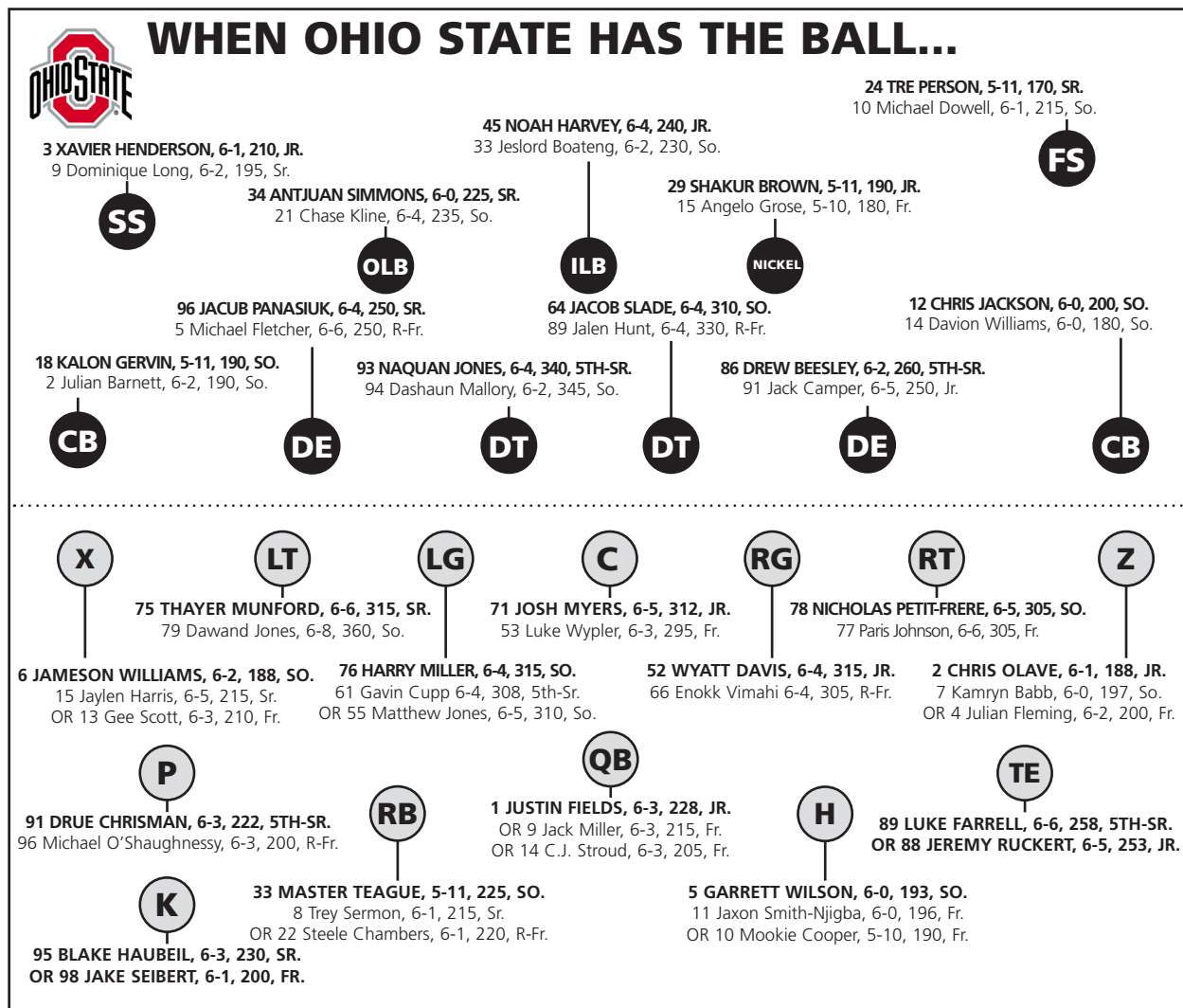


# Ohio State vs. Michigan State

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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. MICHIGAN STATE RUSH DEFENSE

While there is no guarantee the Dec. 5 game at Michigan State will be played, nor is it known which OSU players will not be allowed to play because of COVID-19 protocol, when the Buckeyes last played, a 42-35 win vs. Indiana on Nov. 21, Master Teague had 169 yards on 26 carries with two touchdowns, including a 41-yarder. Ohio State has the top rushing offense in the Big Ten at 233.3 yards per game. The Spartans entered their Nov. 28 tilt vs. Northwestern eighth in the conference in rush defense at 149.3 yards allowed but gave up a miserly 63 yards on 37 attempts (1.7 yards per carry) in a 29-20 upset of the No. 8 Wildcats. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### MICHIGAN STATE RUSH OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE RUSH DEFENSE

The Spartans were last in the Big Ten with 73.8 yards a game but ran for 195 on 47 tries (4.1 average) when Northwestern came to town. Connor Heyward led with 96 yards on 24 totes (4.0). He is the brother of former OSU defensive end Cameron Heyward, who is currently with the Pittsburgh Steelers. Their father was the late NFL running back Craig "Ironhead" Heyward. QB Rocky Lombardi showed some nimbleness with 65 yards on 10 carries. MSU has one rushing TD this season - by walk-on receiver and former tight end Tyler Hunt, whose only run this season was a 1-yard score in the 49-7 loss to Iowa on Nov. 7. Ohio State is second in rush defense at 98.5 yards per game, but teams tend to throw a lot because the pass coverage leaves a lot to be desired. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### OHIO STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. MICHIGAN STATE PASS DEFENSE

Justin Fields was notable not for throwing for 300 yards and two touchdowns vs. the Hoosiers but for his first three interceptions of the season that doubled the total in his OSU career. He was the victim of blitzes on almost every play. The Spartans aren't at that level of containment, but they did have four sacks against Northwestern and possess a ball hawk in defensive back Shakur Brown. He snared two NU passes to give him five in five games this season. If Fields has time, he will find Chris Olave and Garrett Wilson for big chunks. **EDGE: OHIO STATE**

### MICHIGAN STATE PASS OFFENSE VS. OHIO STATE PASS DEFENSE

The Buckeyes will be relieved to see anybody but Indiana's Michael Penix, who threw for 491 yards and five touchdowns seemingly at will. Lombardi isn't in that category but was an efficient 11 for 27 for 167 yards with one pick against Northwestern. He also tossed a 75-yard TD to Jalen Nailor in the first quarter and a 15-yard score to Jayden Reed on the first play of the second quarter. The line protected him and did not allow a sack. For the Buckeyes, no unit needs game reps more than the secondary, which is unproven and unreliable. **EDGE: MICHIGAN STATE**

### SPECIAL TEAMS

The unexpected time off for the Buckeyes may help heal kicker Blake Haubeil (groin), but nobody is letting on if he will return. OSU punter Drue Chrisman had a spectacular game at Spartan Stadium two years ago to help the Buckeyes to a 26-6 win by pinning all five second-half punts inside the 6-yard line. Matt Coghlin is an excellent kicker for the Spartans. He had an early 22-yard field goal against the Wildcats and in the fourth quarter he connected from 44 to make it 20-20 and from 48 to go ahead 23-20. **EDGE: EVEN**

### INTANGIBLES

The Spartans must be confident after their win over Northwestern for a 2-3 record under first-year coach Mel Tucker, who was Ohio State's defensive backs coach for the 2002 national championship team. The Buckeyes must be anxious with the stops and starts to the season and wondering what's around the corner. One thing is for sure: They won't be looking past MSU toward the Dec. 12 game vs. Michigan. All the Buckeyes want to do is play. **EDGE: EVEN**

### STAFF PREDICTION

There is absolutely no way of knowing how the Buckeyes will rebound after the latest off-field setback. They badly need to play but can't play badly and expect to waltz over the Spartans. Without knowledge of who will be missing from the OSU lineup, it can be assumed that the Buckeyes should have enough talent to overcome all obstacles, but it's better to be conservative. **OHIO STATE 31, MICHIGAN STATE 20**



# Bruce Calls Win Vs. U-M 'Greatest' At Ohio State

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. Once again, BSB found two games in the same week that merited inclusion. The following is coverage of Ohio State's 23-20 win over Michigan in 1987, Earle Bruce's last game as Buckeye head coach. It would be the last win for Ohio State in Ann Arbor until Jim Tressel's first Michigan game in 2001, a game that will be featured in the next issue of BSB. Additional features about the 1987 game and the aftermath of Bruce's firing will be reprinted at BuckeyeSports.com on Thursday, Dec. 3.*

Earle Bruce is the first Ohio State football coach to end his Buckeye career with a win over Michigan. It was Bruce's fifth win in nine tries against the Wolverines. And he went out in style.

For the finale, a thrilling 23-20 win in front of 106,031 in Ann Arbor Nov. 21, Bruce wore his charcoal suit with fedora. His players wore white headbands, with "Earle" displayed in red and black lettering, in his honor.

It was Bruce's day. He won his 81st game at Ohio State against 26 losses and one tie – ending as the Big Ten's winningest coach during his nine-year tenure. Afterward, thousands of Buckeye thankful flooded the field to congratulate him, as his players hoisted him upon their shoulders, Cotton Bowl-style.

Despite being fired five days earlier by university president Edward H. Jennings because of "personnel matters," Bruce remained a coach to the end. Bruce then took matters into his own hands by filing a \$7.4 million slander and breach of contract suit against Jennings and The Ohio State University.

But minutes after the game, a glowing smile concealed the anguish Bruce had suffered during the week. There was reason to smile. The Buckeyes had overcome a 13-0 second-quarter deficit, and won the game with a 26-yard Matt Frantz field goal with 5:18 left.

"There's no sweeter victory in the world than one over Michigan in your last game at

Ohio State," said a beaming Bruce afterward. "But the real thrill of that football game was for our football team, down 13-0, to come back and win after the week they've had. They showed me a lot by sticking together and playing as a team. You talk about coming back from adversity, coming back from almost disaster. Most certainly they're made of the right stuff."

Bruce was in the mood for fun. It didn't even bother him when, without his knowledge, the players put on the headbands after running into the stadium prior to the opening kickoff.

"You know I don't believe in headbands, but I didn't see them until they went on the field," Bruce said. "But being the last game, I guess you've got to let your hair down a little bit."

Bruce wanted to talk about the game but media persistence angled the conversation to his firing. He was emotionally drained.

"I have a hole in my stomach. I guess I've had a knot there all week," Bruce said. "How do you go from this?"

He goes with what he calls his greatest win at Ohio State.

"Absolutely, with the things that have happened this week, it's the greatest," he said. "Oh golly, we've had some great victories at Ohio State."

Bruce, lifting a page out of his mentor Woody Hayes' book, focused directly on the silver lining of the week's trauma.

"Every now and then the lessons you learn on the football field come back. And when you get knocked down and hit real hard – if you stay down – that's sad," Bruce lectured. "When you try to teach that to your kids, how can you not do that when it happens to you?"

"You can't always be taken back by the fact you got hit. You can get hit, (but) you've got to do something about it. You can't fold up. I hope every one of our kids learned a little lesson today about coming back. I don't want any wimps on the football field. You don't want any guys who aren't going to fight."

The players Bruce coached in 1987 could best be classified as survivors. Having been told they would not play in a bowl game regardless of the outcome against Michigan, the Buckeyes stormed back after being dom-

## Other Big 40th Anniversary Games

In addition to Ohio State's win in Ann Arbor in Earle Bruce's final game as Buckeye coach, there were several other big games the week of Nov. 21-Nov. 27, including Jim Tressel's win his first year at the helm in 2001. That game will be featured in the Dec. 12 issue of BSB. Other big games during that week in BSB's publishing history include the following:

**1986:** Jim Harbaugh came to Columbus guaranteeing a Michigan victory and backed it up as the No. 6 Wolverines prevailed, 26-24. Harbaugh was 19 of 29 for 261 yards. However he did not throw a touchdown pass and was picked off twice. The Wolverines, instead, were led by Jamie Morris, who ran 29 times for 210 yards and two scores against the No. 7 Buckeyes.

**1992:** Visiting No. 6 Michigan and No. 17 Ohio State battled to a 13-13 tie in a game OSU president E. Gordon Gee famously dubbed "one of our greatest wins ever." Tim Williams kicked two field goals for the Buckeyes, and Kirk Herbstreit connected with Greg Beatty for a 5-yard touchdown with 4:24 to play to earn the tie. Herbstreit was 28 of 46 passing for 271 yards and the touchdown with no interceptions.

**1995:** Undefeated and No. 2-ranked Ohio State had its title hopes dashed when Tim Biakabutuka rushed for 313 yards, the most ever by an Ohio State opponent, to lead underdog Michigan to a 31-23 victory. Eventual Heisman Trophy winner Eddie George could counter with only 104 yards on 21 carries.

inated statistically in the first half. In doing so, the Buckeyes finished the season with a 6-4-1 record. Michigan, heading for the Hall of Fame Bowl, finished 7-4.

Michigan, behind Jamie Morris' 112 yards rushing in the first half, scored on its first three possessions and rolled up 283 yards by halftime. The Buckeyes, meanwhile, might as well have spent the first 25 minutes in the locker room, as they netted only 30 yards in that span. But a 61-yard touchdown drive following a Wolves fumble set the tone for the comeback.

The second half was a reversal of the first, as the Bucks amassed 253 total yards while holding Michigan to 91. A five-yard flare pass from quarterback Tom Tupa to tailback Carlos Snow, who ran the final 65 yards for a TD, gave the Bucks their first lead of the game, 14-13, with 12:27 left in the third quarter. The Bucks never trailed again, though Michigan did tie the score at 20 late in the third quarter.

"I knew they were going to play well. They were going to play hard," Bruce said. "I was a little worried when the score was 13-0 but I knew they were going to try. And that's all you can ask of a football team."

Bruce offered lots of praise and, appropri-

ately, began with himself.

"I love the young men I've been associated with and I want to tell you that I've done a great job handling that football team, not only on the field but off the field," he said. "We've had some great scholar athletes at Ohio State, great graduation rates since I've been there. Plus, we've had a program with a lot of integrity."

And then there was Rick Bay, who resigned in protest of Bruce being fired.

"I've met no man in my whole life like Rick Bay. It's unbelievable the courage that man has. I wanted to hit him back when the Cris Carter incident happened, but he stuck by his guns when the NCAA said they might look at the possibility of restoring his eligibility," Bruce said. "But he was right. He's a super, super human being. He's the kind of guy I would like to be associated with in anything. I'd take him into a foxhole and we could fight the world."

They pretty much had to do that off the field. And leading the fight on the field was All-American linebacker Chris Spielman, who tackled Wolverines 16 times, including 14 solos.

"The greatest player I've ever coached is Chris Spielman. He runs to the football, he hits you, he plays hard on every play," Bruce said.

Bruce and Bay were presented game balls by the players. Jennings, who attended the game, did not make an appearance in the locker room afterward. If he had, he would have heard nary a word from Bruce.

"I don't think President Jennings would be here," Bruce said when asked what he might say to the president if he were there. "I think that would be personal and I don't think we'd be doing much talking."

Bruce was asked what he thought about the idea of a university president firing a football coach over the athletic director's head.

"That's his prerogative. I'm a lifetime member of the Ohio State alumni association, so watch out," he joked.

For the moment, everything could remain a joking matter. The Bruce era had ended amidst controversy, some even speculating he would somehow return to coach the Buckeyes in 1988.

"I don't know how that could happen," he replied at the possibility of again being a Buckeye next year. "I'll always be a Buckeye, though. This (win) is one for the Buckeyes. God bless them. I love them."

*This story originally appeared in the Nov. 28, 1987, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.*



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# Battered Buckeyes Sent Bruce Out On A High Note

By KEN HALLOY

“All of the things that have happened this year, all of the games we didn’t win this year and all that happened this past week makes today worthwhile,” said a grinning Tom Tupa. Tupa’s was only one of many smiles in the Ohio State locker room following the 23-20 win over Michigan in Ann Arbor Nov. 21. The media was treated to the first postgame smiles in four weeks, as the Bucks gave a going away present to fired coach Earle Bruce. The Bucks end the season with a 6-4-1 record, 4-4 in the Big Ten.

The win earned Ohio State an invitation to play in the Sun Bowl on Christmas Day, but new athletic director Jim Jones declined the bid after consulting with university president Edward Jennings.

The week’s events gave the game an anti-climactic setting going in, but the two rivals knocked heads in typically clean, hard-hitting style.

Michigan delivered most of the blows in the first half, before the Buckeyes retaliated in the final 30 minutes, as Matt Frantz dealt the knockout punch – a 26-yard field goal that broke a 20-20 tie with 5:18 left.

Considering the Buckeyes’ luck in recent weeks, many considered Iowa’s last-second TD pass that beat OSU a week earlier, fitting. Against Michigan, the Buckeyes found justice.

The Buckeye offense, maligned much of the season, put together a 77-yard, 15-play drive, consuming 5:18, to set up Frantz’ game-winner.

And Tupa, who has taken the heavy heat for the offensive decline, ended his OSU career with his best quarterbacking performance of the year. He completed 18 of 26 passes for 219 yards and two touchdowns. Tupa did not throw an interception.

The possibility of a fourth straight loss for OSU appeared very real in the first half as Michigan, behind 112 yards rushing by tiny tailback Jamie Morris, scored on its first three possessions and jumped out to a 13-0 lead.

After the Buckeye punted following the opening kickoff, Michigan marched 73 yards in seven plays, capped by a one-yard TD dive by Morris. Morris picked up 29 yards on five carries in the drive and fullback Jarrod Bunch picked up 39 yards on a screen pass from quarterback Demetrious Brown near the left sideline.

Following another Tupa punt, Michigan went 47 yards in nine plays, capped by Mike Gillette’s 34-yard field goal on the first play of the second quarter, for a 10-0 reading.

After three downs and out for the Buckeye offense, Michigan waltzed 58 yards in 10 plays, but was thwarted after failing on three attempts from the Buckeye 5-yard line. Gillette’s 19-yard chip shot completed the Wolves’ first half scoring at 5:49 in the second quarter.

The Buckeye offense, meanwhile, in Bruce’s words “spit and sputtered,” rummaging for only 30 yards and two first downs in the first 25 minutes. The big break came for Ohio State when Bunch fumbled on Michigan’s next possession and OSU outside linebacker Mike McCray recovered at the Buckeye 39 with 4:44 left in the half.

Ten plays later, Tupa, rolling left, tossed a four-yard TD pass to a twisting Everett Ross. Tupa completed all six of his passes in the drive for 52 yards, including connections of 16 and 13 yards to Ross. Matt Frantz’s placement cut the lead to 13-7 and the Buckeyes were

back in business in a game, in which statistically, they had no business being.

But statistics can be deceiving. Just consider Ohio State’s second score, which gave it the lead early in the third quarter. Tupa is given credit for a 70-yard touchdown pass on a completion he actually threw only five yards. The recipient, Carlos Snow, took Tupa’s flare near the left sideline, broke loose between two defenders and with the help of an outstanding block by Ross raced to the end zone. Snow made a nifty stutter and cut inside near the Wolves 20 to elude safety Doug Mallory. Frantz made it 14-13 with only 2:28 elapsed in the second half.

The teams then exchanged punts before OSU safety David Brown intercepted Demetrious Brown’s pass over the middle and returned it 32 yards to the Michigan 19. Brown was hit hard as he released the pass.

Three plays later, Tupa snuck over from the one for the score at 7:11 in the third quarter. Tupa and flanker Vince Workman hooked up for 14 yards near the left sideline preceding Tupa’s sneak. Frantz then missed wide left on the conversion, keeping the spread at seven points. It was Frantz’s first miss in his Buckeye career after making a school-record 52 consecutive PATs.

Michigan responded, driving 46 yards for the tying score after Snow fumbled on a dive off left tackle. Backup fullback Leroy Hoard bulled the final 11 yards for the touchdown, breaking several tackles in the process. Gillette’s conversion knotted the score with 1:14 left in the third.

Wide-open offense ruled in the quarter. There were nine possession changes in all. The Buckeyes showed numerous offensive sets, including utilizing two men in motion out of the robust formation. For the game, Tupa passed 10 times on 17 first down plays.

Michigan coach Bo Schembechler even called for, and Monte Robbins perfectly executed, a fake punt in the quarter. Robbins scooted 25 yards down the left sideline for a first down at the Buckeye 37 on a fourth-and-5 play. Brown, however, fumbled two plays later.

The OSU defense limited Michigan to 91 total yards in the second half, as Morris gained only 18 more yards on eight carries after intermission.

Ohio State’s winning drive was flawless. Tupa completed 4 of 5 passes for 30 yards, including a nine-yard bullet to Ross at the Michigan 12-yard line.

However, Tupa’s backup, freshman Greg Frey, delivered a stinging blow when he came off the bench for one play and hit Workman with a perfect lead pass, good for 19 yards to the Michigan 18. More impressive was the fact the play came on a third-and-9.

Frey was called into action when Tupa was hit hard on the preceding play. Tupa returned after Frey’s completion.

Four plays later, Frantz gave the Buckeyes the lead for good.

Michigan had one last chance, moving the ball to the Buckeye 47 on its next possession, but Hoard fumbled and OSU’s Eric Kumerow recovered with 4:15 left.

The Buckeye offense then ran all but the final nine seconds off the clock, as they drove to the Michigan one-yard line before turning the ball over on downs.

And as Brown’s ill-fated bomb fell incomplete on the last play of the game, Bruce was lifted on the shoulders of his players.

*This story originally appeared in the Nov. 28, 1987, issue of Buckeye Sports Bulletin.*

## The Numbers Game

### Ohio State 23, Michigan 20

Nov. 21, 1987 – Michigan Stadium; Ann Arbor, MI.

Score by Quarters	1	2	3	4	F
OHIO STATE	0	7	13	3	23
MICHIGAN	7	6	7	0	20

**First Quarter**  
**U-M** – Morris, 1-yard run (Gillette kick), 10:02.

**Second Quarter**  
**U-M** – Gillette, 34-yard field goal, 14:57.  
**U-M** – Gillette, 19-yard field goal, 7:05.  
**OSU** – Ross, 4-yard pass from Tupa (Frantz kick), 1:36.

**Third Quarter**  
**OSU** – Snow, 70-yard pass from Tupa (Frantz kick), 12:32.  
**OSU** – Tupa, 1-yard run (kick failed), 7:11.  
**U-M** – Hoard, 10-yard run (Gillette kick), 1:14.

**Fourth Quarter**  
**OSU** – Frantz, 26-yard field goal, 5:18.

Att. – 106,031

	Team Statistics	
	OSU	U-M
First Downs	17	22
Rushing	7	17
Passing	10	5
Penalty	0	0
Rushes-Yards	44-106	56-271
Passing Yards	238	103
Passes (Comp.-Att.-Int.)	19-27-0	6-15-1
Offensive Plays	71	71
Total Net Yards	344	374
Third Down Efficiency	4-14	3-11
Punts-Avg.	6-42.0	4-37.8
Fumbles-Lost	2-1	4-3
Penalties	7-50	2-10
Time of Possession	31:13	28:47

**Individual Statistics**

**RUSHING (Att.-Net Yds.)** – **OSU:** Snow 21-67; Tupa 14-18; Cooper 6-17; Ross 1-5; Workman 2-(-1). **U-M:** Morris 23-130; Taylor 7-41; Bunch 9-40; Kolesar 2-30; Robbins 1-25; Hoard 4-19; Webb 4-17; D. Brown 6-(-31).

**PASSING (Comp.-Att.-Int.-Yds.-TD)** – **OSU:** Tupa 18-26-0-219-2; Frey 1-1-0-19-0. **U-M:** D. Brown 5-13-1-79-0; Taylor 1-2-0-24-0.

**RECEIVING (Rec.-Yds.)** – **OSU:** Snow 3-82; Workman 4-51; Ross 4-43; Cooper 4-29; Higdon 2-16; Matlock 1-10; Ellis 1-7. **U-M:** Bunch 1-39; Morris 3-27; Calloway 1-24; Webb 1-13.

**PUNTING (No.-Avg.-Long)** – **OSU:** Tupa 6-42.0-55. **U-M:** Robbins 4-37.8-50.

**PUNT RETURNS (No.-Avg.)** – **OSU:** Ross 2-9.5. **U-M:** Kolesar 4-1.5.

**KICKOFF RETURNS (No.-Avg.)** – **OSU:** Workman 3-14.7; Snow 1-17.0. **U-M:** Webb 2-21.0; Kolesar 1-22.0; Morris 1-19.0; LaFountaine 1-8.0.

**FUMBLE RECOVERIES** – **OSU:** McCray (2); Kumerow. **U-M:** Osman.

**INTERCEPTIONS** – **OSU:** D. Brown. **U-M:** None.

**TACKLES FOR LOSS** – **OSU:** Showalter (2); Isaman, Dumas, Spielman, Holliman. **U-M:** Messner (2); Abrams, Key, Harris.

**TACKLES (Solo-Asst.-Tot.)** – **OSU:** Spielman 14-2-16; D. Brown 7-2-9; Jackson 7-1-8; Isaman 6-1-7; McCray 6-1-7; Kumerow 5-0-5; Dumas 3-0-3; White 3-0-3; Holliman 3-0-3; M. Sullivan 2-1-3; D. Smith 1-1-2; Showalter 2-0-2; Bell 1-0-1; Ross 1-0-1; Matlock 1-0-1; Peel 1-0-1; Pelini 1-0-1; Gurd 1-0-1. **U-M:** Messner 7-1-8; Cooper 8-0-8; Grant 7-1-8; Abrams 4-3-7; A. Mitchell 4-0-4; Mulligan 3-1-4; Harris 4-0-4; Manuel 1-3-4; Herrmann 3-1-4; Mallory 2-1-3; Key 3-0-3; Bishop 2-0-2; White 1-1-2; Campbell 1-0-1; Hassel 1-0-1; LaFountaine 1-0-1; Willingham 1-0-1; Borowski 1-0-1; Dames 1-0-1; Tm. Williams 1-0-1; Osman 1-0-1; Bostic 1-0-1.

**PLAYERS IN THE GAME** – **OSU:** Kumerow, Holliman, M. Sullivan, Showalter, McCray, Spielman, Isaman, Jackson, White, D. Brown, Dumas, Ellis, Palmer, Higdon, Staysniak, Coles, Uhlenhake, Zackeroff, Moxley, Shaffer, Ross, Tupa, Frey, Snow, Cooper, Matlock, Workman, Craig, Kacherski, Frantz, Boddie, O'Morrow, Bell, D. Smith, Peel, Pelini, Gurd. **U-M:** McMurty, Welborne, Husar, Dames, Vitale, Dingman, Chester, Elliott, Brown, D. Walker, Cernak, Calloway, Kolesar, D. Brown, Taylor, Bunch, Hoard, Morris, Webb, Boles, Manuel, Willingham, Messner, Harris, Osman, Herrmann, White, Abrams, Grant, Milligan, Cooper, Bishop, Key, Mallory, A. Mitchell, Campbell, LaFountaine, Sutkiewicz, Hassell, Tm. Williams, Holland, Bostic, Robbins, Gillette, Borowski, Teeter, K. Mitchell, Simpson.



# Top-Rated Texas Receiver Commits To Ohio State

Ohio State added another one of the nation's best prospects to its top-rated 2022 recruiting class when Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton committed to the Buckeyes on Nov. 23.

The 6-0, 165-pound Burton is considered the second-best wide receiver and No. 15 prospect overall in his cycle, after catching 82 passes for 1,515 yards and 18 touchdowns in two seasons with the Cardinals. He suffered a knee injury during the first game of his junior year and is out for the rest of the season, however.

RECRUITING  
OUTLOOK  
Andrew Lind

Burton, who is the son of former Syracuse linebacker and current Del Valle head coach Charles Burton, landed an offer from Ohio State in March. He has never been to campus but has established a strong relationship from afar with head coach Ryan Day and wide receivers coach Brian Hartline through daily phone and video calls.

Burton included Ohio State in his top 12 on Oct. 6 alongside Alabama, Auburn, Clemson, Florida, Georgia, LSU, Oklahoma, Oregon, Stanford, Texas and USC. But then the Buckeyes landed a commitment from Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers on Nov. 19, and Burton jumped at the chance to join one of his close friends in Columbus.

Burton becomes the ninth member of Ohio State's 2022 recruiting class, joining Ewers; Marysville, Ohio, five-star linebacker Gabe Powers; Kettering (Ohio) Alter four-star linebacker C.J. Hicks; Overland Park (Kan.) Blue Valley North four-star athlete Dasan McCullough; West Chester (Ohio) Lakota West four-star offensive tackle Tegra Tshabola and cornerback Jyaire Brown; Pilot Mountain (N.C.) East Surry four-star tight end Benji Gosnell; and Acworth (Ga.) Allatoona three-star tight end Bennett Christian.

With a favorable depth chart, the Buckeyes can afford to be selective in who else they bring on at the wide receiver position in 2022. Other names to keep in mind include Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei four-star C.J. Williams; Chicago St. Rita four-star Kaleb Brown; Lewisville, Texas, four-star Armani Winfield; and Chandler, Ariz., three-star Kyion Grayes, who is committed to Arizona.

Recruiting, Recruiting,  
Recruiting And Recruiting

During his weekly radio show on Nov. 25, Day spoke about the importance of recruiting and how it should be his coaching staff's top priority.

"That's their No. 1 job is to recruit and develop their players," Day said. "Scheme and all that stuff, that comes later. The scheme's a lot better when you have good players. So the No. 1 job for all these guys is to recruit."

With that, it should come as no surprise the Buckeyes have the second-best recruiting class of 2021 and have jumped out to an early lead in the race for the No.



COURTESY OF CALEB BURTON

**NEXT IN LINE – A native of Del Valle, Texas, Caleb Burton became the third five-star wide receiver from the Lone Star State to commit to Ohio State in as many recruiting cycles on Nov. 23.**

1 spot in 2022.

"It's a lot of momentum for us right now," Day said. "It's been hard because guys haven't been able to visit, but we've been trying to do the best we can to build these relationships virtually and stay in touch with them. I think people nationally are very, very excited about what we're doing here. It's been great. I think we're getting really talented young men, but we're also getting great families and adding to the culture, which is the most important especially in times like this."

"There's a lot of excitement around the program right now, and our assistant coaches, everybody involved in recruiting are on their 'A' game. We want to keep it going."

Buckeyes Among  
Corner's Top Suitors

Grosse Pointe (Mich.) South five-star cornerback Will Johnson included Ohio State in his top five on Nov. 23 alongside Arizona State, Michigan, Oklahoma and USC.

The 6-3, 190-pound Johnson is considered the fourth-best cornerback and No. 8 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He has recorded 14½ tackles and two interceptions in six games for the Blue Devils this season. He has also added 273 all-purpose yards and six touchdowns on offense.

Johnson landed an offer from Day and defensive coordinator Kerry Coombs during a virtual tour of campus in April. The Buckeyes have clearly made an

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
Caleb Burton	WR	6-0	165	★★★★★	Del Valle, Texas	
Bennett Christian	TE	6-6	235	★★★	Acworth (Ga.)	Allatoona
Quinn Ewers	QB	6-3	195	★★★★★	Southlake (Texas)	Carroll
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



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

### 35 Years Ago – 1985

Bob McNea, the administrative associate who headed up the Ohio State recruiting effort, was preparing for the busiest part of the year in recruiting as Ohio State's regular season came to a close. With teams no longer forced to prepare for games, opposing coaches could start to creep into Ohio to recruit.

"Ohio always has a large number of good football players," McNea said. "Because Ohio always has a large number, that means the lions are coming in. We're full of giraffes, or we're full of zebras, and the lions are the coaches coming in – the West Virginias, the Michigans, the Notre Dames, the Penn States, the Pittsburghs. They see a lot of giraffes, and they're all lions ready to pounce."

McNea and his assistant, former Buckeye placekicker Billy Andrews, were responsible for keeping those lions at bay.

### 30 Years Ago – 1990

St. Henry quarterback and Buckeye target Bob Hoying won the fourth annual "Mr. Football" award in Ohio, symbolic of the state's top prep player.

Hoying, also the Division V state back of the year, followed in the footsteps of former Ohio State defensive back Buster Howe, who won the inaugural award in 1987, and OSU tailback Robert Smith, who won the award in 1988 and 1989.

The 6-5, 210-pound Hoying narrowly edged Cleveland St. Ignatius defensive lineman Trent Zenkewicz for the award, given out by The Associated Press.

In 1990, Hoying led St. Henry to a perfect 14-0 season and the state's Division V championship. He completed 13 of 29 passes for 143 yards and one touchdown in the state title game Nov. 24 against Sandusky St. Mary's, rallying his team from a 17-0 deficit in the third quarter to a 20-17 victory.

### 25 Years Ago – 1995

On Nov. 17, Hyden (Ky.) Leslie County quarterback Tim Couch eclipsed the national high school passing record with a 219-yard effort against Belfry in a state playoff game.

Couch then topped off his yardage mark and picked up the national career touchdown record as well with a 221-yard, two-touchdown day in a 47-12 loss to Fort Thomas Highlands in a state semifinal on Nov. 24, giving him 133 for his career.

Couch's Leslie County team finished the year 11-2.

Couch became the first high school quarterback to ever eclipse the 12,000-yard mark, finishing with 12,092 yards for his career.

With his high school career closing, Couch's recruitment was tightening up. Rumors swirled that he had narrowed his field of six

contenders down to three – Florida, Kentucky and Ohio State.

However, his coach Joe Beder denied those rumors.

"I had not heard that," Beder said. "I know Ohio State is one of the six schools he is considering, along with Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, Notre Dame and Penn State."

### 20 Years Ago – 2000

Heading into the holiday "dead period," Ohio State's football recruiting campaign for 2001 appeared to be in full gear.

The Buckeyes picked up two commitments from San Diego Mission Bay running back JaJa Riley and Fort Scott (Kan.) Community College wide receiver Chris Vance, lifting their class total to 13.

Riley committed during his Dec. 24 visit to OSU.

"I committed on (Dec. 3)," Riley told BSB. "I liked the coaches and I liked the tradition there. I just felt it was a great place. I got along with the players pretty well. I had a lot of fun. I think it will be a good place for me to play. I think I fit in there with my style."

Vance broke the good news to Ohio State's coaches on Dec. 10 after backluster visits to Purdue and Minnesota.

"The Purdue visit did not turn out like I expected it to," said Vance. "The atmosphere wasn't what I was looking for there."

### 15 Years Ago – 2005

With Ohio State traveling to Michigan for the 102nd edition of The Game, the Wolverines played host to more than 100 recruits, including several players the Wolverines and Buckeyes were both pursuing.

They included Dominique Douglas, a Detroit-area wide receiver; Thaddeus Gibson, a linebacker from Euclid, Ohio; and Dexter Larimore, a defensive tackle from Merrillville, Ind.

Douglas began the season as a MAC-caliber prospect but began garnering interest from the likes of Ohio State, Michigan and Iowa after lighting up Detroit-area scoreboards.

Ranked one of Ohio's top prospects, Gibson told BSB that Michigan head coach Lloyd Carr had predicted he would be starting by his sophomore season if he chose the Maize and Blue.

He was hosted by Prescott Burgess and Pierre Woods, both Ohioans who spurned Jim Tressel's program.

### 10 Years Ago – 2010

After issuing an early scholarship offer to Plantation, Fla., outside linebacker Ryan Shazier, the Buckeyes could only watch as the four-star prospect opted to stick closer to home and commit to play for Florida.

However, on the heels of the resignation of Gators head coach Urban Meyer, Shazier reopened his recruitment and Ohio State

looked to be the school with the most to gain. The 6-2, 215-pound linebacker was planning a Dec. 15 visit to Columbus.

"My parents were upset by Coach Meyer's decision, and they told me they support me going wherever is best for me," Shazier said. "If I have to go to a faraway state, they have to understand why it could happen. They were a big part of my decision to choose Florida, but now things are different."

### Five Years Ago – 2015

Clairton, Pa., four-star cornerback Lamont Wade was the No. 3 cornerback and No. 20 overall prospect in the class of 2017, and Ohio State was very much in the hunt for his services. Speaking to Scout.com, Wade said he had a good relationship with a lot of the coaches on the Buckeye staff.

"I get a lot of love from Ohio State," he said. "They let me know that I'm a top priority. I've talked to almost every coach on the coaching staff. They hit me up, ask me how I'm doing and stuff like that. So stuff is going really well at Ohio State."

Wade added that he talked with head coach Urban Meyer on a regular basis and said the staff was letting him know that he was very much wanted because of OSU's lack of depth in the defensive backfield.

"I talk to Coach Urban almost every week," Wade said. "He just lets me know that I'm a priority and they want me, they want me out at that cornerback spot. They said they are short on corners. They're definitely a little light, and they want me."

Wade was also being heavily pursued by several other schools, including Penn State, Pittsburgh, Tennessee and West Virginia.

### One Year Ago – 2019

Ohio State three-star athlete commit Cameron Martinez was named the Michigan High School Player of the Year on Nov. 26, becoming the first athlete to win the award in back-to-back seasons in its seven-year history. He received 54 of the 67 votes from coaches and media.

The 5-11, 183-pound Martinez totaled 2,124 yards and 36 touchdowns on 264 carries for Muskegon as a senior. He also completed 64 of 109 passes for 1,258 yards and 11 scores compared to just four interceptions. For good measure, he even took his lone kickoff return 90 yards for a touchdown.

However, Martinez's high school career came to a disappointing close on Nov. 30 with a 30-7 loss to River Rouge at Detroit's Ford Field. Though he did score the Big Red's lone touchdown, Martinez was limited to 108 yards on 34 carries and was sacked five times.

impression on him, even though he's the son of former Wolverines defensive back Deon Johnson (1991-94) and grew up with Michigan paraphernalia around his house. Johnson recently received several

247Sports crystal ball predictions in favor of the Wolverines following a visit to Ann Arbor for Michigan's loss to Wisconsin on Nov. 14. He couldn't meet with coaches or attend the game, but he was able to spend

time with other commits and top targets who also made the trip, à la Ohio State's Buckeye Bash for the win over Nebraska on Oct. 24.

Johnson had hoped to take his first

physical visit to Columbus once the ongoing dead period comes to a close. But with it recently being extended through at least

**Continued On Page 26**

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# Five-Star Cornerbacks Reveal Top School Lists

Continued From Page 25

April 15, 2021, he may end up making a decision sooner than that and without the luxury of visits.

## California Corner High On Ohio State

Santa Ana (Calif.) Mater Dei five-star cornerback Domani Jackson listed Ohio State among his top six schools on Nov. 26. Others include Arizona State, Clemson, Michigan, Oklahoma and USC.

The 6-1, 185-pound Jackson is considered the top-rated cornerback and No. 3 prospect overall in the class of 2022, trailing only Ewers and Cardova (Tenn.) St. Benedict at Auburndale five-star defensive tackle Walter Nolen. He's recorded 62 tackles, 12 pass breakups, three interceptions and one fumble recovery in 20 games at the high school level.

Ohio State extended an offer to Jackson during a virtual visit in April, and though he's never been to campus, he's built a strong relationship with Day, Coombs and linebackers coach Al Washington from afar.

Jackson has talked about his desire to play with Johnson at the next level and actually joined him at the get-together in Ann Arbor. He's also admitted he grew up rooting for the Wolverines, just like his father, who grew up in Youngstown, Ohio, but moved to Southern California when he joined the Marine Corps.

Interestingly, Jackson's mother and

the rest of her family, who still live in Youngstown, are fans of the Buckeyes. That is a big reason many believe his recruitment will come down to Michigan and Ohio State.

The Trojans and Sun Devils are also worth keeping an eye on when it comes to Jackson's potential landing spots. The former has long had success in recruiting his high school while he played 7-on-7 for a team owned by the father of Arizona State defensive backs coach Chris Hawkins.

Ohio State holds one commitment at cornerback for 2022 in the previously-mentioned Jyaire Brown. The Buckeyes hope to land three players at the position, with Johnson, Houston North Shore five-star Denver Harris, Jacksonville Robert E. Lee five-star Jaheim Singletary and St. Louis Lutheran North four-star Toriano Pride among their other top targets.

## California Receiver Reveals Top Schools

Jackson wasn't the only Mater Dei player to narrow his options on Thanksgiving. Four-star wide receiver C.J. Williams included Ohio State among his top 16 schools that evening with Alabama, Arizona State, California, Georgia, Howard, LSU, Minnesota, Northwestern, Notre Dame, Oregon, Stanford, TCU, USC, Washington and Wisconsin.

Williams, who is considered the sixth-best wide receiver and No. 38 prospect overall in the class of 2022, has caught 57 passes for 758 yards and four touchdowns

in his last two seasons with the Monarchs.

Williams landed an offer from Ohio State in April, as well, and is one of just seven receivers in his class to hold such a distinction. He's never been to campus but hopes to make the trip whenever Jackson does – assuming he doesn't commit elsewhere before the ongoing recruiting dead period.

## Commit To Play In Under Armour Game

Although this year's Under Armour All-America Game was canceled due to the coronavirus outbreak, event organizers are moving full-steam ahead in an effort to return in January 2022. They've sent out invitations to several of the nation's top-rated prospects, including the above-mentioned Brown, who accepted the opportunity on Nov. 28.

Brown, who is considered the 13th-best cornerback and No. 125 prospect overall in the class of 2022, was born in Ohio but moved to Louisiana when he was 4 years old. His older brother, Lonnell, was a standout defensive back at Cincinnati Colerain, where he played under legendary coach Tom Bolden, who is now the head coach at Lakota West.

Brown landed an offer from the Buckeyes on April 17 and committed just five days later without ever visiting campus. He then transferred from New Orleans Warren Easton to Lakota West in June, where he teamed up this fall with Tshabola. Had he remained in New Orleans, Brown could have become the first player from the state of Louisiana to sign with Ohio State since Metairie Archbishop Rummel defensive tackle Nader Abdallah in 2004.

Brown earned first-team Greater Miami Conference honors this season while leading the Firebirds to an 8-1 record and an appearance in the Ohio High School Athletic Association state semifinal. He'll be joined at Camping World Stadium in Orlando by Hicks, who accepted his invitation to the Under Armour All-America Game in July.

## Defensive Tackle Drops Top Schools

Bradenton (Fla.) IMG Academy four-star defensive tackle Dominick James included Ohio State in his top 11 on Nov. 25 along with Alabama, Auburn, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nebraska, Penn State, Tennessee, Texas A&M and USC.

The 6-2, 270-pound James is considered the 21st-best defensive tackle and No. 240 prospect overall in the class of 2022. He recorded 30 tackles, one sack, one fumble recovery and one pick-six for the Ascenders this season.

James is a Prattville, Ala., native who transferred to IMG for his junior season. He's never been to Columbus but speaks with Day and defensive line coach Larry Johnson weekly and hopes to take his first visit once the dead period ends.

## IMG Offensive Tackle Interested In OSU, Too

Speaking of IMG Academy, Ascenders four-star offensive tackle Aliou Bah put Ohio State in his top eight on Nov. 28. Also on the list are Florida, Florida State, Michigan State, Oklahoma, Penn State, Texas A&M and USC.

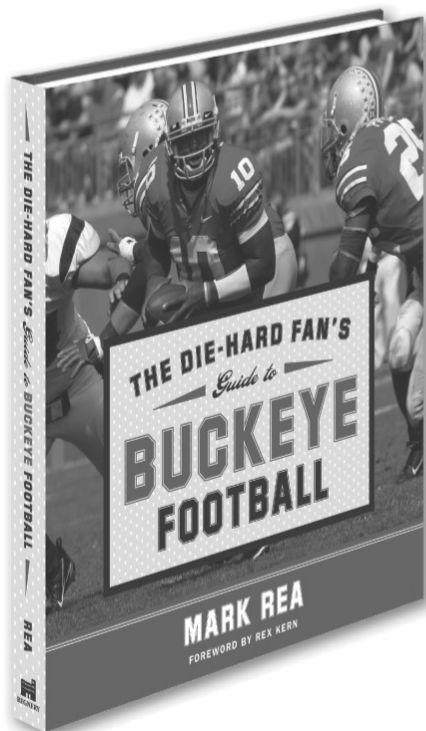
The 6-6, 325-pound Bah, who is considered the No. 324 prospect overall in the class of 2022, transferred to IMG in October after spending the first three years of his high school career at Memphis (Tenn.) Whitehaven – the same school that produced Ohio State freshman defensive tackle Cormontae Hamilton.

Day and offensive line coach Greg Studrawa extended an offer to Bah during a virtual visit in mid-August. He also hopes to visit Columbus for the first time once the dead period comes to a close.

Offensive tackle will be one of the Buckeyes' top priorities in 2022. The staff already holds a commitment from Tshabola, but other names to keep in mind include Lynchburg (Va.) Liberty Christian Academy five-star offensive tackle Zach Rice; Daleville (Va.) Lord Botetourt five-star Gunner Givens; Fond Du Lac (Wis.) St. Mary's Springs four-star Billy Schrauth;

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# ASK AN ANALYST

## With Buckeye Scoop's Marc Givler

Dating back to 2017, Tom Herman's first year as Texas' head coach, Ohio State has landed a commitment from seven five-star recruits while the Longhorns have secured a pledge from just four. Why are the Buckeyes able to have that kind of success in the Lone Star State, and why are the Longhorns struggling to keep those players home?

"There are a lot of factors that go into recruiting Texas. Obviously, from Ohio State's end of things, it has been a snowball effect. Guys like Jeff Okudah, Garrett Wilson, Baron Browning, etc., are having success and they are able to go back home and talk about their experiences in Columbus with the next group. So seeing and hearing about that success just builds Ohio State's ability to recruit the state.

"On the Texas end, it's always going to be hard to lock down the home state. Some of the major metro areas are becoming transplant cities with divided loyalties, and there are too many great players there to keep them all at home anyway, especially when just about every major program in the nation is trying to have some kind of presence there. Then, of course, there are Texas' shortcomings on the field in recent years, and you just have a great recipe for programs like Ohio State to grab great players."

Ohio State has jumped out to a big lead in the early recruiting rankings thanks to recent commit-

ments from 2022 Southlake (Texas) Carroll five-star quarterback Quinn Ewers and 2022 Del Valle, Texas, five-star wide receiver Caleb Burton. Do you think the Buckeyes can sustain that momentum, and who are some of the top prospects who might join the fold?

"There is no question that Ohio State has a ton of momentum right now in 2022, and I do think we'll see that continue in the coming months. I think Greenwood (Ind.) Center Grove four-star defensive tackle Caden Curry is a very strong possibility to end up at Ohio State, and I think the commitments of Ewers and Burton have helped a ton with Lewisville, Texas, four-star wide receiver Armani Winfield.

"Guys like Manassas (Va.) Unity Reed five-star linebacker Shawn Murphy, Atlanta Woodward Academy four-star running back Damari Alston and Reading (Pa.) Governor Mifflin four-star running back Nicholas Singleton – though I don't know if there would be room for both backs – are all guys who I believe Ohio State is leading for right now. There are several other five-star types nationally that Ohio State is in the mix for as well, so it would be expected that they win a couple of those battles too."

Ohio State now has a pair of five-star quarterbacks committed for the next two recruiting cycles in Ewers and 2021 prospect Kyle McCord of Philadelphia St. Joseph's Prep. Are there any concerns about the

strength of McCord's pledge? Additionally, do you think the Buckeyes look for a second quarterback in 2022?

"No concerns here about McCord's commitment. He is much more focused on coming in early to try to compete for an open starting job in 2021 than he is about what is coming in behind him. Before the Ewers flip, I would have said it will be a two-quarterback class, but with a talent like that, you probably just stick with the one and if there is attrition you work the portal for another Chris Chugunov or Gunnar Hoak to fill out the room."

Keeping with the numbers game, how many wide receivers will Ohio State look to take in 2022, and where do the Buckeyes stand with some of their other targets at the position?

"It's probably too early to guess on numbers, but they generally want to take about three receivers. Winfield and Chandler, Ariz., three-star Kyion Grayes are two that they like and that I feel they probably lead for at this point, though Grayes is committed to Arizona. Many people think Oklahoma commit Luther Burden – who hails from St. Louis Cardinal Ritter Prep, the school that produced sophomore wide receiver Jameson Williams – could take visits once they are allowed. Ohio State was runner-up there the first time around and that could be one to watch in the spring/summer."

Charlestown, Ind., four-star Kiyanta Goodwin; and Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne four-star Aamil Wagner.

### Other Notes From Around The Country

- Raleigh (N.C.) Millbrook three-star

linebacker Bryce Steele decommitted from South Carolina on Nov. 24.

The one-time Ohio State target pledged his services to the Gamecocks in April but decommitted on Nov. 24 and is expected to make his new decision on Dec. 1.

• Sources have told BSB that Ohio State's 2022 commits and top targets are eyeing a get-together at Hicks' house on Dec. 12, coinciding with the Buckeyes' scheduled game against Michigan.

It would be similar to the Buckeye Bash held at 2021 Pickerington (Ohio)

North five-star defensive end Jack Sawyer's home on Oct. 24.

For the latest in Ohio State football recruiting news, be sure to check out [BuckeyeSports.com](http://BuckeyeSports.com), free to all BSB subscribers, daily.



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# Barrett's Accolades Earn Him Best Of The Decade

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

*BSB is closing out its eight-part series where, in each issue, the staff writers 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 eight is on the best quarterback of the 2010s.*

The quarterback position is always, by default, a focal point of an offense, but at Ohio State it has not always been where the star talent was held. That is shown through the program's Heisman Trophy winners, where of the seven to hoist the trophy, only two are quarterbacks, and those two won the award more than 60 years apart.

That first winner was Les Horvath in 1944, and then Troy Smith won it in 2006 in the most lopsided voting race for the Heisman until Joe Burrow won it for LSU last year by a higher percentage.

Even with only two winners at the position, Ari Wasserman, former BSB writer and current national recruiting writer for The Athletic who covered Ohio State football through last season, told BSB that Ohio State has had plenty of success at quarterback, but it is the lack of NFL numbers that has been a surprise.

"Ohio State has had a lot of really great college quarterbacks, and they've recruited at a high level. I mean, if you go back even to the '90s, you have guys like Joe Germaine, who might not ever stand out on this list, but was a hell of a college quarterback," Wasserman said. "It is kind of weird that they don't have that like Super Bowl champion Tom Brady-like quarterback considering all the talent that's come through here."

But this past decade, Ohio State had plenty of stars at the quarterback position, many of whom put up numbers that the program had not seen from the position ever before. While some of this is because of a more pass-heavy, modern style of football, Wasserman also said that it had a lot to do with the talent influx the Buckeyes saw under Urban Meyer and, more recently, Ryan Day in the 2010s.

"Ohio State has always recruited at a high level and always been a top-10 program. When Urban Meyer showed up, he turned it into a top-three program. And the difference between a top-10 program and a top-three program is vast," Wasserman said. "The types of players who are now coming to Ohio State regularly from all over the country, it's on a level that it's never been before, and it's been at a high level for a long time, so that's saying something."

## The Roundtable

When asked who they believe was the

greatest Ohio State quarterback over the past decade, here is what the BSB staff had to say:

**Wyatt Crosher:** "I have both been looking forward to and completely dreading making this decision of the top Ohio State quarterback this decade, as there are multiple answers that can be right if you explain them a certain way."

"J.T. Barrett was the leader and most prominent quarterback of the decade and is at the top of many stats in the record book because of that. Braxton Miller had a similar run of dominance earlier in the decade that might have been even more impressive had he not been hurt and changed positions."

"There are also some single-season wonders in the decade worth looking at, as Terrelle Pryor's 2010 season was terrific, Dwayne Haskins' 2018 was historic, and Justin Fields' 2019 was as efficient as you will see. Heck, Cardale Jones deserves a shout-out for finishing off a run to a national title."

"At the end of the day, I look at this question and I have to go with the player I think is the most deserving for my own criteria, and despite everything Barrett did at Ohio State, I have to go with Fields. On pure talent, Fields is the easy choice, but I think what he accomplished last season – Heisman Trophy finalist, 13-0 start and a trip to the playoff – is as impressive as anything any Ohio State quarterback did in the 2010s."

"This is an impossible question, but I think Fields was too good and accomplished too much in 2019 to be overlooked, even with some other really deserving options."

**Joe Dempsey:** "Barrett is not just the greatest Ohio State quarterback of the past decade or the best of the Big Ten in that span, but he is the conference's top signal caller ever."

"No other quarterback threw for more yards or touchdowns in the history of the league than Barrett, which is why he is my QB1 on the Ohio State all-decade team over some stellar competition."

"Miller definitely deserves strong consideration since he is the best running quarterback in program history, and his standout career at quarterback was unfortunately cut short by injury. Pryor, Haskins and Fields were all sensational in their own regard, but they had only one season as the starter in the decade apiece, so that drastically hurt their cases. And as good as they all were, Jones was the only won to win a national title as the starter."

"Pryor might have been the best athlete in the country in 2010; Haskins shattered nearly every Big Ten single-season record in 2018; and Fields put together one of the most dynamic seasons in college football history in 2019. While the other Buckeye quarterbacks shined for a year or two,

Barrett's consistency of production put him above the rest."

**Andrew Lind:** "This discussion ultimately boils down to how much emphasis you place on Barrett's longevity vs. Haskins' and Fields' impact over a single season."

"I think you can truly make an argument for all three, especially since Haskins and Fields were Heisman Trophy finalists, but Barrett ultimately gets the nod from me because of how he stepped in for an injured Miller as a redshirt freshman and put the Buckeyes in position to win the national title, which I don't think he gets enough credit for."

"Barrett then went on to set numerous Ohio State and Big Ten records, some of which might never be broken or will stand for some time. He didn't have as good an arm as Haskins – or even Jones – while Fields is arguably the most talented quarterback to ever come through Columbus, but Barrett's leadership and play laid the foundation for others to have success at the position after him."

"If Fields wins the Heisman and/or leads Ohio State to a national championship, he'll surpass Barrett as the best quarterback in program history – at least in my eyes. But this is where it's important to note anything Fields does this season doesn't count in a debate about the last decade."

**Patrick Mayhorn:** "This is just an impossible task. Ohio State has had some of the best quarterbacks in school history roll through in the last decade, and each one brings such a wildly different skill set and résumé that it's difficult to even compare them."

"Because of that, it's likely easier to find a pick through process of elimination. Pryor, while great in 2010, played just one season in this decade and it was the worst individual season of the three quarterbacks with a similarly small résumé. He's out."

"Also out, unfortunately, is Fields. I think Fields will top this list at the end of the 2020 season, but we aren't counting the 2020 season in this list. That means that Fields has just 2019 to go on, and while he was excellent, that's not enough for me to crown him. Then there's Dwayne Haskins, who had the most statistically dominant season in program history in 2018. I think he's the strongest of the one-year contenders, but he just didn't play enough to take the top spot."

"That leaves Miller and Barrett. Miller was the more talented of the two certainly, and I have no doubt that had he remained healthy in 2014, he runs away with this title easily. He was so dominant when at his best. Barrett, on the other hand, is the most accomplished quarterback in school history. It wasn't always pretty – in fact it frequently wasn't – but he has the accolades to match anyone."

"However, I'm going to go away from the accolades and go with my gut here. Miller's role in Ohio State's return to power cannot be overstated. Without him the Buckeyes certainly don't go 12-0 in 2012 while nearly qualifying for a title berth in 2013. Without him, the Urban Meyer pitch that the Buckeyes can run a spread offense likely takes much longer to take hold with recruits – if it takes hold at all. Miller's career at QB was cut short, but he still had a more profound impact at OSU than almost any other player in program history. On top of that, he was just so much fun to watch."

## The Runners-Up

We had been saying just a sentence or

two about each nominee for previous positions, but the quarterbacks of this decade have all been such key pieces of the teams they were on that it made for the toughest decision yet for the BSB staff. With that in mind, it only felt right to give each of the players whom the staff did not pick a little more of an introduction.

**Terrelle Pryor:** Pryor sneaks into this decade with an impressive 2010 season in the final year for Ohio State head coach Jim Tressel. That year, Pryor completed 65.0 percent of his passes for 2,772 yards, 27 touchdowns and 11 interceptions while also rushing for 754 yards and four touchdowns on 5.6 yards per carry.

Those were the types of numbers expected out of Pryor when he committed to the Buckeyes as a five-star out of Jeannette, Pa. He was ranked the top quarterback and No. 2 overall prospect in the 2008 class and was the highest rated recruit Ohio State had in the modern recruiting era (since 1999) at the time of his signing.

"He was probably the best athlete in the history of Ohio State football, and I don't mean that lightly," Wasserman said. "He was like LeBron James. I mean, the way that he was built in terms of his strength and his speed. And, you know, he was a very good quarterback, who was the reason why Ohio State went to the Rose Bowl all by himself."

**Braxton Miller:** After Pryor's departure, Miller came in during the 2011 season as another five-star, dual-threat quarterback, this time out of Huber Heights (Ohio) Wayne. Though that year did not go well for Ohio State, finishing with a 6-7 record under interim head coach Luke Fickell, Miller proved to be the starter for the team moving forward.

He built on that in 2012, throwing for 2,039 yards, rushing for 1,271 yards and amassing 28 total touchdowns during a 12-0 campaign in Meyer's first season in Columbus. Those numbers only improved in 2013, when Miller combined for 3,162 yards and 36 touchdowns, once again cracking 1,000 yards on the ground.

"Braxton Miller is the most underrated player looking back at it now in Ohio State history," Wasserman said. "He was so freaking good, and people don't remember that. All you have to do is you have to go back and look at the highlight tapes of the things that man did. He did things on a football field that I'll never see again, in terms of just a natural fluid ability to make people miss. Everything about the way that that guy played was special."

Miller steadily improved as a passer throughout his first three seasons, completing over 60 percent of his passes (63.5 percent) for the first time in 2013, while also becoming more efficient as a runner. His electric play at quarterback made Miller a two-time Big Ten Most Valuable Player.

But as he was entering his senior season looking to improve further, Miller injured his shoulder and missed the entire 2014 campaign, only to come back as an H-back in 2015, never fulfilling what he might have been able to accomplish as an Ohio State quarterback.

"I think it would have been a very explosive offense (if Miller had led the 2014 team). I think it would have looked a little bit different in the national championship run," Wasserman said. "I think the offense would have been explosive from the beginning, and they never would have lost to

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Virginia Tech that year.”

**Cardale Jones:** Jones’ stats falter compared to the rest of his peers in this debate, with the former three-star out of Cleveland Glenville totaling 2,323 passing yards, 15 passing touchdowns, 617 rushing yards and four rushing scores in three seasons at Ohio State.

But what makes Jones worthy of mention is when those stats came, specifically in a three-game stretch at the end of the 2014 season. After Barrett went down with a broken ankle against Michigan, Jones led Ohio State to wins over Wisconsin in the Big Ten Championship Game, Alabama in the College Football Playoff semifinal and Oregon in the national title game to finish off the championship season.

In that three-game stretch, Jones completed 46 of his 75 passes (61.3 percent) for five touchdowns and two interceptions. He also ran 46 times for 90 yards and another score.

**Dwayne Haskins:** Most of Haskins’ numbers came in 2018, with the four-star out of Potomac (Md.) Bullis School throwing for just 565 yards behind Barrett the year prior.

It is safe to say Haskins blew those numbers out of the water quickly, throwing for 313 yards and five touchdowns in his first collegiate start and riding those numbers all the way to a program-record 4,831 passing yards and 50 passing touchdowns compared to just eight interceptions. Haskins also did it all with a sterling 70.0 percent completion percentage.

“The staff did such a nice job putting him in a position to use this talent,” Wasserman said. “And he was the first and only real true pocket passer Ohio State has had. I think his talent was amazing. You don’t just get picked in the top 15 of the NFL draft if you don’t have the talent, and he was a tremendous passer.”

Haskins was given the Chicago Tribune Silver Football as the best player in the Big Ten and was one of three Heisman Trophy finalists for the 2018 season after leading the Buckeyes to a 13-1 record, ultimately throwing for 251 yards and three scores in a win over Washington in the Rose Bowl to end his Ohio State career on a high note.

**Justin Fields:** Unlike any other quarterback on this list, Fields did not start out at Ohio State, starting his collegiate career as a five-star Georgia commit out of Kennesaw (Ga.) Harrison. He was the second-best prospect in the 2018 class to Clemson’s Trevor Lawrence and is the eighth-highest rated recruit in the history of the 247Sports composite rankings.

That talent was proven in his first year with the Buckeyes, where Fields threw for 3,273 yards and 41 touchdowns with only three interceptions while also rushing for 484 yards and 10 touchdowns. His efforts made him a Heisman finalist and led Ohio State to the playoff before falling to Lawrence and the Tigers.

When it comes down to pure ability of any quarterback Ohio State has had this decade, Wasserman’s answer is clear.

“He’s the best quarterback Ohio State’s ever had,” Wasserman said. “He’s the best player. Like if you look at him play, he does things that blow my mind, and the reason why is he’s the best combination of runner and passer you could possibly have. We’re talking about a player who will legitimately maybe be the first pick in the NFL draft. He’s really good in this offense, and they’ve designed the offense around him, and it’s going great.”

“He’s going to be the first pick of the draft maybe over even Trevor Lawrence,

who coming into the season was viewed as one of the best quarterback prospects the NFL has ever seen.”

### The Choice

**J.T. Barrett:** Barrett came to Ohio State as a four-star prospect from Wichita Falls (Texas) Rider, and he was rated the second-best dual-threat quarterback and No. 132 prospect overall in the 2013 class.

With Miller firmly entrenched as the starter for the 2013 season and Barrett still recovering from a torn ACL he had suffered during his senior season in high school, Barrett redshirted his first year at Ohio State, watching Miller put up the best numbers of his collegiate career to earn conference player of the year and lead Ohio State to a 12-2 season.

That 2013 campaign made Miller the no-brainer starter for his senior year in 2014, but a shoulder injury, one that he reinjured in mid-August after initially getting it banged up against Clemson in the Orange Bowl the season prior, took him out of the equation and catapulted Barrett into the lead signal caller role as a redshirt freshman.

Barrett’s first start went well enough – 12 of 15 passing for 226 yards, two touchdowns and an interception while rushing for another 50 yards on nine carries – but it all fell apart the next week. Against Virginia Tech, Barrett completed 9 of 29 passes for 219 yards, a touchdown and three interceptions while getting sacked seven times in the 35-21 loss.

Wasserman said his expectations for Ohio State went down dramatically after Miller was ruled out for the season, but those expectations fell off a cliff after the defeat to the Hokies.

“After Ohio State lost Braxton Miller, I thought their season was over. Not that they weren’t going to win 10 games,” Wasserman said. “I think it takes a hell of a lot for Ohio State to not win 10 games. But I thought that their national championship hopes were dead. Then they lost to Virginia Tech and I spent the next five, six, seven weeks explaining why they weren’t going to the playoff.”

“Now granted, at the time, the playoff was new, and we didn’t really know how it was going to work. But I thought that a team that got basically their butts kicked at home and couldn’t get a first down against a pretty average Virginia Tech team wasn’t going to be worthy of that pick.”

Barrett turned it around after the loss, finishing the season completing 64.6 percent of his passes for 2,834 yards, 34 touchdowns and 10 interceptions. He was also a major threat on the ground, rushing for 938 yards and 11 touchdowns. He was given the Silver Football and was named the Griese-Brees Quarterback of the Year in the Big Ten by the Chicago Tribune while also finishing fifth in Heisman Trophy voting for his efforts.

But Barrett’s broken ankle against Michigan stopped the second-year freshman from an attempt at making the title run as a starter, with Jones instead taking the reins and finishing the season with the first national championship in the College Football Playoff era.

Still, Wasserman thinks that Ohio State would likely have made that same run through the Big Ten championship and playoff if Barrett never got hurt against the Wolverines.

“I think there’s a lot of discussions about Cardale Jones came in and the reason why Ohio State won the national championship was because defenses weren’t able to catch up with how strong his arm was, and all that

stuff. I don’t know how much I buy that,” Wasserman said. “I think Ohio State would have won with all three of those guys. All you have to go and look at is A) how nasty that defense was, and B) how wide those running lanes were for (running back) Zeke (Elliott). I mean, the guy rushed for almost 700 yards in three postseason games.”

The 2015 season was a difficult one for both Barrett and Jones, who battled for the starting job throughout much of the year, stunting the ability of both quarterbacks in the process. That led to a major decline in Barrett’s stats, with the then-sophomore completing 93 of 147 passes for 992 yards, 11 touchdowns and four interceptions while rushing for 682 yards and 11 scores.

Barrett was the lone starter in 2016 and had a rebound in production, racking up 3,400 total yards and 33 touchdowns while earning another quarterback of the year honor in the Big Ten. He was not able to get it done in the playoff, however, throwing for 127 yards and two interceptions, while ending the game with negative rushing yardage in a 31-0 loss to Clemson.

But Barrett bounced back in his fifth-year senior season, his only one with Day as part of the coaching staff. The impact was shown in his numbers, with Barrett putting up the best numbers of his collegiate career, marking new career highs in passing yards (3,053), passing touchdowns (35) and rushing touchdowns (12).

That 2017 season did not end with Ohio State back in the playoff after losses to Oklahoma and Iowa, but it did feature what was likely the strongest performance of Barrett’s career. In an Oct. 28 matchup against Penn State, Barrett completed 16 consecutive passes, including a 13-of-13 passing total in the fourth quarter, to spark

a 39-38 comeback victory over the Nittany Lions.

On the game, Barrett was 33 of 39 for 328 yards and four touchdowns, three of which came in the fourth quarter. He was also the team’s leading rusher with 17 carries for 95 yards.

“I’ve never had a kid play perfect,” Meyer said after the game, “but damn, he was close tonight.”

That was a key highlight in a lengthy Ohio State career for Barrett, which ended with him earning his third quarterback of the year award from the conference. He capped off his Ohio State career with his name in more than one spot in the Big Ten record book, ending as the conference’s all-time leader in various categories, including total yards (12,697) and total touchdowns (147).

For Wasserman, despite him not being the most talented signal caller Ohio State saw in the 2010s, it was the numbers and the accomplishments that Barrett held in his time with the Buckeyes that allow him to be called the top quarterback in the program’s history.

“When you ask what makes him special, I think the longevity and the ability to accomplish the things that he accomplished over a four-year period,” Wasserman said. “He played for a long time. It was the identity of the Urban Meyer era.”

“The thing that is always interesting about these discussions is that there’s a difference between best and greatest. He might have been the greatest quarterback because he was around for long enough, led a team to the playoff that won a national championship and won all these accolades and has records and all the stuff just based on longevity.”

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# Bateman Opts Out, Caps Career With Gophers

Rashod Bateman, the reigning Big Ten receiver of the year, will not return to Minnesota when the Gophers return from their pause for positive COVID tests.

The Gophers' standout receiver will forgo the rest of the 2020 season and prepare for "the next stage" of his career, making his announcement on Twitter amid the COVID-19 outbreak that forced Minnesota's matchup with Wisconsin on Nov. 28 to be canceled.

Bateman originally opted out due to concerns about COVID in early August after having the virus himself earlier in the summer. The Big Ten season was canceled and then reinstated with new safety protocols, including daily testing, which convinced Bateman to return.

Minnesota dropped its first two games on the way to a disappointing 2-3 start. Through five games, Bateman averaged 7.2 receptions

unless the average amount of games played per team in the conference decreases.

"First and foremost I hope that everyone in the Minnesota football program is safe and healthy and those affected make a complete recovery," Wisconsin head coach Paul Chryst said in a statement. "It goes without saying that we are disappointed in not being able to play this weekend. This is a great rivalry that is exciting for players and fans on both sides. We will continue to practice this week and turn our attention to getting ready for our next game, against Indiana on Dec. 5."

Indiana is scheduled to visit Camp Randall on Dec. 5, while the Gophers are set to take on Northwestern the same day.

"The health and safety of our student-athletes, coaches and staff have always been our main priority," Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle said.

"We have experienced an increase in positive cases recently and have made the responsible decision to pause team activities. We will continue to rely on the guidance of our medical experts as we navigate the next several days. We are doing everything we possibly can to miss the fewest amount of days possible. Our goal is to be healthy enough and ready to compete on December 5 against Northwestern."

## Nebraska Basketball Nabs Highest Commit In History

Greenville (S.C.) Legacy Charter five-star guard Bryce McGowens committed to Nebraska, becoming the highest ranked recruit in program history.

McGowens, who was initially committed to Florida State, picked Nebraska over Georgia. The nation's No. 3 shooting guard will join his brother, Trey, who transferred from Pittsburgh in the spring to play for head coach Fred Hoiberg.

"I chose Nebraska because of how much trust I have in the program and coaching staff," McGowens said. "Coach Hoiberg has a proven track record of getting guys ready and getting them to the NBA. Also, having an opportunity to play with my older brother is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Nebraska assistant coach Matt Abdelmassih led his recruitment, but McGowens' brother did a good job of letting the five-star shooting guard know how badly he was coveted by the Cornhuskers.

"He was calling me two, three times a day telling me how much he has been improving and how Coach lets them play, including how cool it would be to play with each other," Bryce McGowens said.

Trey McGowens, who was a four-star combo guard in 2019, quickly became convinced Lincoln, Neb., was the place for him and his brother after he arrived in the spring.

"I'm definitely excited," Trey McGowens said, "just seeing the way they do things here.

Things are different, as far as skill development-wise, strength-wise, helping him develop into the best player he can be. He's a hard worker. You're going to get everything out of him. Expect a big year out of him, out of me, out of the Nebraska program as a whole."

McGowens became the highest ranked Nebraska commit ever and said that he hopes to follow through on his high expectations with the Cornhuskers.

"It's an honor," McGowens said. "It means that I have a chance to be a trendsetter. I want to attract the best players in the country to come to Nebraska."

"I feel like I can make a major impact from day one, doing whatever is needed to elevate the program to put us in a position to win a championship. That's the goal. I've always prided myself on winning, and we expect to be competing for a championship next season. I also want my impact to go further than the court, where kids across the country view Nebraska as a program to take serious."

## Penn State Basketball Opener Canceled Due To COVID

The Penn State men's basketball team did not start the season on time due to COVID-19 protocols. The Nittany Lions' season opener against Drexel, originally scheduled for Nov. 25, was canceled, but they were able to take on Virginia Military Institute on Nov. 28.

Head coach Jim Ferry won his first game at the helm, an 86-65 victory over VMI.

## Penn State DB Gordon Enters Transfer Portal

Trent Gordon, a third-year sophomore defensive back, entered the NCAA transfer portal with plans to leave Penn State. The Manvel, Texas, product played in the first three games this season without recording a statistic. For his career, Gordon posted 21 tackles and five pass breakups.

If Gordon leaves the program, that would leave the Nittany Lions with none of their defensive back signees from the 2018 class, since cornerback Jordan Miner entered medical retirement shortly after enrollment due to a discovered heart condition and safety Isaiah Humphries transferred following his freshman year.

As a three-star prospect, Gordon earned more than 30 FBS scholarship offers as the No. 40 cornerback in the country.

After playing in just four games to preserve his redshirt as a freshman, Gordon made a significant jump in year two. Gordon's best outing came against Memphis in the Cotton Bowl when he tallied five tackles (four solo).

Gordon transitioned to safety during the winter with the hopes of cracking the rotation at the position he primarily played in high school.

"I was more comfortable with (safety) anyway, and it gives me a little bit more opportunity to freely play," Gordon said prior to the season. "It kind of builds on my skill set as a corner. Now I can be more physical. Now I can play a lot more fast because I can see everything more clearly now – at this level of the secondary I can pretty much see everything."

Gordon had been listed as a third-team option at safety, behind senior starters Jaquan Brisker and Lamont Wade, and junior backups Ji'Air Brown and Jonathan Sutherland. Redshirt freshman Tyler Rudolph is at the second third-string spot, while the team brought in 2020 four-star prospect Enzo Jennings earlier this year.

## BIG 2020 Standings

### East Division

	W	L	Pct.
<b>Ohio State</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.000</b>
Indiana	5	1	.833
Maryland	2	2	.500
Michigan State	2	3	.333
Michigan	2	4	.250
Rutgers	2	4	.250
Penn State	1	5	.167

### West Division

	W	L	Pct.
Northwestern	5	1	.833
Iowa	4	2	.667
Wisconsin	2	1	.667
Minnesota	2	3	.400
Purdue	2	3	.400
Illinois	2	3	.400
Nebraska	1	4	.200

### Nov. 27 Game

Iowa 26, Nebraska 20

### Nov. 28 Games

Indiana 27, Maryland 11  
Penn State 27, Michigan 17  
Michigan State 29, Northwestern 20  
Rutgers 37, Purdue 30  
Minnesota at Wisconsin, Canceled  
**Ohio State at Illinois, Canceled**

### Dec. 5 Games

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

## Top Performers Across The Big Ten Conference

Penn State running back Keyvonne Lee helped lead the Nittany Lions to a 27-17 victory over Michigan for their first win of the season.

Lee, a true freshman, was thrust into a prominent role following a slew of transfers and injuries, and he delivered. The 230-pound tailback racked up 134 yards and one touchdown on 22 carries.

Michigan tailback Hassan Haskins exceeded the 100-yard threshold on 17 carries for the Wolverines.

The junior running back totaled 101 yards and two touchdowns in the Wolverines' loss.

Rutgers third-year sophomore quarterback Johnny Langan came in off the bench and led the Scarlet Knights to a win over Purdue despite facing a 10-point deficit.

Langan completed all four of his passes for 95 yards and one touchdown, and the dual-threat quarterback added 95 rushing yards.

Indiana tailbacks Tim Baldwin and Stevie Scott deserve recognition for their performance in the Hoosiers' 27-11 win over Maryland.

Baldwin, a true freshman, tallied a game-high 106 rushing yards, averaging 6.6 yards per carry.

Scott, a junior, gained 80 yards on the ground and found the end zone three times to help secure the victory.

Despite his team falling 26-20 to Iowa, Nebraska sophomore linebacker Luke Reimer stood out for the Huskers with a team-high 12 tackles (11 solo).

Reimer, a former walk-on who was featured in the Nov. 8 edition of Big Ten Notes, also had one tackle for loss.

## BIG TEN NOTES

### Joe Dempsey

for 94.4 yards per game with two total touchdowns.

As a sophomore, Bateman corralled 60 catches for 1,219 yards and 11 scores for the 11-2 Gophers in 2019.

Entering his junior season, Bateman switched his jersey number from No. 13 to No. 0, saying the number stood for having zero tolerance for racism in society.

After addressing his concerns with COVID in his announcement post, Bateman thanked head coach P.J. Fleck and his coaching staff.

"Minnesota has changed me forever and the lessons I learned in the Row The Boat culture will stay with me for the rest of my life," Bateman wrote on Twitter. "There is no better coach to play for in the nation than Coach Fleck and I appreciate everything he has done for me."

## Minnesota's Game With Badgers Canceled Due To COVID

For the first time since 1906, Minnesota and Wisconsin did not take part in the Battle for Paul Bunyan's Axe. The Golden Gophers released a statement saying nine student-athletes and six staff members had tested positive for COVID-19, which led to the game against the Badgers being nixed.

In Minnesota's 34-31 victory over Purdue on Nov. 20, the team was without 22 players, and Fleck said approximately half of them were out due to COVID.

The lack of a game gives Wisconsin a maximum of five games on its schedule, which makes it ineligible for the Big Ten title game



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# Holtmann Adds To Class In 2022 Recruiting Cycle

Ohio State men's basketball coach Chris Holtmann is literally guarding against a future letdown in his program based on the backcourt-heavy recruits in the next two cycles.

The latest to issue a verbal commitment is class of 2022 four-star point guard Bruce Thornton from Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton.

His Thanksgiving day announcement (Nov. 26) pushed the Buckeyes ahead of Michigan State to the top of 247Sports' composite rankings.

## COURT REPORT

Craig Merz

Thornton (6-2, 195) is the 30th-ranked player overall, seventh at his position and second in the state.

The son of a former Georgia and NFL cornerback also named Bruce Thornton chose the Buckeyes over Alabama, Indiana, Georgia and Purdue.

He was offered by Ohio State on June 10.

Thornton credited Holtmann and assistant coach Jake Diebler for building a relationship despite him never making a visit to Columbus because of NCAA recruiting restrictions due to COVID-19.

"They kept it honest with me throughout the whole pandemic and everything, and that's all you can ask for as a recruit," he told 247Sports. "It was the little stuff that people don't see. There was just a lot going on, and I knew what I wanted. I knew it was best for me, my family and my dream so I just thought, 'Why not make it happen?'"

He joins a 2022 class that includes four-star shooting guard Roddy Gayle from Youngstown, N.Y., who is ranked 76th overall, seventh at his position and first in the state. Gayle (6-4, 195) committed Nov. 13.

The other member is Cincinnati Princeton three-star shooting guard Bowen Hardman (6-3, 160). He was the first to commit on May 13.

Thornton, who attends the same high school as former OSU guard Shannon Scott (2011-15), is eager to showcase what he can bring to the program.

"My hard work and leadership on and off the court and set an example as a point guard," he said of his attributes. "There's a lot of responsibilities as a point guard in wins and losses so you have to be comfortable in what you do

and what you believe in and everybody else will follow."

Holtmann's 2021 recruits rank 42nd, but that's misleading because four-star point guard Meechie Johnson reclassified to 2020 and will enroll at Ohio State this month. He is now rated 116th nationally, 22nd positionally and third in the state for 2020.

Prior to his move, Johnson (6-1, 185) was the No. 2 prospect in the state for 2021 behind OSU commit Malaki Branham, who is a four-star shooting guard. The Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary product is fourth at that spot nationally as well as the 28th overall best player.

Holtmann does have a forward for next season in Convoy (Ohio) Crestview's Kalen Etzler (6-8, 195), who has moved up to No. 2 in the state behind Branham.

He is 98th in the nation and 21st at his position, according to the composite rankings.

While Holtmann is loading up on guards for the coming years, there's no telling what the roster will look like with players transferring seemingly at will at the first sign of competition for starting spots or the possibility of early exits to the professional ranks.

Also, with winter sport players receiving an extra year of eligibility due to the pandemic, it's hard to judge future rosters.

For example, guard Jimmy Sotos is a transfer from Bucknell who is a senior but who could return next season as a graduate.

As it stands for the guards, C.J. Walker is the lone senior. The juniors are Musa Jallow and Duane Washington. There are no sophomores, and among the freshmen, Johnson is joined by Eugene Brown.

### Tall Order

Holtmann recently talked of adding a post player either through the 2021 recruiting class or by transfer.

"We have been recruiting big guys, some of them for a couple years now, over two years, and I'm excited about where we're at," Holtmann said. "I think the pandemic has changed the timeline for some guys. In some cases, it sped it up and in some cases it slowed it down. We're going to run the race with guys that we feel great about, have a great relationship with."

"You also have the spring period in which we'll also certainly take a look at available transfer big men as well. They'll be a part of that kind of pool of recruits that we'll look at next."

Five-star center Chet Holmgren, No. 2 nationally in 247Sports' composite for 2021, has been on the Buckeyes'

## 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	SG	6-3	160	★★★	Cincinnati Princeton
Bruce Thornton	PG	6-2	195	★★★★	Alpharetta (Ga.) Milton

radar for a long time. Holmgren (7-0, 190) attends Minneapolis Minnehaha Academy. Gonzaga is considered the favorite to land him, but the Buckeyes are right behind along with Michigan and Minnesota.

Holtmann is also pursuing a pair of centers from the IMG Academy in Bradenton, Fla.

Efton Reid (6-11, 225) is a five-star ranked 22nd overall, fourth at center and third in his state. Reports have Ohio State and Pittsburgh emerging as the front-runners with Michigan in the mix. The Richmond, Va., native received an Ohio State offer on April 2, 2020. OSU assistant coach Ryan Pedon is the lead recruiter.

Reid's teammate, five-star Charles Bediako (6-11, 215), appears to be a solid Alabama lean, but the Buckeyes, Duke, Michigan and Texas hope for a change of heart. Bediako is a spot behind Reid at No. 23 overall and fifth at center.

The tallest players on the OSU roster are sophomore Ibrahima Diallo (6-10, 220), graduate Seth Towns (6-8, 230), senior Kyle Young (6-8, 225) and sophomore Zed Key (6-8, 245).

Looking ahead to 2022, the Buckeyes on Nov. 16 offered Bristol (Conn.) Central four-star center Donovan Clingan (7-1, 255). Clingan, who in November had to quarantine due to contact tracing for the coronavirus, has more than 15 offers.

They include Georgetown, Maryland, Michigan State, Notre Dame, Syracuse and Yale.

He is 44th overall, sixth at center and the top Connecticut prospect.

### On The Move

Speaking of big men, several media outlets reported Nov. 25 that Kaleb Wesson, who left after his junior year but was not chosen in the NBA draft in November, has signed a training camp contract with the Golden State Warriors as a free agent, although there has been no announcement on the team's website.

Wesson (6-9, 253) led the Buckeyes last season with 14.0 points and 9.3 rebounds while increasing his three-point percentage to 42.5 percent from 34.7 percent the previous season. That touch from the outside makes him attractive to the Warriors.

Holtmann has been promoting his former player for months and was disappointed that no NBA teams took a chance on Wesson at the draft.

"There is no question in my mind that Kaleb is really going to add his game, his skill set, to an NBA organization that wants him," the coach said. "And not getting drafted, I think what most people understand now, can often be a better situation for younger players because they get an opportunity to find a team that really does value their specific skill set."

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# Bucks Answer Some Questions, Others Remain

By JOE DEMPSEY  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Ohio State entered the season with numerous questions after losing four key players, including three starters, but the Buckeyes emphatically quelled many doubts in a dominant win over Illinois State.

Head coach Chris Holtmann's squad played so well in the season opener that the team entered its second game with high expectations and a significant spread (-26.5) against UMass Lowell. The River Hawks made the Buckeyes battle, bringing many question marks back to light.

"You're trying to learn from every win and every loss, from every circumstance and experience. That's one of our core tenets. We're trying, and we're going to learn from this," Holtmann said following the Buckeyes' victory over UMass Lowell Nov. 29.

"It certainly feels better after a win, but I think as a coach, I'm going to look back and say, 'OK, these are all the things that we have to improve on.' And it's a significant list, but it's early in the season. We can make those strides. There's no question that we have a lot to improve on."

## Buckeyes Ride 22-0 Start To Season-Opening Blowout

After losing three starters from last season, Ohio State entered its first game with many question marks.

The Buckeyes answered some questions about that new-look lineup with their 94-67 victory over Illinois State at Value City Arena on Nov. 25, led by 19 points and eight rebounds by Justice Sueing in his debut for Holtmann's squad.

"He just has a variety of ways in which he can attack you, and he's pretty powerful," Holtmann said of Sueing. "And you combine his size with his ball skills and his athleticism, and he's a good player. He's that versatile wing forward that is really valuable in today's game."

The host Scarlet and Gray screamed out to a 22-0 lead before the Redbirds (0-1) got on the board with a Dedric Boyd free throw 6:24 into the game.

The Buckeyes' opening run began with five points apiece from sophomore forward E.J. Liddell and Sueing and was capped by a triple from freshman Eugene Brown, with a Duane Washington three-pointer, four points from freshman forward Zed Key and a dunk by Sueing in between.

"It just felt like we were released, like let the dogs out the cage," Liddell said. "Because we've just been practicing against each other hard every day, being pushed and just working on our details so much. It just felt good to be out there again."

Illinois State answered the 22-point deficit with a 7-0 run, and Kyle Young ended it with a layup on a great pass from fifth-year senior point guard C.J. Walker, who finished with 10 points and six assists to two turnovers.

Battling back and forth with the Redbirds, the Buckeyes extended their lead to a 42-18 with 2:54 until halftime.

"When you see a couple of shots go in, it feels like our team really jells and is able to feed off of that," Sueing said. "But more importantly, we just stayed together and were playing off each other, which led to good things like sharing the ball and stuff like that."

The standout highlight of the first half for the Buckeyes came in transition with 6:18 remaining until intermission. Walker found

Young for an exciting alley-oop slam on the fast break, which the 6-8 forward flushed despite a foul. Young added the free throw.

Illinois State's D.J. Horne went on a solo 7-0 run to end the first frame, cutting the Buckeye lead to 17.

"We did not finish the first half very well offensively or defensively," Holtmann said. "I was disappointed with that."

Josiah Strong opened the second half with a three-pointer to cut the Ohio State lead to 42-28, but 14 was the closest the visitors came. The Buckeyes responded with a 12-2 run, which they extended to a 26-11 stretch overall, leading 68-39 with 10:43 left.

From there Ohio State cruised to the 27-point victory in the season opener, leading by as many 37 points.

Sueing, who sat out last year after transferring from Cal, made his first eight shots on his way to an 8-for-9 shooting performance. Liddell scored 16 points with three rebounds, three assists, two steals and one block, while Young added eight points and eight boards in the frontcourt.

Washington, a junior guard, scored 12 points with two rebounds and three assists with no turnovers. Key finished with 12 points and five boards on 3-of-4 shooting and a 6-of-9 mark at the charity stripe, adding one block and one assist in 17 minutes, while Brown added three points and four boards.

Antonio Reeves led the Redbirds with 17 points on 5-of-11 shooting.

With the victory all-but-secured, the Buckeyes emptied their bench, and walk-on players Harrison Hookfin and Jansen Davidson added four and three points, respectively.

Overall, Ohio State's two-point defense was excellent against Illinois State, allowing just 35.1 percent of makes on those attempts compared to 45.0 percent on threes. The Redbirds committed 16 turnovers, and the Buckeyes gave it up 10 times.

"We still allowed them too many easy, clean looks," Holtmann said. "They shot 45 percent from three. We know that's something we have got to continue to work on. But overall, our defensive effort was sharp, our attention to detail was good. We played hard and competed on that end. And I think that's going to have to be who we are."

Holtmann's squad did not ever lose grasp of a substantial lead after its hot start against the Redbirds.

"It sets a good tone just to show how good we can be," Sueing said. "I feel like we're just scratching the surface with this one. Obviously, it's going to pick up as the season continues. But I'm just looking forward to continuing to work with my guys. We'll take it game by game."

## Ohio State Overcomes 2nd-Half Deficit To Defeat UMass Lowell

Ohio State overcame a five-point deficit in the second half to defeat UMass Lowell 74-64 at the Covelli Center on Nov. 29.

"That was our first game having adversity and our first time with a new team going through that adversity," Walker said. "We just wanted to stick together and have that mindset that we had a lot of time within the game. Once we took the lead, we just wanted to make a statement, finish the game strong and make the right plays. We weren't making shots at the time, so we just wanted to stick together and make the right next play defensively and offensively."

The Buckeyes (2-0) entered their matchup with UMass Lowell as heavy favorites, but the River Hawks brought their brand of excellent

## Ohio State 94, Illinois State 67

Nov. 25, 2020

Value City Arena • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F									
Illinois State (0-1)	25	42	67									
Ohio State (1-0)	42	52	94									
Illinois State	Total FG	FT	Reb.									
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Horne	29	4-12	0-0	0-2	1	2	10					
Strong	30	5-11	2-2	0-1	2	4	15					
Ndiaye	18	2-5	0-0	0-1	0	3	5					
Reeves	27	5-11	5-7	1-6	1	0	17					
Kotov	17	0-2	0-0	2-3	1	2	0					
Andrews	18	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	3	4					
Sissoko	15	0-3	0-0	1-1	5	2	0					
Boyd	13	1-5	3-4	0-1	0	4	5					
Washington	15	1-3	1-1	1-4	0	2	3					
Fleming	18	2-3	3-4	0-5	7	1	8					
Totals	200	22-57	14-19	8-25	12	26	67					
Percentages: FG: 38.6%. FT: 73.7%. Three-point field goals: 9-20 (Strong 3-5, Horne 2-4, Reeves 2-4, Ndiaye 1-3, Fleming 1-1, Sissoko 0-1, Boyd 0-1, Washington 0-1). Team rebounds: 4. Blocked shots: 5 (Strong 2, Ndiaye 2, Sissoko). Turnovers: 16 (Fleming 5, Horne 2, Kotov 2, Andrews 2, Sissoko 2, Strong, Reeves, Washington). Steals: 2 (Horne, Reeves). Technical Fouls: Sissoko.												
Ohio State	Total FG	FT	Reb.									
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Washington	27	4-12	2-2	0-2	3	0	12					
Walker	24	3-8	4-4	0-2	6	1	10					
Sueing	20	8-9	2-3	4-4	1	0	19					
Young	19	3-5	2-3	1-7	1	3	8					
Liddell	23	5-9	6-9	2-1	3	3	16					
Key	17	3-4	6-9	3-2	1	1	12					
Ahrens	13	2-4	0-0	0-0	0	0	6					
Brown	18	1-4	0-0	0-4	0	1	3					
Sotos	10	0-1	0-0	1-0	2	5	0					
Jallow	13	0-4	0-0	0-3	0	1	0					
Diallo	7	0-1	1-2	1-1	0	0	1					
Hookfin	5	2-3	0-0	0-0	0	1	4					
Davidson	3	0-0	3-4	0-0	0	0	3					
Totals	200	31-64	26-36	14-29	17	16	94					
Percentages: FG: 48.4%. FT: 72.2%. Three-point field goals: 6-17 (Washington 2-5, Ahrens 2-4, Sueing 1-1, Brown 1-4, Walker 0-2, Jallow 0-1). Team rebounds: 5. Blocked shots: 3 (Liddell, Key, Jallow). Turnovers: 10 (Sueing 3, Walker 2, Key 2, Jallow 2, Liddell). Steals: 8 (Sueing 3, Liddell 2, Washington, Walker, Jallow). Officials: Green, Siville, Felder. Attendance: N/A.												

perimeter shooting and sound team basketball to Columbus.

Washington led the Scarlet and Gray with 21 points, while Walker added 13 points and five assists in the 10-point win.

After the Buckeyes went up 56-51 with 7:33 to play, the visiting River Hawks (1-2) ripped off five straight points to tie the game with 6:46 remaining.

Washington answered the River Hawk run with a three-pointer on a friendly roll around the rim, but UMass Lowell senior guard Obadiah Noel responded with the equalizer from deep out of a timeout.

Liddell and Sueing gave the Buckeyes a four-point edge with back-to-back baskets before sophomore forward Darion Jordan-Thomas hit a jumper for the visitors.

Walker hit a clutch shot with 2:30 left to push the lead to 65-61, but Noel cut it to two with a jumper of his own on the ensuing possession. Sueing extended the lead back up to four with a pair of free throws, and Washington hit the dagger from deep after a 2-for-10 start from beyond the arc.

"I got some good looks during the game and unfortunately they didn't go down," Washington said. "But the saying is 'shooters shoot,' and you've still got to be confident in yourself. And I believed in myself, and I let it fly with confidence and put it in, so credit to C.J. for making a good pass."

After a lackluster first half which ended tied at 33, Ohio State picked up its defensive intensity to open the second half. But UMass Lowell continued to play extremely hard and knocked down shots from deep. The River Hawks took five-point leads on two separate three-pointers in the second half, leading 41-36 at 15:59 and 50-45 with 11:21 left.

They shot 33.0 percent (5 of 15) from beyond the arc in the second half and 36.7 (11 of 30) for the game.

Ohio State had jumped out to an 8-2 lead in

## Ohio State 74, UMass Lowell 64

Nov. 29, 2020

Covelli Center • Columbus, Ohio

	1	2	F									
<b>UMass Lowell (1-2)</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>64</b>									
<b>Ohio State (2-0)</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>74</b>									
<b>UMass Lowell</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>								
	<b>Min.</b>	<b>M-A</b>	<b>M-A</b>	<b>O-D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>					
Withers	19	2-10	0-0	0-3	4	5	5					
Blunt	33	3-6	2-2	0-1	1	4	11					
Boudie	15	0-2	2-2	0-3	1	3	2					
Mitchell	7	0-1	1-2	0-0	0	0	1					
Noel	40	5-21	2-4	2-5	5	3	15					
Jordan-Thomas	20	3-6	2-2	2-1	0	2	8					
Daley	33	4-4	2-2	2-2	4	2	11					
Thomas	24	2-4	0-0	0-4	0	1	6					
Brooks	9	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	4	5					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>21-56</b>	<b>11-14</b>	<b>7-24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>64</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 37.5%. FT: 78.6%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 11-30 (Noel 3-13, Blunt 3-4, Thomas 2-4, Withers 1-6, Daley 1-1, Brooks 1-1, Mitchell 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 6. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 5 (Boudie 2, Brooks 2, Withers). <b>Turnovers:</b> 13 (Noel 4, Mitchell 3, Daley 2, Thomas, Brooks, Jordan-Thomas, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 3 (Daley, Jordan-Thomas, Boudie). <b>Technical Fouls:</b> Withers.												
<b>Michigan</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>FG</b>	<b>FT</b>	<b>Reb.</b>								
	<b>Min.</b>	<b>M-A</b>	<b>M-A</b>	<b>O-D</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>PF</b>	<b>Pts.</b>					
Sueing	35	4-9	6-9	2-4	1	3	15					
Young	30	2-8	2-2	2-6	0	2	6					
Liddell	27	4-8	3-4	3-5	0	4	11					
Washington	35	7-17	4-4	0-3	1	1	21					
Walker	35	2-7	9-10	0-3	5	4	13					
Key	17	3-4	2-4	2-2	1	2	8					
Sotos	7	0-0	0-0	0-0	1	2	0					
Ahrens	6	0-1	0-0	0-0	1	0	0					
Browns	8	0-1	0-0	1-3	0	0	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>22-55</b>	<b>26-33</b>	<b>12-29</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>74</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 40.0%. FT: 78.8%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 4-18 (Washington 2-5, Ahrens 2-4, Sueing 1-1, Brown 1-4, Walker 0-2, Jallow 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Liddell 2, Key 2). <b>Turnovers:</b> 9 (Walker 2, Key 2, Jallow 2, Liddell). <b>Steals:</b> 6 (Sueing 3, Washington, Walker, Liddell). <b>Officials:</b> Sciroto, Riley, Cruz. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.												

the game's first 3:35, appearing to be ready to roll to another blowout win with an 8-0 spurt after UMass Lowell scored first.

After the River Hawks cut the Buckeye lead to 8-6 with more than 15 minutes until halftime, Key fired off a 6-0 run by himself. The freshman big man finished with eight points, four rebounds and two blocks in 17 critical minutes.

"E.J. was in foul trouble today, so (Key) brought a lot," Walker said. "Offensively, he finished under the rim, got some great defensive rebounds that we needed when we got stops, and he just brings a lot of attention under the basket for us to make plays, like me, Duane and Justice, being able to get downhill."

The Buckeyes and River Hawks battled back and forth until Young extended the lead to 21-13, equaling the biggest advantage of the first half for the Buckeyes.

Liddell finished with 11 points, eight rebounds, and two blocks, while Sueing pitched in 15 points, six boards, and three steals.

Noel paced the River Hawks with 15 points and seven rebounds.

The River Hawks' stringent defense held Ohio State to 34.4 percent shooting and 0 for 8 on three-pointers in the game's first 20 minutes. Meanwhile, the visitors shot 40.0 percent (6 of 15) from beyond the arc in the first half.

UMass Lowell ended the game at 37.5 percent from the floor (21 of 56) and 36.7 percent from deep (11 of 30), while Ohio State finished at 40.0 percent on field goals (22 of 55) and 22.2 percent on threes (4 of 18).

"We were able to get just enough stops there late, and our execution late against their zone got a little bit better, and Duane was able to make that three that created some separation. But I think (our defense) has to be a staple for us," Holtmann said. "We'll shoot it better than we have these first two games, there's no question about that. But our defense has to sustain us."

Fourth-year junior wing Musa Jallow missed the game after suffering a lower leg injury during pregame warmups.



# Buckeyes Cancel Opener, Then Dominate Duquesne

By WYATT CROSHER  
Buckeye Sports Bulletin Staff Writer

Before Ohio State women's basketball could even take the court for the first time this season against an opponent, COVID-19 stepped in and took away the Buckeyes' scheduled season opener against Akron on Nov. 25. The game was slated for 6 p.m. following the men's basketball team's opener against Illinois State.

"The Ohio State University Department of Athletics, in alignment with COVID-19 testing and protocols for nonconference opponents, has canceled the women's basketball game against the University of Akron scheduled for tomorrow evening at 6 p.m. at the Jerome Schottenstein Center," read a statement released on Nov. 24. "The decision was made out of an abundance of caution and with the welfare of the student-athletes, coaches and event staff in mind after Akron shared results of its most recent testing."

As the statement said, the COVID results that led to the cancellation were on the Zips' side, and though an Ohio State spokesman could not confirm to Buckeye Sports Bulletin that it was a positive test, the results led to the Buckeyes taking extra precautions and deciding not to play.

"I'm disappointed because I wanted to get this thing off the ground tomorrow, but at the same time, we're just trying to make sure that we adjust and control what we can control and just get prepared for when we do play a game," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff told BSB immediately following the announcement. "I was really hoping we would get this one under our belt just to see what we look like, but it is what is. We just have to absorb this and adjust and move on."

McGuff said he found out the news of the cancellation around 1 p.m. the Tuesday of the announcement and that his players, while taking it as well as he could have hoped, were certainly upset with already losing a game on the schedule.

"We told the team, and they were just kind of shocked and in disbelief," McGuff said. "They were obviously ready to play somebody and were excited about this, but they handled it about as well as you could and we had a productive practice after."

As teams often have to do while playing sports during a pandemic, Ohio State just had to continue to push forward, practicing as scheduled on Tuesday and Friday and replacing the Akron game with a practice that Wednesday before taking a day off for Thanksgiving.

And though the two teams were not able to get the game played on its initial date, McGuff did say that Ohio State and Akron were having discussions about trying to play the game later on in the season.

## Buckeyes Start Off Season With Lopsided Home Win

It was not the cleanest performance, but No. 20 Ohio State (1-0) still managed to control its opener Nov. 29 against Duquesne (0-1), defeating the Dukes 82-47 and holding a double-digit advantage for the final 27:08 of the game in front of an attendance limited to media and coaching staff at the Covelli Center.

"It was definitely different, and it's different for all of us through these weird times, but I think, as the game went on, I think everybody got more comfortable," Ohio State sophomore guard Jacy Sheldon said of the empty stands. "We've had a lot of time to play with each

other, and I think that showed. We played really well together, so I think just as the game went on, I think everybody got more comfortable and settled in."

The Buckeyes took a 36-17 halftime lead and never looked back, starting the third quarter on a 13-4 run and cruising the rest of the way. Sheldon led the team with a game-high 20 points on 8-of-13 shooting, with senior guard Braxtin Miller not far behind, netting 16 points and making five of her 11 attempts.

But it was not a flawless performance for Sheldon, who committed three early turnovers before getting into the rhythm of the game and avoiding another turnover throughout the final three quarters.

"She had those turnovers which are uncharacteristic of her, and I got on her and told her to kind of settle in and play aggressively within what we do," McGuff said. "I thought as the game went on, she played really well."

All 11 Ohio State players active for this season saw time on the court, with every player scoring except for freshman guard Anyssa Jones, who was the last to enter the game.

One of those players who saw time was Rikki Harris, a redshirt freshman who missed last season recovering from a shoulder injury after missing significant time in high school for a variety of other injuries. Harris finished with seven points in 14 minutes during her first on-court action for the Buckeyes.

Despite the lopsided win, junior forward Dorka Juhasz did not have her strongest performance, hitting just four of her 13 attempts from the field while also turning the ball over three times. She did manage a double-double though with 10 points and 12 rebounds on the afternoon.

"I thought she got really good shots and just didn't make them to the level that she's capable of," McGuff said. "But she took open threes, she posted up aggressively and got the ball around the basket, she got to the free-throw line, and I think if she continues to get those shots, she's going to score a lot of points for us."

The Buckeyes held Duquesne to 14-of-62 shooting (22.6 percent), including a first half in which the Dukes hit just four of their 28 attempts, missing all 11 shots from behind the arc for a paltry 14.3 shooting percentage. Duquesne ended up hitting on just one of its 22 threes (4.5 percent) for the contest.

"That was the focus," McGuff said about Ohio State's three-point defense. "I'm surprised it worked."

"Unfortunately, I can't tell you that it was all because our defense was there contesting shots. I think we were on some, but they got too many open ones that they just happened to miss."

Sheldon was also impressed by the defensive performance put on display by Ohio State and said that it was a big team effort to shut down the Dukes as dramatically as the Buckeyes did.

"Obviously that's very great for our defense," she said. "Everybody did a great job, the whole team. That's our bigs, too. They did a great job hedging off the screens. That's something we're going to continue to work on and hopefully continue to get better at."

On the other end, Ohio State shot 50 percent from the field (33 of 66) but had similar struggles from three, making just 3 of 14 (21.4 percent) and missing its first five attempts before Harris hit the first three of the game for either team with 11 seconds left in the first half.

Sheldon credited the offensive success to the playmaking and teamwork showed by

everyone on the roster during the 35-point victory.

"We did a great job in transition, all of us did, passing it around, finding the open man, which started with our rebounds," Sheldon explained. "Our bigs did a great job of rebounding, getting up the floor fast. We played really well together. Everybody made the extra pass, everybody played really well, so it was a lot of fun."

The Buckeyes outrebounded Duquesne, 52-37.

As for McGuff, he thought the scoring output could have been better for his team, especially considering the talent on his roster. He also said that the 14 three-point attempts, down dramatically from the 23.2 per game the team had last season, was due to a focus on being less dependent on shots from behind the perimeter.

"It's certainly been a focus," the coach said. "Last year we did become at times too reliant on the three-point shot. I think that's going to be a big part of who we are, but we also have to be able to get the ball inside as well. I thought we got a lot of good shots. We missed open threes. We got shots around the basket, and we got to the free-throw line. We just have to shoot it better and I don't think the shooting was reflective of our abilities, but we have to get in the gym and make sure we get more consistent."

Laia Sole was the only Duke in double figures with 10.

Next up, Ohio State will have that chance to be more consistent when the Buckeyes take on Kent State in a noon game at home on Dec. 2.

## Old Friend Shines In A New Place

After sitting out the first three games of the season, former Ohio State guard Kierstan Bell was granted immediate eligibility for Florida Gulf Coast on Nov. 29 and played later that day against Davidson.

In her debut, Bell immediately made program history, becoming the first player in Florida Gulf Coast history to record at least 20 points and 20 rebounds, scoring 24 and hauling in 20 boards in the 84-61 victory.



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## Ohio State 82, Duquesne 47

Nov. 29, 2020												
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	1	2	3	4	F							
Duquesne (0-1)	10	7	11	19	47							
Ohio State (1-0)	17	19	23	23	82							
Duquesne	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Hamilton	33	3-12	2-2	1-3	0	3	8					
Sole	22	3-9	4-4	1-11	0	2	10					
Johnson	17	0-5	0-0	1-2	0	5	0					
Bragg	17	1-6	1-2	0-0	0	2	3					
Kalin	30	0-5	2-2	1-1	0	0	2					
Elliott	10	0-2	0-0	1-0	0	1	0					
Langley	21	1-6	6-8	2-0	1	0	8					
Samson	4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	2	0					
Serafimovska	4	1-1	0-0	1-2	0	0	2					
Myers	11	2-6	0-0	3-1	0	2	5					
Linard	14	1-5	0-0	0-1	1	1	2					
McConnell	16	2-4	3-3	1-0	0	1	7					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>14-62</b>	<b>18-21</b>	<b>12-25</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>47</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 22.6%. FT: 85.7%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 1-22 (Myers 1-4, Hamilton 0-6, Langley 0-4, Kalin 0-3, Sole 0-1, Johnson 0-1, Bragg 0-1, Elliott 0-1, Samson 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 4. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 4 (Johnson, Kalin, Serafimovska, Myers). <b>Turnovers:</b> 18 (Kalin 6, Sole 3, Bragg 3, Langley 2, Hamilton, Johnson, Myers, TEAM). <b>Steals:</b> 4 (Langley 2, Sole, Kalin).												
Ohio State	Total	FG	FT	Reb.								
	Min.	M-A	M-A	O-D	A	PF	Pts.					
Juhasz	24	4-13	2-7	2-10	1	2	10					
Patty	12	3-5	0-0	2-1	0	4	6					
Greene	21	3-5	0-0	0-3	2	4	6					
Sheldon	31	8-13	4-4	1-3	3	2	20					
Miller	34	5-11	4-5	2-1	3	0	16					
Beacham	23	2-4	0-2	1-7	1	2	4					
Poole	15	3-5	1-2	3-2	3	4	7					
Mikulasikova	15	2-2	0-0	0-5	1	3	4					
Harris	14	3-6	0-0	0-1	1	1	7					
Hutcherson	9	0-1	2-4	0-3	0	0	2					
Jones	3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	1	0					
<b>Totals</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>33-66</b>	<b>13-24</b>	<b>14-38</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>82</b>					
<b>Percentages:</b> FG: 50.0%. FT: 54.2%. <b>Three-point field goals:</b> 3-14 (Miller 2-4, Harris 1-2, Juhasz 0-3, Patty 0-1, Greene 0-1, Sheldon 0-1, Poole 0-1, Hutcherson 0-1). <b>Team rebounds:</b> 5. <b>Blocked shots:</b> 5 (Juhasz 2, Beacham, Poole, Harris). <b>Turnovers:</b> 15 (Juhasz 3, Sheldon 3, Greene 2, Beacham 2, Poole 2, Harris 2, Patty). <b>Steals:</b> 7 (Greene 2, Harris 2, Juhasz, Patty, Sheldon).												
<b>Officials:</b> Morris, Zentz, Cross. <b>Attendance:</b> N/A.												

"I was ready to come out and compete today," Bell said after the game, "so that's what I did."

Bell accomplished the feat in just 29 minutes, shooting 11 of 19 from the field and also adding three assists, three blocks and a pair of steals while turning it over just twice.

The former five-star prospect out of Canton (Ohio) McKinley finished second among the Buckeyes as a true freshman with 10.9 points per game and third with 4.4 rebounds per game in her lone season at Ohio State last season.

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# Good Time To Reassess Your View Of The Season

Sometimes perspective is a good thing. After the cancellation of Ohio State's game with Illinois, most of what was heard from Buckeye Nation (and, come to think of it, non-Buckeye Nation) centered around championships and playoffs and how inept the Big Ten offices are. While there is some truth to all of that, they are ancillary pieces of an ever-changing puzzle.

## THE FACTS MAN Mike Wachsman

Yes, not playing the game with Illinois could end up impacting the Buckeyes mightily in their quest for a Big Ten championship. With the league offering no wiggle room for making up games, every cancellation impacts a team mightily. It puts them on the precipice of not being able to qualify for a league title, which means that all of the hard work they put in during the offseason goes for naught. Ask Wisconsin how it feels about not having a chance to represent the West Division in the league title game. The Badgers are already out of it – so why should they continue to play? There's no shot at a brass ring, no championship in their immediate future. Sports is about competition, against foes and for

championships. Once an incentive is taken away, why should a team bother anymore? That's a hypothetical, by the way, but a question that's been asked more than once on social media.

The Illinois game has some importance to the big picture, but the Dec. 5 game at Michigan State is the true zero hour. If that one is not played, the Buckeyes are out of the title chase – no ifs, ands or buts. Because the league handled this poorly from the start, of course. Unless there are more cancellations in the final two weeks, the league average of games almost certainly won't fall below six. And that's the only way Ohio State would have a path to the championship game if the MSU game isn't played.

Illinois is the past, nothing can be done about it. Grousing about whether or not it should have been played is pointless.

Michigan State is the future, and it still can be played if Ohio State's pre-emptive move to cease all football-related activities ends up working. People were mad at the Big Ten, but this was Ohio State's call to cancel the game. It didn't like the way things were trending with positive tests among its population, so it took the stance of stopping things now, in hopes that maybe it would result in stemming the rising tide. If it works, then the Michigan State game is likely on. If not, then OSU is potentially playing for pride the rest of the season.

The Big Ten office has taken its share of criticism, a lot of it justified. There was

no reason to completely cancel the season before walking it back and making it a postponement, with a mid-October start. Keeping the original schedule that was made before all of this hit would have been fine, as it had built-in off weeks and an ability to make up games that might be postponed. The easy thing would have been to simply axe the nonconference games but keep the rest of it intact, which would have meant a mid- to late-September start. Any postponements could have been moved to the off weeks or the end of the schedule (as the SEC and ACC have done, quite well), and there wouldn't be this worry about teams not qualifying for this or that.

Some will see Kevin Warren as ahead of the curve, because the rise in cases has fueled more postponements and cancellations in recent weeks. Sort of an "I told you so." He used worry about the rise in safety and health as his overriding reason for delaying the season, and in a few regards maybe he was correct. There have been spikes in cases, including two of the highest-profile coaches in the sport – Alabama's Nick Saban and OSU's own Ryan Day – being sidelined after testing positive. But his position was also partly based on fear of the unknown, which is no way to operate.

There's an old saying that it's better to try but fail rather than not try at all. That is completely on target in this case. For people to have said in July and August that there simply is no use in trying to play, that things are too dangerous, simply because they didn't know, that was silly. We encounter the unknown daily, yet still live our lives. As long as common sense was used, there was no reason at all to scrap the season. The coaches and players were overwhelmingly for it and put in too much work to be told that it didn't matter.

The reality is that over 82 percent of scheduled games have been played. And that's something to be happy about.

This is where perspective kicks in, folks.

Rather than shouting and whining about how ESPN is against Ohio State or how the league is sabotaging its cash cow with arbitrary requirements, why not simply enjoy the season for what it is? A somewhat disjointed yet still fun, wild ride.

Many thought we would never reach this point, with a championship game in sight and the CFP actually happening. A lot of voices felt that we would be lucky to get to the halfway point without shutting the whole thing down – some were even hopeful of that, especially in the national media. They were all but cheering for the shutdown of the sport which they make their living covering. Seems odd, no?

Yes, the pandemic is real, and yes, there are potential long-term consequences for people who get it. To say otherwise is dangerous. However, being told how to live your life is something that should be reserved for parents, military leaders and prison wardens. While it would be nice if everyone had empathy and kindness, that's not realistic. And forcing people to do so has been proven to not work.

If this is a year when Ohio State happens to be one of the best teams in the country but plays only five or six games and isn't chosen for the CFP, that's fine. It's not like the program is going anywhere anytime soon.

Fans should be happy that we have

football at all and should relish every weekend in which they can watch their beloved team take the field. Instead, many will continue to complain about perceived injustice – in a sport that has been rife with injustices for years. Kind of funny to me.

This season is such an outlier that nothing will get me upset. OSU in the playoff? Great. OSU not in the playoff because it only played six games? Fine with it. Just give me football, and make sure that the players and coaches and staff are healthy. That is my main takeaway.

If Saturdays are approached in this manner, rather than with a perpetual scowl or search for the latest miscarriage of justice against Ohio State, things will go a lot smoother. Removing the championship context from the season will make it more enjoyable, especially if you allow yourself to realize that this season is unlike any other before – and probably after.

While the drumbeats about this "failed experiment" of a season grow louder, some of us are just happy with what we have. Sitting down at noon on Saturday and realizing we still have a smorgasbord of football ahead of us is exciting. Even better if the Buckeyes are involved.

Has the cancellation of Maryland and Illinois dampened my enthusiasm about Ohio State's season? No. Has it made me lash out at the Big Ten because I thought they "had it in for the Buckeyes because Ryan Day was a main proponent of playing the season"? Nope.

If you choose to lash out rather than enjoy, to rage about how this affects you rather than how it affects the team – maybe a healthy dose of perspective is in order.

It's just a game, and young adults playing it. They want desperately to win but also want to be healthy. Maybe their concerns and desires are a little more important than ours?

### Dandy Dozen

The cancellations and postponements of games makes it more difficult to put rankings together. There are now all kinds of qualifiers, most centering around the number of games played.

I'm really torn on what to do with Ohio State – keep it higher as I truly believe it is one of the best teams, or drop it down because others have accomplished more on the field? Not an easy task. At some point games played have to matter, and right now the Buckeye are facing a deficit in that department. It isn't quite to the freak-out stage at the moment, but panic might be just around the corner.

As noted above, if the Buckeyes end up playing five or six games while others play nine or 10, that must be taken into consideration.

For now, the Buckeyes stay where they are. But if more games are missed, they will drop.

1. Alabama (8-0)
2. Notre Dame (9-0)
3. Clemson (8-1)
4. Ohio State (4-0)
5. Florida (7-1)
6. Texas A&M (6-1)
7. Cincinnati (8-0)
8. BYU (9-0)
9. Indiana (5-1)
10. Iowa State (7-2)
11. Miami (Fla.) 7-1
12. Coastal Carolina (9-0)

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# Bucks Latest To Be Entangled In COVID-19 Mess

Anyone who has worked with me or been to BSB World Headquarters knows that I have all sorts of piles of notes stacked around with various column ideas. Was it coincidence or karma that just before Ohio State's game with Illinois was canceled, a clipping from The New York Times that reader Joe Huber had sent me back in September, shortly after the Big Ten reversed course and announced plans to play a truncated season, fell from one of the piles?

Times sports columnist Kurt Streeter was criticizing the league for "egregious preference for profit over public health and a disregard for morality and common sense, not to mention the health of young athletes."

Streeter said the conference presidents and chancellors "watched football this past weekend on campuses across the South, in coronavirus hot spots."

"The Big Ten administrators decided their schools could no longer afford to miss out. The pressure was too great.

"We can give a nod to the daily testing and strict protocols that the Big Ten is depending upon for its return," he continued. "They are the closest thing colleges can offer to the rigorous screening done in the highly controlled N.B.A. bubble in Florida that has allowed that league to carry out its season."

But Streeter also saw problems down the road.

"It will be next to impossible to keep an 18-year-old football player who has contracted the virus – but feels just fine – from seeing his girlfriend, going to campus parties or returning home for grandma's birthday."

This is just the type of behavior that Ohio State, poised to make a run at the national championship, has tried to curtail – up to this point seemingly successfully.

"Most people don't know what these guys have been through," Buckeye coach Ryan Day recently said of his team. "They don't understand the sacrifices that have been made. They haven't seen their families in months. When they leave the facility, they're isolated in their room and not able to go anywhere because of this virus."

Added center Josh Myers, "I'm definitely not going to lie and say it's been easy because it hasn't. The only two buildings that I've been in since August have been the football facility and my house. And that's it. No grocery stores, nothing.

"We'll keep on making the sacrifices because it's worth it."

Still, the virus somehow penetrated Ohio State's bubble. Someone brought it in, and the Buckeyes joined the many other teams in the Big Ten and across the nation that have had to postpone or cancel games.

"The Big Ten is sending the wrong signal to the nation," Streeter said when the league announced the season was back on. "The coronavirus pandemic has not turned the corner. It is not on its way out."

He was proven right.

I have said in this space – and Streeter seems to agree – that I believe if the other conferences had followed the Big Ten's lead and canceled or delayed their seasons, the Big Ten would not have reversed course.

Now that we see the muddled mess we are left with and with no idea what is coming in the upcoming weeks, I pose this question:

If the Big Ten had stuck to its guns and not elected to play football, might the other conferences ultimately have followed their lead and canceled or postponed their seasons as well?

## Best Of The Decade

I've been enjoying our series on the best

## THE VIEW FROM 15TH & HIGH

### Frank Moskowitz, Publisher

Buckeye players at each position group from the last decade. I must admit I have eagerly been waiting for the final installment of this series because I figured it to be most interesting.

Accordingly, we agreed to hold this segment, the quarterbacks, until the end because of the probability of more lively debate with a field that included Terrelle Pryor, Braxton Miller, J.T. Barrett, Cardale Jones, Dwayne Haskins and Justin Fields. Ohio State could make an easy claim to the title of Quarterback U. of the Decade, when it comes to 2010-2019.

One of our staff members who helped come up with our choice for Ohio State's quarterback of the decade, Andrew Lind, summed up the debate within our staff concisely.

"This discussion ultimately boils down to how much emphasis you place on Barrett's longevity vs. Haskins' and Fields' impact over a single season."

Depending on how things go this season, Fields may end up being considered the best of this illustrious group. But any production or accolades he gains this year will be credited to a different decade. In fact, 10 years from now, we may be asking how much emphasis do you place on (future Buckeye quarterback's) longevity vs. Fields' impact in 2020?

I must confess that I am not as high on Barrett, the staff's ultimate pick, as many Buckeye observers. He was a fine quarterback, who could both run and pass and was an outstanding leader. As a freshman, under very difficult circumstances, he took Ohio State to the brink of a national championship, before Jones brought the team home. But how much of Barrett's place in the Ohio State and Big Ten record book is based on ability and how much on the previously mentioned longevity?

If you want to put longevity up against the amazing single seasons of Haskins and Fields, I offer up Miller as an option for best quarterback of the decade.

"Braxton Miller is the most underrated player looking back at it now in Ohio State history," said former BSB staffer Ari Wasserman, currently with The Athletic. "He was so freaking good, and people don't remember that. All you have to do is you have to go back and look at the highlight tapes of the things that man did. He did things on a football field that I'll never see again, in terms of just a natural fluid ability to make people miss. Everything about the way that that guy played was special."

One can only speculate what Miller's career numbers would look like if he had logged a fourth year at quarterback for Ohio State. Not only would he have had the benefit of that many more games, but he would have had the benefit, if he had played in 2014, of another year in the Urban Meyer/Tom Herman offense and the benefit of being surrounded by what was built with one more year of the Meyer-led recruiting machine.

Would the Buckeyes have won the national championship that year with Miller at the helm? I guess we will never know.

Wasserman doesn't say either way, but it sounds like he has them as a contender.

"I think it would have been a very explosive offense (if Miller had led the 2014 team)," he said. "I think it would have looked a little bit different in the national championship run. I think the offense would have been explosive from the beginning, and they never would have lost to

Virginia Tech that year."

In their recapping of Barrett's career, I'm glad the staff brought up his performance against Penn State in his senior year of 2017. In that game Ohio State trailed 35-20 at the end of three quarters and 38-27 with 5:42 to play.

Barrett led the Buckeyes to two touchdowns in those final minutes, both on his passes, to secure the improbable 39-38 Buckeye victory. In one of the greatest clutch quarterback performances in Ohio State history, he completed his last 16 passes, including 13 of 13 in the fourth quarter for 170 yards and three scores.

For the game, Barrett was 33 of 39 for 328 yards and four touchdowns with no picks and was also the team's leading rusher with 17 carries for 95 yards.

"I've never had a kid play perfect," Meyer said after the game, "but damn, he was close tonight."

That game alone is enough to earn Barrett serious consideration as top QB of the decade. But I ask you two questions:

What could Barrett do that Miller couldn't, and if you had your pick, which of the two would you want at quarterback?

I'll go with Miller.

## Anniversary Wins In Ann Arbor

Maybe I should have thought twice before I appointed myself the commissioner of BSB's 40th Anniversary Football Season. It hasn't been quite as easy as I might have thought. Once again, I'm left with two games I have deemed necessary to add to the season, this time from the week of Nov. 21 to Nov. 27.

I like the serendipity of these two games – the 1987 victory over Michigan and the 2001 Michigan win. The '87 game was the last game as Ohio State coach for Earle Bruce, while the 2001 game was Jim Tressel's first Michigan game. Out with the old, in with the new. Both games have gone down as among the most famous Buckeye victories in the storied rivalry, and they will forever be linked by the fact that Tressel's win was the first in Ann Arbor since Bruce had turned the trick in his final glorious game 14 years earlier.

In this issue we look at the 1987 game. We will get to Tressel's affair in the next issue of BSB.

After the Buckeyes came out in their famous "Earle" headbands, it looked like The Game would just be a continuation of an '87 season when the Buckeyes were on a three-game losing streak, including the painful, last-minute loss to Iowa that led to Bruce's firing on the eve of Michigan week.

Ohio State, on a two-game losing streak to its rivals, fell behind 13-0 and gained just 30 yards in the game's first 25 minutes. But the team didn't fold and late in the second quarter went on a 10-play, 61-yard drive that consumed 4:08 and put the Buckeyes right back in the game when Tom Tupa connected with Everett Ross for a 4-yard touchdown to pull Ohio State to within a single score at 13-7 with 1:36 to play before the half.

It was a game that was marked by traditional, long Ohio State drives, with a notable exception.

On the first play of the Buckeyes' first possession after coming out of the locker room at halftime, Tupa threw a short pass to tailback Carlos Snow near the Buckeye 35. With the help of key blocks from Ross and Alex Higdon

and a dynamic juke by the freshman near the Michigan 20, Snow flew 70 yards to pay dirt, and suddenly the Buckeyes were on top, 14-13.

As I said in this space some 33 years ago, "Michigan safety Doug Mallory is still looking for the athletic supporter Snow faked him out of on his TD run."

The OSU defense, which had yielded 283 yards in the first half, was also coming around.

Midway through the third quarter, David Brown picked off a Wolverine pass and returned it 32 yards to the Michigan 19. Tupa needed just three plays to take advantage of the short field, doing the honors himself and sneaking in from the one. Matt Frantz missed the PAT, and the Buckeyes led 20-13 with 7:11 left in the third.

Michigan wasn't done yet, tying the game at 20 with 1:14 left in that same period.

On the road, with little to play for, Ohio State could have wilted in the final period. But instead, the Buckeyes put together another Ohio State, Earle Bruce-style drive, going 77 yards on 15 plays, eating up 6:45 of clock before Frantz brought the game to its final margin on a 26-yard field goal with 5:18 left.

The Wolverines still had a shot, but they fumbled at the OSU 47 and Eric Kumerow recovered with 4:15 remaining. The Buckeyes impressively ran off all but nine seconds before turning the ball over on downs at the Michigan one.

"There's no sweeter victory in the world than one over Michigan in your last game at Ohio State," said Bruce afterward. "But the real thrill of that football game was for our football team, down 13-0, to come back and win after the week they've had. They showed me a lot by sticking together and playing as a team. You talk about coming back from adversity, coming back from almost disaster. Most certainly they're made of the right stuff."

The victory was obviously a team affair, but it was spearheaded by two seniors – one oft-criticized and one rarely, if ever, criticized.

Tupa, in his first and only year as the Buckeye starting quarterback, had been blamed for much of Ohio State's woes throughout the season. But he responded this time around with perhaps his best game of the season, completing 18 of 26 passes for 219 yards and a pair of scores without an interception.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the ball, linebacker Chris Spielman was capping off his legendary Ohio State career with 16 tackles, 14 of the solo variety, and a 9-yard sack.

"The greatest player I've ever coached is Chris Spielman," Bruce said after being carried off the field on his players' shoulders. "He runs to the football, he hits you, he plays hard on every play."

Spielman was equally quick to praise Bruce. "He's my coach and he will always be my coach," Spielman said.

"I felt so satisfied and happy for Coach Bruce," Spielman continued. "I tried to get out of there. I didn't want people coming up to me. It was his last time as a Buckeye, and I wanted him to savor every second, every millisecond."

"That was kind of like Christmas when you give somebody a present and you see the joy on their face. That was satisfaction enough for me. That made my year to see how happy he was."

After the big victory, someone suggested that the fired coach might somehow return for the 1988 season.

"I don't know how that could happen," Bruce said. "I'll always be a Buckeye, though. This (win) is one for the Buckeyes. God bless them. I love them."

And as we learned throughout the following 30-plus years, truer words were never spoken.

"I'll always be a Buckeye."



# 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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